

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 26, 1994**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 94/04/26

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

Bill 24 Appropriation Act, 1994

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening with pride to move second reading of Bill 24, the 1994 Appropriation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill that comes to the Assembly after perhaps one of the most unprecedented processes of review, an expenditure plan of magnitude put forward by the Premier's government, the President of the Executive Council and the government that he leads. I can't help but think of the number of days before the budget came down 24 February when we were in Committee of Supply discussing and debating interim supply. There were a number of days there, in addition to debate on the interim appropriation Bills. Then, of course, there was the budget on 24 February, and there was extensive debate of that motion that day and in subsequent days.

Then we launched into Committee of Supply debate and a rather new innovation in this Assembly, perhaps relatively new across this country, designated subcommittees of supply. By my count, the actual Committee of Supply debate was some 25 days. I chalk that up to at least in the order of 45 to 55 hours of intelligent debate. I won't say it challenged the intellect of all the members in the Assembly. Some of them but not all of them. Then we had three days of debate on the capital projects division estimates of the heritage savings trust fund, an estimated number of probably in the order of four to seven hours, and then, more recently, last evening the debate on the lottery fund, another day. Then, of course, there's the designated subcommittee of supply, which is a required four hours and five designated subcommittees. I estimate that's close to 20 hours.

Mr. Speaker, I estimate that this Bill before us, before it even has gotten here for the kind of debate I know we will enjoy this evening, has probably had a debate in the order of anywhere from 75 to 100 hours – I won't put an adjective on that – of thought-provoking debate in the various committees and review.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that this government can bring forward this kind of plan that is an important part of a four-year plan to balance the budget in this province. It was a promise made by a leadership candidate by the name of Ralph Klein back in October 1992 when he attended upon a composite high school in the constituency of Leduc, Wetaskiwin-Leduc at that time. He made a commitment that day that a government under his leadership would balance the budget in four years' time. It was that simple. Here we are now 16, 17 months later engaged in something really unprecedented across this country.

I look at the commitment we laid out before the people of Alberta that is contained within the Appropriation Act today, that we said on May 6, 1993, that we were going to balance the budget. We spelled out the plan, how we were going to do it in four years. We were going to reduce spending by \$2.7 billion, and then, on top of that, we were not going to do it by increasing taxes. We have lived up to and we will fulfill the promise to balance the budget without raising taxes in this province. Mr. Speaker, that's not an easy task. That requires an awful lot of

thought and forward-looking discussion. I think about the budget roundtable that began in March 1993 in Red Deer. I think of the roundtable that occurred in Health in August 1993 and then a series of roundtables led by the minister without portfolio, the MLA for Bow Valley, and Dr. Norman Wagner, who traveled this province and listened to hundreds, thousands of Albertans as well as meetings by all of my colleagues on the government side that went out and asked Albertans what they thought. The same was true in Education. The same was true in advanced education. The same was true in a number of programs across the government.

But I digress, because I said on May 6 we laid out our plan. Eleven days later the Premier of this province called a provincial general election and went out and promised one thing. He promised to fulfill the plan that was spelled out by his government 11 days earlier. He promised not to make promises, and he got a whopping mandate to implement exactly what he promised to do. He got 51 seats, 51 seats on this government side of the House, and yes, a very respectful and respectable 32 members on the other side of the House. It is clear: Albertans gave this government a mandate to do the job that is spelled out in the Appropriation Act that is before the Assembly for second reading today.

Mr. Speaker, what have people said about our plan? Well, there are a number of folks across the country and across the continent who have commented favourably on the plan put forward by this government and the plan that's spelled out . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I just want to remind hon. members that we are in second reading stage. The Speaker is in the Chair. The Mace is on the Table. I know the atmosphere has got rather noisy, and you might think we've gone into committee, but we have not. The hon. Provincial Treasurer has the floor introducing Bill 24 – just in case anybody hasn't heard of it. Hon. members will please keep the noise down so that the hon. Provincial Treasurer can be heard by the Chair at least. The Chair is very interested in what he has to say.

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what you're seeing tonight is typical of what this government caucus is all about. It's like a stable of thoroughbred racehorses . . . [interjections] Fifty-one, Mr. Speaker. Fifty-one Northern Dancers ready to get off in the race. And it's hard. They're an excitable but excited group of Albertans who are committed to the cause and committed to the plan which they went door to door and promised to fulfill.

Where I just want to speak briefly on what others are saying about us is I read what the rating agencies have to say. In the case of Canadian Bond Rating Service they "reaffirmed current ratings on the province of Alberta's debentures and short-term ratings." Not only did they confirm our rating; Moody's did exactly the same thing. In doing so, what Moody's acknowledged was

the province's sustained commitment to eliminate its budgetary imbalance, as demonstrated by the results of year one of its four-year . . . plan.

They went on to say:

The existence of a business plan outlining multi-year and detailed spending targets for the government sector adds comfort to the feasibility of the plan.

More recently, Standard and Poor's last week reaffirmed our double A senior rating and our A1 plus U.S. commercial rating and said that it reflected the province's implementation of many tough measures. "The large deficits of recent years have rapidly

increased Alberta's debt burden," but they said that "Alberta's largely resource-based economy has performed better than the Canadian average in recent years."

8:10

What they're saying, Mr. Speaker, and what this government is saying is that it's not yet time to uncork the champagne bottles. We still have tough decisions to make in the days ahead. I think you've seen that, and it's witnessed in the budget and in the appropriation Bill that is before members of the Assembly today.

But put aside those from outside of the province who have commented, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to reflect on those who are here working in the province. I think of a gentleman by the name of Brent Ling, the vice-president with Cedarglen Homes in Calgary, and he's quoted as saying: "I honestly think there is more optimism about the Alberta economy because of the way our government is reacting to the deficit." Another one, Jay Westman of Homes by Jayman is reported to have said:

We're seeing tremendous optimism in Calgary, and a lot of it is due to the policies of the Klein government. Our customers are telling us they believe he's moving in the right direction.

So, Mr. Speaker, we can listen to the people outside Alberta, but I think it's also important to listen to our constituents and the people who live here in the province of Alberta. What is exciting is the attention which our plan and our actions to date have attracted from people across this country and indeed across this province.

We won't deny that the actions we are taking to get our financial house in order are tough measures. They are tough measures in that they touch the lives of Albertans. We take great care, and I believe that my colleagues around the table have suffered a great deal of anguish in coming to the decisions that we have had to make, but we do believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is only through this prescription, through the recipe that we have laid out in the four-year plan and in Budget '94 and this appropriation Bill, this recipe that is essential to the long-term growth and strength of this province. We could easily take the Liberal approach of trying to hope and believe and pray that we will grow our way out of this problem, not address the issues head on, not make those tough decisions that would have been reflected in an Appropriation Act, a Bill 24 under the leadership of a Liberal Provincial Treasurer. I know that Albertans would dread that thought, but I would put to you – because we've heard the rhetoric from the other side, the same kind of spending that has occurred in the past – that you wouldn't have seen a billion dollar reduction in spending. You probably would have seen an increase in spending, much like their Liberal brethren did in Ottawa, but we are here . . . [interjections]

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Opposition House Leader is rising on a point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under 23 to point out that the Treasurer is impugning the motives of Liberals here. It should be noted that in fact a province that beat this province to the punch in announcing – this province has simply announced that at some time in the future we'll get a balanced budget. In fact, there is one province in this country that has already done that, and that of course is a Liberal province, New Brunswick, whose deficit is about one-third on a proportional, per capita basis, of what this Treasurer and his government have managed to achieve. So if he's going to impugn motives, he should at least get his facts right.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order. The Chair does not believe saying that somebody would probably do something that another government would do is imputing false motives. Therefore there is no point of order. There is a question for debate, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung will be able to set out his position very clearly on this matter for debate, but the hon. Treasurer has the . . .

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, because of the member's point of order I was searching in the veritable library under my desk here for the Bill that was brought forward by the province of New Brunswick, their so-called deficit elimination plan. In our deficit elimination plan we're talking about a consolidated deficit. We're talking about eliminating that consolidated deficit by 1996-97. What the member across the way is talking about is a province who is committed, yes – and I respect that – to eliminating their operating deficit by next year. If you look at their consolidated deficit, they are a good four years away from balancing the consolidated deficit. It's that kind of accounting policy the Liberals are well known for across this country and which this Progressive Conservative government will not stand for any longer.

The deficit elimination plan of the province of New Brunswick, the Liberal government in the province of New Brunswick – and I admire the efforts of that government. They have had to make some tough decisions as well. But their deficit elimination plan you could drive a Mack truck – you could drive 10 Mack trucks that wide – all the way through the deficit elimination plan in New Brunswick, because they acknowledge how deeply dependent they are on federal revenues. In our province for every dollar that we receive in revenues about 15 cents comes from the federal government. In the likes of New Brunswick it's 33 cents, maybe even 40 cents. Their plan says that if federal transfers drop, then their deficit plan comes to an end.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising on a point of order.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 459. I thought we were speaking about appropriation Bill 24. Is this not the Bill that is before us? [interjections] Then I would respectfully ask the Treasurer to keep his remarks addressed to this Bill.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, you know, the hon. member is absolutely right. I don't know why I'd want to talk about a Liberal policy anyway or a Liberal plan. The member is right.

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: The agenda, the work at hand is this government's plan to eliminate the deficit by taking the second year of this Appropriation Act, 1994. Mr. Speaker, it is an exciting plan. It is a visionary plan that was pulled together through the hard work of 51 men and women combined with the efforts of senior- and middle-level civil servants in this provincial government, combined with the expertise and the advice and the assistance of many in the private sector who want so desperately to make this plan work. I know I've rattled them. I know they're a little unsettled on the other side.

I know I have several more minutes in front of me, but knowing that this pent-up stable of thoroughbred racehorses on this side of the House would want to face off in the debate with the mares and

the nags from the other side, I will give up the floor now and ask that all members support second reading of Bill 24.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about Northern Dancer, but he didn't tell you the whole story: weak ankles and a very low sperm count.

MR. EVANS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I don't see how the member opposite's sperm count has anything whatsoever to do with Bill 24.

8:20

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against Bill 24. It's amazing when you listen to the front bench. They have an array of euphemisms. They talk about the previous government, the other guys, them. Never them. There is no accountability on that side of the House. Nobody on the front bench there accepts responsibility for getting this province into a \$30 billion debt situation, for generating a structural deficit beginning in 1986 that has forced us today to come to this spot where now we have to shut hospital beds, we have to close classrooms, we have to penalize the public sector for the sins of this government.

The sins are manifest, Mr. Speaker. Beginning in 1986 there was a sharp fall in energy prices. Was there any reaction by many of the members in the House today who were elected in 1986? They sat passively at the cabinet table, Mr. Speaker. Passively they sat there. They said: "Yes, yes, yes. Spend, spend, spend. Let's not plan. Let's not do anything. Let's not rock the boat." So when we listen then to the . . .

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw rising on a point of order?

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I don't see how the member can be attesting to events in this House when he was not a Member of the Legislative Assembly at that time.

DR. PERCY: All I have to do, Mr. Speaker, is look at the spending pattern; I see deficit after deficit, eight successive deficits since 1986.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, we are here today dealing with the Appropriation Act, Bill 24. When we look at this Bill . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order, please. The Chair would like to hear some of this debate.

DR. PERCY: So here we are today, Mr. Speaker, living within the confines of the Deficit Elimination Act. We're attempting now to eliminate the deficit, and members on both sides of the House are agreed on one thing: the deficit must be eliminated. A province such as ours with a nonrenewable resource base cannot afford a structural deficit. However, when one looks at appropriation Bill 24, when one looks at the so-called business plans, do you see a clarity of thought, a focus, or a philosophy? No, you don't. Just as they went spend, spend, spend, spend when the money was rolling in during high energy prices, it's now cut,

cut, cut without analysis, without focus, without a plan. They're just roller coaster politicians. They ride the cycle up, they ride the cycle down, but they don't change. They're locked in a track, one-way blinders. He talks about thoroughbreds. Well, I think we're seeing a group of horses on the way to the glue factory.

Let's look at this budget in the context of the Deficit Elimination Act. Here we are. The projected consolidated deficit is going to be \$1,550,000,000. Now, is that good, or is that bad? Well, under the Deficit Elimination Act, Mr. Speaker, the target for this year would be \$1,800,000,000. Now, is it a good thing to be exceeding the Deficit Elimination Act when, first, you don't have the school boards in place? They're being reorganized and restructured. Second, you don't have the regional hospital boards in place. They're being reordered, restructured, maybe appointed, maybe elected. Who knows? They don't. The two big areas of spending in the province – health care and education – the actual delivery mechanisms to people on the line, ensuring where the services are going to be allocated, those boards aren't in place. Yet they're cutting deeper and faster than they have to under the Deficit Elimination Act. Why? To look good when it's an election year. The issue here . . . [interjections]

Oh, they don't like listening to the truth. I'll tell you another thing, Mr. Speaker. Member after member will speak on this side of the House, and nothing will be heard from that side, because silence is consent. They know we're right, and they will not speak. I make a bet that there will not be a rotation of speakers tonight, pro and con, because they know we've got the goods.

When you look at the budget and you see the projected spending under the Deficit Elimination Act, they're going to cut deeper and faster than they have to, \$750 million more than they have to, to eliminate the deficit. We're going to have short-term pain for long-term pain. There's no gain in this system, none, because they're going to inflict more costs on the system than they have to. It is an issue of process here. What you first should do is actually have your boards in place. It's called lining up your ducks, Mr. Speaker. Then you cut, and you allow the newly constituted boards to implement. They're not doing that. It's ready, fire, aim on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

Now, getting to the specifics of Bill 24, the Appropriation Act, do we see a coherent philosophy that tells us how we're going to reduce spending and still deliver services in an efficient manner? We don't see that. The business plans have no discernable measurement targets. In fact, in some states – Texas, for example, Mr. Speaker – in the appropriation Acts themselves by department they set out the targets to be achieved. The hon. Provincial Treasurer is afraid to do that, to set the targets out.

Their idea of performance, Mr. Speaker, is cutting. If you read the business plans, what do you see? Their idea of targets and performance measurement is how much they're going to cut, not what they're going to deliver. The essence here is that government is in the business of providing services in a cost-efficient manner. We don't see any plan in the business plans. All we see is an array of platitudes wrapped up in jargon with a projection of how much they're going to cut in each department. Those aren't business plans. Anybody over on that side of the House who has had business experience knows what a business plan is and knows that telling how much you're going to cut but not telling what you're going to deliver is not a business plan.

We look at the overall budget and we ask: is there a sense of balance to it? Now, this is the point I was trying to make initially. They ride the roller coaster. They ride it up when the money is flush; they ride it down when the money is gone. Is there a sense of balance? You see, there's more than one way to eliminate the deficit. You can cut, you can raise taxes, or the more intelligent

way is in fact to expand the wealth base in the province by trying to get jobs, to create a good environment and generate jobs.

Now, they profess that by cutting and holding the tax regime constant, there's going to be a flood of new firms in here because of the economic environment in the province. If you actually look at what's happening: business confidence here is weak. The Informetrica study clearly shows that we're going to knock off at least a percent of real growth from the growth of GDP. They forecast that a minimum of 10,000 jobs are going to be lost, Mr. Speaker, because of the way these cuts are being imposed. People are concerned because they see cutting without a plan. They see no mechanism to try and generate an environment for business.

Their idea of promoting growth is to try and attract smokestack industries. Well, those types of firms are long gone. They're bound for Mexico. They're bound for central America; they're bound for parts other than Alberta. The types of firms that will come are high-tech firms, those that draw upon skills generated by the educational system, by our infrastructure. For them taxes are important, but what is also important is the longer term potential of the region to generate the types of human skills required to produce the services or the goods in question. They look at the package of goods provided by government. Governments not only provide services at the lowest tax rate, but they have to be focused on education, infrastructure. We don't see that in this plan, Mr. Speaker. There is a sort of naive belief that if you hold the tax regime constant and you cut, cut, cut, firms will come. But firms buy a package of attributes of a region. They not only buy low taxes; they buy the quality of life, the amenities, the sense of optimism in a region. It's not at all clear, regardless of the unbounded belief that they have that this package is going to work, that it will. The numbers just don't support their belief.

What we would like to see and what is missing in the budget and certainly can't be captured in the Appropriation Act is some sense of balance, that first of all they have a process in place by which the legitimate concerns of Albertans about the delivery of services are met and heeded. What we have instead is a series of roundtables that provide an array of suggestions to government. They look upon it sort of as a cafeteria where they pluck what they like and leave on the table that which they don't like. And then they call that consultation. It's basically trying to provide themselves with those suggestions that they view palatable and ignoring those that they don't.

We've seen that, for example, Mr. Speaker, with the consultation with seniors. They were going to consult, but the amount they were going to spend is fixed: what we give you here, we're going to take away from there. That's not consultation, Mr. Speaker. That is basically sort of a sham. It's a ploy. It's not consultation. It's not providing seniors with input as to the design of the package that they would like, with the series of thresholds that were integrated, with integration with the federal program where there was some sense that \$10,432 was not a high income. From the perspective of this government it is, and probably by the time they get through with their economic policies, \$10,432 will be a high income, for all we know.

8:30

Mr. Speaker, what would you think of a government that imposed a 61 percent marginal tax rate on individuals earning \$17,000 over their income range, \$17,000 to \$18,200? I'd call that socialistic, I'd call it draconian, and I'd call it wrongheaded. But the seniors of Alberta are hit with that. That's part of their economic philosophy.

We don't see, then, a coherent philosophy that has any balance. If the Provincial Treasurer had gotten up and said: "We're going

to eliminate the deficit, but also we're going to try and create an environment for jobs. We're going to try and stimulate small business. We're going to actually do something that's reasonable. We're going to cut taxes to small business, say from 6 to 4 percent, give them some margin to work with and some sense of optimism." We don't see that, Mr. Speaker. What we saw embodied in the budget was a whole array of new taxes, 83 new taxes called user fees, user fees on things from lightning rods to 4-H clubs. I really don't believe that that's either constructive – they're hidden taxes. Increase in medical premiums is a tax. You have to buy health insurance. You can't escape it. You know, there are two things you can't escape in life: death and taxes. Certainly you have to buy health insurance. That's a tax. You can't avoid it. But no, they say, there's no new taxes in this budget. Well, our estimate is that there's significant, up to about \$300 million in additional revenue generated over the next three years from these sets of taxes.

Over and above these user fees – taxes – is a whole range of off-loadings on municipal governments. Just as the hon. Provincial Treasurer has been crying the blues that the federal government is going to start downloading on the provinces as it cuts back programs with provinces, so this government has been downloading on municipalities and cutting back an array of grants to municipalities without much warning. I mean, the cascade of taxes from the federal government to the provincial government, the provincial government to local government: ultimately it's all going to fall on the property tax of local ratepayers. This government may well indeed meet its deficit elimination targets, but it will be at the expense, then, of the budget balance of local government, and we're going to see a significant, perhaps even astronomic rise in local taxes as this government opts out, shifts down, and says, "Well, if you want the service, pay for it yourself." If we look at the array of Bills that have accompanied the budget, Mr. Speaker, the proposed health Acts allow local boards – appointed boards, not elected boards – to requisition taxes to provide a patchwork of health care facilities through the province, each offering a different array of services, probably at different tax rates.

We don't see a sense of coherence; we don't see a sense of balance in the budget process. It's too bad, because all Albertans are concerned about the deficit. The election results clearly said that those parties that viewed fiscal responsibility as being important received the vote of confidence from Albertans. The Liberals received 40 percent of the vote, and the Conservatives received 44 percent. That's 84 percent, Mr. Speaker, votes in favour of fiscal responsibility. Where the parties differed is in process and, in a sense, compassion and humanity. What the Liberals would have done had we formed government: (a) we would have reduced significantly capital expenditures. We would not be out paving every highway, as they initially proposed under the previous government of Mr. Getty. In fact, what we would have done is in that first year bought the time to analyze programs to determine targets for those programs to achieve. We would have delivered business plans that said, "These are the targets that we intend to achieve with the money we will spend." We would have provided an array of low-cost, efficient, targeted programs. We wouldn't have tinkered at the margin as this government has. All they've done is aggressively downsized the status quo.

Has there been any innovation in government, I ask. The answer is no. I'll answer my own question, because they never do in question period. Have we seen, for example, incentives introduced into government so that civil servants have an incentive to spend less rather than operate on a use it or lose it mentality? Haven't seen it yet. They talk about mañana – next year, next

budget cycle – but it's not here now. How were the business plans generated? Were they generated from a bottom-up process where civil servants said, "This is how we can do it better; this is how we can measure it"? No, it was top down. Caucus committee said, "This is what we want; send it down to the civil servants." Civil servants said, "Well, this is how we're going to try and do it," would send it back up, but if they didn't like it, sent right back down. That's not in the book *Reinventing Government*. That's not in any management manual that I've ever seen.

What you attempt to do, Mr. Speaker, is ensure that your staff are onside, that they generate the ideas and you provide incentives, bonus payments for them to do better. We haven't seen that here. In fact, any effort to get this government to consider business plans as a way of doing business has almost been received like a death threat. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, for example, each and every time the opposition said, "Let's have a business plan for the ALCB as it's privatized," said, "No, no, no; we might let information out and allow interest groups to organize," as though information was something to be hoarded, as though a plan was something to be hidden.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that in order to get people onside, you have to provide them with a plan. You have to set out discernable benchmarks and performance measures, and they have not yet done that. They've given us the skeleton of such an approach in A Better Way, the collection of business plans, but there are not the performance measures; there's not the quantitative targets that we want to see. Ideally, what we would see, then, in an appropriation Bill like this is for each department a series of targets or performance measures that should be achieved so that they would put their money where their mouth is: "This is what we're going to give Albertans for the \$11 billion that we're going to spend." We're still spending a lot of money, and it's not at all clear that we're spending it efficiently. We're certainly spending less than we have in the past, but that's not the issue. Are we spending it better? Have we targeted it at those groups that need it? Do Albertans have a sense of direction from this government that they know what Alberta will look like three years from now? They'll know that Alberta three years from now may not have a deficit, but surely they don't want Alberta to look as though it's been struck by a nuclear winter. They'd like to know there would be employment growth out there, there'd be a thriving industry that would employ Albertan youths so they don't have to hit the road for Toronto, don't have to hit the road for Vancouver. They won't need ministers here handing them bus tickets to go hither and yon.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're disappointed in the budget. We agree that the deficit has to be reduced. We agree that we have to balance the budget, but we think there are better ways of doing it. We think that process is important. We think that process should be debated in the House. I certainly hope then, if the hon. members on the other side have found what I have said to be provocative, that they will stand up and speak. Or will they just say yes? You know, silence is consent.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising tonight to speak in favour of Bill 24, the Appropriation Act. I have to say that I didn't find the hon. member opposite's comments provocative; I found them to be something else. However, I gather I'm not allowed to use those terms in this Legislature, so I won't express my opinion on what I actually felt they were.

Mr. Speaker, when you go through a redesign and a restructuring in a province of how you manage the public's interests, it takes an awful lot of effort. That's what the Klein government has done over this last year and a bit, go through and identify within this province priorities and directions but keeping in mind fiscal realities that we have to face not only as governments but as Albertans and as a country. There is extreme disappointment in this nation that our counterparts in Ottawa have not recognized the realities that face them, but we as a government indeed have. We've gone through a process that started last winter where we identified a streamlined process for government. I'll remind hon. members that just over a year ago, nine ministries of this government were eliminated – not merged or anything else but in fact eliminated. I can say that that was an appropriate move at the time. It began a process of identification of priorities, of looking at things that were important to Albertans, things that were essential, of how we could redesign this government to give the people of Alberta a government they could afford to have, not any longer a government that was in dreamland. Fiscal reality had hit.

8:40

We had an opportunity last year to recognize that Alberta had the smallest debt per capita of any province in this country, but the fastest growing deficit. There came a time that if we didn't grab those reins and pull them tight and get hold of that deficit fast, it would get away from us, and we would be in the same predicament as every other province – as every other province – in this country. With our team we sat down and we went through a process, through various reviews. The Financial Review Commission we developed came forward with some priorities and identifications for us. We went through and developed an economic plan called Seizing Opportunity, which led into our May 4 budget. We did indeed go to the polls based on that budget, and we made no bones about it, Mr. Speaker, that we had a job to do, that we had to face the realities in this province. That's what we carried to the people, and we received a mandate to proceed with that. That was the only promise, in fact, that we carried forward, that in fact we would address the fiscal realities that faced all Albertans.

I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons I did this is I don't want the next generation to face the difficulties we're facing today. I'm not prepared to leave this Legislature without having completed the job to do that. Once that is complete, then I can truly go home and say that we have done the job that we were sent here to do.

When we came back from the election, we sat down with our staff, with our bureaucrats, as you've called them, and asked them to work with us to put together a three-year plan of how we could address the realities that face us. They indeed did do that, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that in the Department of Energy for the very first time – the very first time – all of the agencies and boards came together with the department to identify priorities, to identify our objectives, our missions, and how we could measure the goals and objectives that we had laid out. Contradictory to what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has said, our department people and our boards and agencies work together.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, in my particular department they worked basically to eliminate their own boards and agencies. That was their own recommendation. If you look at the Ministry of Energy today, surely you will realize that Alberta Oil Sands Equity is now gone. The Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission will be eliminated this year. The Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority is now gone. There is a merge taking place. There is a Bill before this House to merge the Public

Utilities Board and the Energy Resources Conservation Board. This came as a result of the bureaucracy, the agencies, the boards, the commissions coming together, not the Minister of Energy, with a plan to provide Albertans with the services that they felt were appropriate and necessary as we go over the next decade past the year 2000, something that was important. Now, that is a measurement that I think is commendable for those people to do, because basically they said that we have to face realities in this province, and they bought into the program.

Mr. Speaker, I take great exception to Edmonton-Whitemud's comments that the bureaucracy was not involved, because he knows perfectly well that particularly in the Ministry of Energy they in fact were involved on a hands-on basis. I'm sure that he will retract those kinds of comments. I would expect that he will make it well known that he retracts those comments, because he knows they are not true.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through a process of eliminating the deficit, it's not easy, but nobody said it was going to be easy. It's difficult to make choices. It's difficult to identify priorities and go through a plan. But, you know, there are other departments besides strictly Education and Health that have gone through some tremendous streamlining, some tremendous cuts. They've done that in order to keep the priority areas of health and education and social programs as our top priority. Some of the departments have taken 50 percent cuts, 50 percent cuts in what they do so that we can in fact deliver the very best we can in Education but something that we can afford to deliver.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the results of the plans, someone said to me, "Well, they're all a little different." That's right. Of course they're different. How can you compare a Department of Energy business plan with a department of social services business plan when the objectives and the missions and the goals are substantially different? But, overall, when you bring those plans together, as we have done in the presentation by our Provincial Treasurer on February 24, the plan is very clear. It's laid out. This has never happened before by any government in this country, to lay out a plan. [interjections]

They're chirping over there, "Where are the dollars?" Well, if you read the estimates books, you'd see where the dollars are. If you looked at the estimates . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Energy I was before this House three times – three times – with my estimates. Three times I presented those estimates. They had the entire evening to ask questions, and you know, some of the questions I was a little surprised at. I don't know whether they read anything about them or not, but they clearly didn't identify the restructuring models that have gone on in my ministry. They didn't focus on that. They didn't look at the objectives. They didn't recognize the realignment and the direction that we're going in. They didn't even look at the development in our oil sands areas as being one of the main focuses for the future of this province. That never even came up. It didn't come up at all.

Now we're going through another process. This is year one of that three-year plan. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Energy, as will other departments, will be well over 20 percent reduced, not only in dollars but also in staff.

I'd like to say once again how proud I am of the people in the Ministry of Energy who put the future of this province ahead of their own personal interests to come forward with a plan that would eliminate their positions but would be best for the future of this province. I'd like to thank them in this House for their co-operation because they believe in the future. They believe in the future of this province, and they don't want to leave this mess to be cleaned up. They recognize that we have a deficit and a debt.

We have a deficit and a debt that have to be addressed. You can't fool around with it any longer. You cannot. It has to be dealt with now. If you don't, it will get away. The Liberals want to study it for a year. All that's going to do – and you know that as an economist, Edmonton-Whitemud; you know that – is add another \$3 billion to the debt. And if you don't know that, then you should go back to school and learn about it, because I'm telling you, this is adding to it.

Mr. Speaker, reality has hit. Someone asked me the other day: "Why are you moving so fast? Why are you moving so fast to deal with this?" Well, I'm sorry, but when you're making a thousand dollars a month in your home and you're spending \$1,500, the boys with the black bag show up at the front door real quick. The same thing happens here. If you don't deal with this problem with us now and work with us on this problem, I can tell you that we'll be in big trouble.

This government is committed to it. We are committed to eliminating this deficit. We would like the members opposite to work with us, but it is obvious they have no intention of doing that. They want to study it. Spoken like a true academic. They want to study it for another year. They probably have theses they want to write. I look at the members opposite, and how many of them are from the university? All they know how to do is to study. That's all they know how to do, study, study, study, or hire consultants. Way to add to the deficit. The reality is that we don't have the money. We're spending more than we're taking in. You know, I don't know what you do about it, but the problem is, you have to face reality.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, the other analogy is that you can hold. The other thing was let's hold off on making a decision. Well, I can tell you, hold off on making your mortgage payment on your house and go into the bank and say that you want to think things over again and see what your bank manager says to you. I've got news for you: they take the house off you. They just take the house off you, Mr. Speaker. To hold and wait? This Appropriation Act is reality. It's reality. It has to be dealt with.

MRS. HEWES: It's embarrassing.

MRS. BLACK: The hon. Member from Edmonton-Gold Bar is saying "embarrassing." I would be embarrassed too, if I were you; I truly would. You have sat here and not supported this cut when you have children and grandchildren that you have to go home and face and say to, "I'm not prepared to do anything about it." Well, I can tell you that as a parent I'm not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to go home and face my family and say, "I have done the very best I can in trying to deal with this so you don't have to."

I've heard all kinds of mumbo jumbo. I've heard mumbo jumbo in here about the effects on the children. Well, you know, it's a funny thing. I have a child in grade 5, and he said to me one day, "Mommy, are you going to take our computer out of our school?" This was in the fall, and I said, "No, of course not." You know what? The computer is still in his school. And now he said, "Why haven't you taken it out?" I said, "We have no intentions of doing that." You know what's happening now, Mr. Speaker? The children are starting to come around and say: "They were only lying to us. They weren't telling us the truth. They're not going to hurt us." Of course we're not going to hurt them. Why would we hurt our own children? What we're doing is we're making a better tomorrow for our children. We're turning it around so that our children have an opportunity to be debt free,

have an opportunity to start off on a level playing field without having to face the burden of not facing reality by this House and by this government. We are doing that right now, facing that reality so they don't have that burden.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. DALLA-LONGA: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-West is rising on a point of order.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: *Beauchesne* 420. I was wondering if the hon. minister would entertain a question. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. It's up to the hon. minister to decide whether she'll entertain a question.

MRS. BLACK: Sure.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: The minister talks about all these budgets and how they're so . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I'd like to know how the minister voted on the budgets of two years ago, if she voted in favour of those budgets. Did you support every one of them?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I voted in favour of those budgets, and I'll tell you why I voted in favour of those budgets. I voted in favour of them because I felt they were right at the time. [interjections] That's the truth. That's the honest truth. I voted in favour of those because I thought they were right.

Debate Continued

MRS. BLACK: But what I found out was that reality wasn't there. Reality is here. We have restructured this government to bring reality into play, and if the members opposite haven't recognized yet that we have a team that is committed to that reality, if the team is not . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, if these hon. members would just be quiet, you could at least answer the question and get on with the debate. The little chirping that comes from over here is unbelievable.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's because they're little chirpers.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. There seem to be chirpers on both sides.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say is that I believe in the process we have gone through, and I believe that we have brought reality into this process. We've dealt with it openly and honestly, and we have involved our caucus and we have involved the members of our government and the public in this process. That is a fundamental change from the way we have done business in the past, and it was a change welcomed by all members, not only our members on the front bench but our members in the back as well, because they have been involved.

Mr. Speaker, with those few comments I'd like to say in closing that I feel comfortable with this Appropriation Act, and I would hope all members on both sides would realize that this is a new team. This is an open government. It has never before in the history of this province been as open as we have today, a government that is committed to making a change, a government that has its staff onside to help make that change and make those difficult

calls, a government that is prepared to make the tough calls, make the tough choices, because we believe in the future of this province. We believe in a process that will provide us with the best advantage of any place in this country without raising taxes, without disadvantaging people, without putting burdens in the way of development. That's what we believe in on this side of the House, and with our Premier's lead we have been able to put this in place.

I would hope that all members will support this appropriation Bill that was presented by our Provincial Treasurer, because it is right. It is the right direction. I would hope that hon. members opposite would join in with us and lend their expertise and help to develop this. We would like that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said: why didn't you join us years ago? Well, in 1902, the year the brown cow died, something else happened. Today is today. This is now and that was then. So let's go together. Let's get this thing done. Then we can all say, "We've done a good job," and we can carry on.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy has moved that debate be now adjourned on Bill 24. All those . . . [interjections] There is a motion before the Assembly.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I was on my feet before she made the motion. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order. Both members please take their seats. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung could not have been on his feet while the hon. minister was on her feet.

The motion before the Assembly is that debate be now adjourned on Bill 24. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Black	Fritz	Paszkowski
Brassard	Gordon	Pham
Cardinal	Havelock	Rostad
Clegg	Hierath	Smith
Coutts	Jacques	Sohal
Day	Laing	Stelmach
Dinning	Langevin	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Trynchy
Evans	McFarland	West
Fischer	Mirosh	Woloshyn
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Germain	Mitchell
Beniuk	Henry	Nicol

Bruseker	Hewes	Percy
Chadi	Leibovici	Sekulic
Dalla-Longa	Massey	Vasseur
Totals:	For - 34	Against - 15

[Motion carried]

9:10 **Bill 21**
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994

[Debate adjourned April 26: Mr. Beniuk speaking]

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

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that as the debate was adjourned, the Government House Leader had risen on a point of order, so I request enlightenment. Has the point of order been dealt with, and do I proceed?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member may proceed.

MR. BENIUK: I may proceed. So I assume that the point of order has been dealt with. Okay. I thank you.

I was addressing some of the principles involved in this Bill. This Bill will expand the mandate of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission to include other addictive behaviours, and one of them is of course gambling. I had pointed out - and I'd like to expand on this - that there is an important principle: if we are to provide assistance to people who become addicted to things like gambling, there should be sufficient funds provided to counter the fantastic advertising that takes place to encourage people to gamble. I noted just before the session ended - and I'll just refresh everybody's memory - that I believe on the 31st of January of '94 the Deputy Premier, who's in charge of lotteries, announced that there will be half of 1 percent of lottery profits earmarked for this program. I had pointed out that it would be nice if on sheer principle the amount of money allocated for this project would at least equal, if not exceed, the amount of money being spent to advertise to get people to buy lottery tickets or even to get involved in the VLTs. I do believe this is a very important part of the principle of expanding the mandate, to include assistance to people that become addicted due to gambling. I stressed that this afternoon, and it was at this point, Mr. Speaker, that the Government House Leader rose on some point of order, which I gather has been dealt with.

I am simply trying to point out that this was on principle, that as we look at expanding treatment assistance to people who are addicted - whether it's alcohol, whether it's drugs, whether it's gambling - there should be sufficient funds provided to counter on the other side the money that's being spent to encourage people to do these things. On cigarettes, for example, to encourage people to stop smoking, the advertising side has been prevented from taking place on television. Here we have massive, massive amounts of advertising to get people to gamble, and now we're going to say that there will be, I believe - as I mentioned, the Deputy Premier, the minister responsible for the lotteries, had referred to half of 1 percent of profits. I don't think that equals the amount of money being spent to encourage people to gamble, and this has to be addressed when one looks at the principle of this Act. I fully support that assistance has to be provided, but with it there should be on the other side an encouragement not to advertise to get people to gamble. I mean, there are two sides to this. It makes no sense simply to go and say that we will provide funds to reduce people's addiction to gambling and then turn

around at every opportunity and have flashy advertising commercials on television showing the great new life of a person who went and bought a lottery ticket or went and gambled to suddenly become rich overnight.

While I strongly support this Bill, I do hope that this will be taken into account and that the minister responsible will try to encourage less advertising by the lotteries people and will provide still additional funds than he has indicated for this project. I gather we will have other opportunities in all probability to address this, and maybe this can be rectified so that those two principles come together on this Bill.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hadn't planned to speak to any issues tonight, but when the hon. Provincial Treasurer referred to a financial Bill by mentioning Northern Dancer and other thoroughbreds, I realized that we had reached a point this evening in the Legislative Assembly where if the Provincial Treasurer wanted to treat some of his professional colleagues, women colleagues, by referring to them as representative of male stallions, then I felt that I'd better get over here and with your kind indulgence speak and direct my attention to the Bill that is before the House now.

I want to say that I had hoped to deliver the speech of my lifetime on the appropriation Bills, but I was cut off rudely from that opportunity - rudely - to debate on behalf of all Albertans a \$10 billion or \$11 billion expenditure debated and passed in one hour.

Point of Order
Relevance

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is rising on a point of order.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Relevance, 23(i) and (j). First of all, Northern Dancer was a gelding. Secondly, the Bill he's speaking on is the Bill in front of us right now. It has nothing to do with the appropriation Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, I hope that he will soon conclude his introductory remarks and get down to Bill 21 or . . . Yes, Bill 21.

MR. GERMAIN: I can understand how the Speaker might be confused as to the number of the Bill, Mr. Speaker. They move here with lightning speed. In fact, it's the only thing that moves here with lightning speed.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned yesterday that since the hon. members opposite get so much comic relief from my commentaries, I'm still waiting for those pouches of money to come slithering over here. I am still waiting.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, concluding my introductory remarks, the member opposite coming from an agricultural community must surely remember that Northern Dancer went on to raise more in stud fees, I believe, than any other horse in the world. I do believe . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Couldn't have been a gelding.

MR. GERMAIN: It wasn't all that funny.

I do believe it was either F. Lee Bailey, the great criminal lawyer, or it was the Barnum and Bailey circus owners that said that you can fool all of the people some of the time, and I believe the member opposite speaking of Northern Dancer as a gelding would fall into that category.

I want to now move to Bill 21, if I might. Bill 21 is a short Bill, but it is in fact a very interesting Bill and a very interesting piece of legislation in the province of Alberta because it reminds me of attempting to stop a cruise missile with a fishnet. That's exactly what we have proposed here in the Bill and in the background that led up to the Bill. This province is now extracting from generally poor and average poor and desperate people looking for the gold ring, Mr. Speaker, \$311 million net of expenses: \$311 million in lottery funds gambled and spent in the province of Alberta. That is net of every other bingo, every other casino, every other community gambling event. Three hundred and eleven million dollars out of a population of 2 and half million people, where most people would agree that approximately 45 percent of the population, in fact, are under 18 and under the age of adulthood. So we're going to throw a paltry \$850,000 and \$150,000 start-up in attempting to stop what is obviously a problem that is as big as a ballistic missile firing through the sky, and we're going to bring out a fishnet to try and encircle that ballistic missile.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Act itself provides that now, now in the province of Alberta, it will be regulation that determines whether something is an addiction. Are we next going to be tackling those people who are pleasantly plump? Is that going to be the next addiction that we are going to be pushing back? Are we going to be pushing back the addiction of chocolate cake and ice cream? Are we going to be pushing back the addiction of those people who love to read? Are we going to start defining every psychological aberration, because gambling is a psychological disorder? Are we now going to have people declared to be in fact in need of rehabilitation, in need of help on the basis of a ministerial order? That's what we've come to in this particular legislation.

9:20

This legislation – and I'm speaking to the principle of Bill 21 – again is an example of this government's desire to govern by regulation. There's no intention to come and govern by legislation that is clear and sets out all the details. It reminds me that I was going to make the point – by comparison to this Bill I can do that, I believe, Mr. Speaker – that net budgeting in the appropriation Bills masks from the public attention over \$1.2 billion of government indirect taxation that is spent but not revealed in the appropriation Bills. I point out that by comparison to this Bill, we again have another example of legislation by regulation. I want to suggest to all members of the House: do not fall into this trap; do not allow regulation to become the manner in which we are governed in the province of Alberta. I would say to all Members of the Legislative Assembly: be particularly cautious when you start allowing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to describe other addictive behaviours and to leave open those addictive behaviours that we are addressing.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Now, because we have been given some explanatory assistance and because the hon. member earlier that was referred to as one of that stable of Northern Dancers, one of the 51 Northern Dancers – the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow was referred to earlier by the

Provincial Treasurer as a Northern Dancer – because of the member's introduction to the Bill, we understand that this Bill wishes to seek and dig out the root problem of gambling in Alberta.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a problem with gambling in Alberta. We have a problem in which gambling in this province in net revenue to the provincial government has increased 300 percent in the last three years. Did the Minister of Energy's revenues increase 300 percent? No, they didn't. Did the Provincial Treasurer's taxation revenues increase 300 percent? No, they didn't. Did the environmental fees charged by the minister of environment increase 300 percent? No, they didn't. Did the department of agriculture's fees and assessments and levies increase by 300 percent? No, they did not.

In the face of an economic recession that has battered Alberta for just about four continuous years, including the last three years, we had the Deputy Premier here yesterday night chirping about – and I use the word "chirping" because that is a word that the Minister of Energy ascribes to commentaries in this Legislative Assembly from time to time, and I would say that if it fits the goose, it should fit all the ganders as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who goosed you?

MR. GERMAIN: I'm sorry?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

MR. GERMAIN: Through the Chair. The Minister of Energy wants to debate sitting down. I have noticed that the debate in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has virtually dried up.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, 23(b) of Standing Orders is very clear about being called to order when you're speaking to matters other than the question under discussion. Other debates are not pertinent to this. What is pertinent is Bill 21. The one-sentence amendment is what is being debated. He's referring constantly to other debates. Standing Order 23(b) covers that and also 23(d). I would ask him for the first time tonight to refer directly to Bill 21 and not to other debates.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, I know that at times lengthy debates are not always seen to be as fruitful as they could be. Nevertheless, we are dealing with the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994, which evolves around the issue of gambling. Because it is so brief, perhaps that's why it is spawning such wide-ranging discussion.

There is a point made by the Government House Leader, hon. Member for Fort McMurray. I know you were able to bring in all kinds of other things that had not risen 300 percent, but perhaps we could confine it to the true parameter of Bill 21, which is gambling.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. I'm always grateful for instruction from the Deputy Speaker. I'm always grateful when the hon. House leader interrupts my train of thought. It allows me to

regroup, organize my thoughts. Sometimes on occasion I might even pick up a little extra steam and carry on with some ferociousness to the end of the commentary. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought I was, and I want to apologize to the House leader opposite if he did not follow the drift of my debate.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: I thought I was speaking to the issue of gambling addiction in the province of Alberta by pointing out that there are obviously in the middle of a recession sufficient moneys that are spent on gambling in the province of Alberta, that the minister in charge of the department has publicly stated that revenues are up approximately 300 percent. I don't think that's in dispute.

The principle of this Bill is to try and treat gamblers, chronic gamblers who have a problem. How many are there? Well, of the whole population there's apparently 5 or 6 percent of the people who may have a problem with gambling. Well, if you knock off the children – because I do believe at least with the video lottery terminals you have to be 18 to go in there because they're in a licensed premises – if you take the children out of the loop, then you've probably got about 10 percent of the population that has a gambling addiction problem, is spending more money than they can afford.

Now, that is a problem, in my respectful estimation, that should be debated in this legislation, as to whether or not this particular legislation is appropriate in terms of its width and its breadth. Does it go far enough to protect addictions to gambling, or is it going to be simply a token amount thrown at a problem because the government itself is getting embarrassed by the amount of revenues that are coming in in this province from gambling?

This is not the only source of gambling that goes on in the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are the car raffles, the house raffles, the Girl Guide raffles, the horse races. There are the community bingos. Why, up in Fort McMurray bingos are a popular part of some of the social structure. Those things are all gambling as well, yet over all of those things the government is able to extract \$311 million net of expenses.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury rose earlier today and made a very profound comment. He said that the more they saw – it reminds me of a lot of young women out with their first date. The more they see of their date, the less they like their date. I believe that I'm paraphrasing the Member for Olds-Didsbury. He did not seem to be a fan of video terminals, and he may – he may – be the lone voice in the wilderness crying in this Assembly.

I must say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the allurements of quick and ready money from gambling in all provinces is a seductive one that is hard to resist. In my estimation, when we get a Bill such as this coming before the floor of the Legislative Assembly, it is designed to do one thing, and that is: it is designed to salvage and save the conscience of a province that now is disproportionately taxing the poor and the less fortunate through gambling revenues. I think we have to really monitor the situation, and we have to really wonder whether Bill 21 is the right vehicle to do that.

The other issue, talking to the principle of Bill 21, that I would like to deal with in the last bit of time that I have on this Bill is the clash between the other obvious mandate of the alcohol and drug addictions organization, AADAC, which is focused and which has a history and a performance delivery model focusing on the addictions of alcohol and drugs. Those addictions are very, very important. There is no sign in our society that either of those addictions are on the wane. Quite the contrary.

9:30

I suggest to all members of this Assembly that drug addiction and alcohol addiction are going up in the province of Alberta. I suggest that we will soon be in a situation where the government will realize that their token amount spent on gambling addiction is not sufficient, but because drug addicts and people who overindulge in alcohol do not generate \$311 million net of all expenses to the province . . . I know that members will argue that there are 400 and some million dollars made in taxation revenue in alcohol, but alcohol sales in the province of Alberta are on the decline. Alcohol consumption in society appears to be dropping, and I think we're soon going to have a situation where the government will be earning more money from gambling than they are from alcohol and drug addiction.

Then what will happen, as the alcohol and drug addiction organization tries to balance its obvious public mandate with its new boy on the block, is a little bit for alcohol addiction. I suggest that this particular piece of legislation is going to do nothing more than lead to a few little television ads that encourage people not to gamble as much. Maybe there'll be a television ad with a nice cute kid poking his face in the side into the glass of a tavern as inside we see the parents pulling away on the levers of the lottery. There is very little beyond that that I think that we can accomplish, and I think that this particular piece of legislation is simply an attempt to salve a wounded conscience.

Now, I will soon sit down, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know that others will want to get in this debate and deal with this particular debate. I hope we will be allowed to exhaust this debate before moving on to another Bill because I'm interested in hearing what all Members of the Legislative Assembly have to say. I'm interested in hearing what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has to say. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has made more speeches in this Assembly than anybody else here. Unfortunately, all of them are from the sitting position on his chair. I'm interested in hearing what the Member for Calgary-Varsity has to say. I'm interested certainly in what the Member for Vegreville-Viking has to say. I'm interested in hearing from Olds-Didsbury and yes, I'm interested, very interested in hearing what the hon. Minister of Energy has to say on this very, very serious issue.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You forgot me, Adam.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, he talked about you already.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw rising on a point of order.

MR. HAVELOCK: No, I'm rising to give my attempt to thank you for once for recognizing me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: With standing up and the noise coming from that quarter, you can understand why the Deputy Speaker thought it was a point of order.

MR. HAVELOCK: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: He's not finished.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry. Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was a very, very high blow the member gave you from over there. I

would have said low blow, but from your elevated position and his subordinate position, I felt high blow would be a better adjective.

You know, I'm interested in hearing what the member opposite from Calgary-Glenmore has to say about these addictions. She's a nurse, has spent many years, I'm sure, dealing with some of these issues, and I would be interested in hearing what the members opposite have to say about this very important piece of legislation.

I'm prepared to conclude my comments tonight, and I look forward to the rest of the very informative debate. Thank you.

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

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find this debate I guess "astonishing" would be the best word. If I've ever seen digressions with the intentions of meaningless filibuster, that's happening on Bill 21.

The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994 was set in to expand a very good program to an area of need. This time we're focusing on gambling. I might say that I've heard the members opposite very frequently harass the minister responsible for lotteries about a report on gambling: "Report on gambling. Do something. Do something." Now I am subjected to the most hypocritical views that I've ever heard in this House, when they turn around, when legislation is put in to accommodate that.

MR. MITCHELL: Stan, what is being NDP for four years and becoming a PC, if that isn't hypocritical? [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Edmonton-McClung, order. If we could return to some level of debate as opposed to through the fence. [interjection] I'm quite aware that it's both sides, hon. minister. Thank you.

Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I would like to just make a comment, that the enlightened, such as myself, change; the ignorant stay the same forever. I hope that lays to rest for the hon. member my progression upwards in life from the New Democrats to the Progressive Conservatives.

AN HON. MEMBER: We turned him down.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, it's difficult to turn something down that was not offered, but you can go in your delusion of ignorance for as long as you please.

Mr. Speaker, AADAC has been doing a very fine job. AADAC has got detox centres. It's got outpatient and community education services. AADAC extends into the community. It extends into the community across this whole province. Where we have addiction problems, the vehicle of AADAC does a very effective job of addressing these problems. The principle behind Bill 21 – I think perhaps the member that introduced the Bill and myself were the only ones speaking to the principle of the Bill, unfortunately. The principle of this Bill is to take it through an order in council to be able to expand the efforts of AADAC to other addictive areas. I find it most reprehensible to sit here and listen to the nonsense that's been emanating for the duration of this debate, criticizing a very straightforward amendment, when the whole sum total of the amendment is:

(1.1) The Commission may carry out the objects referred to in subsection (1) as they relate to other addictive behaviours, not limited to gambling, "other addictive behaviours" – there may be something else that we're not aware of that would come up,

Mr. Speaker, – as "designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

That is a very significant arm of the government. The decisions are public. They're called orders in council. It's not anything that would be slipped through under the door. It would be expedient, so we wouldn't have to go through this process if in fact there were other addictive behaviours that should be addressed. Rather than commending the Bill – and I must admit that some of the members when they first rose would say that they support the Bill, and that was the last words of intelligence that we heard as they rambled off into the wilderness. Instead of making their few comments and saying, "This is a good Bill, and perhaps it can be improved here or there," which we'd be very pleased to listen to, we're into a nonsensical filibuster.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray is rising on a point of order.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you. The point of order is on the issue of relevance. Last night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a very cogent ruling from the Chairman of Committees, who indicated that one cannot comment on the lack of debate from members in the Legislative Assembly. I suggest with respect that it is up to others to judge the quality of the debate. If this member wishes to speak to the principles of Bill 21, he should do so. With respect to this member, the members of this side of the Assembly are mature adults and know their role and know their job, and we do not need lectures with respect to parliamentary procedure, particularly from the Whip from the opposite side.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Having heard the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, do you wish to respond to the point of order?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. His point of order just underlines the nonsense that we've been subjected to, and I'll leave it at that.

9:40

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Not being a cook, I'm reminded of something that goes: what is sauce for the goose is good for the gander, or some such culinary-type term. It seems to me that only a moment ago we had members getting up and saying that one side was not being relevant to the point of Bill 21. We now have another member who gets up and talks at some length about the other side not talking to the Bill, and then we get a point of order on the person who's talking about others not talking about relevance. It really does seem to me that both sides are treading on the whole issue of what is cogent to Bill 21 which is before us. We hope that Stony Plain can now return to Bill 21.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your ruling, and I must say that I was on Bill 21. I was responding to the debate, and as far it digressed, I followed. But I will return to the point.

Debate Continued

MR. WOLOSHTYN: The point is that this legislation, if members of this Legislature on both sides of the House are interested in addressing other forms of addiction through the vehicles we have, will be passed and passed forthwith. If that is not the intention of this House – as I am getting the distinct feeling that that's not what the opposition wants, Mr. Speaker – with all due respect to

all of them at whatever level they want to be addressed, I'm going to . . .

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Point of order.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Twenty-three (h), (i), (j). The member's imputing what our . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: You're wishing to rise on a point of order, Calgary-West?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker. The member's imputing that we have a motive of not being interested in debate, which I submit is incorrect.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have entertained over the last year many weeks a number of citations of our now almost infamous 23(i). Very often, if you really look at them, motive is an imposed or a supposed reason for acting in a certain way. Just saying that someone has some characteristic or appears to have some characteristic in what they're doing isn't really a motive. It may not be that the person is advancing the cause of their debate, but certainly we do seem to have a fair bit of that. The casting of an aspersion on an action is one thing, but referring in general terms is not truly a 23(i).

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understand.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before we recognize Calgary-West, if there's someone on this side who wishes to add to the point, then we can . . .

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, is what you're saying, then, is that the member opposite doesn't know what he's talking about? Is that what you mean?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think that is putting words in the mouth of the Chair. The Chair is not allowed the luxury of having such opinions.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Debate Continued

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been many, many concerned citizens who have prompted this government to act and to react to another dimension of addiction, and it was mentioned in this House quite frequently: gambling. This Bill would have permitted the addressing of that. I feel that after listening to the debate that I have no other alternative than to talk to the Member for Calgary-Bow, determine what level of concern there is, and perhaps in some way articulate that if this Bill in fact does not proceed, as I feel that it should not because the debate is not on the principle of the Bill, that perhaps there'd be some way of addressing this issue and letting the concerned people know that there was a sincere effort made in this House to get this legislation through. At this point, if the debate doesn't improve on the principle of the Bill and then improve on the Bill, I feel we should move on to some other legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Speaker, standing in my place and being threatened that if I represent my constituents and speak about an

issue that's very important in my constituency and to the people that I represent is frankly an insult to the House, an insult to every member, and certainly an insult to this member. I want it to be on the record that the government Whip has said that if we don't fall in line and do exactly what the government wants us to do, and if we continue to represent our constituents, they will do exactly what they did in Bill 24, where they cut off debate on a \$15 billion expenditure after one hour. Believe me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be spending a lot of my energy in the coming months informing my constituents and constituents of members across the way exactly what the government has done this evening.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, in all sincerity, it does pain me somewhat to continue to have to belabour you with these points of order. The member for Edmonton-Centre stood up and said he was going to address the Bill. He has now waited on for I don't know how many minutes about what somebody else said and about what he's going to do in his constituency about the appropriation Bills. And 23(b) just comes in again: he's speaking to matters other than that which is under discussion. Every member opposite has spoken to matters other than this Bill. We are simply saying: will you please address this Bill?

MRS. HEWES: So did the Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Two wrongs don't make a right, hon. Bettie.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, we don't have Bettie.

MR. DAY: You're correct. We don't have Bettie, and I withdraw that remark, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will take the advice, and I will stick to the matter of the Bill to please the Government House Leader, if that's what he needs tonight, in all sincerity.

Debate Continued

MR. HENRY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 21, as has been outlined by a couple of the other speakers, adds the ability of the Lieutenant Governor in Council - i.e., our cabinet - to basically identify any other what they consider addictive behaviours to be, in terms of providing treatment, the responsibility of AADAC. There are just a few short points that I'd like to make. Number one, how did we get to this point where we have a government who is saying we have a problem and having reports commissioned by government acknowledging we have a problem in addictions in this province? This government has been going like a speeding train down an Amtrak to get us into more and more and more gambling in this province without thinking about it, without consulting Albertans about it, without consulting professionals about the ramifications.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was a time in this province when games of chance, items such as bingos and casinos, were the territory of religious groups and of charitable groups, not of governments and assorted other groups that the government keeps letting in. This province has moved into megagambling in a megaway. We have video lottery terminals all over the place, and

we've seen no plan. What we see is a little band-aid in this Bill trying to stop a major problem that we have identified in Alberta. If any professional in mental health had been consulted, if any entrepreneur in gambling had been consulted, they could have predicted that we would end up at this point. Unfortunately, Albertans have not been able to be consulted on this issue. The Deputy Premier, the Premier, and other members of the government have simply made decisions in a very top-down, paternalistic way, telling Albertans: "What you think really doesn't matter. You really don't understand. We see the big picture, so we're going to do what we want anyway." Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we end up with is an ill-thought-out nonplan for our province.

There are many views in terms of gambling in our province, and there are some who would say that we should expand gambling. There are some who say that we should look at the options. Members of my caucus, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the last number of years have begged this government to sponsor hearings across our province so we can find out what people in Alberta want the role of gambling to be in our society. People in Alberta do not want the government making these decisions for them. They have the right and they have the expectation to have input into those decisions. There are varying views in our province. There are those who would say that we should have no gambling at all. There are those who would say that we should wipe out casinos, we should wipe out video lottery terminals, we should wipe out bingos, and we should wipe out pull cards and raffle tickets.

9:50

There are those on the other end of the continuum who would say that in their view there's an economic opportunity here, and what we should be doing is perhaps saying in Edmonton and Calgary, "Let's identify a strip, and let's have Las Vegas north and Las Vegas north-north, and if we wanted to go to Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, we could have Las Vegas north-north-north and continue." We could have a revenue-generating tourist attraction: that's a legitimate view expressed by, frankly, individuals in the business, individuals in our society, in our province. However, those individuals have never had the opportunity to lay out the various options to the government and to the people of Alberta so we can have an informed, intelligent discussion about where this province is going in gambling. Instead, we have a government who shuts their doors and says, "Well, just in case we have anything else besides gambling we want to deal with, let us do whatever we want, and just trust us." Well, we know what "trust us" gets us, don't we? It gets us NovAtel. It gets us Gainers. It gets us the mess we're in today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and people do not trust this government.

This government, whether it likes it or not, whether it acknowledges it or not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in direct competition with the traditional charities, with the traditional churches who have provided good works in our province for decades, even centuries. I think it is shameful that the very government who would off-load more and more and more responsibility onto the charitable sector and onto the religious, spiritual sector, more responsibility and more costs than they can indeed handle – and believe me, they're saying loud and clear: stop the train; you're dumping on us too much. It is a tragedy that the very government who would off-load these services, who would say to young parents who can't get work, "Well, that's not my problem; that's your fault; go out and work and use the food bank and go see your church and let communities handle it all," is a government that is pushing charitable organizations, pushing churches throughout our province right to the limit in terms of their charitable works and is the very

government that turns around and does a reverse Robin Hood and takes the money away from those charities by being in direct competition in the gaming sector. There's something wrong here. There is something dreadfully wrong with a government who acts in such a hypocritical manner towards the charitable organizations and the church communities in our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government would like to amend the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act in order to, as they say, allow them to be able to treat addictive behaviours through AADAC. There's no question that addiction to gambling – and I specify addiction to gambling, not gambling – has in recent years been added to the DSM-3 criteria produced by the American Psychiatric Association as a definable mental illness. There's no question. My hon. colleague from Fort McMurray indicated some numbers, and we have to continue to work to make sure our numbers are indeed the numbers that are out there in terms of how many people are afflicted with this definable mental illness. It is very clear that we do have to provide treatment, but one must wonder when a government decides that they're going to take a piece of legislation and not simply deal, albeit in a band-aid way, with the problem but all of a sudden says, "Let us handle anything we want to do," that the government defines as addictive behaviour.

If in this Act the government were to bring forward – and perhaps when we get to committee we can see that – not simply that we have any "other addictive behaviours" and leave it up to the government to define what addictive behaviour is – and goodness knows what the government will come up with next as to addictive behaviours – but if it were to say, "addictive behaviours as defined by the DSM-3," or as defined by some other internationally recognized authority, then we might have some more sympathy or some more support for the Bill. Perhaps we can look at that in committee, but we all know that the government does not accept amendments from the opposition, so I do hope a government member rises in committee to clarify this and narrow this down not just to anything that the government feels is addictive behaviour. I believe if the government had its way, if they thought they could get away with it, there are members of the government who would define a loyalty and adherence to a Liberal ideology as an addictive behaviour and want to treat us for it. That's possible under this Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a poorly drafted Bill. We need some more clarity in terms of not just the words that the government says but specifically – and that might allay the concerns of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow – if we were to cite some outside source that would define what are addictive behaviours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government is trying to do a little PR campaign by saying they're going to take some of the lottery dollars that have been gained through gaming and put them into treatment for the very source that they're raised from. This is not the role of government. It is not the role of government to move without consulting people, without an overall plan that defines what kind of province we're going to have, that defines how it is that gaming will take form in the future. We don't know that. There are proponents who would like to see video lottery terminals in every corner store in the province. I would personally be one of those people arguing very hard against that. But we need to have a very public discussion. We need to have a set of hearings, a commission, a commissioner who would go around so Albertans would have the opportunity to be able to stand up and be able to tell this government what role gambling should play in our society.

Should we proceed more and more? There are some people who are quite comfortable with the level of gambling that we have in our province today, from bingos right through to video lottery terminals. There are some people who would like to have a bit

more. There are some people who would like to have a lot less. Albertans deserve the right to tell their government, to tell all legislators exactly how far they want to go on gambling, exactly what role gambling should play, and to define where gambling should happen. Should we be allowing children to be involved in gambling? I, as one member, think not, but there may be other views in our province. This government, as usual, doesn't want to hear the views and instead would rather simply tell Albertans what's good for them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, charities in this province are hurting. Charities in this province are struggling. Charities in this province are crying to this government, saying, "Please stop off-loading." I know it's tempting for me to stand here and say they're all saying that because it's the fault of the Minister of Family and Social Services. Well, it's not all at his feet. It's at the whole government's door front.

The changes the government is making in education, the changes the government is making in health, the changes . . .

Point of Order Relevance

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry again to tax the patience of yourself and all members in the Assembly, but the member opposite is not talking about the Bill. He's talking about charities crying. The member who presented this is talking about people crying who need attention. We're trying to bring in legislation, one sentence that releases dollars to those people who are crying. The political comments we're hearing from the people across the way have nothing to do with the people in this province that we want to help. I wish he would confine his remarks to the Bill.

MR. HENRY: To the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I totally disagree with the assertion of the Government House Leader. My comments are directly related to Bill 21 and the purpose of Bill 21. The charities, the churches, the community organizations in this province are struggling not only because of the policies of this government off-loading but, as I said earlier, also because this government has entered more and more and more into direct competition with those community groups, religious organizations in the gaming field and taken money away from those groups.

10:00

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, on the point of order one can't help but agree with what you're saying in terms of the direction that government may or may not be taking with regard to the issue of gambling and how it may impact charitable organizations; however, that's not the focus of the Bill. It's on the addictive part. If that's the point of the hon. Government House Leader, as I've suggested to the hon. Member for Stony Plain, to focus on the Bill, I could, I suppose, indicate that. That's not to take away the argument that you might have on some other Bill, should it ever arise.

MR. HENRY: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that direction.

Debate Continued

MR. HENRY: Specifically to the issue of addiction to gambling. As I said earlier, we have strayed into this province without a

plan, without any sort of clear direction, increased gambling that has led to increased addictions to gambling. We have more gambling. We have more types of gambling. We have more availability to gambling. All of that has contributed to the increase in addictive behaviours relative to gambling. As well, because of the off-loading of the government and because of the competition provided to the charitable sectors, charitable sectors are also moving more and more into gambling and provision of more and more gambling. As somebody who has spent his entire adult life working as a volunteer and as a professional in a charitable nonprofit sector, I can tell you it is a major, major struggle for organizations.

I'd like to relate a discussion that I was privy to when I was the director of the Canadian Mental Health Association a few years ago. The board of the association recognized that addiction to gambling at that time had recently been established to be a definable mental illness under the DSM-3 criteria. But the problem was that the organization was receiving more and more demands and requests for its services and less and less dollars available to do that from governments and other sources. The economy generally – there were less dollars, and it was a real struggle. Twelve strong community members in the Edmonton area, people from all walks of life – accountants, lawyers, secretaries, homemakers, retired people, and people who volunteered full time – sat around this table and agonized over one of the most difficult decisions I have ever seen that organization go through. The decision was: do we get involved in casinos and gambling or not? We heard at the table, "How can we do this when we know that this contributes to more gaming and more gaming availability and therefore more gambling addiction and therefore more demand for our services?"

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Get on the Bill. Get on the Bill. Get on the Bill.

MR. HENRY: Mr. Speaker, I'm hearing "on the Bill." I'm speaking very specifically to why this Bill is before the Legislature.

Again, that very same organization: I also heard the argument from other members of its board saying that this is a difficult decision, yes, but it's a decision we must make because we need the dollars, and the demand's out there, and gaming is relatively easy dollars compared to direct solicitation and other kinds of fund-raising. So again, in the most agonizing, heart-wrenching debate and discussion I've ever seen in a charitable organization, that organization by a majority vote of one decided reluctantly to enter into the gambling arena and started sponsoring casinos. That organization knew at that time, by doing that in a very small way, that they were going to be contributing to the problem that this Bill attempts to address. They knew at that time, but they had no choice because they needed the dollars to respond to the ever increasing demands in the community.

It disturbs me greatly that any government – and this is not specific to this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but any government – would ask the legislators that are elected to give the Lieutenant Governor in Council, about a dozen people out of 83, carte blanche to define any other behaviour to be addictive. Again this legislation does not refer to any outside expertise or outside reference that says, "Here are the kinds of addictive behaviours." For the record the member who sponsored this Bill and other government members have been saying that this amendment is directed specifically at addictions to gambling. That is not the case. That may be the intent, but that is not the drafting, and I quote, "may . . . relate to other addictive behaviours designated by the

Lieutenant Governor in Council." So what other behaviours are going to come? We do know that out in the real world in the human service sector there is much confusion between government departments as to whose responsibility is whose. Are we going to see the Lieutenant Governor in Council all of a sudden saying, "Anorexia and bulimia should go to AADAC; let them handle it." Well, that's going to be allowed. Twelve people will make that decision, not this Legislative Assembly.

I see the government Whip throwing his hands up. Well, I can tell you, if the government Whip would like to go back and have a better drafting of this Bill or clearly define it so that it doesn't go the route of everything else with this government, which is more decisions behind closed doors, more decisions by the elite 12 and leave everybody else out on the streets, then this Bill could be more and more supportable. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill gives carte blanche.

I welcome debate from the other side, and I do want to say, having given some history in terms of how we ended up at this point, that we need to pay more attention to gambling as an addictive behaviour. I appreciate the intent of the Member for Calgary-Bow – I believe it was Calgary-Bow – who presented this Bill.

MR. DAY: No, you don't.

MR. HENRY: The hon. Government House Leader would like to enter into debate as to whether I appreciate the merits of this Bill or not. Mr. Speaker, we all know that a member's word in this House is taken as the truth, and I would ask the hon. Government House Leader to await his turn in debate and perhaps he can give his opinion.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow has good intentions with this Bill. Frankly, I believe the government as a whole has decent intentions with regard to the Bill. It is loosely drafted. I would like to see some changes. I do recognize that we are at second reading of the Bill – and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker – but as I understand it, in second reading of the Bill we will be voting on the principle of the Bill and not necessarily agreeing with the wording of the Bill or some of the detail of the Bill. I would welcome debate from the other side of the House. I would be thrilled if a government member, especially one of the chosen few from the front row, would be able to stand up and say that there is going to be a public review of gambling.

In any case, I think I will find myself voting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in support of this Bill. Thank you.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this has been a sad, sad time in this Legislature today. As we look at this particular Bill 21 here, I recognize there are times when both sides of an Assembly will use and play politics to drag things out. We know that the opposition wants to get as many question periods as they can, so we know they're filibustering every Bill possible. But when I look at this – and I'll read the one sentence into the record, because there are people who read *Hansard*, and they're very conscientious citizens. What the Member for Calgary-Bow is asking is that the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission be allowed to help people who are also, for instance, suffering with an addiction towards gambling. That's why the sentence is very clear. That's why the sentence very clearly says:

The Commission may carry out the objects referred to in subsection (1) as they relate to other addictive behaviours designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Point of Order Clarification

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

10:10

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is rising on a point of order.

MR. HENRY: The Government House Leader has been up and down so often tonight that I just wanted to have clarification from the Chair. Is the Government House Leader up on a point of order, or is he indeed speaking to the Bill?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of clarification it's my understanding by the record that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has not spoken on debate, has spoken in points of order, and we were trying to check that out, but my records show this is him speaking on debate.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is the third time tonight in a space of less than 20 minutes that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has been ruled, in effect, not in order but out of order. That's exactly my point.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: This is a one sentence amendment, and it's designed to allow the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission to help more people than simply those who are addicted to alcohol. It is a compassionate move brought forward by a compassionate member, and people are there right now because the member and others have consulted. They've asked and they've listened, and people have come to the government and said, "Please can you help us; can you change the legislation," as we've done here, an amendment, "so that you can help us?" There is probably not a simpler, more straightforward – you talk about narrow – more narrow amendment before the Assembly in this entire session. What we've heard tonight – and we've heard it now from members opposite – is that they are going to just drag things out. They don't care about hurting people. They're going to drag things out. It's a very distressing situation.

I'm going to be consulting with the member who is sponsoring this Bill to ask her to communicate back to the groups who are ready with programs to deliver to people in need now, to people on the verge of suicide, if there's some other way that we can help them. While we consult with these groups and explain to them what is happening and explain to them why their dollars are being held up, while we explain that to them, I'll ask if there's some other way we can get those dollars to them.

On that point, I now would very sadly move to adjourn debate.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we now adjourn debate on Bill 21. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Black	Fritz	Paszkowski
Brassard	Gordon	Pham
Burgener	Havelock	Renner
Cardinal	Hierath	Rostad
Clegg	Jacques	Smith
Coutts	Jonson	Sohal
Day	Laing	Stelmach
Dinning	Langevin	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Trynchy
Evans	McFarland	West
Fischer	Mirosh	Woloshyn
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Nicol
Beniuk	Henry	Percy
Bruseker	Hewes	Sekulic
Chadi	Leibovici	Vasseur
Dalla-Longa	Massey	Zariwny
Germain	Mitchell	

Totals: For - 37 Against - 17

[Motion carried]

Bill 19 School Amendment Act, 1994

[Debate adjourned April 18]

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

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 19. Education is indeed a debt due from present to future generations. Education today, more than ever before, must see clearly the dual objectives: education for living and education for making a living. You know, education is indeed a core value to Albertans. With that framework, I'd like to now speak to Bill 19 and share with you my grave concerns about this Bill.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

The first grave concern that I have - and it's shared by many Albertans - is that it infringes on the constitutional rights of Catholics to levy and collect their taxes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not believe that I would stand before this Legislature in the province of Alberta and see a constitutional right being taken away without even the government of the day having the democratic decency to at least go to the courts to ensure that the constitutional rights of Catholics were indeed being protected. It also interferes in hiring and firing of superintendents, and indeed it bypasses the school board by the minister.

Then when you actually take a look at what they call opting out and what it results in, it severely restricts the assessment base, unless the current legislation that allows us for directing allocation in the case of undeclared individuals and corporations is retained. This is undemocratic to say the least. Now, if we're opting in, it certainly doesn't guarantee, through Bill 19, an equitable share of

education funds, because the method of distribution has as yet not been defined in legislation.

We should also take a look at school councils in section 17(1). The powers of school councils appear to infringe upon the duties of trustees, superintendents, and even principals. This Bill is going to create confusion. Who indeed is in charge? You can't serve two or three masters, and that in essence is what Bill 19 is doing.

Let's also take a look at charter schools. Who are they going to be answerable to? Certainly not to a board.

The provincial government, in essence, has become all powerful in the distribution of the Alberta school foundation. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the powers that this government has taken through Bill 19, every Albertan should be fearful. They've certainly demonstrated over the past two decades that they are not competent when it comes to managing money, and to this point in time I haven't seen any evidence that they've gained competence in that area. Only time will tell, but to allow that same government - and when we look at the front benches, it's still very reflective of the past Conservative government - to have the power to take over a tax base that belonged under another governance is quite frightening.

10:30

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we look at sections 94(2) and (3), it clearly allows the minister and the superintendent to bypass the board. Why bother with a board then? They've been rendered impotent. That in itself is scary, to think that the minister and the superintendent are all-powerful. Indeed, I put it this way, that the superintendent and the minister could indeed be in bed together.

Look at the power that the minister has through section 17. Once again, the school council has broad authority to bypass the trustees, so it's not only the superintendent that could be in bed with the minister. We're also seeing school councils having the ability to bypass the trustees. What's happening to our democratic society that we would allow through Bill 19 the powers that this Bill has given to a minister?

Now, the government has also taken away the property taxes from schools. What's to stop this same government taking the same authority, the same taxation powers that municipalities have? It's not farfetched. We see a government, Mr. Speaker, who's hell-bent on getting their hands on any form of taxation that they possibly can. If it's not through 30 instances of downloading through user fees; it's by taking the funds for supporting our school systems, and I would say that every Albertan should watch very closely where their next move is.

You know, they continued to make mistakes over the past decade, and I used to think: does this government indeed have a vision? I would suggest that, no, they don't have a vision; they've got a revision. Indeed the revision is a return to the 19th century, a return to a time before public education, a time before public infrastructure, and a time before public responsibility. The level of control by Bill 19 in education is breathtaking. In effect, children will study what they want them to study or they get no funding. That's in essence what Bill 19 is saying to the Catholics in the province of Alberta.

Section 17(7) is also to my mind quite frightening.

The Minister, on the request of the board, may dissolve a school council . . . at any time, without any notice or consultation, as I read it, if in the minister's opinion

the school council is not carrying out its responsibilities in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

Can you imagine what's going to happen at the local level? We've got the school trustees, we've the superintendent, we've the

minister, and then the minister suddenly decides that the school council that truly is supposed to represent the community is going to be dismissed. We'll have holy war in our communities. Who's going to be supporting whom? Are we going to be supporting our school councils? Are we going to support our superintendent? Are we going to support our trustees, or is it the minister we're going to be supporting? All it's going to lead to is total confusion.

How indeed can we also say within the membership of school councils that nonparent voters are not going to have the same degree of being included in the councils as parents are? Once again this is undemocratic. Nonparents who do not have children with the school system have as much right, if they're paying the taxes, to be part of that process.

In section 24 it's very fuzzy as to what the relationship between chartered schools and school councils is going to be. Are we going to have community councils indeed when there are chartered schools? Also, when you look at section 24.6(1)(b), the minister can put chartered schools outside the reach of boards. That in itself should raise concern. Who indeed is going to be supervising these chartered schools? Is it the minister? Is it the bureaucracy? Or are they going to be out there doing what they deem they desire within that environment? I would suggest that if that's the case, it could lead us down a road that may not be the road that this society wants to see.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, members of this government have suggested that this Bill is forward thinking. I would say that it's anything but forward thinking. It's revisionary. It's not visionary. It's going to do a disservice to the present generation that is being educated within our school system. Yes, the educational system did need restructuring, but I don't see this as restructuring. It's destruction.

What Albertans were asking for was to see an educational system that was truly accountable to the electorate. There's nothing in Bill 19, I would suggest, that this is what's going to happen. You know, Mr. Speaker, whether it be Bill 19 or any other Bill that has been brought before this Assembly – since this government came in office, they've had an attitude.

AN HON. MEMBER: Elected to office.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Elected to office. They've had an attitude that they truly know what's best for Albertans. You know, the assertion that they know what is best for Albertans is based on a set of assumptions, and it's rooted in paternalism. They know what is best. We've seen that same paternalism for the past two decades, and where did it get us to, Mr. Speaker? This is what I fear when I see the same people taking control of a significant financial area of Albertans. The litany of financial disasters that past Conservative governments have left – when you look across Canada, there's not another province that has left the litany of debt that the past Conservative government in Alberta has.

MR. DINNING: Who got re-elected?

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: We keep getting told that they got re-elected. Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker. But the essence of democracy is to listen. The essence of democracy is certainly not the arrogance that I have seen displayed in this House.

When I look this evening at the Bills that have been before us, I see an arrogance that is unbelievable. I have seen a Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Speaker, stand before this House and leave the

distinct impression that he is intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity. I begin to believe that he actually believes what he's saying, and that is really quite frightening.

When we look at Bill 19, I fear that once again we're going to see the squandering of tax dollars. Once again we're going to see a destructive administration. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that we stand indicted by our children for denying them the same educational opportunities that we had. We cannot guarantee that same educational opportunity that my children had and that I had. We will have to face ourselves every day and contemplate what we've had when we've elected governments with even mundane competence to this House.

10:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, Albertans want a change within their educational system, and I would suggest that this Bill 19 does not address the changes that Albertans were looking for. Yes, they were looking for a restructuring. Yes, they were wanting to see the moneys that were spent and what were perceived as top-heavy administration dealt with. They wanted to see the perception of incompetent teachers being dealt with and ensure that there was an evaluation system in place that would remove incompetency from the classroom. That isn't addressed by any stretch of the imagination. Getting people out of the offices and allowing the money to filter down into the classroom, that isn't what we're seeing through Bill 19 or through the budgets or the business plans.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly wanted to see students in a streamlined system that met the needs according to their ability in what they deemed was the area they wished to have a career in. What we're seeing is confusion within Bill 19 with no clear direction where our students indeed fit in.

We also see a key program being threatened and different levels evolving around the province today, and I'm referring to kindergarten. I look back to my days in school in Scotland, Mr. Speaker. We didn't call it kindergarten in those days; we called it infant 1. In those days we went to school at four and half years old. I stand before you today at 55 years old. I can't even guarantee my grandchildren that they will have a kindergarten education. I will say that parents are going to be forced into deciding where they're going to buy a property. Or are they going to sell a property they're living in today to move to another area so that they can guarantee kindergarten full-time or the 200 hours because a certain area within the province of Alberta will be able to give the full program?

We're supposed to be creating equity in funding, Mr. Speaker, and we can't even get our act together to make sure we've got equity in kindergarten. How sad it is that here we are in 1994, and in 1968 when we came to live in the province of Alberta in a place called Breton, I could access that for my child in a village of 500 people. This is what this government has brought us to.

MR. DINNING: Still can, Muriel.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer has just indicated across the floor that we still can. I would ask the Provincial Treasurer to tell Albertans in Edmonton: is the city of Edmonton going to match the county of Strathcona kindergarten program? If he can go out and tell Albertans that kindergarten programs are going to be equitable across the province of Alberta, then I'll accept what he's saying today, but don't sit in this House, Mr. Provincial Treasurer, and leave an impression that there's equity in kindergarten in the province of Alberta when there isn't.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our future lies with the educational system. We have to ensure that our students in the province of Alberta

have the very best education possible, because the reality is that if they don't, we don't have a hope of competing in that global marketplace. We have to ensure that when we graduate our grade 12 students or our graduates out of the U of A or the U of Calgary, they can match any student coming out of an Ontario educational system. I hear continually from the private sector and the major industries that there still is a tendency that they favour specifically the province of Alberta's educational institutions. I'll use one example, the Faculty of Engineering at University of Waterloo. [Mrs. Abdurahman's speaking time expired]

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise and speak in favour of this Bill, but I also would like to take an opportunity to let the Legislature know a few of the activities that I've been carrying on on weekends while I go home. [interjections] No, these are activities that I'm very proud to tell the Legislature about because I have been home listening to my constituents. I've been talking with teachers in my constituency, I've been talking with parents in my constituency, and I've been talking with school boards in my constituency. The most important thing is that I'm listening to what they're having to say. I haven't been out stirring things up and letting them know that the world is going to end tomorrow, as the members opposite obviously have been doing from the remarks that we hear in this House.

I talked with a number of teachers on the past weekend. In fact, there was a group of about 50 to 60 teachers from Medicine Hat. We talked in general terms about Bill 19. Mr. Speaker, I must say that certainly there is concern. I wouldn't expect, when change of this type comes along, that there wouldn't be concern, but the thing that I think is so important is that unlike the members opposite they were not talking doom and gloom. They were not talking the end of education. They came forward with some very constructive suggestions, and I would like to take this opportunity to let other members in this House know what the suggestions were from the teachers I talked to on the weekend.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, the teachers in Medicine Hat for the most part understand what the minister is proposing with this Bill, and in general terms they agree with what the minister is doing in this Bill. We talked about the funding portion of this Bill and the fact that we are going to have equitable funding for all school jurisdictions across this province. This is a principle that is agreed with. We talked about the fact that the whole concept of corporate pooling has been around for years and years and we were getting absolutely nowhere. And this certainly went on long before I had an opportunity to sit in this Legislature. I've talked with people who were in the know and involved, and they concur completely that this was going nowhere. Corporate pooling was something that was not going to get anywhere. There was just no agreement on any fronts on corporate pooling, and I think somewhere along the line somebody had to take the bull by the horns and say: "Okay. Here's what we're going to do. We come up with a funding formula, full provincial funding."

This is not unique to the province of Alberta. There's full provincial funding in other jurisdictions across this country. This isn't a new concept. This is a concept that needs to be developed, and it's something that people understand. They understand, number one, that it doesn't matter if you're in Edmonton or Medicine Hat or in High Prairie. Your school taxes are going to be the same, and your children are going to have the same opportunity for education in this province.

10:50

The other thing we talked about with regards to this Bill is the process that it takes and extends beyond Bill 8, which we discussed last time, and it further encourages school boards to amalgamate and regionalize. I think there is certainly consensus that this again is intelligent, a thing we had to accomplish in this province because there's no doubt that with the number of boards operating in this province, the number of school jurisdictions operating, there was a terrible waste of taxpayers' dollars involved in administering our school system. So we had that to agree on.

The other thing we had to agree on, Mr. Speaker, was the concept of moving more of the decision-making with regards to schools and school boards more to the local level, the school level. Now, the principle was agreed with. This is where they had some constructive criticisms, and this is where I would like to perhaps point out to the minister that I think there needs to be some thought when we get into the school councils. I will point out to the members of this Legislature the same thing I said to the teachers when I met with them, that the school councils, although their responsibilities are laid out very clearly in this Bill, it does say "subject to the regulations." I think that is the most important part of that section of the Bill, "subject to the regulations."

I would like to make the message very clear to the minister on behalf of the teachers that I spoke with on the weekend that we have to be very careful when we develop the regulations. We have to be sure that the school councils don't get so powerful that they tend to shift policy in the school from year to year, because I think it's obvious to anyone dealing with school councils that parents are going to have a good deal of interest when their children are involved in the school. Two, three years later, perhaps even less than that, their children move on, move out to another school, and you're going to have another set of parents. I think the regulations need to be firm enough that the school council is going to have to take some kind of direction so that they can't make a 180 degree turn in policy in the school every two or three years. I don't say this is a criticism of the Bill; I say this is a something that can be developed through regulation.

The other issue we talked about was superintendents, and I think it was generally agreed that the government had been listening, the minister had been listening, and that the superintendents issue as we see it in this Bill now is agreed to by most of the people I've been talking with in my constituency, not only teachers but parents and school board. In particular the school board, in discussions that I've had, say this is a reasonable compromise. They can certainly understand that the minister wants to have some say in who the superintendent is going to be, and this is something they can very reasonably live with. They wanted me to express my thanks to the minister on behalf of the people that I spoke to, saying they acknowledge that the minister was listening very intently, and on this particular issue they feel that this amendment and this Bill react very positively to the comments.

I've had a number of other discussions, but I think those comments would probably be more appropriate when we get into discussion in committee on this Bill. So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and encourage anyone else to contribute to the debate.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have been talking to constituents, door knocking. I'll just recount, as I get into the

principles of this Bill, what I heard prior to the election and subsequent to the election.

Certainly prior to the election, Mr. Speaker, what I heard was tremendous concern about the deficit, concern about how the deficit had arisen. At a number of doors I knocked on I was really surprised that people were concerned about school boards. In fact, on occasion I thought I was running against the superintendent by the number of comments that I would hear. But I never heard one single individual say: "Centralize power under the dome. Give the Department of Education the ability to fire superintendents if they do not like what they do." I did not hear that before the election, and I certainly have not heard it after the election. What I heard instead was concern about the Department of Education. I heard in fact that the Department of Education was perceived by many parents and very, very many teachers as being relentlessly trendy, that a new curriculum fad would emerge and it would be adopted regardless of the cost to school boards, regardless of the cost to teachers and the curriculum. That was a problem of the Department of Education.

I heard as well, Mr. Speaker, concerns that the Department of Education was overstaffed and underworked. I heard many of those types of concerns, but I did not hear parents saying, "Please, have the government take over the entire nonresidential tax base." I never heard that once. I did hear concern about inequities that arose from funding and the M and E tax. That did come up on occasion, particularly from individuals who might own businesses in M and E jurisdictions. What I heard were inferences that indeed there were problems and this was an issue of taxation. In fact, many of us then thought when the tax review commission was set up that in fact they would do the logical thing, that they would deal with the issue of M and E in conjunction with the issue of school funding. Instead that did not happen. In fact, we still do not know what is going to replace the M and E. There is still a state of tremendous economic insecurity out there in those jurisdictions that heretofore had relied upon the M and E. They don't know at this stage what is going to be put in place, how high their business taxes might now rise, how high their other types of taxes may rise to replace the M and E. It's still extraordinarily vague.

Subsequently, since the election and certainly since the House has been in session, I have been door knocking, because it is a nice anchor on reality to hear what your constituents have to say. The type of comments I have heard really relate to the nature of: why was such a fundamental restructuring of our educational system required? The position I heard from many individuals was that the deficit was an issue of provincial government spending, not school board spending. There was real support evidenced for the position taken by both parties that elected members that the number of school boards had to be reduced and that regionalization had to occur because that would do a number of things. That would reduce administrative overheads. It would provide a more rational structure of delivery of educational services, and it would just remove the duplication that had existed in the system. There is strong support for regionalization, but there is support tempered by the knowledge that the regionalization that has to occur has to be a marriage of desire rather than a shotgun marriage. Because there is concern that unless rationalization occurs along standard or normal trading patterns, along the standard flow of commerce, it's going to be very difficult then for the type of collegiality within regions to emerge that is required to ensure an equitable distribution of resources within the boards that may emerge.

So those are the types of concerns I heard in general in talking to a number of parent advisory groups and individuals, the types of concerns that emerge about Bill 19. I, too, as the Member for

Medicine Hat observed, have heard a number of constituents – and these would be constituents who are both teachers, constituents who have children in schools, and just interested observers – express that the parent advisory councils is something they want to see debated in the House. They do not want us to pass legislation blindly that leaves it up to the minister to define these in whatever way he might wish. They want to see the nature of these councils debated, the powers given to these councils debated, and the limits of authority debated. If there's one single issue that has come to the fore in terms of unsolicited phone calls to my constituency office, it has been a concern that we're creating the seeds of internecine warfare within our schools over parents' advisory groups – because there just seems to be no limit on what those can do – the nature of conflict between those councils, teachers, the principals, and the school boards. There is real concern that this is not flushed out and it is left to regulation.

11:00

So I would echo the comments, and unlike, though, the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, I view this as a criticism of the Bill. This is something that ought to be debated in the Legislature, ought to be flushed out. I would hope some member on either side of the House would bring forward an amendment to that effect, that would set out exactly what we could expect from these types of councils, because there is real concern that we're going to get bureaucratic gridlock, that we're going to just get conflict within schools, between schools, and with school boards.

There is also the point the Member for Medicine Hat referred to, which is the potential for significant change, shifts in the focus of these groups as the mix changes through time. This is something that ought to be debated in the Legislature and ought to be flushed out in legislation and not left to regulations.

The other issue that has come to the fore concerns charter schools. I think many parents view charter schools as being perhaps a useful exercise and something that ought to be looked at. However, what surprises many parents who are looking at this is the ability, then, of the minister to exempt at his discretion these schools from various provisions in the fact that these schools report either to the minister or to the school board.

There's concern, then, that we're going to move away from the notion of a level playing field, that we may get different levels of teaching competence within these schools. That is a real concern. People want to see choice, they want to see diversity in the educational system, but they view it as a fundamental role of the provincial government to ensure common standards and competence among those people who are teaching in those schools. The notion of discretion and a blank cheque to the minister, regardless of his intentions, frightens individuals.

So while there is support for charter schools, there is in fact I think a legitimate desire for the provisions relating to charter schools to be tightened up and the ability, then, for discretion or exemption from the rules to be removed and a cleaning up of that provision so that those charter schools report to the school board, not just to the minister. That I have heard from many parents.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

The notion, then, of a system being demand driven again makes a lot of sense. Certainly in the city of Edmonton that is how the school boards have operated. I mean, you just have to look at the diversity of choice across schools here, the range of bilingual programs whether it's German bilingual, Ukrainian bilingual. There is choice here, and it's driven by the fact that students can vote with their feet, and that really does bring a degree of

accountability to the system. You combine that with school-based funding and that makes for a very responsive school system. That, Mr. Speaker, was done within the existing legislation. We have it here and it works. You didn't have to restructure the whole system to get a high degree of accountability. It is here in Edmonton.

Now, one issue that does emerge and again has only been referred to by one or two of my constituents but certainly from people I know that live outside the area is: to the extent, then, that this is going to be a demand-driven system and you have an array of bedroom communities about the city of Edmonton and about the city of Calgary, you will in fact have a clustering of students deciding to go to the larger, urban-based schools because they may offer a broader array of programs or just might have larger capital structures, a stronger sports program, or simply because they're bigger and are in the larger school system. There is a legitimate concern that what may happen is that there will be a kind of whirlpool effect with many of the bedroom communities finding that their school systems are being denuded of students. This will be in a sense consistent with choice, but at the same time it may put tremendous stress on the outer rings around certainly Edmonton and Calgary, possibly Red Deer and Grande Prairie.

Again, I don't know how one deals with that, because on one hand one has to be in favour of choice but on the other hand one can see there is going to be a collapsing inward of the system. That has come up. I think you're going to see, as people look at some of the implications of this, real concern as to how these adjacent school boards are going to deal with this and how they're going to be able to plan, because by not being part of a larger school system they may not have the amenities or the array of program alternatives that will attract those students. So I think that is a concern the minister ought to address. I'm not sure how he can address it.

The other issue that comes up – and again the government has a history of viewing any criticism as being driven by special-interest groups. Well, people are concerned. They're not necessarily special-interest groups. They're just not sure about the direction this restructuring is taking us, especially with regards to the separate school system. Again, people were concerned about the deficit prior to the election; they remain concerned about the deficit now, but they never connected fighting the deficit with in fact removing some of the fiscal capability of the separate school system. That had never entered into the debate.

There is a concern of many of my constituents that this Bill has adverse implications for Catholic ratepayers, particularly with respect to their ability to have access to the undeclared residual. That is a concern, and it's viewed as punitive: the fact that if they opt out, they lose this. It just will mean, then, a higher level of taxes to provide the comparable level of services you would find in the public system. So that is viewed as punitive. When I'm asked of that, I just say: well, it's part of the provisions of the Bill. I don't understand why it's being done. I certainly don't see this as being a first line of attack against the deficit, because school boards didn't run at a deficit. I mean, the deficit was generated at the provincial government level by programs that were inefficiently delivered at high cost relative to our revenue base.

The other issue that emerges, Mr. Speaker, concerns the centralization that is evident with this Bill. The perception by my constituents of centralization arises from two points. The first point is the issue of superintendents and the fact that the government has focused so clearly on superintendents as being agents of the Department of Education and the Minister of Education. That is viewed as centralization. But as people say, "Well, if the

superintendent disagrees with the minister, who is he going to listen to, the board or the minister?" Well, it's pretty clear that the superintendent, whoever he or she may be, will listen to the minister and not to the school board.

To the extent that one views diversity and local preferences and local interests as being important, because that provides a high degree of accountability, I think we give up something significant by in fact breaking the linkages between a superintendent and the local school board and strengthening those to a bloated, relentlessly trendy Department of Education. If in fact I had seen significant structural changes in the Department of Education, I would perhaps be more sympathetic to this Bill, but what I see is change and structural change without cause being imposed on the rest of the school system with very little change being undertaken in the Department of Education. So I see that the issue of centralization, then, with respect to the appointment of superintendents sets a lot of bells ringing and the centralization of the tax base.

Let's face it, Mr. Speaker, governments are viewed with some cynicism today. Certainly there are some actions of this government, what they call the previous government, that buttress that perception, that decisions are made on the basis of political self-interest rather than on a basis of equity. We've talked time and time again about how priorities are set for hospital construction and how it appears that the colour of your political card, the party the MLA belongs to, determines who gets what in terms of hospital construction. That is an issue that has been made. We've asked time and time again in this House for a clear set of priorities as to how decisions are made with respect to capital expenditures. We don't get it. We've asked time and time again for clear criteria as to how an array of government expenditures are made, and they're not given.

So one cannot help but be cynical, then, to say that you centralize power with the provincial government, and then we're to believe naively that in fact the allocation of funds will be done on a completely arm's-length, neutral basis. There is nothing in this Bill that would lead us to believe that's the case, because we know there are significant differences in costs between rural and urban areas. The low density of population in the rural sector, the fact that the schools are much more widely dispersed makes them higher cost relative to urban centres, and that has to be taken into account. You can't have a one size fits all formula. That, Mr. Speaker, is where we start to get into sort of the nitty-gritty.

11:10

We will easily accept that you need a lot of flexibility in determining the allocation of funds, but as soon as you allow open-ended discretion, the notion, then, that some MLA with influence can feather his or her nest comes to the fore. We're going to ask: how are decisions to be made with regards to capital allocations, with the allocations of operating funds? There have been a lot of questions raised about these issues with regards to hospitals, and I'm sure they're going to be raised.

Now that the government has moved along centralizing decision-making under the dome, those types of issues will come to the fore with regards to the school system. Certainly as we get into debate on this Bill, it would be very useful for the Minister of Education to set out very clearly how this is an arm's-length process, how it's completely nonpartisan, how the needs of school boards will be met on the basis of legitimate need, not on the basis of whether or not their MLA is a Tory or a Liberal. That has to be set out very, very clearly. What is the formula going to be to allocate funding? How are differences in costs of providing school delivery taken into account? How do we take into account differences in administrative costs between rural and urban boards?

Because, again, one size doesn't fit all given the diversity in this province and given the differences in costs and just the size of some of the school jurisdictions that will emerge. So we have to be assured that this Bill, then, will lead to an allocation of funds that's based on need and merit and is completely and utterly arm's length from the political process, and we don't see that.

There's still a lot in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, that is determined by regulation, that will be set out after the fact. I'm afraid, in light of what has happened since 1971, that we're not willing to say: "Oh, yeah, we trust you. We're sure you'll just do this on an arm's-length basis." We heard that with regards to appointments, that the Premier was going to set up a mechanism by which all appointments would be arm's length and would be vetted. Well, there are a lot of appointments that come through in orders in council to what we would call significant bodies, whether they're university boards, college boards, and the like, that don't appear to go through that vetting process. So politics appears to be intrinsic in the way this government operates, politics in the sense of rewarding friends and trying to signal that if you don't elect a Tory, things aren't going to go your way.

So I think the minister faces an uphill battle in demonstrating clearly that that is not the case, that it in fact is a Bill that is designed and structured in such a way that it is utterly nonpartisan in its applications and funding goes on the basis of demonstrated need and is consistent with ensuring that every Alberta child, regardless of where they live, gets equal access to funds.

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

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gosh, I'll tell you, it's just one statement after another, and I guess at some point you've got to stand up and recognize that in fact the education Bill is a well-thought-out Bill. I thought the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud were in fact support for a 'nonpartisan' fiscal equity, individual student recognition, and I quite frankly thank him for those supportive closing remarks.

MR. HAVELOCK: What's 'nonpartisan'?

MR. SMITH: Nonpartisan, unless you're in Yugoslavia.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, it's a great thrill for me to stand up at this august hour and be able to talk to the education Bill.

I was very fortunate to attend a school that I guess could have been defined as a charter school, could have been defined as a private school, could have been defined as a Catholic school, could have been defined as a nondenominational Catholic school, and yet pragmatism and good problem-solving skills really saved the day for education in this small community in Saskatchewan. The leader of that institution was a monsignor in the Catholic church by the name of Athol Murray. He described two people in society, Mr. Speaker, and I've carried this with me all my life. There are two kinds of people, those on the building crew and those on the wrecking crew. I think we've heard from both sides of that tonight.

But focusing on the Bill, the great restructuring, the great Armageddon of education that we've seen so eloquently painted from those members opposite is just not occurring. I mean, we have \$3 billion being spent on 534,000 students. We have a reduction of spending that, when blended with all the funds, amounts to less than 9 percent. I mean, let's be realistic, Mr. Speaker. We've all run businesses. We've all had contributions in our household. We all understand that a buck is a buck and 91 cents is 91 cents. Does that mean we couldn't get an extra pair of

shoes? Does that mean we couldn't get the school supplies? Does that mean we couldn't get the books? Let's be realistic.

We have in fact designated education as a top priority of this government. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we've recognized the fact, as do many economic studies and much economic research, that education is more important at the K to 12 levels than it is at the advanced education level in terms of returning social benefits to society. So it's great to know that in fact we are reflecting the priorities, certainly of Calgary-Varsity, which is very keenly attuned to education. I've had 460 enquiries to date, which represents just under 5 percent of those that voted for me and represents about 2 and a half percent of total voters in the entire riding and in fact represents less than 1 percent of all those enumerated. So it is a burning issue to some 10, 12 people at this point, but in the great scheme of things there is a recognition in Calgary-Varsity that there is a plan, there is a vision. There's a confidence in the leader of the education side of this government, the fact that we have in a minister – you know, it's kind of like bringing in inventory to your plant, a just-in-time inventory to try to have the right product at the right place at the right time. It's my feeling, echoed by many of those in Calgary-Varsity, that in fact we have the right person in the right job at the right time.

11:20

I'd like to speak more about how important education is to Calgary-Varsity, Mr. Speaker, because this Bill has generated the concern that I've mentioned to you. We have a key education group of advisors, because as I guess a person who has been trained a little bit on the classic side but mostly on the business side, I recognize that the most important thing to be as a politician is a listener and a proponent. I'm keen to listen to this education advisory group that I have, which is composed of parents, teachers, and administrators and in fact represents a cross section of Calgary-Varsity. The Bill addresses some of the very key components the Calgary-Varsity constituents need to know and want answers to.

On the campaign trail we found that the parents weren't happy with the education system as it sat, the students weren't that happy with it, and the people who worked in the system weren't that happy. In fact, all those who seemed to be playing within this system were not happy. Now we have some really unhappy people, but in fact we have less than 1 percent of the total enumerated voters in Calgary-Varsity unhappy with this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the system is not a gross and total restructuring. It's an orderly reduction of spending in the magnitude of less than 9 percent, which is consistent with the lowest reduction of all the business plans, which have orderly reductions upwards of 20 percent. That gets us towards a balanced budget that in fact is represented in the business plan, that in fact represents a statement of intent, that in fact represents a vision. Finally a government has come forth. They've put together a thousand-day plan and said, "Hey, guys, chip away at it for a while." But you know, if you get on the building crew, you can really help to make this thing work, because it's going to take every Albertan working to make a plan.

So the accountability, the accountability to students and parents, Mr. Speaker, is important. It's the ability for these parents and for these students to have maximum choice and to deploy that choice with student-based funding. In fact, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said: something that reflects individual choice and reflects equitable allocation of resources on a per student basis. I think that finally a government has come up, made a strong, strong position of deployment of resources. We've listened; we've consulted. In fact, I have attended over 23 schools

in my riding. I've been to the French immersion program schools. I've been to every school that's asked me, and to some that haven't I've even shown up. As a matter of fact, I've even been into the riding of the hon. Minister of Energy.

Just last Friday I spent two hours in an ECS program. I spent an hour and a half in a grade 1-2 class, and gosh, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what. I don't see where we can change the management structure and allocate those funds, maximize those dollars to the classroom – in fact, restructuring is going to benefit the classroom and not be this Armageddon that we've had referred to earlier.

The question of the separate school board and the public school board. I think this in fact reflects choice, Mr. Speaker. Choice is one of the cornerstones of this plan. Certainly the great number of people of the Roman Catholic faith in this caucus – the contributions they have made to making this plan better I think have been well accepted, certainly by this caucus and certainly by the constituents in their various ridings.

The importance of choice and the private school and the concept of piloting charter schools, of not all of a sudden going to 50 or 100 or 200 or 1,000, is very important. It's very important. I mean, alternatives are important to an informed consumer, and today more than ever, Mr. Speaker, you now have informed consumers of educational services and programs.

The central collection of revenues and what has become known as fiscal equity. It's quite clear, Mr. Speaker, that one process cannot occur without the other. Educational funding should be granted on a per student basis to ensure this universality and hopefully the equality of education. In fact, the school that somebody in the oil patch – as you know, a very transient industry and yet one that has seemed to have risen throughout this recession that we've battled endlessly against for the last four years. And certainly a 3.5 percent growth in this province reflects a recession. I sure hope a modest recovery of 8, 9, 10 percent might be welcome, and in fact a boom of 12 to 15 percent. Who knows? The numbers are interesting. Maybe they should do a poll. I heard it discussed earlier.

The dissemination of funds on a per student basis through a central funding mechanism is important. In fact, it brings up the discussion of concern about arm's length. If you have some tremendous group of patronage that herds in and they make some decision about some far riding getting more – more money, more buildings, whatever – in fact, Mr. Speaker, in areas noted strongly for their Conservative roots, there are individual members of this governing party that will have to go out to those ridings and sell a big tax increase. But they wouldn't harp away and chip away at the Bill. No, because they're part of the building crew. In fact, they are saying, "We're ready to contribute on this side in Lacombe-Stettler, in Cypress-Medicine Hat, in Rocky Mountain House, because we know that there are less fortunate school boards out there."

Now, gosh, I know that principle of sharing may not in fact be shared by the party opposite. But as you know, the Conservative way of thinking is a good education for everyone in this great province. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, I've been there. I've seen Medicine Hat. I've seen Manyberries by night, come around the Del Bonita turn. You go out there and you run into wonderful schools. Then, you know, as you move farther up, the Mayerthorpes and the Whitecourts, come up through Breton and the Alsike corner past Drayton Valley – I mean, there are schools that need equitable distribution. One of my favourite runs has always been from Peace River up to Manning, through to High Level, then on to Paddle Prairie, and finally intercept right on the border at a little town called Keg River. Of course, tucked back in the bush is an old oil boom town called Zama City. In fact I

have a picture of the Zama City city hall. I really wish we were there right now.

But I mildly digress. I mildly digress to tell people how important in fact fiscal equity, central revenue collection, and distribution on an equitable basis is to all Albertans, not 51 constituencies, Mr. Speaker, but 83. This government is pleased to speak on behalf of all 83 when some of the other ones can't quite make that same building type contribution.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, that with the establishment of this fund we have an arm's-length reporting group, an audit committee, a watchdog. In fact, the minister has taken those strides to ensure that there is accurate reporting, good financial statements, dissemination of financial information, and a clear accounting of the financial information in education funding. Again, I think that's a great move towards accountability by the province, for the province, for all Albertans.

11:30

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister could take one more step and talk about parent advisory councils, in which there's been concern and there's been interest. In fact, this local school board of directors, this management steering committee, concerned consumers, whatever you want to describe them as – I see the minister having that same level reporting directly to him as an advisory group, the importance of the minister establishing who's first in this system: students and parents. In fact, I can see the minister at some not too distant future day establishing a parent advisory council, chosen perhaps at random, perhaps fortunate enough to include one or two keen and active parents who support wholeheartedly this educational reform package. They indeed could be serving on the parent educational advisory council, working with the minister in kind of a hand-in-glove fashion, sounding board, helping him with the accountability side, helping him with the input side. I just look forward to that day when we reflect a parent advisory council at the departmental level and one right down at the old school level.

In fact, that mere solution to a problem where we have talked about credibility – who has lower credibility than, say, the party opposite? That would be the school board or the Department of Education. In fact, a parent advisory council, a watchdog committee on the dissemination of funds, would serve to reinforce the performance and accountability of the Department of Education, the school board, the administrative structure, and, in fact, the schools. That's what we seek, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, throughout this, access to the system. In fact, when the outcome is Johnny can't read, it's not, "Gee, I'm concerned about fiscal equity, Mr. MLA." "Gee, I'm concerned about what's going on here or there." It's, "Hey, Johnny or Jacqueline can't read." Then what do we do? We have to go and we have to talk about access into performance measurement at the school level, at the school board level, and at the department level.

We can't have disjointed reporting structures anymore, Mr. Speaker. We have to be in a position where in fact our customers, the consumers of the education system, have access to that system so in fact they can demand accountability. Believe me, it works for everybody when that happens. The school boards will continue to have major input into education decisions. It's certainly not downplaying their involvement in the process, the curriculum course standardization. In fact, I was surprised at a budget meeting at the Calgary board; 160 individuals turned up working in a curriculum related department of the local Calgary board of education. Now, where should that responsibility sit? If we have a clear system, a clear management structure with delineated job descriptions, activity descriptions, you can in fact reduce the

duplication. You can reduce your administration; you can reduce a lot of the superfluous and the redundant factors that we have found in education as it grew through trendiness, through alternate approaches, through a number of things that basically evolved into a system that became self-serving. I think that was the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning, because really when the system stopped serving the needs of the parent and the student, it signaled the need for important change.

I'm again quite frankly pleased that (a) it's the first time I've met the bell and, secondly, that we're here doing what we're doing now. Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to vote against Bill 19 for many reasons. I was struck by something that the Minister of Energy said earlier tonight. She said in an impassioned and I'm sure sincere way that she was doing her best to confront the problems that her government had created in this province. I want to say that her and her colleagues' best simply is not good enough, and if ever there had to be evidence of that observation being true, it is in Bill 19.

Mr. Speaker, I hardly know where to begin in analyzing the shortcomings of this Bill. Perhaps one of the most profound problems amongst the many problems is that early childhood services are not being contemplated in this Bill and that full kindergarten programs are not being protected by this Bill. The government says that it is opposed to two-tier education. The Premier says and he promises that he will not allow education to be eroded in this province. The fact of the matter is that the government is half right. They're not going to allow a two-tier education system; they have already allowed a three-tier education system. If you live in Calgary and you have some money, you'll be able to buy a full year's kindergarten program. If you live in Edmonton, whether or not you have money, you won't be able to buy a full year's kindergarten program through the school system. If you live elsewhere in the province, you'll be afforded a full-year kindergarten system by the school board that exists in your area. This is creating a three-tier education system that means that different children in different parts of this province will have different educational opportunities. That should be a startling, an astonishing initiative to this government.

It will also mean, Mr. Speaker, that once the children who have not received as good a kindergarten education mingle with children in grade 1 who have received better or whose parents have been able to buy better education, then very likely those students will be held back or thwarted in their progress because teachers will be obligated and focused on bringing other students who haven't had adequate kindergarten education up to speed, as it were. So what we are doing is taking an entire generation of children, putting them at a disadvantage, imposing that disadvantage on children whose parents have been able to buy some advantage the previous year, and we are creating, I believe, a very, very serious problem with the education system.

At the height of cynicism the Minister of Education has said – and the Premier has endorsed it – that they have thousands upon thousands of pages of studies that aren't clear in determining whether or not early childhood services are adequate or help. But I wonder whether they have studies that show that grade 1, a full program, is as good as half a year grade 1 program or grade 2 or grade 3 or grade 4. I'll bet they don't have any idea for those grades either. What they've done is made a very arbitrary decision because they think they can get away with it. The fact is that there is much evidence to show that particularly disadvantaged

children need early starts, need Head Start programs. Kindergarten has been implemented with that in mind.

Earlier tonight we got into a bit of debate saying: "You know what? It was a Liberal government, the first provincial government to balance the budget in this country. It was New Brunswick." Do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? Do you know what they just did, Mr. Speaker? I should point out for the Treasurer's benefit that they also have a per capita debt that is less than one-third Alberta's per capita debt, and they have never had the financial advantages that this government has had. They have never squandered them. They've done it.

11:40

MR. DINNING: Here's the Bill. Mack truck Bill.

MR. MITCHELL: They did it, Jimmy.

MR. DINNING: No, they haven't.

MR. MITCHELL: They did it, Jimmy, and you haven't done it yet, and you're awfully cocky for a guy who hasn't done it yet. He's awfully cocky for a guy who has never done it, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DINNING: Four more years.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. MITCHELL: New Brunswick has done it. This young man hasn't done it, and he is awfully cocky for a guy who hasn't done anything yet. My point is that they have achieved, three years before this government has achieved it, a balanced budget, one-third the per capita debt, and they just recently implemented full kindergarten schooling. You know why that is? A Liberal government did that. You know what? With half the advantages, Jimmy. With half the resources and half the advantages. Mr. Speaker, you know why? Because they understand the importance of education to pull their province out of economic circumstances, much of which are not their doing, that are worse even than this government has brought this province to.

This government is disregarding the importance of education. They've talked about education as being important, but they have diminished its importance. If ever you want to see its diminished importance, look at early childhood. You know why they're doing it? Because I'm sure they think those five-year-olds aren't going to be voting for 13 years, and by that time I guess they'll have figured something else then. The fact of the matter is that of all the things that this government has done – I look at what they have done in early childhood services in this province, and I am truly, truly appalled by its implications for this province. Truly.

Let's look at funding. You know, I have to laugh. This government wants to – in fact, it brags. Probably over a few Kleineken at Banff they were patting themselves on the back, saying: "Man, are we reducing government. Man, have we reduced government." You know what they've done, Mr. Speaker? They've set out to reduce government for everybody else, or so it would seem, and they've grabbed \$1.3 billion worth of more government, more power into the centralized domain of this front bench. Probably the back bench gets to snip away at it, but they obviously don't have too much impact. Otherwise, Calgary-Currie would be true to her Catholic school board roots and she would be voting against these people. That's what she would be doing.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

MRS. BURGNER: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is rising on a point of order?

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, what would it be?

MRS. BURGNER: Twenty-three (i). Point of order. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the question has been called, and I have yet to vote on this particular Bill in front. I don't like the fact that the hon. member across has implied how I will or will not vote. He's prejudged my position.

MR. MITCHELL: At 11:46:14 in *Hansard* on April 26: we'll just record that statement, and then we'll see how Calgary-Currie votes, because I'll bet she'll be voting for this Bill.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: That brings me, Mr. Speaker, to my next point. [interjections]

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

That brings the Chair to say that it hesitates to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 61(3), the Chair is required to put the question to the House on all appropriation Bills on the Order Paper for second reading.

**Bill 24
Appropriation Act, 1994
(continued)**

MR. SPEAKER: On Bill 24, Appropriation Act, 1994, all those in favour of second reading, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Black	Fritz	Pham
Brassard	Gordon	Renner
Burgener	Havelock	Rostad
Cardinal	Hierath	Severtson
Clegg	Jacques	Smith
Coutts	Jonson	Sohal
Day	Kowalski	Stelmach
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Trynchy
Evans	McFarland	West
Fischer	Mirosh	Woloshyn
Forsyth	Paszkowski	

Against the motion:

Bruseker	Henry	Nicol
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Chadi	Hewes	Percy
Dickson	Leibovici	Sekulic
Germain	Massey	Vasseur
Hanson	Mitchell	White

Totals:	For - 38	Against - 15
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[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

**Bill 25
Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund,
Capital Projects Division) Act, 1994**

MR. SPEAKER: On Bill 25, Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Capital Projects Division) Act, 1994, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Black	Fritz	Pham
Brassard	Gordon	Renner
Burgener	Havelock	Rostad
Cardinal	Hierath	Severtson
Clegg	Jacques	Smith
Coutts	Jonson	Sohal
Day	Kowalski	Stelmach
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Trynchy
Evans	McFarland	West
Fischer	Mirosh	Woloshyn
Forsyth	Paszkowski	

Against the motion:

Bruseker	Henry	Nicol
Chadi	Hewes	Percy
Dickson	Leibovici	Sekulic
Germain	Massey	Vasseur
Hanson	Mitchell	White

Totals:	For - 38	Against - 15
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[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

**12:10 Bill 26
Appropriation (Lottery Fund) Act, 1994**

MR. SPEAKER: On Bill 26, Appropriation (Lottery Fund) Act, 1994, all those in favour of second reading, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:11 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Black	Fritz	Pham
Brassard	Gordon	Renner
Burgener	Havelock	Rostad
Cardinal	Hierath	Severtson
Clegg	Jacques	Smith
Coutts	Jonson	Sohal
Day	Kowalski	Stelmach
Dinning	Laing	Tannas
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor, L.
Dunford	Magnus	Trynchy
Evans	McFarland	West
Fischer	Mirosh	Woloshyn
Forsyth	Paszkowski	

Against the motion:

Bruseker	Henry	Nicol
Chadi	Hewes	Percy
Dickson	Leibovici	Sekulic
Germain	Massey	Vasseur
Hanson	Mitchell	White

Totals: For – 38 Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Bill 19
School Amendment Act, 1994
(continued)

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Mitchell speaking]

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They've tried many things to interrupt my speaking in this Legislature, but that was successful.

I'll recap just briefly what I had said before the vote: one, that I feel a great sense of dismay about what the government is doing to early childhood services, that it's very interesting – and the government is myopic about this – that it is a Liberal government in New Brunswick which is the first government to present a balanced budget in this country.

MR. DINNING: That was an operating budget. Operating budget.

MR. MITCHELL: I know the Treasurer's very sensitive about this because he sat there and voted for eight consecutive deficit budgets.

They have a per capita debt that is less than one-third of Alberta's per capita debt, never having had the resources, and they just brought in full early childhood education, the full year. So let's keep that in mind, Mr. Speaker, when we hear about Liberal governments.

I want to address the issue of centralizing school funding in this province. The Premier, who says he'll never break a promise, has promised that there will be less government. Well, on the one

hand, there's less government for all those school boards, but of course there's a great deal more government, about 10 percent more government at least, for this band that calls itself a government. The Premier has picked up \$1.3 billion extra in revenue. As if that isn't a dream come true, Mr. Speaker: we're actually going to hand these guys another \$1.3 billion every year, an increase of 10 percent. They've taken that from school boards, which are closer to the community, closer to where delivery of education services is assessed and the needs can be better met, have brought it into a central authority that has distinguished itself by running up \$30 billion in debt over the last seven years with only \$15 billion a year. So who knows what they're going to do with the rest?

They have denied the fact, Mr. Speaker, that as they have reduced government out there, perhaps that they have strengthened and broadened and built and extended their own power and their own government. If I were less cynical, I would have to say that they're doing that, of course, because they can't resist power. The real irony is that we only have about a \$30 million or \$40 million equity problem. It would take that much money. In fact, they proved that, because just before the election they took it from lotteries and put it into Education to say that they'd equalized, and now that isn't a good enough solution, so they're solving it with a \$1.3 billion solution.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Well, it makes very little sense, Mr. Speaker. In order to do this, they fly in the face of the Constitution. They'll say that the Constitution doesn't matter, the Charter of Rights doesn't matter. They'll say: well, we shouldn't have had separate school boards given special status in the Constitution. Well, that may or may not be the case. I argue that of course it should be the case.

What's very interesting and the question I want to ask rhetorically of this government, Mr. Speaker, is: when is a deal not a deal? The Constitution is the ultimate deal. It is the ultimate deal. We signed it, and we said to separate school boards, to the Catholic school boards, that they could have this distinct set of rights.

If the Treasurer inherited his parents' house because the parents had a deal – it was their house and they gave it to him – the deal would still stand. Then if he bequeathed it to his children, I suppose they could own the house because that's a deal. At what point would somebody say: well, no, we don't want it to be a deal any more; I'm sorry, Mr. Treasurer, you can't bequeath your house to your kids because there's no longer a deal? Is it 10 years? Is it 15 years? Is it 125 years? Well, the fact is that it's a deal, and this government cannot arbitrarily break that deal and break the rights that underline that deal.

Who can trust this government? If a deal, if an agreement as important as that agreement, as significant, as enshrined as that agreement cannot be honoured by this government, who could possibly ever trust them, Mr. Speaker? Well, nobody could ever trust them.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order, hon. Government House Leader?

MR. DAY: Under Standing Orders 23(i) and (j). What we're hearing here are very clear allegations, I think, that the member

would like to reconsider in terms of the government not being able to be trusted because of things we're doing or contemplating doing. There's avowing certain motives there, which is definitely unparliamentary, and suggesting dishonesty and suggesting lack of trust because of certain actions. I'd like the member opposite to reconsider his comments and withdraw them.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to just point out that (i) and (j) don't apply to an entity. They would apply to a member, and I didn't pick on any member. I talked about the government in general. The fact is, I'm not impugning . . .

MR. DINNING: You were talking about the Treasurer.

MR. MITCHELL: I was talking about your deal with your mother's house, but that's quite different from your breaking the deal on the separate school board.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. I think Edmonton-McClung has indicated quite clearly that while he's using a broad brush, he's not applying it to individuals but to the whole government. That's a harder one to make stick that 23(h), (i) and (j) apply to it. I did not hear in his words dishonesty of an individual, so I would find that there's no point of order at this time.

12:30

MR. MITCHELL: Do you know what I want to say about the House leader's referral to Standing Order 23(i) and (j)? I want to say boring. He can never seem to be able to come up with anything more creative than that, Mr. Speaker. I take it as a slight diversion, but I'm still focused on my point.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. DAY: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on yet another point of order.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hour is late, and certainly if you wanted to deliberate on this and refer to it tomorrow, that would be fine. In fact, the reference is *Beauchesne* 485(3), where it talks very clearly about the fact that unparliamentary language can offend the proprieties of the House, not naming a certain member but in fact the entire House. It could also read the government. So here it's not a specific member, but in fact it is referring to a group of people or a body of people. If I could leave that for your consideration, even for tomorrow, I'd appreciate that.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader. Indeed we'll spend some time in the wee hours of the morning thinking about this one and make the appropriate comments on it when the time arises tomorrow.

Edmonton-McClung.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only is it the case that they want to take away these rights from separate school boards, but then when confronted with the constitutional and legal problems of their case, they begin to manoeuvre and manipulate their position further. What they ultimately end up doing – and I don't know a more delicate word to use – is to blackmail separate school boards. Because separate school boards are given the opportunity to opt out . . .

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I don't want to prolong things longer tonight than we should, but unparliamentary language under *Beauchesne* 486. Really, using the word "blackmail" is absolutely wrong, and if the member would simply do the honourable thing and withdraw that word and not continue to offend the proprieties of the House.

MR. MITCHELL: I withdraw "blackmail." We've used it before in this House, Mr. Speaker, but what I will say is that they have attempted to make an offer to separate school boards which they think the separate school boards will not be able to refuse.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'd take that as a retraction or a correction.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me outline exactly how that works. They will allow Catholic school boards to opt out, but in doing so, they will lose the right of access to a proportion of undeclared taxes. Now, the Member for Calgary-Currie will be interested to know that that will cost the Calgary Catholic school board \$27 million. She knows it. That is a 39 percent reduction. The expectation is that it will cost the Edmonton separate school board the same percentage amount. That is a huge, huge offer, lever, bargaining chip, negotiating position on the part of this government. I won't use that other word again.

What's more, Mr. Speaker, is that there is no assurance in this Act that separate school boards will be able to receive as much money as they do now. They could get more or they could get less based upon nothing more or less than ministerial discretion, reflected in regulations that that minister may from time to time establish without even reference to this Legislature.

Secondly, these sections of the Act do not in any way restrict or control any moneys that the minister may pay from the Alberta school foundation fund to any board. Mr. Speaker, there is strong legal opinion to suggest that this is prejudicial to separate school boards, and it is particularly galling that it should be done, because it does not accomplish anything more than applying a \$1.3 billion quote, unquote, solution, power grab, tax grab to a \$30 million problem.

The question of superintendents. It's been said, and I believe it, that the government is using this fear mongering idea that we are having a financial catastrophe – and of course, it is very serious; they created it – as a screen for implementing an ideological agenda. If all they wanted to do was solve the perceived financial problems, the inequality of financing of education in this province, one would think that they would deal with that: the money. But that's not all that they're dealing with. They have also established that they will establish control over the hiring and firing of superintendents. That goes quite a bit beyond the financial aspect of this Bill. It goes to an ideological concern for centralizing, for imposing, I would argue, educational doctrine in a way that jumps beyond the boards that have been put in place traditionally as part of the democratic tradition of this province because they are closer to the grass roots of this province, the grass roots which this government would say it upholds and subscribes to, Mr. Speaker. So if we

look beyond the financial matters, we would think we wouldn't see very much more if that's all they were attempting to solve, but of course it isn't all that they are attempting to solve.

Ideology agenda. Let's look at charter schools. It was striking, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier of this province, after being given two chances in a public forum to describe charter schools, couldn't answer that question. It's striking because education is being fundamentally restructured, and one would think that the Premier, who leads this government, would at least be able to describe what a charter school is. If a charter school is going to be an affront to a Catholic school system, if it's going to be an affront to the public school system, one would think that the Premier should be able to describe that. The fact that he can't leads us to believe – would leave me to believe – that the leadership that they claim is not as strong as it might be. It frightens me, Mr. Speaker, because it has profound implications for what will become of education.

It's interesting to note that there are 1,700 schools in this province. Is this government considering the possibility of 1,700 charter schools, 1,700 special boards? That's a lot less government. On the other hand, is this government considering 1,700 special school councils? The Member for Calgary-Varsity actually stood up with the idea tonight and suggested that they should all jump school boards and report directly to the central government. Well, I'd say we'd probably have to have 15 or 20 ministers of education mired in the minutia of trying to manage this broad network of schools.

My final point, Mr. Speaker, is that I am tired of hearing the Premier say: we want the money to go to the schools; we want the money to be in the classroom. I'm not tired because it's not right but tired because he's not backing it up. It should stay in the classrooms, and there should be an emphasis on classrooms. Have we seen that? No. We've seen hundreds of teacher layoffs. I would assume they were working in the classroom. We've seen a cut in half of early childhood education. I would assume that that was done in the classroom. What I see is an erosion of the education system through a cynical political power grab that does not serve the best interests of this education system.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, in rising to support Bill 19, I'd just make one early observation, and that is that I've heard about centralization, I've heard about tax grab, I've heard about rights, I've heard about Catholicism, and I've heard about power, but I haven't heard once from the members of the Liberal Party what is best for students in Alberta. The entire debate on that side of the House has been void of any discussion, any attention on what is best for Alberta kids. Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length about this, and I intend to the next time that we can speak on this Bill.

Given the hour, I would move that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

12:40

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 19. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

Bill 20 Regional Health Authorities Act

[Debate adjourned April 19]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Bill 20 is a peculiar Bill, when you read it through, because it sets out the regional health boundaries and authorities. It's really interesting that this evening we have the juxtaposition of Bill 19 and Bill 20, because they're so fundamentally different. Bill 19 centralizes power under the dome. This is a Bill that is quite different. It allows, then, regional boards to be set up.

Again, let me make it very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we were very strongly in support of regionalization and very strongly in support of ensuring that health care facilities represented the demographic needs of the particular regions in which they were situated. We were very strongly in support, then, of a health care system that was community based, that was aimed at preventive health care and in which you had an array of health services provided, not just acute care facilities, which this government has had a propensity to build. It was though they had only one plan for a hospital, and that was acute care. Well, the reality is that with an aging population you need an array of facilities from geriatric to extended care to acute to community-based health care services. So the issue here is not in fact changing the structure. The cleavage between the opposition and the government is not on regionalization. It's not on ensuring a structural change in health care and providing a much broader array of health care services. It really is with the process by which it's being adopted.

Let me, first of all, turn to the issue, then, of taxation. Was it Patrick Henry that said: no taxation without representation?

AN HON. MEMBER: It was Mike Henry.

DR. PERCY: Yeah, that's right. It probably was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

This is a Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that provides for taxation without representation. It does give the local health authorities the ability to requisition funds, and we're talking of appointed boards. Time and time again we've heard ministers and certainly members of the health planning councils that are out there now looking at regional structures say: the problem with democracy is that it throws up special-interest groups. The definition of a special-interest group is anybody who in fact either dares to criticize or offer alternatives to what this government proposes. So although there is the option for both elected and appointed boards, it's very clear that their preference would be (a) for appointed boards and (b) for Tories.

I mentioned earlier that although the Premier had spoken of setting up this mechanism for vetting appointments, for ensuring that the process would be arm's length and would be merit based, there have been a variety of appointments across universities, technical schools, and colleges that have not gone through that. By any definition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are significant bodies. We have not seen a use of that. In fact, I would say that I'm aware of one that the Minister of Energy had set one up for the choice of a deputy minister, and it appeared to work very well and is in fact a very, very good appointment.

So we've talked about a process. The Premier has certainly talked to the press about it. He just has failed to use it. It's there to be used, and it's worked successfully, but it hasn't been used for appointments to a wide variety of significant bodies. So there

is no reason to believe that if they do go down the appointed route, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they would in fact move to appointments that would be based on merit rather than the colour of your political card. So real concerns there, because Albertans will not accept taxation without some democratic input, which means elections, because accountability ultimately means those people that impose taxes have to be held accountable to the people on whom the taxes are levied. This structure here provides then, I think, for serious problems in terms of accountability.

The other problem that emerges with this Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we end up with a patchwork of health services throughout the province that depends very much then on the tax base of the particular regional structure. One of the things that we do elect a provincial government to do is to ensure through legislation or regulation the provision of services at least to a minimum level. This Bill in fact allows this patchwork to emerge where your access to health care facilities depends on luck of the draw: where your job is, where you're living. We ought not to put such a vital element of living and social services to be provided on such a haphazard, ad hoc basis.

We have very serious concerns, then, about the issue of the array of services that are going to be provided and the fact that we cannot be sure that under this Bill everybody will get a level of services to an acceptable minimum level.

We also have concerns about the possible provision of user fees to be charged. Again, what we will observe happening is that what Albertans will have access to will depend very much then on the tax base of the regional health board, and those that have low value tax bases will resort to financing activities with user fees. So the whole issue of accessibility will vary from region to region depending on the richness or poorness of the particular tax base that the regional health authority can requisition. We think that ought not to be the case, that no region of this province should be disadvantaged in that regard. So we are not clear when we look at this Bill how that potential problem will be addressed.

Another issue that really comes to the fore as well – again, it's a variant of the issue of accountability, Mr. Deputy Speaker – is the issue of financial disclosure. In September or October the issue of disclosure with regards to the financial statements of UniCare at the University of Alberta hospital emerged. That was an attempt by the University of Alberta hospital to set up basically a software computing company and then to market those products. It was a financial disaster, and it was not possible to get access to the records. That type of problem still exists here. There are not provisions in here to ensure that those types of records would be accountable. There are not even provisions in this Bill to ensure that the regional board meetings will be open to the public. Again, now here we have appointed boards, they have the ability to requisition, and the meetings are not even going to be open to the public. I mean, that's a serious problem.

Another issue is that as these regional boards are set up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill is silent on how in fact within the health region you ensure that the various municipal MDs within the particular jurisdiction have representation on the board. How is it, then, that every region within the regional health board has representation, ensures that its health care needs are met? Again, the Bill is not very clear on the structure. Much like Bill 19, what we have is sort of a skeleton of a Bill with the nuts and bolts to be filled in later with regulations. Those regulations will not be subject to debate. They will not be brought here in the open so that stakeholders can have a chance to say, "Yes, we agree with that," or "No, we disagree with this particular provision." So we would much prefer to see the major elements of both this Bill and Bill 19 to be in the legislation and not as regulations to be

determined when and however they choose by their caucus rather than in open debate here where the interested parties can all have a voice and read *Hansard* to see the nature of the debate and the arguments made pro and con in favour of various elements in the Bill.

12:50

We're also concerned again about some of the other financial elements of this Bill, and in particular the fact that municipalities are given the right to borrow money and issue debentures for health care requirements. Again, this brings us back to one of the central themes that seems to emerge in this particular Bill. Here the theme that seems to emerge is: your ability to finance and provide health care depends very much on your local tax base, and it does not appear to be much in the way of a responsibility of the provincial government. This is a direct contrast, then, to what we see in Bill 19 where this is centralization by the government taking over the tax base and then a yet to be announced formula by which the funds will be allocated on an equitable basis. Surely there has to be a happy medium between the two polar extremes. It's almost schizophrenic that we'll have these two Bills side by side when we're dealing with education and health care, both of which are fundamental to the longer term economic development of this province. So we certainly would like to see much greater elaboration and detail of those elements.

I certainly support the move towards regionalization. I think virtually all members of our caucus support the move towards regionalization. It's a question, then, of how those structures are set up and the financing of the provision of health care in this province. We think that it is a fundamental right of every Albertan to have access to the same level of health care regardless of where they live. The issue then is: how do we provide that in the way that is consistent with the fiscal realities of this province? Given the different demographics between rural and urban areas, given the size that some of these regional health boards will have, it's clear there will be inequities that emerge that are driven by geography, driven in part by tax base, but there is a role for the provincial government to ensure that some norm is provided and that one region is not disadvantaged relative to another simply because they're poor. The role of the provincial government is in fact to finance these core types of programs. In the case of Bill 19, there the provincial government has seen fit to grab this entire tax base when all that was needed was a \$30 million to \$50 million injection from the general revenue fund to finance it.

When we look at Bill 20, where's the fiscal equity? There is none. The members over there have been very strong in saying that fiscal equity is the key. Well, I would then ask that those members, when they talk in favour of this Bill, demonstrate to us how this Bill is consistent with fiscal equity, how it's consistent with some type of equitable access to the provision of health care in the province rather than being a crap shoot that depends on your local tax base, the ability of your local municipal government to finance health care through debentures, the willingness of your regional health board to impose user fees, or its ability to requisition from the local tax base. So I have a real problem when I compare these two Bills in the fact that we're dealing with polar extremes.

With those comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will conclude.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to speak to Bill 20. I support the idea of regionalized

health care in the province. I don't think that anyone can argue with the fact that one thing we have to continuously look at is seeing the number of ways that we could reduce overlap and duplication, and certainly creating these health regions that are suggested is one idea that is not new but, at the same time, a fairly decent one.

We have some problems. I have some problems with the Bill that I want to discuss, and I look forward to being able to continue in the committee stage and look towards perhaps maybe making it a good Bill. That's what this is all about. The debate is one in which members are given the opportunity to review the Bill, understand the Bill, and start to debate it. If there's something good that comes out of this thing, then the government ought to take that and consider it and put it into the Bill and make it law.

Mr. Speaker, I can recall running in an election less than a year ago. All of us were involved in that. Members on this side of the House anyway were saying that not only government has good ideas, that the opposition has good ideas. Now, I ran with the firm belief that we'd form government. I ran with the firm belief that we would have something concrete and tangible to contribute to the province. I still believe that we contribute. All of us do, not only the members sitting on the front bench but also the backbench of the government, the ones that sit back and say that they have a say. It really seems to me that not only the opposition doesn't have much to say anymore; it's the backbench as well. So the government seems to be controlled by the front benches.

I'm going to suggest that the health care system and the education system and the social services system that seem to be the biggest problem within the expenditure side of our budget are ones that could have been controlled quite easily in other areas. I know that when we ran, we said that we would like to see efficiency audits done. Efficiency audits in health, Mr. Speaker, would go an awfully long way in trying to identify where the overlap and duplication are. I'm looking at a document that I just ran across. It says clearly: in 1991 the government of Alberta undertook an internal review of federal expenditures. Here is a document that says that the federal government spends approximately \$4.3 billion pursuing the same purposes within Alberta as the provincial government does. Holy moly, Mr. Speaker. That's an awful lot of money. I mean, here we are: this budget in health is one that could have great implications. If we could perhaps maybe consider reducing some of this overlap and duplication on this side, then we wouldn't have to worry about slashing without trying to find out how we can cut in Health.

But Bill 20 is before us today, and I should speak to the Bill, and that is the fact that the hospital regions, these 17 regions that the government has identified now, I think should be decided by the people themselves. I can't understand why it is that we have some consultations throughout the province – I know that the Minister of Health has gotten up time and time again and said: well, we had consultation on the boundaries. You know, I'm an elected representative, and quite frankly I didn't realize this was going on. I mean, there was an awful lot going on. If I didn't realize this was going on, what about my constituents and people all across the province? When they were talking about certain seniors' issues, I can remember time and time again when people on this side of the House – and members on that side of the House said that there were open consultations. Open consultations. There were 60 seniors or something to that effect. Holy. Mr. Speaker, 60 seniors across Alberta? This is unbelievable.

Now here we are today talking about putting these 17 regions together, and they say: well, we've had consultations. I think it's almost the same consultations that decided the boundaries in the electoral process that took place in this province not long ago. We

still have court cases going on. At one point the judges in this province said that this government made a mistake; they erred in the process, in the way they went about doing it. I think this is going to open itself up to a great deal of court challenges, and we ought to get ready for it.

1:00

You know, in taking into consideration these regions, 17 of them, one should also take into consideration natural trading boundaries.

DR. WEST: You should be ashamed of yourself.

MR. CHADI: A lot comes into play when we start talking about natural trading boundaries.

DR. WEST: Shame on you.

MR. CHADI: I recall years ago when we were considering building a road, Mr. Speaker. We lobbied the government of the day to build a road from Lac La Biche to Conklin. We went to Conklin. Do you know why? Because they had natural trading links with our community of Lac La Biche. But the government in its infinite wisdom decided that perhaps maybe what they ought to do was build a road between Fort McMurray and Conklin instead. The people of Conklin protested. They were livid. They were upset over the fact that they wanted to come to Lac La Biche because it had its natural trading links. I recall that they used to come in. They used to trap fur and come into town by train, sell their furs and buy their groceries, their tea and coffee and sugar, and head right back up towards Conklin. But, no, the government decided it should go the other way around. It should impose upon the natives in Conklin and the people of Conklin a road going north to Fort McMurray. Well, forget about the natural trading boundaries. Forget about the people's desires and wishes. The government did whatever it wanted to do anyway. That's why I say that it's going to open itself up to a great deal of court challenges with these health regions and boards.

Another thing that concerns me in this Bill – and, again, I'd like to be able to take this into the Committee of the Whole and discuss it there – is section 4(1), where it says that

... a health region is established, the Minister shall by order appoint the number of persons the Minister considers appropriate as the first members of the regional health authority for the health region.

Well, the minister at his whim goes ahead and appoints the number that it needs, and he appoints these persons to the health region.

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

I mean, whatever happened to our hospital boards? Whatever happened to the people that got elected to do a job in the area where they live? The people that work in the area, the people that understand the area: they're the ones that ought to be elected, not appointed, Mr. Speaker, but elected to do it. I mean, what's stopping anybody? Shame on us all if we sit in this Legislature and just figure we can go ahead and appoint people at the whim of the minister to look after a health region that encompasses probably in the range of 150,000 people, an appointment to look after them. Never in the history of the province of Alberta – we've always had, as far as I can recall, elected members to hospital boards. Now, I'd like to see that continued. I can't imagine where we would at the whim of the minister just allow appointments to take place.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

DR. WEST: A point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: Yes, on relevance. We're on roads. We're talking about the health Act, health regions. I thought we were on schools here. [laughter] Mr. Speaker, you see, it's really relevance I was talking about.

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister for Municipal Affairs saying to me that I ought to be ashamed of myself time and time again. I was wondering what he was saying. It's quite clear that the minister ought to be ashamed of himself. We clearly are on Bill 20, and if we're not, then perhaps maybe somebody ought to tell me. I would appreciate your ruling, Mr. Speaker, to advise the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs not to interrupt a speaker that is speaking on the right Bill. It's rather rude.

MR. GERMAIN: He's ridiculing the Legislative Assembly.

MR. CHADI: That's right, not to mention the ridiculing of the Legislative Assembly. I think he probably knew that we were on Bill 20 but jumped up just for the heck of it.

May I continue, Mr. Speaker? Are we still on a point of order here, or what's the story?

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Continue. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper has the floor.

Debate Continued

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, I want to continue. Since the Minister of Municipal Affairs starts talking about roads to Conklin, I'll have you know that the government in its infinite wisdom decided to take the bulldozers and all the road building equipment that time that they were building this road from Conklin to Fort McMurray. They took them straight to Conklin and started to build . . .

**Point of Order
Relevance**

DR. WEST: A point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: Now my point comes home. He is back on transportation, on the road to Conklin, and what relevance does it have to Bill 20?

MR. CHADI: I'm talking about connecting regions here within the health regions that we're discussing, 17 of them, Mr. Speaker. Seventeen health regions. Some of them have no roads to get to. At the same time, I'm just saying that natural trading boundaries have to be considered. When we talked about building a road to an area where there were no natural trading boundaries, that is the relevance here. Thank you very much.

Debate Continued

MR. CHADI: So when we talk about appointing rather than electing people to boards, Mr. Speaker, I have concerns with

respect to the taxation part of it. Because quite clearly in section 20(k) it's going to allow for things like user fees. You know, call them what you want; I say it's taxes. The downloading is taking place. It's taking place in all sectors across this front bench from every single department. We've seen it time and time again, 80 new fees or taxes that have been introduced in this budget alone.

AN HON. MEMBER: Eighty-one.

MR. CHADI: Eighty-one; I stand corrected. It's 81 and not 80, Mr. Speaker. There are implications in this Bill. Again there are situations allowable for user fees. So at the whim of the minister, once again – and I'll read section 20(k) to you. It says:

The Minister may make regulations . . . authorizing regional health authorities and community health councils to charge fees for goods or services they provide and respecting the amounts of the fees that may be charged for those goods and services.

So that's nothing more than another tax. I mean, section (k) should have just said: the minister may make regulations authorizing the regional health authorities to impose taxes. That's clearly a bunch of mumbo jumbo to say exactly that, Mr. Speaker.

So why is it that somebody is appointed – appointed, mind you – at the whim of a minister of this government to the regional health board to impose taxation on people. Now, here is just another bureaucrat, in other words, imposing a tax on the local people. That's why I say that we have to have those folks elected. People have to be elected within the regional health boards, those authorities, regions, to be able to have the power to tax the local people. Those are the people that are going to be deciding who it is that they want to represent them in their health regions or not.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if we don't do our job in this Legislative Assembly, we won't be here next time, because those are the same people that are going to elect us or not elect us. That's why we have to do that. Now, I can understand why you may want to appoint somebody over having them elected, because it's easier that way for the government to be able to sit back and say, "Well, now you can go ahead and get a little more user fees out of these folks." And you know what? They're going to be able to do it under this Act. That's what I'm against, Mr. Speaker.

1:10

MRS. BURGNER: Are you done now?

MR. CHADI: Oh, heck, no. I've only begun. I've only just begun.

Now, we have section 13 here. I want to also express my concerns. It says here, "municipal council's borrowing powers." Section 13 is one that causes a bit of concern for me, Mr. Speaker.

The council of a municipality that is wholly or partly included . . .

Not only wholly but partly included.

. . . in a health region may, notwithstanding any other Act . . .

Under subsection (b) it says it could

borrow money by temporary borrowings or debentures, without recourse to the proprietary electors or obtaining approval from them.

Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? Can you believe it? Can Members of this Legislative Assembly believe the fact that anybody can have the power – an appointed official, somebody appointed at the whim of the minister – to borrow money without any recourse from the people that put him there, the electors? It's unbelievable that the rest of this House, people on opposite sides of this House agree with it.

That's the problem, the arrogance that has taken place over the last number of years. Hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker, is an even better word, simply because here we are in this House, elected officials,

and we have to go to our electors. We ought to have to go to our electors and say to our electors: "We're going to borrow this kind of money. We need this kind of money to run the province. Are you in agreement or are you not?" Now, we as legislators represent in our constituencies the people of the province of Alberta, yet in this Bill it says that anybody appointed can go ahead within that region. Now, 17 health regions means that it's almost three to four constituencies apiece. Out of 83 here, divide that by four, and I think you've got an average of about three or four constituencies that each health board is going to represent.

So here we are with a situation where a health region is going to have around 150,000 people, and they're going to be told – or not even be told. They're not even going to be told that their health board, the people who were appointed by the minister, has just borrowed money, and it doesn't matter what you say; there's nothing you can do about. Well, you see, if they were elected, the people of the province of Alberta that live within those health regions could do something about it: they could get rid of them the next time round. That's why section 13 ought to be changed. It's no good the way it is. I can't imagine why we would want it in there.

Mr. Speaker, another area that gives me some concern is the fact that when the Liberals were running in the election, we were talking about things like efficiency audits, an audit that would see that where there were efficiencies, we would take advantage of them, we'd capitalize. Where there was overlap, where there was

duplication, we would get rid of that. You see, 60 percent, I understand, of all patients that are in the urban hospitals, the acute care hospitals in the cities are from rural Alberta, so we've got a big problem here when we start talking about shutting down hospitals in the cities. Yet in the country we're talking about cutting them back by 1 and a half or – how much, Grant? – 4 percent, something to that effect. I mean, there's a total inequity here. There's something wrong with the system. It's falling apart, and we've got to do something about it. Closing urban hospitals without having the benefit of the regional boards that are in place quite frankly is stupid, Mr. Speaker, quite clearly.

So we have to consider doing what other jurisdictions are doing, and that is to consider having these efficiency audits placed within these hospitals to find out whether or not we indeed can eliminate some overlap, some duplication. I know that there's a lot of it there that we can . . . [Mr. Chadi's speaking time expired]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, even though it is yet early and we are still full of energy, I feel it would be time for us to give some consideration to the reasoned comments on this side of the House. To do that, we need some time. So I would move that we adjourn debate and reconvene in a few hours at 1330 today.

[At 1:17 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

