

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 2, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/05/02

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people.

We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by 66 parents from the city of Leduc expressing concern about the reduction of hours in early childhood services.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 232 names on a petition requesting that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta leave the Children's hospital on its current site.

MR. BRACKO: Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from 510 residents from St. Albert and surrounding area who urge the government

to reconsider the inclusion of the Sturgeon General Hospital within the Edmonton Region and to allow the Sturgeon General Hospital to serve its customers from the city of St. Albert, the MD of Sturgeon, the Town of Morinville, the Village of Legal, the Alexander Reserve, the Counties of Athabasca, Barrhead, Lac Ste. Anne, Parkland and Westlock.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a petition with 522 signatures from Legal – that's all of Legal – asking that the Sturgeon general hospital be moved back into the health area encompassing Westlock and Barrhead.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 497 people who ask the government to take the Sturgeon general out of the Edmonton region because it continues to serve the area around, including the Hutterite colony in my area, the Alexander reserve, even parts of Westlock, Lac Ste. Anne, and Barrhead.

Thank you.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. deputy Leader of the Opposition.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I request that the petition I presented on Monday, April 18, from the residents of St. Andrew's Centre regarding seniors' services now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter the level of support for all benefits for Alberta's seniors until seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I request that the petition I presented on April 13 from senior citizens asking the government not to alter funding arrangements for lodges be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter funding arrangements for Alberta's Seniors Lodges and Seniors Subsidized Apartments until Seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions to funding arrangements.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled in this Assembly on April 18 regarding seniors' benefits be now read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter the level of support for all benefits for Alberta's seniors until seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition which I recently tabled regarding the cutting and funding for early childhood schooling now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative assembly to continue funding kindergarten at the current level, allowing each and every child in Alberta the opportunity to receive 400 hours of kindergarten instruction.

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I might ask the Assembly to have read and received the petition which I tabled on April 12 in this Assembly dealing with the matter of seniors' lodges.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter funding arrangements for Alberta's Seniors Lodges and Seniors Subsidized Apartments until Seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions to funding arrangements.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 29

Nova Corporation of Alberta Act Repeal Act

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Nova Corporation of Alberta Act Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides for the repeal of the Nova Act, the temporary retention of some provisions of that Act for transitional purposes, and the amendment of the Gas Utilities Act. As well, the repeal of this Act further shows this government's commitment to getting out of business.

[Leave granted; Bill 29 read a first time]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I would move that Bill 29 as just introduced be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 31 Municipal Government Act

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 31, the Municipal Government Act.

This legislation reflects the government's commitment to put more decision-making in the hands of local authorities. It will provide municipalities with greater flexibility to respond to changing conditions now and in the future.

Bill 31 has been developed following extensive consultation with municipalities and other stakeholders throughout Alberta. In keeping with the government's initiatives to deregulate, the Municipal Government Act will consolidate 21 Acts and their attendant regulations. The result is simplified and streamlined legislation written in plain language.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 31 read a first time]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 31 as just introduced be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table with the Assembly an additional 424 education coupons received from across Alberta. People here are voicing their concern for the Premier and others from the benches opposite to take education off their hit list. I'd like to table those now.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of guests that I'd like to introduce this afternoon to yourself and to all members of the Assembly. First of all, we have four active home schoolers from around the province of Alberta. We have Mr. and Mrs. Dick and Joanne Barendregt from Neerlandia and Dave and Aline Stasiewich from New Sarepta. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

As well, Mr. Speaker, it's always very significant when young Albertans have an opportunity to meet young people from around the world. The Rotary Club in the province of Alberta is very, very active in sponsoring young people from other countries to visit our province and by the same token to have young people

from our province go elsewhere. In the members' gallery today is Aimee Miller from Westlock, who will be leaving on a one-year exchange program sponsored by the Westlock Rotary Club. She'll be going to Australia in July of 1994. Residing in the province of Alberta but soon to return to her home is Pascaline Renat from central France, who arrived in Alberta in August of 1993. She'll be leaving for her homeland in July of 1994. She was sponsored by the Westlock Rotary Club. We also have Silke Fricke from northern Germany, who arrived in Alberta in August of 1993 on a cultural stay international program. She's been in Alberta and Westlock since that time. She'll be returning to Germany in June of 1994. They're accompanied here today by a representative of the Westlock Rotary Club: Mr. Les Dunford, who is also associated with a local newspaper in Westlock, the *Town & Country*. All of these guests are in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

1:40

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly 68 outstanding grade 8 students from Dan Knott junior high school. They are accompanied today by their teachers Heather Chorley, Mike Dalquist, and Tom Sherwood. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my privilege and pleasure to introduce a special visitor from London, England, who has joined us today: Dr. Alex Paszkowski. Dr. Paszkowski has just completed a psychiatric study on those who have been brain damaged due to accidents. I'd ask the House to recognize Dr. Paszkowski.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. deputy Leader of the Opposition.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to introduce to you and members of the House students from Austin O'Brien high school in Edmonton-Gold Bar. There are 12 students visiting us today. They're accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Marie MacRae and the assistant Mrs. Bruna Kriegel. They're sitting in the public gallery, I understand. I'd ask them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you 10 members of the PC youth and PC youth executive. These are the future leaders of this province. [interjections] Some of them shall be. Their president is Craig Watt. I'd ask them to now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly 12 young Alberta students from grades 6 and 10 from Alberta Bosco Homes. Also they're accompanied by four of their teachers: Marlene Forest-Wallace, Dean Jerace, Victor Bidzinski, and Carrie-Ann Beattie. They are seated in the public gallery,

and I'd ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to introduce to you and through you a constituent and parent Adam Parrish, who is concerned about the impact of education cuts on his children.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two very exuberant and enthusiastic constituents of mine, one from the lovely town of Beaumont by the name of Jacquelyn Feth, the other a constituent from the lovely city of Leduc: Russell Elgert. I would ask that the Assembly give them both a warm welcome this afternoon.

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

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my constituents in Sherwood Park. This first is Susan McManus, who is an assistant in my constituency office. This afternoon also joining her is Tawa Anderson, who is a youth of my community who has been an honour student and has just returned from his first year of honours political science at Dalhousie University in Halifax. Tawa will be working with me this summer. I'd ask that they rise in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

Mental Health Week

MRS. McCLELLAN: I rise in the House today to draw the attention of Albertans to the importance of this week across the country. May 1 to 7 is Mental Health Week. The slogan this year is "making mental health matter," and matter it does, Mr. Speaker.

In this province my department and the Alberta division of the Canadian Mental Health Association are dedicated to working with our partners to help people manage change and maintain their mental health. The benefits will be seen in better overall health for everyone.

I speak on behalf of all of our partners when I stress that it is possible and vital to make Albertans aware of what they can do to make mental health matter. During the week our focus is on giving people some tools that suggest how to keep a positive attitude in the face of adversity. Many individuals are struggling to overcome feelings of insecurity and uncertainty and are seeking help about first steps they can take to regain a feeling of control in their lives.

To celebrate the week, Alberta Health and the provincial Canadian Mental Health Association have developed information flyers in the Strike a Balance series. In the flyers individuals are given ideas about how to put life into their work and their leisure time. The flyers will be distributed through clinics and offices of both organizations. In addition, staff of both organizations are carrying out activities and events that best fit their community needs.

Alberta Health's 53 mental health clinics and two extended care centres along with our partners continue to provide valuable mental health services to Albertans. As stated in our three-year business plan, the focus on mental health services will be shifting to more community-based services. This refocusing of resources

is supported by most mental health professionals, and I certainly strongly support this move.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge a milestone reached by the Canadian Mental Health Association: 1994 marks the 75th year the association has advocated for services to Canadians who are mentally ill. We are proud to be closely associated with the Alberta division of this agency that offers hope and independence to thousands of people every year.

I ask all members of this Assembly to join with me this week in making mental health matter.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, first I'd like to acknowledge the fact that the association is a national volunteer association, and in fact two members of the Liberal caucus are lifetime members and recognized by that national association. A third member of our caucus has served as chair of the Alberta Hospital. So we feel that there is some bench strength in understanding the issues that affect Albertans particularly with this sad and horrible illness.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the government for its initiative in dealing with the association in sending out the flyers, but our caucus notes with some regret that the concept of community-based planning, a concept that's been known for some 20 years, is slow in getting going in this province. We note that the government seems to be more anxious to move the institutions and close those institutions and get those patients into community facilities before the workup has actually been completed. Resources are important. The whole backup service of getting patients into community settings is important, and we note with regret that the mental health strategic plan that we know has been ready for some four months is not before this Assembly and not before the people of Alberta. So there is speed that we're worried about. There are resources that aren't being properly focused, and the result is that we think patients are not being given the kind of support they need, particularly children.

There is a clear issue here of demand that's not being met, and we urge the government to look at that demand and look after that demand and to properly plan so that transition for community-based health for mental patients is more properly looked after.

Thank you, sir.

head:

Oral Question Period

1:50

North West Trust Company

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, Albertans learned last week that a Tory fund-raiser, Mr. Gary Campbell, who is also the chief executive officer of North West Trust, will receive a huge severance package when he leaves North West Trust. Albertans have also learned as of last Thursday that the Treasurer gave a proxy for 99 percent of the votes of North West Trust to Mr. Campbell to vote as he deemed necessary to look after his own financial terms of departure. In an information circular put out by North West Trust, we now learn that senior officers of North West Trust will be eligible for pension benefits. Mr. Treasurer, will you confirm why a CEO who's only been there for seven years has suddenly become entitled to pension benefits?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, this matter was brought to my attention some two weeks ago, and upon being aware of it, I wrote to the chairman of North West Trust Company and asked that the board of directors – the board of directors – review the remuneration and termination arrangements for executives and senior officers. I look forward to the outcome of that review by the board.

MR. DECORE: That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. Will the Treasurer confirm that a mistake has been made by the Treasurer and that he will move now to roll back the salary of \$276,000 of Mr. Campbell, his severance package of \$570,000, and completely eliminate a pension package for this individual?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I didn't wait until now. We took action two weeks ago.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, will you agree that a puny letter to the board that the Treasurer has sent is not good enough, that you now must become involved and ensure that there is no big fat severance package, that there is no continued big fat salary, and that there are no pension benefits for this individual?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the letter in my mind was not a puny letter at all. It was a very straightforward letter asking the board of directors of North West Trust to do something about salaries, which by the way, Mr. Speaker, were negotiated some years ago. What was deemed to be right at that particular time is perhaps not appropriate for today, and we want the board of directors to address this particular situation.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberals should be very, very thankful to us for doing most of their research, because it was through amendments to the Financial Administration Act that these agencies are now required to publish their salaries. Even with their \$2 million research budget they probably wouldn't have found that out unless we had given them the information in the first place.

Independence of Judiciary

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, when Albertans go to the courts, they are often involved with some branch or agency of the government.

AN HON. MEMBER: Ask Percy.

MR. DECORE: No. I'm going to ask the Premier because he seems to know all about judges.

The Premier stated this weekend that he hires Provincial Court judges and he can fire Provincial Court judges. That's called control. Our Constitution makes it clear that there's a division between government and the judiciary. Mr. Premier, will you confirm that you have no power – no power – to give orders to the court, to say that you hire them and therefore you can fire them? You can't fire them, and you know it.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Justice minister supplement. There is no doubt about it: we hire judges. There is no doubt about it: we hire Provincial Court judges. As a matter of fact, for the last two to be hired, I recall quite clearly signing the order in council along with the Lieutenant Governor. There is a process, yes. And I stand to be corrected. To fire a Provincial Court judge also involves an OC, but there is a procedure that involves, I believe, the Judicial Council and the chief judge. I will have the hon. Justice minister supplement as to what that procedure is.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that the Constitution sets out that the judiciary is an independent body, and in fact our democracy is predicated on that. I can affirm that the government of Alberta thinks that the judicial independence concept is paramount. The Premier is absolutely correct that we

do hire, and in the event that a judge is to be fired, we do fire, but there is an arm's-length body, the Judicial Council, that hears recommendations from the chief judge of the Provincial Court, who has the day-to-day responsibility for the administration of the judiciary, in this instance the Provincial Court. In fact, the item of the last day has been before the chief judge, and I would expect the resolution of that matter to come. In the event it hasn't, he would recommend the issue to the Judicial Council, and the Judicial Council would then do whatever they do in terms of their hearings and whatever determination they came to. In what would be an unfortunate circumstance, if they were ever to recommend that a judge be fired, that would come, then, to the government, and only then would the government have the capacity to in fact fire a judge.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Justice agree that the comments made by the Premier went way too far – way too far – because they became a threat, a threat to the judiciary that is completely improper?

MR. SPEAKER: That question will not be accepted.

MR. DECORE: All right. Mr. Premier, I'll ask you. I'll ask you if the Minister of Justice won't answer it. Will the Premier agree that he made a big mistake in threatening the court and that this kind of activity by a Premier is wrong and shouldn't be done in the way he did it?

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Before the hon. Premier answers the question, the Chair wants to make it quite clear that the hon. Minister of Justice did not refuse to answer the supplemental question. The Chair asked him not to answer it.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I want to make this quite clear: I would never interfere in the conduct of an officer of the court and the administration of justice, and no one in this caucus would. I can't speak for that caucus, but no one in this caucus would. I will say that if someone who is earning taxpayers' dollars, good taxpayers' dollars, well over a hundred thousand dollars a year, has a problem relative to his wage package and says, "I will not sit, and I will not work, but I want to get paid," I think that there is something fundamentally wrong with that. That's what I'm talking about. If any other employee in the service of the government of Alberta said, "I'm going to take my pay, but I'm not going to work," you know what would happen? At least from my point of view, he would be fired.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Third main question.

2:00

Young Offenders

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans do not have confidence in the youth justice system. The Premier, however, has appointed a panel of Conservative MLAs to look at only one element of that system; namely, the federal Young Offenders Act. But this province is responsible for every other element of the young offender system. The Act is the only thing Alberta can't change. My question is to the hon. Premier. Will the Premier expand the mandate of his Conservative task force to include all components of the system, including institutions, youth court, facilities, programs, police, and schools?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would highly suspect that that will evolve anyway as we get into the public participation process. Indeed we invite the public to address issues as they see fit, but

the primary focus really will be on the Young Offenders Act. At least it is the perception of this government from the phone calls and the concern that has been expressed. Basically that concern is telling us that people are very, very concerned about that Act, how it's being enforced, how it is being administered. They would like to see the government develop a position relative to that Act and perhaps other matters pertaining to the administration of justice and the accompanying legislation so that we can take that position. When the Minister of Justice goes and meets with his counterparts, he will have in his hand a firm government position. When I go to a First Ministers' Conference, I will have a firm government position relative to this very serious issue.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think the last response, then, begs this question: if youth crime is such a high priority for this government, why not make this an all-party panel, Mr. Premier, like you did for freedom of information?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as much as the members of the opposition would like to be part of the government, the simple fact is that they are not. They are not. It is our responsibility to develop government positions. This is not unusual. We have gone through this exercise in the past. I know that when the federal government had a position, for instance, on CO₂ emissions that could have been of great detriment to this province, the government then went out through a public hearing process and developed a position on CO₂ emissions so that we could take that position to the federal government and strongly defend it with the backing of the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question, then, is: why will the Premier charge into one area of federal responsibility like the Young Offenders Act and then say that there's absolutely nothing he can do about gun control, which is also a matter of federal responsibility?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I said nothing of the kind. I said nothing of the kind, and I would challenge the hon. member to show me the quote or the reference where I said that there was absolutely nothing we could do about gun control. What I did say is that any member of my caucus has the right to express his or her view relative to gun control.

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

Summer Farm Employment Program

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since it began over 20 years ago, the summer farm employment program has provided a truly valuable service. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.
The hon. member.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you. This program has enabled a large number of young Albertans to acquire valuable farm work experience in addition to helping provide Alberta farmers with needed assistance during a very busy period of the year. Can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development advise the

House as to whether or not this program will be in place for this year?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking. I am pleased to announce that, indeed, this program has proven itself to be so worth while that we will continue this program. In the past, to date, 34,000 young people have been not only trained but have also had the opportunity of developing work style and work ethics in the agricultural community. This program has been shown to be so worth while that we're very pleased that we're able to continue it for another year.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister advise as to how many positions will be available in the program for this coming year?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise that up to 540 positions will be available for the young people to train in actual on-farm practice right on site.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: are there any restrictions in place regarding who may participate in this program?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are some restrictions. The employee must be between 15 and 24 years old. The employee may not be a member of that particular farm family. He has to be from another source as far as employment opportunity is concerned. The deadline for applications will be no later than May 20 of this year. The timing, as well, for the employees will be from the 1st of July until the end of August, as far as the program length is concerned.

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

Young Offenders (continued)

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former advocate's extensive study of child welfare included a review of the young offender system in which he concluded that the problem is wider than just the legislation. Now the government yet again is studying youth crime but from an enforcement point of view. My question to the Minister of Family and Social Services is: why is the minister not providing his colleagues and this Assembly with reliable data about the correlation between juvenile crime and the circumstances in which children are raised?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I believe this government is doing quite well in dealing with the issue of children, at least under my department. We do have a considerable number of programs. We have a budget of over \$200 million. We have over 8,000 children in care presently, and we do deliver programs in various ways. Like I mentioned before, the budget we spend around the Edmonton area alone is over \$500 million, and we have contracts with over 150 agencies across the province to deal

with different forms of programs for the young. If time would allow, I could just mention a few of the services we provide. For an example, in the Edmonton . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. SEKULIC: Why hasn't the minister acted on the former advocate's recommendations on children and the young offender systems, such as working to ensure access to meaningful, coordinated, and appropriate services?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I believe this minister has taken action in relation to dealing with children that unfortunately come under our care. We do have a review going on right now, the second phase of a three-phase review of the overall department. The first phase deals with the employables and trainables in the department, which allows us now to have more dollars to work within the high-needs area, including children and persons with disabilities and the elderly. The second phase of the welfare reforms, of course, deals with children's issues, and the third phase will deal with persons with disabilities. All three overlap in that area that the hon. member is asking me about. We do have a long list of agencies we contract at this time that provide services around Edmonton, Calgary, and rural Alberta. If time allowed, I'd outline some of those services, but I know it probably doesn't.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental?

2:10 Sexual Orientation

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Speaker, my constituents are again enraged and outraged – yes, outraged – by a recent news article that quotes a Mr. Leland Stevenson, spokesman for the North American Man/Boy Love Association, expressing his joy at the recent decision by Madam Justice Anne Russell that Alberta's Individual's Rights Protection Act should include sexual orientation as a protected category. The spokesman goes on to say that he is happy to hear that Alberta is moving towards, quote, more enlightened times, and he commends the Leader of the Opposition for demanding that the government not appeal – repeat, not appeal – the ruling of Madam Justice Anne Russell. My question is to the Minister of Justice. Will your decision to appeal or not appeal reflect the rules of law, or will it reflect the demand of the leader of the Liberal opposition?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, any appeal that the Department of Justice analyzes is based purely on law. As this case is before the courts in the sense of appeal, we should tread cautiously, and we'll have that decision forthcoming in the near future.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Justice. Will your decision therefore, Mr. Minister, take into account the demands of the majority of Albertans?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, again it'll be based on questions of law. That's all we can base the decision on.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Justice: will you please advise the Assembly, Mr. Minister, on what date you will be advising of your decision on the appeal?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to be evasive, but our department is challenged with looking at this case amongst

others and bringing them forth. We do have a deadline of May 11 while Justice Russell has stayed this decision, so we'll definitely have to have it before then. I'm expecting it any day.

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

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ms Karen Iverson was afflicted earlier this year by muscular weakness and progressive numbness. Her doctor said that she should get an MRI right away but that she would have to wait four to six months before she could get one in an Alberta hospital. Considering this unreasonable and possibly dangerous delay, it was recommended that Ms Iverson go to a private MRI clinic and spend \$1,250 to get this scan, which she did. To the Minister of Health: what does the minister say to all those Albertans who don't happen to have \$1,250 to get an MRI scan when their doctors say that they need one?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will not comment on the individual's particular case. In the case of MRI I think I have commented on this in this House a number of times. Alberta has more access per capita to MRI services than any other province in Canada unless there have been some very, very recent developments in the last few days. MRI services are provided to Albertans on a prioritization basis based on a publicly funded system. Each institution that has an MRI has a set of guidelines and has a prioritization system. Certainly it is entirely incumbent upon the physician requesting the MRI to put the case forward and for that system to prioritize.

Mr. Speaker, my information is that if you need an MRI in Alberta today, you will receive one within 24 to 48 hours. Now, there are waiting lists on prioritization. Again, I must make the point that the physician puts the individual's case forward and the documented reasons for request of that MRI, and that system is responsible for responding in a prioritized fashion.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, there's something wrong with the system, Mr. Speaker. What system could possibly prioritize as low as a four- to six-month wait progressive numbness, muscular weakness, which could clearly be related to multiple sclerosis or a hidden tumour of the spine?

MRS. McCLELLAN: This minister will not diagnose in this Legislature, unlike the member opposite. However, again, individual cases have to be dealt with with their physician and with the hospital required, or if a person wishes to contact the minister, I will speak or write to them directly regarding their concerns. Mr. Speaker, I do believe that we in this House should depend on the experts, the professionals in the system. Again, Alberta has the best access to MRI in a publicly funded system of any province in Canada.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this person contacted the minister on March 30 and contacted the minister's department in February, and she still hasn't received any kind of response from this minister.

Why does the minister allow the MRI at the Cross cancer hospital to sit idle for five days a week, the MRI at the University hospital to sit idle for as much as three to three and a half days a week, when the proper use of that equipment could solve the four- to six-month waiting list that exists out there right now and at relatively little, at marginal cost?

MRS. McCLELLAN: There are occasions when MRI requires some maintenance and some upkeep, and that has occurred. However, the hours of operation of the MRIs are completely within the discretion of the institution that houses that MRI. Mr. Speaker, the MRI are funded within the global budget of a hospital. They have the opportunity to reallocate diagnostic dollars to increased use of MRI if they feel that's in the best interest of the health of their patients. Again, I have to say that I believe the experts, the professionals in this field are the best to judge the use of this diagnostic test and for what it is used. It is my intention to continue to allow that to happen. I have to remind the hon. member one more time that this province has more access to publicly funded MRI than any other province in Canada.

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

Canadian Airlines International Ltd.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Knowing the competence of the Provincial Treasurer and his department as custodian of Alberta dollars, in the ongoing spirit of open disclosure the Provincial Treasurer has tabled with this House a loan guarantee agreement between Canadian Airlines and the taxpayers of Alberta. In light of the new agreement recently signed by American Airlines and Canadian Airlines to ensure continued competition in the airline industry for the benefit of Albertans, do the terms of our agreement with them change?

MR. DINNING: No, Mr. Speaker. The agreement between the government of Alberta and PWA Corporation stays intact. In fact, now that the agreement has been signed and the arrangement and the relationship with American Airlines has been consummated, this is a good deal for the people of Alberta. It's great news for the employees and the shareholders and the creditors and the other governments, Canada and British Columbia, along with ourselves, who contributed to make this important Alberta industry – and I underscore that: this important Alberta industry – get over that bridge and get into a mode where they have a very, very positive and bright future. It's good for the Canadian traveling public, and we're proud to have been part of it. The obligation that Canadian Airlines undertook through PWA Corp, with a \$50 million loan through the loan guarantee, remains intact, and all conditions are as they were from the day the agreement was tabled in this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the guarantee commence to be either reduced or removed?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the \$50 million becomes repayable immediately at the time of the agreement, which was last week, April 27. It's repayable under the following condition: beginning July 27, 1994, the corporation will make 12 quarterly payments of principal and interest over that 36-month period to the provincial government.

2:20

MR. SMITH: What position, Mr. Speaker, in terms of security or repayment do the taxpayers of Alberta have relative to the new financial structure of the company?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, all of the security that was associated with the guarantee and then subsequently as the

guarantee was drawn down is spelled out in the guarantee package that was filed in this Assembly about a year ago in the interests of disclosure and full transparency. That is a practice that this government has undertaken since day one. I would refer the hon. member and others to that guarantee agreement, where the security and our position are backed up by assets owned by the company.

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

Biomedical Waste Disposal

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hospitals are forced to sort, store, and then ship their garbage to the government-created private monopoly at Beeseker. On the other hand, the government recognizes the ability . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order please. For the record it's Beeseker.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] They are listening. Thank you for that correction. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order, hon. members. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hospitals are forced to ship their waste to Beeseker, but on the other hand private laboratories are allowed to find the lowest cost means of dealing with their waste while still meeting environmental standards. To the Minister of Health: why have regional incinerators been shut down even when they could be easily upgraded to meet environmental standards at no additional cost to the taxpayer?

MRS. McCLELLAN: A preamble can certainly be interesting. If you listened to the hon. member, you would suggest that every hospital is completely taking all of its garbage to Beeseker, which is just east of Calgary, for the hon. member's information. Absolutely wrong, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely wrong. Biomedical waste is being transported from many hospitals because their incinerators do not meet our environmental standards. Now, it is a judgment that it is too costly to upgrade the number of regional incinerators or hospital incinerators in this province to meet those standards. This has been worked out on a cost basis. Biomedical waste is a very small part of hospital waste, and hospitals are managing the regular waste out of their hospitals right there. I should think the hon. member would want us to handle biomedical waste in the best way possible.

Our environmental standards are constantly being upgraded and changed, and it would certainly seem quite in order to have a facility to handle that. Mr. Speaker, it is not a government facility in any way, and any private-sector person who wishes to put up an incinerator to meet those standards can do it today.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. To the Minister of Health again then: why was the Grande Prairie regional hospital forbidden, then, if this is just a matter of dollars, from entering into a contract with a North Dakota company, where they could ship their waste cheaper than sending it to the Bovar facility?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly look into that. As to where they send it, the shipment of biomedical waste by the hospital is a matter in their jurisdiction. Now, there are

such things as interprovincial or intercountry agreements that would have to be met. The minister of the environment may have some additional information that he would want to supplement on this whole issue.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If the government is truly concerned about the environment and not just supporting the private monopoly, the one by Bovar, why are laboratories allowed to find alternatives for the efficient and effective disposal of their waste but hospitals aren't?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, all health facilities have a responsibility to dispose of biomedical waste in a safe manner. The hospitals in this province are funded by Alberta Health and by the taxpayers of this province. We do set standards and guidelines and some controls on how they manage waste. This is part of it. So I would say that it's quite responsible that we ensure that these wastes are handled in a safe way.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Student Achievement Tests

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been asked a number of questions by a few professional teachers in my constituency concerning achievement testing and the increased emphasis on testing. To the Minister of Education: will the results of achievement tests throughout our educational system have any discernible meaning if test results of ESL students, special ed students, or learning disabled children are included in the averages?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is a provision in the policy and guidelines related to the administration of achievement tests which allows students who would not benefit from writing these tests to be exempt from that particular sitting of the test. I would also like to add that it is, however, very important to monitor this situation, because provided the system and the students will benefit from the achievement tests, we want to make sure that all eligible students do write those tests.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. The supplemental to the minister: will these results accurately portray acceptable teaching methods if these students' marks are included in the results, these marks being ESL, special ed, or the handicapped, sir?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is for the very reason that these results may not serve any useful purpose that we therefore provide for the exemption that I mentioned in my first answer.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the minister: will there be a method to evaluate students at the beginning of the year and towards the end of the year to determine the student's progress rather than whether he or she has achieved an adequate test result?

MR. JONSON: Well, I would certainly hope so, Mr. Speaker. That is one of the very important functions that students working

with their teachers and in the classrooms go through. There's always an assessment, I think, at the beginning of the year, and throughout the year there are several tests, I'm sure, and other methods of evaluation are applied. So in terms of measuring at the beginning and the end of the year, that is a matter of school responsibility. Consideration is being given to administering the achievement tests closer to the end of the school year so that they might be of some value in the school's evaluation as well as being of benefit to developing curriculum and improving programs at the provincial level.

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

Second Language Programs

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the recent devastating cuts to education in our province, Alberta was envied for its support for education, including heritage languages. Kindergarten in particular provides an early learning opportunity for children whose first language is not English. One such example is the Russian-speaking children in the community of Plamondon, whose kindergarten time is destined to disappear as a result of cuts to ECS funding. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why is he allowing such a disadvantage to occur against these Plamondon children and hundreds of others like them in our province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the language grant program that we've had in place for some time is continuing. It is certainly reduced by 5 percent as of September 1 and 2 and a half percent as of September 1, 1995.

2:30

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes, but we're talking specifically kindergarten here on behalf of a community that otherwise doesn't have the same access to information. I wonder if the minister would provide some guarantee of funding to grade 1 so that children from heritage language communities such as Plamondon and others could make up for the lost instruction time.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the funding of grade 1 to grade 12 continues as outlined in considerable detail in the budget announcements and in the business program.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: We're talking about children who are born here, Mr. Speaker, who can't get this kind of support. I wonder if the minister would perhaps then guarantee the Plamondon community some access to the funding available from the enhanced opportunity grant program to ensure a 400-hour, full-fledged program for kindergarten in their area.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understand the question, the hon. member is asking for a guarantee of an optional or an additional language program in the schools of this province. I think that is something that is a priority and a decision to be made by local school boards. All across this province school boards are faced with making decisions as to what additional second languages can be offered in a particular jurisdiction, and this will be the case with respect to grade 1 in the Lac La Biche school division.

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

Francophone Education in Lethbridge

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Education. The francophone co-ordinating council in Lethbridge had expressed an interest in acquiring one of two schools that have been closed, the Dorothy Gooder and the Hardieville schools. Now, my understanding is that the minister has approved the sale of Dorothy Gooder by the public school board to a religious group in Lethbridge. My first question is: has the minister approved the use of the Hardieville school for the francophone co-ordinating council?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, no, I have not approved the use of the Hardieville school for that purpose. However, I would like to go on to indicate that I have met with representatives of the francophone co-ordinating council in that area, and I do note that they have expressed an interest in utilizing the Hardieville school. That decision, if it were to be made, would depend upon a significantly increased enrollment and justification for devoting an entire school for this purpose, but certainly they have made their presentation, and they have put forward their preference.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Catholic school board cannot afford any more than a French program within an existing school, as currently is the case, can they be forced into funding a stand-alone school?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I would have to say to the hon. member that it is a debatable point as to affordability and nonaffordability as far as the future is concerned. Any school becomes more viable as a free-standing operation if there is the enrollment to justify it and to utilize the space that's provided for it. So with respect to the question, I can only say that it will depend on what the future holds in terms of increased enrollments and the degree of viability there would be in making that sort of a move.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: are there amalgamation opportunities for the francophone co-ordinating council in Lethbridge?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the co-ordinating councils are designed to promote and support a francophone program within a particular area of the province, and because of them being of that nature, there are not any of the usual types of opportunities to link up with a district school division or county. However, if there were to be a francophone authority, as was provided for in Bill 8, established in a neighbouring area of the province, say in the Calgary area, there is a possibility of some sort of joint arrangement being arrived at, yes.

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

School Board Finances

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The regionalization of school boards will bring several boards under one administration and under one new funding formula. Boards will join a newly formed region with different levels of financial reserves, liabilities, and even unfunded debts. My question to the Minister

of Education: will the boards who have reserves be able to retain these dollars for the benefit of their own local schools?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to dealing with surpluses or reserves and the whole process of amalgamation and regionalization, the position that my department has been directed to take is that if a school board has an unsupported debt and in their reserves they have capital reserves dedicated to that project, we expect them to be applied to paying down that debt. If, on the other hand, they have a general surplus, that surplus can be applied either in the course of this school year or it can be part of the overall agreement in the distribution of funds when boards amalgamate or regionalize.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question?

MR. LANGEVIN: Yes. My question's again to the Minister of Education. In the case where there are no reserves available, who will be responsible for unsupported debts? The government, the local boards, or the newly formed regions?

MR. JONSON: In terms of, Mr. Speaker, I guess you would call it underwriting or guaranteeing the debt, with the move to full provincial funding, the province will be. With respect to how the payment of the liability incurred in that debt will be addressed, that will be a question for the working out of a new provincial funding formula, which we expect to have in place by the fall of '95.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. LANGEVIN: Again to the Minister of Education: who will be responsible for existing deficits that were formed just on the eve of leaving it and joining a new board?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would have to discuss the specific circumstances of a deficit that a school board has been running, because it is somewhat contrary perhaps to legislation. I would have to examine the peculiar circumstances.

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

Ambulance Services

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health. Can the minister tell the House if the planned integration of emergency services under the new regional health authorities will result in a reduced level of ambulance service?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, on February 2 I announced some guidelines for establishing regional authorities. At that time I suggested that it was important to have linkages between ambulance emergency services and the regional health authorities. However, there is nothing in this government's plans to consolidate all of the ambulance services that are presently available under the regional health authorities. That is something that the regional health authorities may want to discuss as they progress through their business plans, but today that is not our plan.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the regional authorities control ambulance services, will the municipalities be left to assume the costs?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that is certainly not our intention. Ambulance services in this province are operated in a number of ways and delivered in a number of ways. Alberta Health is responsible for interfacility transfer of patients in total for the air ambulance program, but other ambulance services are operated in some cases by fire departments, by municipalities, or through a hospital program. So as I've indicated in my first answer, it is not the intention of this department to change that arrangement at this time. However, if regional health authorities wish to discuss with municipalities how they deliver those services, I am sure that would be a discussion welcomed.

2:40

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the province looking for a free ride by downloading responsibility for ambulance services onto municipalities?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, no. Today we'd spend about \$28 million in ambulance services. Again, I would expect that any arrangements that the regional health authorities wish to discuss with municipalities should be done on that basis. Regional health authorities would have the responsibility obviously for the delivery of interfacility transfers, as they have today, and may assume some responsibility for air ambulance, which is totally provincially funded.

MR. SPEAKER: The time for question period has expired.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Royal Assent**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

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

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

MR. SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Gordon Towers, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

HIS HONOUR: Please be seated.

MR. SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has, at its present sittings, passed certain Bills to which, and in the name of the Legislative Assembly, I respectively request Your Honour's assent.

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

No.	Title
3	Natural Gas Marketing Amendment Act, 1994
4	Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, 1994
24	Appropriation Act, 1994
25	Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Capital Projects Division) Act, 1994
26	Appropriation (Lottery Fund) Act, 1994
Pr. 2	Lethbridge Foundation Amendment Act, 1994
Pr. 3	Companions of Angela and Francis (Koinonia Association) Act
Pr. 8	Shaw Communications Inc. Act
Pr. 9	Tammy Lee Barnes Adoption Act
Pr. 10	Janna Adella Marie Kinnee Adoption Act
Pr. 15	Silvia Kathleen Miles Adoption Act
207	Adult Adoption Act

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[Mr. Speaker took his place in the Chair, and the Mace was uncovered]

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

2:50
Bill 19
School Amendment Act, 1994

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to lead the debate on Bill 19. The other day I made some comments with respect to the position that the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore took in that he had expressed concern for keeping some of the small schools open in rural Alberta. I had also made the comment that if he gave up some of his salary as a teacher, he may keep them open. Well, it would take more than a portion of his salary to keep some of the schools open. As I go through some of the Bill 19 amendments, I know that at the end of the day the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore will be supporting the Bill because in essence this Bill provides for equity in education no matter where you live in Alberta.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, as a former reeve and a member of the school board I was involved in a fair amount of meetings and debates over the provincial funding and equity in education question. I remember back to the days when the hon. Provincial Treasurer was the Minister of Education and trying to reach a consensus with the number of school boards that we had in Alberta and a consensus on equity in education. One of the things that we agree on in terms of principles is that children are created equal in this

province and, as well, that they have a right to access a basic education again no matter where they live in this province.

One of the other principles, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the fact that location of industry is a function of geography. We have often heard through the debates on fiscal equity that various representatives from school jurisdictions have told us how they have cajoled and invited industry into their particular district and, as a result, increased the assessment and, of course, created more dollars for education within their jurisdiction. One of the things that has happened, however, is that the industry located in those jurisdictions, municipalities, either had a good form of transportation to ship the product that they were manufacturing or there was a well-trained work force that was close to the industry setting up or they were seed stock. We found out that industry developed, generally speaking, along corridors in this province. This really became a topic of debate through the meetings we had, and as a result, it came to a number of Alberta School Boards Association conventions. In fact, some of the conventions that I had the pleasure of attending didn't get past the first resolution, and most of the time it was fiscal equity that was the number one resolution we had to deal with.

I'd like to remind this Assembly that the decision that was reached by the ASBA was made on a weighted ballot. It wasn't made democratically by a show of hands. Really the weighted ballot was determined by the amount of dollars you spent, not based on the educational needs of the student in that particular jurisdiction. So if you spent more money, you had more votes. Of course, those of you who were school trustees prior to coming to this House knew that if Edmonton and Calgary got together, their weighted ballots would completely remove any influence that rural school jurisdictions had in winning a vote. Something similar to what happens here in the House: all you need is a small number of members to rise after a show of hands and call for a weighted-ballot vote. I don't remember the exact number in the bylaws, but it could have been 15 or 18 members that needed to rise. As a result, some of the smaller boards really didn't get much of an opportunity to influence the decision-making of the Alberta School Boards Association.

Finally government has made a decision, and we've written that into the Act in terms of full provincial funding, which will provide for basic, equitable education for children no matter where they live in Alberta. As a result, we will be able to keep some of these small schools open in parts of Alberta. By closing some of those schools, students would be forced to travel a great distance to access education in a neighbouring school. It may mean in some of those cases the closure of those schools where students would have to travel more than two hours in one direction, and that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not equitable.

The other area I'd like to cover is regionalization. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can no longer support a ratio of trustees in some of these school jurisdictions of one trustee to 50 students. We find that ratio in many of the school jurisdictions in Alberta. As a result, we have to regionalize, amalgamate, reduce the number of boards. We will have fewer trustees and introduce greater efficiency into the system.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

With respect to the role of the school boards, the legislation in Bill 19 will ensure that school boards will continue to be responsible for the employment and termination of all staff, the transportation of students, the setting up of bus routes, the budgeting and accounting of all moneys from the province, the setting of fees, the construction and renovation of schools and other buildings

within their jurisdiction, and subject to legislation and regulation the establishment of policies and the hearing of appeals, the closure of schools, and the accountability for and the communication of student achievement. Mr. Speaker, as well, they will have an added responsibility for the development of three-year business plans and also the discretion to grant charters to charter schools.

Overall, I believe that Bill 19 will bring a much needed change to our educational system. The public perception of the upper educational system has not really been that supportive over the last number of years, and I believe this Bill will allow for teachers to have more authority in the classroom, allow the principals of the schools to be leaders. It will certainly involve more and more parents in the decision-making at the local school level as it reflects the discipline, some of the planned student achievements, and the direction the school is taking.

So on those points, Mr. Speaker, I know that we'll have good support for the amendments in Bill 19 and thank you for the opportunity.

3:00

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is discriminating against Catholic and independent schools. On March 31 Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, was unveiled and people all across the province stopped in their tracks. What was this? Once again the government proved how it does not listen to the people who elected us to govern. The Premier said as much in the Legislature recently when several separate school boards decided to voice their opinions. That was back on Thursday, April 14. He said that the government won't make decisions based on the size of rallies. What kind of message does that send out, Mr. Premier? How are people in this province supposed to express their concerns before Bills become legislation?

Bill 19 outlines ways to restructure basic education, but it's not about education. This government is talking about money. This proposal is to remove the taxation power from school boards. The province would collect all property taxes for education and place them in the Alberta school foundation fund, or the ASFF. In essence, the government would take all the property tax money and put it in a big pot, doling it out to the different boards in a fair and equitable manner. Like many things, this sounds good. It sounds like poor boards would be able to access the same funds as wealthier boards.

There's one huge flaw in this plan: the legislation does not specifically address the formula. This is a very important issue. If a formula is not included in the Act, it could change based on the whim of the minister. How can the government even debate this issue without seeing the formula that would equally distribute the collected money? The government should spell this out before they go any further. If a school board needs additional funding than the allocated amount, they would be forced to hold a plebiscite. This means some boards would remain in a have-not situation, while the wealthier boards could provide additional programs. I thought this amendment to the Act was to get rid of this scenario.

Students across Alberta deserve the best, regardless if they live in Lethbridge or in High Level. Even if the board did have a plebiscite and raised money from it, the minister would tell them how to spend it. Once again the minister would be exerting power over the local community. This plebiscite will only raise 3 percent of their operating budget, and boards will only be allowed to hold one once every three years.

Recently Catholics across the province stood up against this government. They do not want the government controlling the collection of school taxes. They maintain that this violates their rights under the Constitution. Nearly 10,000 Albertan Catholics gathered to send a message to this government that they don't like this Bill, and they want to make sure that they are heard. Well, I heard them, and so did this Liberal caucus.

In 1988 separate school boards won the right to access some of the undeclared property tax dollars. Prior to that, all undeclared tax dollars went solely to public boards. With this change to the School Act, the government is giving the separate school boards some choices. It's saying: if you don't like this plan, you can always withdraw from the Alberta school foundation fund altogether. But withdrawing from this fund is not that beneficial to most boards. If the board chooses to leave the ASFF, they will lose the undeclared portion of residential and corporate taxes. Remember, separate boards just won the right to some of that money in 1988, and now they could lose it. That's a substantial loss to most boards. If the separate board did not belong to the provincial fund and wanted more money than they were allocated, a plebiscite for them would only allow them access to declared residential and corporate taxes. Bill 19 does not guarantee that separate school boards will receive as much money as they do now. It's all up to the minister.

Why can't the government leave the separate school assessment alone? Why fix something when it's not broken? Does this not prove to the government that they should take another look? Those who work in this area daily are the truly knowledgeable ones. If they are concerned, then maybe the government should be.

It would seem that Alberta Education is going on a voucher system. Although that may seem attractive to some, it will be detrimental to small rural school districts. This system will allow funding to follow the student. It sounds good, but if that student lives in a rural district and decides to attend an urban school, the rural school will suffer. Many rural schools are already struggling with small student populations. We should have a test period with this voucher system to evaluate the impact on small rural schools.

The majority of school boards in this province are against this plan. Does this not say something? Concerns have been expressed by the ATA and the ASBA. These groups make up the people who run our schools. Wouldn't the people who run schools know what will work and what won't? Maybe we should ask for their suggestions.

Bill 19 destroys the autonomy of the boards, placing important decisions in the hands of the minister. Does the Minister of Education think he does not have enough power right now? A good leader delegates authority. Instead, the minister wants complete control. Why else would he go after the power to order a school board to replace a superintendent? Is that really a minister's job? Can't school boards handle those kinds of tasks? They have been for years. Under Bill 19 superintendents will no longer be responsible to the members of the school board. Their job will be to implement the minister's policy. This control by the minister's office will have an adverse effect on school boards. Not only will they lose their autonomy, but the community decision-making body of the area will be in jeopardy.

The Official Opposition believes funding changes need to happen. Right now the province funds 58 percent of the school board's spending with 42 percent coming from property taxes. Changes to the Act give 100 percent of funding coming from the province. This leaves the school board with no way of getting additional funding. The school boards lose power. We believe the province should provide 85 percent of the funding with the

remaining 15 percent coming from property taxes. This still gives school boards the freedom to continue offering programs in their schools that they deem necessary. Bill 19 has all the funding coming from the province based on a per capita system. As I mentioned before, if a board needs more, a plebiscite would have to happen.

Bill 19 also allows for the creation of charter schools without local school board support. If a group cannot agree to terms with their local public or separate school board, the group could bypass the boards and go straight to the minister for approval. We believe the minister should not grant charters to schools where they have been refused by the local school boards. What is preventing the government from full funding of the new charter schools but completely ignoring existing independent schools?

3:10

Bill 19 clearly states that charter schools will be public or separate and not private. Existing independent schools have been receiving funding from the government, and nowhere in this documentation for Bill 19 does it mention these schools. Right now independent schools are concerned that the government will not allow them to apply for charter school status so that they, too, can take advantage of the funding. They already fit the criteria for charter schools.

The government is suggesting funding pilot schools, leaving existing independent schools out. I don't know how the government can justify funding new, experimental schools while refusing to fund existing, alternative schools. Public moneys will be used to fund private choices. This needs to be looked at very carefully. The government could be treading on very unsafe ground.

Who will provide the evaluation of charter schools? Who will make sure that properly trained instructors are teaching our children?

This Bill also looks at amalgamation of boards. We agree with this; however, the government had better make sure that it does not amalgamate a separate board with a public. The government must respect the rights of these two groups.

Another area that will change is that Bill 19 provides a greater role for parents and communities in the school system. That, too, sounds good, but that also leaves a huge area for abuse. For example, what if a school group is controlled by parents who do not represent the will of the majority? This, too, takes away power from the elected board members.

The school board's role is at risk. This Bill will phase out school boards, and that will lead to problems down the road. The education of our children will suffer if boards, who have a great understanding of the needs of their students, are eliminated.

The minister needs to take another look at this Bill before third reading. We cannot and should not allow changes to our educational system that would adversely affect our children. This is very serious. The province must not violate the powers of the school boards. This is a democracy, and boards are elected by residents in that area. They have a better understanding of their needs than the minister in an office miles away.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to stand up and speak to Bill 19, amendments to the School Act. The education business has always been close to my heart, and during the last 30 years I have followed what is happening around the world. What has happened is: your government has economically destroyed this province. However, I will carry on with the education part. I've had the opportunity to travel to Asia and

Africa, visit many systems and many countries to see what they're doing well and to see what we may be doing better. I've traveled to Africa. I've traveled to other parts of the world to listen, to hear what is going on.

As we look at the amendments to the Bill, we should also be looking at what is best. How do we find out what is best? We look at what is happening in many parts of the world, pick out what's best from their countries, and implement it here if it makes sense.

We don't have to travel. I know that a former minister took a group touring Europe and other countries, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to come up with a report. I read through the report, and not too much, if anything, was implemented from it. We didn't learn from it. All we have to do is go to the University of Alberta where you have in the department of education experts from these various countries – whether it's Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Orient, or whether it's Europe, France, Germany, Holland – and see how they have put together their educational systems. Or we could go to South America. Many come here from South America – Brazil, Argentina – to study. We can get a group of experts from all over the world at almost next to no cost to get together and see what changes need to be made so our education system is competitive with any other system in the world today.

I did have the opportunity to go through *Toward 2000*, the economic development policy paper, and one statement that comes out is: education is our future. Education is our future. This is the case. If we are prepared – like our parents and grandparents provided the avenues for us to take advantage of the opportunities, we need to do this for the next generations. We ourselves lived in a time when we were able to take education and move ahead, benefit from it. If we worked hard, we had the capability to be part of the economic system.

We also should be looking at the business that goes on throughout the world. In other words, education does not stand alone. It's integrated with business and an infrastructure, the health care system, in the different countries. The leading economic countries have an excellent education system and work with their education system as well as an infrastructure for health care in looking after those who need the assistance, not making them dependent on the system but assisting them to be part of the society and the opportunities to be involved in having jobs and so on.

I have visited Japan and looked at their system. In fact, we have what is known as the Yamada exchange, and this exchange started out of the Yamada high school in Japan and has gone across Alberta. It rotates on a three-year basis. Southern Alberta, Calgary, has this exchange of 200 or 300 students every third year. Red Deer, central Alberta from Rocky Mountain House across, I believe, to the Saskatchewan border, has had this group once or twice. Then Edmonton and the northern regions also have the Yamada exchange.

Tremendous learning occurs when we mix students from different countries. They learn from our system; we learn from their system. They come over. They see what has happened here. The opportunities that we have are different from the opportunities in Japan. Our students go over there and vice versa, see what opportunities the Japanese have that we don't, what the emphasis is on. The systems are quite different in many ways. We know that in some areas certain segments in the Japanese schools or education system may be slightly ahead.

What we must do is use our education budget. I believe it's – what? – \$14 million to \$15 million or \$12 million to \$13 million for the Department of Education to look at the total picture and compare apples to apples. We always get reports that this country is better than ours, but we never look at the complete picture. In

some areas in Japan their sciences and maths are ahead of ours, but when you look at the total number of students that take part on a per capita basis, it doesn't hold true. The Japanese system eliminates – eliminates – many students from taking part along the way. If you don't get into the best play school, you don't . . .

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Yeah. Would the hon. member entertain a question in debate?

3:20

MR. BRACKO: No, Mr. Speaker. I have too many important things to tell, but I'd be glad to speak with him. I'll even go to his office after this session and talk with him and enlighten him. Maybe he can get a new trick. He's using this one all the time. You know, there must be something else he can learn.

DR. WEST: It's an honest question.

MR. BRACKO: Well, sure. I'll be glad to later.

Debate Continued

MR. BRACKO: Anyway, ladies and gentlemen, as we look at the number per capita, we see that a large number are eliminated along the way. If you don't get into the right play school, you don't get into the right kindergarten, and then you can't get into the right elementary school, the right junior high school, the right senior high school, and then in the right university. They're cut off. There is not the same emphasis here on equality of education. We're way ahead. They are a very status-based education system, which eliminates a majority of the students before they are able to graduate, and it's based many times on the amount of money that the parents have. You can see that. So we have to compare apples to apples.

We've had the privilege, my wife and I, of having a Japanese exchange student for two years in our home and going to St. Albert high. She did extremely well but did not qualify to get into a Canadian university in Alberta. However, she did apply and got into the best private university in Japan. She can't get in here, but she can get into the best private university in Japan. So what is that saying to us? So we have to have a comparison that works, and it's important that we do.

Also, the person in charge of the Yamada exchange for many years came over here and for several years got used to our system. He of course took the best from the Japanese system, but he decided in his 50s to move to Canada. In Japan this is almost unheard of. You stay with the company or the school or wherever you're working for a lifetime. But at that age, with three high school students he decided to come to North America to take advantage of the system we have here. The aspects, he knew, were better than what they had in Japan where they're regimented to be able to think.

Also, I discussed with our exchange student's father, who's a businessman in Japan, for many hours the education advantages in Japan, the education advantages in Canada. He was saying that to get into the top university in Japan, the University of Tokyo, you have to memorize three thick books, and whoever memorizes these three thick books gets in with the highest marks. But it

doesn't teach them to think for themselves. They come out being able to memorize and regurgitate what they've taken in, but the thinking that should be there isn't there like in our system. So what we have: they come out and they of course get the jobs at the top firms, but the leadership isn't there. So they are coming over, picking up the good ideas from here and taking them back. Throughout the world the Japanese are sending exchange students to learn the ways of different countries not only for education but to learn the way the culture works in different countries so that later on as businesspeople they can come over and conduct business throughout the world.

What has Alberta done? Let me just emphasize what former Premier Lougheed said about six months ago: Albertans need to send students to Japan to study. Where was he for the last 21 years? I don't know. You know, he was looking after the petroleum industry, and education was secondary. When there's no money now, we have to redo what has been done over the last 20 years. Still he's off base, because it's not Japan that we should be sending students to. It's Japan, but it's also Taiwan, South Korea, South America, different countries. The big companies will tell you: "We are looking for people who can speak the language of certain countries. We are losing thousands of dollars through mistakes." They can get an interpreter, but many times the interpretation may be different and costly to the countries. They want to work with the Department of Education so we can have students ready to go into these areas. I don't see that in Bill 19.

Also, Australia is ahead of us. They had 12,000 exchange students in Japan. We had 300 from all of Canada, not Alberta, all of Canada.

We need to focus on that, to look where we're going. Where do we want to go with these amendments to the education Bill by the year 2005, 2010, 2025? The top business companies in Japan have a plan for the next 150 years for where they want their companies to go. Education: we look at it, and we're reaching back. We're trying to make up distance that we've lost instead of just where we are and moving ahead. So what we need is to look at what is happening throughout the world.

We look at what has happened to university students in Japan too. A couple of years ago we went to P.E.I. with our Japanese family who was here, and we met in P.E.I. a university group from Japan. They went to a private university, and we tried to find out what university they were at. However, they were so ashamed of the private university – the calibre was so low – they wouldn't tell us. These things we don't hear unless we get into and understand how their culture works. So as we look at our education system, we have an excellent one, but we want to improve on it. We want to know where we're going in the next 10, 15, 20, 35 years. We want to make sure that our children and our children's children have the same opportunities that we have had.

I look at Taiwan. When I went there in 1970, we saw many of the students working in the museum in Taipei. We asked: what were they trained in at university? They were town planners, engineers. We said, "Well, when are you going to work in the area that you studied in?" They said, "We will." I said, "Well, when will you do it?" They said, "When we take over China." I was hard pressed to believe they still thought that way, but they have taken that situation from where they were and become one of the leading economic nations in this world. That's what we have to learn: how do they do it? We must also work together to come to that area.

We look at Hong Kong. We look at form 6, the equivalent to our high school, and they are slightly ahead of us. However, we

must remember that in Hong Kong only 2 percent of their students went to university. Two percent. In Canada I think it was 15 or so at that time. Now they've built another university, so it may be up to 4 or 5 percent. We can make generalized statements, but the department that has the largest research budget needs to tie these things together to see what the facts are, to separate, and not give us information maybe like the studies they did on the ECS and kindergarten to support the way Bill 19 is cutting out half of the kindergartens.

Also in business – we need to include business, very important in the education system. In the United States the armed forces service industry, the big industrialists involved in this are now working with K to 12 schools to assist, to prepare them for the future. We need to involve business. Just a few comments from business on what's happening and how this education Bill does apply to it. Maybe there will be regulations that'll fit in. I hope so, but I haven't seen any regulations, so I don't know. They're from an economic restructuring conference in Jasper, October of last year. Some of the comments: "Virtually all of our new jobs this year have been part-time jobs." How is the education system dealing with this, contract jobs, part-time jobs? What else can we do to assist and maybe make more full-time jobs? Another comment: "We must develop our human capital – our skills and capacity for innovation – if we are to remain resource-rich and not become resource-poor." What are the innovations? What are the creative things we're doing in Bill 19 that are going to move us into the 21st century to keep us competitive and make us more competitive in the world? I don't see that in Bill 19. Maybe they'll come out in the regulations. Another comment: "First and foremost, change must be grounded in principle, not in ideology but in principle." So as we look at what's happening economically and happening educationally, we have to make sure it's done on sound principle.

3:30

Another comment made: "Business, in partnership with government and educators, develop a common research data base of research projects so information can be shared and commercial application realized." A sharing of information, government working with business – have business pay for it. Everyone benefits from this. We need to do this. Working with educators: for years as an educator I always worked with the chamber of commerce to see what was needed in business, how the school system, the education system, could be flexible to do things that would help meet the needs of our students and help them go into business without a large amount of extra training; through the junior achievement program spent many hours, many years in fact, working and discussing ways. One of the best courses that our students took to get us in tune with business wasn't in the school; it was through junior achievement where they formed their own company, produced a product, marketed the product, managed their own business, and then after 20 weeks they sold their company. You know, companies took these students when they saw on their résumé that they had a junior achievement background. They would get jobs ahead of others who did not. This is what we must be doing: working with businesses, working at all levels from kindergarten right up to university and into the colleges and so on.

Next, "job readiness should be taught in the education system with regards to skills and competitive attitudes." They need to know: what is the competition out there; what are the attitudes around the world that we need to have to be successful? As we look at this, Mr. Speaker, we know that we have to move ahead. We cannot just go with the status quo. Again, sustainable change

should be based on data-based decisions, not guesswork or ideology. This is what we need in the education Bill. We look forward to making some amendments that perhaps will assist in this.

As we also looked at the fiscal plan of our schools, Mr. Speaker, I did ask the minister some questions, and he responded. I thank him for these. Currently 1,121 of our 1,500 schools have debentures. Now, this to me was one of the biggest mistakes that has been made. When you do debentures, you pay for something three or four times, instead of paying cash as needed. This should have happened; we had the good years when it should have happened. We had the heritage fund that could have provided for this. Instead, we taxed Albertans two or three or four times as much as they should have been. Now they're saying that the idea of paying cash for future school projects rather than debenture borrowing is being considered. I trust they will do more than consider it. I trust they will put it into practise to show that they are becoming more fiscally responsible than in the past.

Again, total indebtedness is approximately \$3 billion you spent instead of paying cash as you went. That's the theory of a socialist: to spend and spend and pay more interest and more taxes and cost the taxpayer more money. Then they say they know all about business. [Mr. Bracko's speaking time expired] No. I need more time, Mr. Speaker. I just got a quarter way through.

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I regret that I could not devote some of my time on this important Bill to my friend from St. Albert, who was obviously passionate about the issue of school legislation in the province of Alberta. He has done a wonderful job, and it will be difficult for me to follow, but follow I must. I regret that I have only 20 minutes as well to debate this most profound legislation that will affect all Albertans for all time. It is, in fact, symbolic that this Bill 19 is both the largest in volume that we have tabled in this Assembly in the short time I have been here; it is the most volumetric as well in the profound changes that it wishes to do. [interjection] I noticed as well that the Minister of Municipal Affairs wants to engage in this debate, and I wish and hope that he will have the courage to stand up at the appropriate time and take his 20 minutes as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Just for the hon. member's information, the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has already contributed to second reading.

MR. GERMAIN: Then I do hope he will allow me the courtesy to make my contribution.

I want to make seven points, Mr. Speaker, in connection with Bill 19, in the overview of the Bill. I recognize that there will be many times to debate the individual items on this particular piece of legislation. I want to reach out and I want to speak and I want to ask hypothetically today: who will be the 10 members from the government side that have the courage to vote against this legislation? Who will be the 10 people on that side that stand up and support public education in this province? Who will be the 10 members on that side that will stand up and say that they stand with Roman Catholics to protect a right that they feel is important to them? Who will the 10 people of courage be? Will it be the Member for Calgary-Varsity? We can only hope so. Will it be the Member for Calgary-Shaw? We can only hope so. Will it be the Member for Calgary-Cross? We can only hope so.

Now I return to the points I wanted to make about the Bill. I want to talk about the first portion of the Bill that many Albertans find odious, and that is the centralized tax grab from rural Alberta, sucking all of that money into a central depot to be given out at the whim or at the will of the government. Now, I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the people who toil in the 40 below weather in the Syncrude plant in northern Alberta, struggling in the darkness, struggling in the cold, struggling with the tar sand that is barely movable in those temperatures, they did not create a facility there to have the tax money go into a central organization and at the will of the government to leech back into their community.

On the tax issue in Fort McMurray, I can tell you that alone among the communities in this province Fort McMurray has the highest education taxes of any community, and this in spite of the fact that they rely heavily on a machinery and equipment tax segment that the government is also purporting to interfere with. Now, when you have that situation, you say: is it because of wasteful school boards, or is it because of a high cost of living in a hostile environment and a rapid population growth during a boom that required a high capital structure? When you analyze the circumstances, you find that that is why the tax allocations in Fort McMurray are high, and that is why the funding is needed for education of Fort McMurray students. Surely those people who work in the frigid north, in the darkness and in the cold, are entitled to speak up personally and speak up through their elected member of this Assembly to preserve the independence of taxation in the province of Alberta.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that to the extent that taxation rights are synonymous and integrated to constitutional rights of freedom of religion, there is an issue there that has to be dealt with that the government despite their efforts cannot stickhandle around. Who over there are the 10 people with courage who will speak up for Catholics? Who will speak up for them?

I want to move on from the taxation issue and talk about the issue of loss of board control. Prominent in that particular issue, of course, is the taxation, but buried in that are the sections of this particular Act that would take away from the board the fundamental right to hire and fire and control their key executive, the superintendent of their schools. Now, the Premier in his infinite wisdom said to Albertans after he had listened to them: I will change things so that you do not lose control over your superintendent. Nobody in the province of Alberta – no Roman Catholic in the province of Alberta, no separate school board in the province of Alberta – could ever assume that they have control over their superintendent when he must report directly to the Minister of Education and his unelected entourage of civil servants and be fired by that unelected group as well on recommendation to the minister. Who in this province would ever identify that as being independence to hire your own key executive? Nobody, Mr. Speaker. Nobody in the province of Alberta will come to that conclusion. I hope there are 10 people with courage over there that likewise do not come to that conclusion. [interjections]

3:40

I can see that there will be much useful debate following now, as I have awakened some of the interest and some of the desire to speak up for education on the other side. I want to move on, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the other concern with this particular legislation. It may indeed be the hon. Member for Red Deer-South that speaks up for education. Who is to know where the 10 with courage will be found?

I want to talk about the vagueness of this legislation from the point of view of government by regulation. We have seen a profound shifting of the attitude of this particular government away from laying it out pure and simple. The Treasurer in his infinite wisdom always talks about that he's going to lay everything out and everybody is going to see it all and debate it all and learn it all and hear it all. What we have in this particular legislation, Mr. Speaker, is legislation by regulation. The school boards tell us, the public school trustees tell us, the Catholic school trustees tell us, educators across the width and breadth of this province tell us that it is very hard to catch this School Act. Even though it is a big, bulky piece of legislation, it is very hard to throw a lasso around it because it is vague: vague by legislation, by regulation.

In the back rooms of government echelons we're going to have government by regulation on something as important as schooling and education in the province of Alberta. I want to point out that that is of serious concern to all Members of the Legislative Assembly, and it ought to be of concern. There ought to be 10 people over there with courage that will speak against this legislation at the right time, vote against this legislation, indeed kill it at the vote on second reading so that we do not have to get into the hours and hours and hours and hours of debate as the Official Opposition struggles mightily against overwhelming odds to bring balance back to this particular School Act. We could kill this Act right now in second reading, and we could send a message to all Albertans that we do not lightly walk, trample, and stomp on educational principles in the province of Alberta.

I move on to other issues that are of concern in this particular legislation, and that is the issue of the multiplicity and complexity of the tax system that is being proposed and created. Now, the government had a bit of a problem, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry. The problem was not anything to do with education.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. member's comment is taken in good spirit, but it has moved the Chair to say that whenever anybody is in this Chair, it is the Speaker. It is not the Deputy Speaker or the Deputy Chairman of Committees. It is the Speaker, whoever is the occupant of the Chair.

The hon. member.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes. I got so worked up about the School Act that I overlooked the niceties of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for bringing me back to the niceties of the Assembly as I debate this most important piece of legislation, Bill 19, the School Act, the largest and most profound piece of legislation that we've had tabled here in the short time that I've been an MLA representing those good folks of Fort McMurray, who had the courage to vote for change and to send me to this Legislative Assembly.

I look forward to the government members coming to Fort McMurray. I always enjoy having government members in Fort McMurray.

MRS. BLACK: Do you want me to come?

MR. GERMAIN: Yes, certainly. The Minister of Energy diverts me and wants to know if she should come to Fort McMurray. This minister is always welcome in Fort McMurray. She referred to the oil sands as the jewel of the Alberta energy program. Frankly and with respect, up there in Fort McMurray we agree.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: I return to the School Act now. The government has created, Mr. Speaker, yet a third form of taxation: taxation by plebiscite. Now, if we study the history of the tax problems that the government faced in the province of Alberta as it related to schools, we see that they had about a \$50 million problem. That problem was to correct the underfunding for those school boards that geographically were located in areas where they did not have a wide enough machinery and equipment base, oil sands base, development base, and residential base to properly fund schools in Alberta. For that \$50 million problem we've got Bill 19 that will completely dismantle education in the province as we know it. There are many people who suggest that this is a good system. Why, you know, just the other day the hon. Deputy Premier was defending the Alberta educational system as being one of the best in the world, and there are many that agree with that submission. One has to wonder why we would dismantle an educational system that has served Albertans so well for a \$50 million problem.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just wondering if the hon. Member for Fort McMurray would entertain a question during debate.

MR. GERMAIN: Only if the House will give me unanimous approval to take the question after my 20 minutes are up, because this is such an important debate that I do not want to erode my time.

MR. SPEAKER: You'll have to check at that time, hon. member.

MRS. McCLELLAN: You've wasted quite a bit anyway.

MR. GERMAIN: Yeah. Well, we'll see. We'll see about time management as we get into the details of the School Act, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: You've got lots of time.

MR. GERMAIN: We have lots of time, other members tell me.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: The plebiscite on taxation proposed by educational systems to raise some of their funding creates yet another machinery of taxation in the province of Alberta that is not warranted. If you're going to have a plebiscite to raise 3 percent of your funding, why not just make your levy, raise your funding, take the government portion the way it has always been, and get on with the business of educating children in Alberta? Why create yet another machinery to allow school boards to go dip a little bit in the pot so that now we have the government collecting all the tax, the government deciding what's fair and equitable and sending it back? We have no indication in this Bill how the government will determine what fair and equitable is. For high-cost areas like Fort McMurray one of the concerns is that they might just simply use the word "equal." Well, equal, Mr. Speaker, does not mean equitable, and it is equitable funding that Albertans want to see. And it is adequate funding that

Albertans want to see for education, not this little plebiscite here and a plebiscite there and collect 3 percent here and some from the government and top-up money from the government. That seems, with respect to the draftsmen of this Bill, to be a complexity that was not needed or warranted. One has to wonder about an imagination that would create that type of system.

Other issues have been touched on, and I want to continue the debate on those issues. One of them that I want to touch on is the issue of forced amalgamations. We recognize that in the province of Alberta there may have been over the passage of time the creation of too many school boards. Most of the creation of these rural boards was done for various political reasons that had no merit beyond the politics of the day. Well, okay; let's strive to streamline the amalgamation process and allow school boards to amalgamate. They have already been doing that. There are histories of boards amalgamating and solving their mutual problems by coming together. There is nothing wrong with a negotiated and an encouraged and an enthusiastically arrived at amalgamation. If the government in its infinite wisdom is prepared to say that 60 school boards should govern all of the children in the province of Alberta, that is a recipe for disaster, because what that recipe means is that they will be spread awfully thin in many cases and in many areas of the province, and it will be an open opportunity for the Minister of Education and the department and the government officials to go in and run education and extract that from the elected boards that are supposed to be representing students, teachers, and the communities alike in these issues.

There are other difficulties with this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker. The one difficulty, of course, is the school councils and the relationship that principals will have to school councils. Well, I must tell you that I recognize in my own case, growing up as a poor boy in a poor area of a major urban city, that without education what little I've accomplished in life would have been much less. So I owe a debt of gratitude to the educators and to the education system that we have evolved in Canada, and I intend to speak up ferociously and forcefully in this Legislative Assembly and everywhere else that I'm asked to speak on the educational issues that are so prominent in this Bill which amends the School Act.

3:50

I also know from watching my father go and participate in what was then the home and school associations – and now it may have other names and other vocabularies attached to it – that these are for the most part concerned parents who like to give advice to their principal and to their elected board officials, but they do not particularly want to take on a greater role in school administration. This particular legislation mandates them to. It says: you shall. Well, what if the hardworking family of three children enjoying a school system wants to go and give constructive criticism but they don't want to be part of a political machinery, a school council? We have mandated now by decree that there will be enforced volunteerism in the schools. We have set that up so that it is in some fashion a liaison between the school boards, which have now lost some power, and the school councils, which have gained some power, and the principal. We don't know what his role is going to be in connection with the school council. Will he be the chairman of it? Will he be a resource person? Will he be an advisor? We do know that the school council may be able to order him around. The school board will be able to order him around. The Minister of Education by virtue of the mandate of having the ability to fire that man will be able to order him around, and so this school council concept also does not fit well in this particular School Act.

Mr. Speaker, all of us on June 15, whatever party we represent, were elected to come here for a purpose. What we were elected to come here to do was to try and represent our constituents and try and do right by Alberta. Not one of us knocked on the door and said, "I will be stifled by superior dictates." Not one of us when we knocked on the door said, "I will not speak up for things that I think are wrong with education or with health care." Focusing only on education, who was it of this group that knocked at the door that might have high and strong beliefs that the Roman Catholics, for example, should not have the right to collect taxes? Who knocked on the door and said: "I will stand up at the right time and vote for the loss of your autonomy. I will stand up and vote for the loss of your constitutional rights."

I said earlier when I started my comments, Mr. Speaker, that I was looking for 10 people of courage. This particular Bill is not a good Bill. This particular Bill is a flawed Bill. If you vote against Bill 19, the sky will not fall. I suspect that you will not even be punished, because the government will recognize the importance of free and wide-ranging debate on this Bill. If you vote against this Bill, you will be standing up for education in the province of Alberta. You will be standing up for your constituents.

Now, what will happen – I do not want to unduly alarm you – if you vote against this Bill? If the hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie stands up and votes against this Bill, what will happen is that the government will have to find the \$50 million for the underfunded schools. But the government then has a wonderful opportunity to allow the educators of the province of Alberta to solve the funding issue that grips Alberta at this time. We do not need all of this camouflage, all of this particular rhetoric on charter schools, on school councils, on loss of hiring of the superintendents. If the government's mandate on their elected basis was to balance the budget, they have a wonderful opportunity to do so now simply by voting against Bill 19.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to join the debate at second reading on Bill 19. As the previous speaker indicated, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, this perhaps is not only the most significant Bill we will deal with in this session but indeed perhaps the most significant Bill we will deal with between now and the time of the next general election.

I think when we look at Bill 19, Mr. Speaker, we see it's going to change financing of education. It's going to change the structure of public education. It does that in far-reaching and fundamental ways. I've talked to a great number of Albertans, as I think every member in this Assembly has, about concerns in terms of education. Many of those Albertans I've spoken to, particularly in Calgary, have expressed alarm and concern at where this government is going in terms of education. I've told those people that I share their concern, of course, with the Bill but I take some measure of comfort. When they ask what I could possibly take comfort from given the pronouncements by the hon. Minister of Education, the Premier, and so on, I tell them it's because I know that members in the government caucus share my concern for the future of public education. You know, I think of the Member for Calgary-*Bow*, who in fact taught my daughter in elementary school. I know there can't be a more committed professional educator than that member. I look at the Member for Calgary-*Currie*, who has been at numerous forums with me in Calgary-*Buffalo*. It's always a treat to have that member attend

these sessions in Calgary-Buffalo. I know her commitment through long and distinguished service on the Calgary Catholic board. My friend from Calgary-Shaw I know comes with a background and a history in public education.

Point of Order Repetition

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

MR. RENNER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(c), needless repetition. First the Fort McMurray member went through the entire caucus reminding us all which constituencies we came from; now the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is doing exactly the same thing. I think we have better things to do in this House than have him introduce us to everyone else in our caucus.

MR. DICKSON: Well, two points, Mr. Speaker. The first one: I had no intention of introducing that member. The second point: I've always apprehended that that rule related to a speaker within the course of his or her 20-minute presentation being unduly repetitive. Of course, if I see some excellent points made by another member, I would hope I'd have full latitude to be able to follow up and repeat in fact some nuggets that I thought were worthy of special attention.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair wouldn't encourage the hon. member to repeat other members; that would be repetition. But the Chair really didn't find what the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was saying to be repetitious of what Fort McMurray had been saying.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In any event, what I was trying to give all members was a sense of my response. The reason I take some measure of comfort, not perhaps a huge degree of comfort but some measure of comfort, is that although Bill 19 appears to dismantle public education as we know it in this province, my hope is that when it comes time to vote on this second reading, those members I've referred to and other members who understand how important public education is will do what I suggest public education requires; that is, vote against Bill 19.

You know, there's a lot of talk in debate – and we've heard much of it – about macrosystems. We talk about school financing. We talk about those big issues. Mr. Speaker, I prefer to approach this from a much simpler perspective. I guess I'm interested in what the impact is going to be on the children in Calgary-Buffalo. I'm interested in what the impact is going to be on the children in other parts of this province. Whether it's the little boy who attends a community school in my constituency – he comes from a single-parent family; his mother is a cocaine addict and a prostitute – whether it's a 12-year-old child finishing elementary school, I think what we want to know is: what's the impact on those children? If we have a student who's starting grade 10 at Western Canada high school, what I want to know is: what kind of a future is that child going to have in terms of finishing high school and proceeding through high school?

4:00

There's a teacher at Western Canada high school who has been singled out for one of the excellence in teaching awards. This teacher, in fact, is one of the finalists. I wonder, Mr. Speaker,

when we deal with a Bill like this, what kind of impact this legislation will have on professional educators like that, like the Member for Calgary-Bow, people who have committed very large portions of their working life to educating our children. That's important.

You know, I will turn the corner for a moment and address one of the concerns I have with Bill 19. This isn't the first time I've suggested in this Legislature that we are having government by regulation, but I have to raise this issue one more time, Mr. Speaker. If we look at this Bill, when we look at the sections that delegate to regulatory authorities – section 7, section 8, section 11, section 12, section 13, section 16, section 18, section 22, section 24, section 51, section 55 – we don't find answers. We don't find assurances for Albertans that are concerned about the future of public education. All we see is: yet to come, still under construction, still under work, and an invitation by the government to take us in faith; trust us. Well, what's at stake here is fundamentally too important to simply entrust it to regulatory authorities.

I remind members of two things. We have a Standing Committee on Law and Regulations that hasn't met for a long time. That's the first problem. The second one is that we do not do in Alberta as the federal government does, which is actually publish regulations in draft form in advance. We should do that.

Let me address the question of finance, because that's certainly one of the key parts of Bill 19. The concern here that I have and many Albertans have is the plan to centralize the supplementary levy. In effect what we have, Mr. Speaker, is a \$1.23 billion grab to solve a \$30 million problem. We can quibble over whether the amount necessary to achieve fair school equalization may be a little more, may be a little less than \$30 million, but it's nowhere close to \$1.23 billion. There is no guarantee this government can give Albertans that is credible that the funds which are committed through the supplementary levy are in fact going to be dedicated to education and that the community that generates those funds will see the funds being reinvested.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, there is a book that I found very useful, authored by a gentleman named Tim Sale, which is entitled *An Analysis of School Funding across Canada*. What Mr. Sale does is he goes through and he looks at the funding models in every jurisdiction in Canada. I commend the book to members, because it's a good analysis. One of the things that Professor Sale identifies at page 177 is, and I quote:

Radical changes in the funding of education are not required to elicit and support greater parental involvement or choice, better tracking of students and their achievement levels or the use of more effective learning strategies. What are required are political will to place these issues squarely on the public agenda, and careful research to ascertain which are worthy of adoption.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that we already have in Canada a very broad range, that we have a lot of variation in this country in terms of levels of dependence on property taxation. I understand that in Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia there's a minimum property taxation level, which really amounts to a provincial levy. In P.E.I. and New Brunswick property taxes are provincially levied.

So the issue is: how does this particular restructuring proposal in Bill 19 represent an improvement on the system we have? When I say an improvement, members, it's not an improvement for the mandarins, it's not an improvement for the people in the Department of Education, it's not an improvement for superinten-

dents and school principals, but does it represent an improvement to the children of this province, our children, the children of Albertans? That's the issue we have to address, and that's the issue we'd have to be able to address in the affirmative before I or any other member would be able to say, yes, I could support this Bill at second reading. Well, I'm not there, Mr. Speaker, and I can't be there because the principles set out in here I'm satisfied are going to undermine the public education system that we now have, are going to jeopardize the education for those children.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I wish this province spent a fraction of the amount of energy that we're now expending, expended by the deputy minister and the government, on fiscal reform. If we could spend just a fraction of that energy determining why we have in Alberta perhaps the lowest graduation rate in Canada for 15 to 19 year olds, lower than Newfoundland, P.E.I., and New Brunswick, isn't that what would be a more important consideration and perhaps a more useful consideration for the children of this province?

Mr. Speaker, I have a number of Catholic schools in my constituency. I've had the opportunity to meet with the members of the board of the Calgary school board. I've had a chance to meet with educators and parents at town hall meetings, forums, meetings in my office. The point that is made by those parents and educators and board members time after time after time is that we have in the Calgary Catholic school system a system that has been fiscally responsive, and I think nobody can challenge that. We have a system there that has been innovative, that has been creative, that provides an absolutely top-notch quality of education to children in that system. That's what I'm told, and I've had it confirmed by independent sources.

The proposal to require Catholic boards to give up an undeclared portion of corporate and residential taxes is just clearly unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-seven million dollars, or 40 percent, of the tax revenues would have to be surrendered just to exercise their right to levy their own taxes, a right that's been guaranteed and reinforced since 1901 in the North-West Territories Ordinance.

You know, I remember when the Member for Calgary-Currie and I went to St. Mary's high school, and we spoke to a group of parents and educators as well. At that time the Member for Calgary-Currie said that, you know – and I'm paraphrasing here – she had a lot of work to do; she was going to talk to the Minister of Education; she was going to talk to her caucus colleagues because there wasn't a clear understanding of the constitutional right that Catholics have in this province. Well, I'm interested to know how successful she was with her colleagues. I'm going to be watching when it comes time for a vote on this to determine whether that member was successful in persuading her members that Bill 19 does not respect – indeed, it undermines – the rights of parents that want a Catholic school education for their children.

You know, I also say that it's a fascinating thing that at the very time the government of this province is moving in a trend to decentralize when it comes to social services, when it comes to health care – in a host of other service delivery areas the move is to decentralize. When it comes to education, the move is in exactly the opposite direction. Mr. Speaker, as hard as I've listened to comments both inside and outside this Legislature, I've yet to hear some satisfactory reconciliation of those two competing drives and shifts. It makes no sense.

Mr. Speaker, there's a conflict in Bill 19 between school councils and school boards. You know, if you look at section 8 of the Act, section 17(7) proposed, and I quote:

The Minister, on the request of the board, may dissolve a school council without notice at any time if the Minister is of the opinion that the school council is not carrying out its responsibilities in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

It seems to me that one doesn't have to have much of a crystal ball to see that we're setting up a tremendous conflict between school councils and school boards and the minister. What I see are fuzzy lines of communication and direction, confusion in terms of responsibilities, and I don't think it's responsible that we put that kind of legislation forward.

4:10

Moving on to school board amalgamation, Mr. Speaker – a great idea. I commend the Minister of Education, finally, for realizing that we can't afford this huge number of school boards. This is an effort I can wholeheartedly support. If it came in another form, I'd be happy to vote for it. Unfortunately, the bookends to amalgamation of school districts are wholly unacceptable to me. But that's a positive move.

I have tremendous concerns with charter schools. This is section 11 in the Act. In the new Act it would be division 2.1, sections 24.1 to 24.7. You know, Mr. Speaker, it would be foolish if members in this Assembly didn't take instruction from similar models in other countries. Not to say that they're transported without consideration within the local context, but consider for a moment if we look at the state of Illinois, if we look at what happened in New Zealand, if we look at the United Kingdom, where we've seen a variety of models similar to what's proposed here in terms of charter schools. I think members have to keep in mind that not only do we learn from jurisdictions where the so-called reform of charter schools has not worked, but we also have to take instruction that in this province we already have, certainly in Calgary, alternative schools which already exist with particular focuses but within the public school system. That's where we can create competition. That's where we can create options for parents and options for children. But it strengthens the public school system; it shouldn't undermine it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sad – and I've spoken in this House before – about the demise of the 66 community schools we have in this province. The government wants us to charge down a road of charter schools when the community school, a model that worked and worked well, whether it was in Red Deer or Lethbridge or Calgary or in any other centre – they worked well, and they are no more.

I want to move on quickly, because I have a concern that the inner-city areas, where we have a high drop-out rate already, are going to be particularly adversely affected by charter schools. Mr. Speaker, it's instructive to consider comments by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, which concluded:

The worry is that financial and human resources are strongest in schools serving white middle-class children, and weakest in schools serving low-income areas with a high proportion of Maori enrolment. Then further on another quote:

Many of the findings back up our own concern that the changes are beginning to impact seriously on the schools serving less-advantaged groups of New Zealand society.

Well, there are lots of disadvantaged groups in Calgary-Buffalo, and my concern is that those children are going to be left in, in effect, ghetto schools. The parents that have money will take their children out of inner-city schools, put them in charter schools, put them in schools where the parents can make an additional financial investment. But in downtown Calgary those children, many of them children of new Canadian families, are going to lose out.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of school councils, I have problems there. If we look at Chicago, I'm impressed that in Chicago

every public school, as I understand, is run by a council of parents, community members, teachers, and a principal. But let's be candid, members. You know, I had come from a junior high school parent advisory council, Montgomery junior high school in Calgary, perhaps one of the strongest, most active in that city, but those people don't want to run the school. They as parents want a role to assist the school administration, to assist the teachers, but these people are busy people. They don't have the time nor do they have the wish to take over, wrest control of education away from those educators.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to share one story with members. A young schoolteacher in my constituency had been leaving church, and one of her neighbours who knew she was a teacher came up to her, sort of pointed a finger at her, and said, "Well, we're taking over now." She said, "I beg your pardon." This gentleman said: "Well, you professional educators have had your chance. It's now time for us ordinary citizens. We're taking control of the schools back." You know, that young teacher is wondering whether she has a future in education. She wonders whether a Bill like Bill 19 is going to leave a future for her, and I think there are a lot of good educators who are thinking the same thing, asking themselves exactly the same question. We're being unfair to the people that do a good job.

I think when we look at the Alberta school foundation fund, the concern has to be – we saw what happened simply a year ago with the Municipal Financing Corporation. There we had a fund of money that was set aside, and the government accessed it when they had to for another purpose altogether.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't bother to introduce those members on the other side of the Legislative Assembly who should know better than to vote in favour of this Bill because they will have their own consciences to deal with in the months and the years ahead when they see the dismantling that the education system is going to go through. This is not a Bill that is a forward-thinking Bill. This is not a Bill that should be put forward by a progressive albeit conservative government. It is a backward-thinking Bill and, as such, does not have any visions in it. It sets up mirages, which is something that this government is very good at doing when they're in the desert looking for something to provide them with an impetus in their ways.

They've set up the mirage of having committees of MLAs who are going to go across the province and listen to people as to how to actually implement this Bill. Well, this should serve as a wake-up call. Schools start in September, the end of August, yet some of these reports aren't going to be filed until the middle of September. What are schools supposed to do, what are principals supposed to do, what are parents and teachers supposed to do, and in what context are they supposed to do those things? In essence, this is as the other Bills that we have seen brought forward in this Legislative Assembly: ill conceived, ill thought out. There should only be one place for it, and that's file X, otherwise known as the garbage can.

Now, if we look at some of the recent polls, I'm sure some of these members are sitting back and thinking, "Boy, we've done a good job." Well, when people are asked, "What about the quality of life for children in this province; is that going to improve, or is that going to get worse?" 59 percent of people . . .

DR. WEST: Yes.

MS LEIBOVICI: You're right; they said yes, Mr. Minister of Municipal Affairs. That's exactly what they said. So you know what you're doing. You know that you are making the quality of life in this province worse, and I'm glad that we have that in *Hansard* now.

When we talked about the cuts to education, when people were asked about the cuts to education, 65 percent of the people in this province – that's a silent majority; right? – oppose the cuts to education. Even though they're silent, they're out there listening and judging and thinking, and there will be a judgment day that comes. We won't talk about health care, because that Bill is yet to come up. So what we're seeing is that opposition in this province solidifying. Approximately 46 percent of the people in this province . . .

Point of Order Clarification

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: Yes. A point of clarification, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation.

DR. WEST: *Beauchesne* 42. Often in debate, Mr. Speaker, reference is made to another member on a comment. I just wanted to say that my comment to the hon. member of yes was when she said: will the education in this province get better with this Act? I said: yes, absolutely. I just wanted to clarify that because she said that *Hansard* will record it. She left an innuendo on the table that I had referred to it getting worse, but I did not.

4:20

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I'm having difficulty relating what you are saying to "strangers who misconduct themselves in the galleries will be taken into the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms." It would appear that under the citation listed – there is no one in the galleries, in any event, except *Hansard* people.

So we would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to continue.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 46 percent of the people in Alberta have solidified in terms of their opposition to the moves that this government is putting forward, yet we have a government that says and a Minister of Education that has brought forward a Bill that says that classrooms will see no change as a result of this; what we're looking at is cutting and going after administration. In reality the fact that we've cut the budget by about 14 percent, in reality the fact that there are increased numbers of students in classrooms, in reality that kindergarten has been halved, in reality that the programs within the community schools have been eradicated: those will have no effect on education in this province at all. Well, again I think it may be time for the members – it's spring – to go outside and start to smell some of the roses that are growing out there.

Now, we're seeing that Bill 19 is a restructuring. That's a famous word that this government likes to put forward. But in actual fact what we're seeing is a centralization. When we look at the number of sections that deal with regulations that we have no idea – not one person in this Legislative Assembly can say: "I know what those regulations are going to say. I know what the future of education will look like in this province. I even know what it will look like in September."

We have sections 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 22, 24, 51, 55. Those sections deal with – there are areas within this particular Bill that deal with the government hiring and firing superintendents, and the government makes no bone, or its bureaucratic arm makes no bone, in saying that the function of superintendents will be to implement the key policies of government. They will make sure that they are implemented. The government intended to ensure that these provincial policies are implemented. These are not superintendents who will be able to act on their own accord or in regards to what is good for education within their particular boards, but these will be superintendents who will be fearing for their jobs and will be waiting for their orders from Edmonton, from the bureaucratic structure within Edmonton. So that's the kind of restructuring we're seeing.

We see that there will be charter schools formed. Again we have no idea what those regulations are going to be; maybe some kind of quasi-voucher system. I'd like to bring the members' attention to a synopsis that was done with regards to the school voucher debate that went on in California quite recently. What it basically came down to was the fact that the voucher system was going to increase costs within California and that there were going to be no real teaching standards or public disclosure of what to do with the tax money. In effect what ended up happening was that there was a group of witches who wanted to set up a charter school. Now, do we know what the regulations are going to be for charter schools in this province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes. Yes.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, then if you know, there's no need for the X number of MLAs to go out and pretend that you're consulting with constituents around Alberta. How much is that going to cost taxpayers is what I'd like to know.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

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

MR. DAY: Citations 482, 483, and 484. I just wonder if the member opposite would entertain a question.

MS LEIBOVICI: As the hon. Member for Fort McMurray had indicated, if after the end of my 20 minutes the Assembly wishes to revert to that, more than willing. We can have more than one question, and we can get into a true debate on both sides of the Legislative Assembly.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Those are concerns. Those are real concerns with regards to what is going to happen with the whole issue of charter schools.

What are the dollars that are going to be deflected in order to set up a charter school? Now, for those members who are representing rural areas, this should be the point in time where you would sit forward and say, "Well, actually what might happen is that because of dollars being funneled elsewhere, we may end up losing our school in our town." Because of dollars being funneled and following the individual, what might well happen is that if you get a town close to a larger rural area, then perhaps the dollars will follow into the urban area, not the rural area. As we are seeing across this province small towns closing because the post office is closing, because there are various government services that are closing, because of the fact that their

local school might be closing, and, yes, because this government, because of its budget cuts, might even be helping to close rural hospitals – as we see that happen, what you're going to see is small towns closing and people in rural Alberta saying: "Well, perhaps we shouldn't have trusted this government. Perhaps we shouldn't have believed that they listened and cared about us in rural Alberta." I think that's something that needs to be looked at.

And not only with regards to the following of the dollars but the whole notion of the open boundaries. Right now we have ability to move within certain areas in Alberta from one school board to another school board. Why is this really a requirement, to have the open boundaries?

So what we see now is a Bill that has not really addressed some key principles, that has not really addressed: how do we make education better in this province? What in fact this Bill has done is look at: how do we control, how do we centralize, how do we – by "we" meaning the government – get our hands on the dollars?

I realize that there are usually two sides to every story, so I'd like to put forward some questions and some answers in terms of what the government would like us to believe and in terms of what the realities are. The first question is the one we need to really look at, and that is: why is the government bringing about the kinds of changes to the education system in Alberta that we're seeing via Bill 19? Is it about fiscal responsibility? Is it about providing better education? The government would like us to believe that, yes, it is, that it's so that our students can be competitive, so that they can be well prepared, that that's what it's about, and at the same time it just so happens that we're going to actually be saving some dollars.

Now, the reality is that what we're looking at is a control agenda, where the control is centralized in Alberta, and that in actual fact there is no way that you can do better in education by increasing dollars. It just doesn't make sense. Why would you spend less if education is so important not only to our young citizens but also to the future of this province? Well, the only answer that the government can come back with is because it'll get rid of the deficit. Well, the reality is that every document you pick up, every piece of research that you look at – and I defy the Minister of Education to come back with anything that says differently – says that you need to have good education, that you need to have an adequate amount of fiscal dollars towards education, and that if you cut across the board, as this government has done, in effect you are affecting the classroom.

So how much in actual fact is being reduced? Well, we've heard a couple of figures. From the government we've heard it's 12.4 percent over a four-year period. In actual fact, if you don't fiddle around with the figures, what you're looking at is 14 percent. So again it begs the question: how can the quality of education in the classroom be improved when you're reducing education?

So what's the plan? What's the plan? Is there a plan? We've got a Bill 19 with so many holes you can drive a Mack truck through it. So what have you got now? Now you've got a minister and a task force of MLAs who are going to be going around the province to try and get a plan, to try and buy the voluntary – I'd like to underline voluntary – regionalization of school boards. So again, as we've seen with every other thing since the opening of this session, there is no plan. There is no forward thinking. There is no vision. There are just mirages that eventually, as we've seen by the latest polls, the people of Alberta see right through.

4:30

So what are some other questions that we can look at in terms of what is and what isn't. Appointment of superintendents. Well, the government says: no problem; they're going to be accountable to their school boards. In actual fact, if the person who fires and hires is the one that's asking for the accountability, then is there that arm's length? The answer, of course, is no. In actual fact, the superintendents are going to be responsible, as the individual I quoted earlier had indicated, only to implement the policies of government. Now, when and how will these superintendents be appointed? Well, phased in over three years is what we're told. What's the result of that? What the result is is a politicized education system. Is that really the best way to provide education to our young people, through a politicized education system?

Again when we ask the question about the whole restructuring of the education system and whether it's based on centralization of decision-making or a move away from local control of education, we're told by the government that, no, it's not. It's based on increased responsibility and involvement of parents and business in the community. Well, the fact of the matter is that the local control of education, as we've known it, is no longer going to be there. In actual fact, what the government is trying to do is mandate volunteers. This has got to be one of the craziest things that I've seen in here, in section 17 where it talks about "a school council shall be established" and "the majority of the members . . . shall be parents."

Well, I'd like to know how you can mandate a volunteer. How can you tell anybody that they shall do something in their spare time? Not only does this government not think of itself as a dictatorial government, as we can see by some of these actions, but have we really become a state where the citizens "shall do" what the government says? What happens if there isn't a school council established? What happens if there are no parents that want to be a member of that particular school council? What does the government do? Do you throw them in jail? Do you say, "Your children will not come to school"? What do you do? But I guess that's what the regulations are for; right? That's what we need to wait for to find out the end result of some of these thoughts, these nightmares, these – I don't know – that are in this particular Bill.

Community schools. I've heard members talk about the importance of community schooling, the importance of lifelong learning, the importance of having people involved in their communities and in their schools, yet the government says that they can't afford the 65 designated schools that are throughout this province. In actual fact, what should be happening is that the government should be saying: yes, every school is a community school, and, yes, we will ensure that the resources are there so that you do become a true community school. You don't take something away and then say do it. There comes a certain point where people just can't do any more, and the requirements that are being put onto individuals within this province are to the point of being ridiculous.

Now, when I talked a little bit about the charter schools and funding following the student, again we have no clear idea. There's no clear indication of when or how that's going to start. We just get bits and pieces, and people in the community have to sit back. It's not only us in the Legislative Assembly that you are doing a disservice to by not having your plans in place, but you're doing a disservice to every Albertan in this province.

So what I'd like to close with is the fact that this Bill is ill conceived. This Bill has not been thought out in a rational, reasonable manner. This Bill has occurred in a void, because if

in fact the government were aware of what this Bill meant to do, there would be no reason to have MLAs trooping across this province. I wonder if that's not a way for the front bench to say to their backbenches: "Well, we'll keep you busy. We'll give you a little committee. That should keep you out of trouble. That should use your talents. You'll go and talk to people." I wonder if that's not what the purpose of these little committees is.

I would at some point in time like an accounting of how much these committees will cost us, because I'm sure that the members are not going to be putting their hands in their pockets and saying, "I will pay for my expenses because I believe this is really important to the people of Alberta." I'm sure that it's not on one out of your five trips across the province that you will be going on these tours. I'm sure that when you have staff traveling with you – because you have support staff with you – those are dollars that are expended, and perhaps those are extra dollars if there's extra staff required. So I think there should be a public accountability for how much these little committees are going to cost the citizens of Alberta.

Then what I'd like to see is an actual accounting of what the regulations and where the ideas for those regulations came from, a detailed accounting in terms of who said what, when, and where those regulations came from, because when we look at the roundtables, when we see what happened with the roundtable on education, there was a workbook that was prepared, and the workbook had the ideas in it. It didn't matter what people said around those roundtables; it was the workbook that counted. When you looked at the workbook and it said let's cut kindergarten in half, it didn't matter that most people couldn't agree on that. That's what was then brought forward as legislation and as budget cuts within this particular Assembly.

So again, I think that in order to provide faith again in what is happening in this province, there needs to be an open accounting of what these committees are about.

Thank you very much.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to once again address this House at this particular time on schools and education in our province. I might start out by saying that with time being as short as it is to speak on this matter, I won't be entertaining any questions under 482 or in fact 42, if there are any strangers in the House.

AN HON. MEMBER: The only strangers are the ones over there.

MR. WHITE: There seems to be some loud stomach grumbling noise from the other side, sir. Perhaps it's close to dining hour or something, that we're hearing all of this rumbling and bemusements or who knows what it is.

A fundamental question here hasn't been asked. It hasn't seemed to have been asked by members of the other side, as much as they profess to be able to go through the legislation and be critical. We have heard none of it here certainly. The fundamental question is whether education is an investment or whether it is an expense. Now, this government by this piece of legislation, coupled as well with the budget we have seen before, clearly puts education as an expense. There's no question about that. There isn't any other western government that we're aware of which does that.

4:40

Particularly in Third World countries now, they're striving desperately to get some of the education materials that we cast off and that this government leaves in a garbage bin in order to help

them move along into a second stage of production. I happen to have had some experience in the Third World, and I know that every single parent in those Third World countries is looking for some education for their children and spend a great deal of time and effort working towards that end because they simply didn't have the opportunity. Yet this government is taking education and treating it as though we have to chop here and have to chop there and we have to slash.

Remember where this started from. It was the Premier's pronouncement: 20 percent across the board; that's how we're going to solve the problem. He wiped his hands and walked away. Subsequently, he knew that he had to listen to some of the people. He came back, and he was at least partially humbled by what the population had to say. They said: do not cut education to the extent that you're hurting our young people. Fortunately, at that time he listened. How much he cared is shown by the, quote, unquote, 12 percent – calculated how, we're not sure – reduction in the costs of education.

The investment can only be made with the desire to have the best possible system affordable. You don't start out from the position of saying, "This is what we have; it's too much money; slash," closing your eyes and slashing. What you say is – you take the position that there are some savings to be had, and certainly there are by part of this Bill. It's done to reduce the number of practising boards, the number of administrative entities in order to administer these, but that's a very, very small percentage of this education budget. Certainly that can be done and it should be done, but it doesn't mean that you have to change the whole system to get at that end. You have to decide how that teaching in the classroom is to be done, and one of the fundamental rules, having been married to a teacher for some 24 years now . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: I've been married to one for 30 years. Does that make me more of an expert?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's not necessary to add your thoughts to any that may be expressed by the recognized speaker. I wonder if you would put your name down on the list or stand up when the opportunity arises and express all of your thoughts at one time. In the meantime, you may sit down.

I would wish that we could continue to hear from Edmonton-Mayfield.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. There's something to be said for good education. It usually teaches some manners. However, sometimes the system does in fact fail, and we get these rude interruptions when they do not know when to speak or how to put thoughts together so that they can express the thoughts clearly and concisely in a House that welcomes their questions and answers and concerns. One merely has to stand up at the appropriate time, as a good principal or teacher would tell you, and know that that is the time to express thoughts.

There seems to be some misconception that a problem existed in the education system here in our province to the extent that a sledgehammer was required to place a tack. Well, yes, there was a problem, there always has been a problem, and there will continue to be a problem, because you can never, ever, ever, no matter how hard one strives, get to the perfect position of having an educational deliverance system that is all things to all people and that does the job completely that it was intended to do. But

that doesn't mean to say that everything has been bad, and it doesn't mean to say, certainly, that school boards have been mismanaging their funds. As a matter of fact, you take the collective debt and net it all across the province from all the school boards, and you get awfully close to zero. Here we have a government that in the last eight years, or nine years now, has collectively gone \$30 billion, 30,000 millions of dollars, in the hole, taking it away from people that were managing to break even. Now, give me a little bit of sense in that. The average citizen out there says that it's equivalent to taking all the profit-making ventures in this city, from the small pizza shops to all of those entities around the Coliseum, and giving them to Peter Pocklington to run. That's ridiculous, and that's exactly what is happening here.

There are some equalization problems; we'll grant you that. In fact, there is a formula worked out by the School Trustees' Association that was working towards getting at that. They did have a great deal of difficulty with some of the schoolless school boards. That had to be recognized and could be recognized and regulated out of existence without much difficulty by the minister.

This massive power grab seems to have some kind of motivation that has yet to be expressed by those on the other side of the House that should know. It can't be just costs, because the costs could have been managed in some other manner. It couldn't have been redistribution of the wealth in this province to those areas that require it, and it couldn't be just to limit the number of school boards. It has to be power and control. I don't really subscribe to the view that all the members opposite believe that is the proper end. There are people throughout this House that are principled and believe that they are here to do the best they can for the citizens. Those members on the other side should recognize that that's what it is.

Here we are pooling all of this power, and it's totally and completely opposite to any other direction that this government professes to be heading in. We see it in the charter schools part of this Act, which says: look, let's get some innovation out there; let people do what they want. Yet you're bringing all the power back to one central government office, one minister, one minister's staff to disseminate all there is in the way of administration. And there's no question about it. You can't tell me that appointing, or no matter what kinds of euphemisms you can come up with now for what the appointment is and who hires and fires a superintendent – because it's clear. The superintendent does and will report to the hierarchy. As a matter of fact, probably the only hierarchy available after September will be that hierarchy, and that's where the superintendents will come from. They'll come from up and down and across the system. There aren't any school boards that will be hiring.

The establishment of parent control through school councils is the worst joke that you could ever perpetrate on a parent. I happened to go to the parents' association in the school that my children go to, and it's a very good atmosphere. We have a very good relationship with them, but we don't have the confines of not knowing how the regulation works and how one goes about getting things changed, because we live in an area where the Edmonton public school board has school-based budgeting. Now, that's about as innovative as you can get and still live within one school district, which could be in fact the model. Of course, it came from Edmonton, so the members opposite would never, ever consider that, even though the superintendent happens to be one of the leaders in educational administration and is now recognized as a leader not only in North America but in the world. Unfortunately, he's leaving. He's in fact leaving all of Canada, and not anything to do with 19, although he's quite happy to depart at a

time before 19 becomes effective, because he had no great desire to work for the province and through some of those that he's had endless battle with to try and maintain some independence.

4:50

There was a time when the province could and should have had a little more control over how the moneys were spent, when 90 percent of the budget of all the schools in the province came from the province. So the local levy was not nearly as onerous as it is now. Consequently, we didn't have the problem that this Bill purports to solve. We didn't have that problem. We didn't have the differences in assessments and differences in budgets per student in these various areas across the province. There wasn't any need for equalization because equalization already occurred. There was also a time when the Social Credit government of the day was managing the affairs of the province, and they, at the time, went away from this position, went away from the centralized control. They decided in their wisdom that it was better, much, much better, to send out the message to parents and school boards alike that they were in charge. They were the ones to question how their children were to be educated. They were the ones that had the power to reshape some of the programs and deliverance of the programs. Now we've got the exact reverse, and the only reason that can possibly be imagined is pure, simple power. It's a power grab second to none. There is no question about it.

Now, if you take the creation of charter schools as a direction, we've heard all the horror stories of charter schools. Here's hoping that it doesn't come about in this province that we have all of these religious and quasi-religious sects that decide they require a school unto their own and therefore bring in their own version of what a curriculum should be, even though it should be governed and delivered by the province. Hopefully that does not happen, and in most cases I'm sure it shall not. But each and every one of these educational systems can be an experiment unto itself, and when an experiment fails, particularly in education, you cannot go back and repair the damage. Once the damage is done, you can't give that child back that time in school. You cannot retrain that student because that student is then socially beyond the level of being able to receive that kind of instruction any longer. Once the system has failed that student, there's no way of telling, because no matter what kind of every third-year testing goes on, you can only test that which is delivered in a small range of the curriculum. You cannot test it all. Any school system can manage to get by that minimal standard, but it's the other fundamentals that may in fact be lost.

The question again returns to investment or expense. Now, if there is the feeling that this is an expense and this Bill is an experiment and the experiment fails, what do the members opposite have to say to those children some 15 or 20 years from now, when they say that these children have been robbed of this time? What happens when any of those - there are some members opposite who have close family members that are in the teaching profession. Ask them if it's a straight-line interpretation, the deliverance of good-quality education and the classroom size. You go from 18 to 25, where a student is able to have some individual attention in a class, versus what we're heading to right now, and what the educators say is that we're heading to 25 to 30. Now, that's simply not a straight line. That increases astronomically the difficulties with disciplinary problems, particularly in the middle grades, from 5 to 9, such as we've had ample demonstration of at the time in this House. Those problems occur much more, are much more difficult in those years, because a teacher must contain that group of students first, keep them under control

such that they do not disrupt all the students, and be able to deliver education. Now, this government through this Bill in combination with the budget are heading directly to that. What does this government intend to say to those students? If there's anything that they can say three, four, 10 years down the road, the only thing that can be said is: I'm sorry. Members of this House, that simply is not good enough.

The last area that I'd like to deal with is these massive changes heading towards designing a system that in fact fails for a lot of students. Parents begin to recognize that, and it has already happened in our province just next door, British Columbia. Twenty-five percent of the students there are now in private schools, and there's a reason for that. It becomes syndromonic. Once you withdraw those funds from the school system and start putting them into private school systems, the schools shrink and shrink and shrink and have too much difficulty attracting students and bringing students from afar to be able to present those core programs. The less students, of course, the less funding, and on it goes. Now, this is fundamental to the rule of deliverance of public education, that a level of education satisfactory to all of the residents of the province is delivered to all of the students of the province. That is not happening in British Columbia. By this Bill, it certainly is heading to a direction of elitism, and that, Mr. Speaker, is certainly not the way that this parent wishes to have his educational system delivered in this province.

Thank you for your time, sir.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this afternoon to stand up and speak to the principles outlined in Bill 19.

As I started looking at this Bill, I had to sit back and ask myself: what should be the principles of education that we deal with when we look at issues in amending our current Bill and, in fact, creating the structure that we'll deal with within the education system? You have to start with basically saying that the Bill has to be measured in terms of its ability to create an education system that will provide young Albertans with the ability to actively and effectively contribute to our future. You have to use that kind of as a basis for judging the amendment.

Now, within the focus of this particular Bill 19 under that structure of the education system that I talked about, we find that the main focus is some restructuring of the process of education that would allow for a greater degree of fiscal responsibility within the province. I don't think that across Alberta we'll find very many people who would argue with that as a supplementary reason for amending the Bill. What we need to do is deal with how these changes to the education system can actually contribute to how we're dealing with the education system. I have to question the government in terms of whether or not this focus on fiscal responsibility and this focus on changing the education system necessarily have to be done through a process of centralized taxation powers or a system that basically promotes and increases the degree of centralized power that is allocated to the Minister of Education and his staff in the department. So you end up, then, by beginning to ask how these kinds of issues can be addressed within the context of looking at the Bill.

5:00

Now, within the Bills that the government introduced in the fall session and again this session, there's been a lot of discussion about the idea toward a business approach to government. A lot of the amendments and a lot of the Bills that have come in have

focused on basically trying to encourage the government of Alberta to be more businesslike. I have to question in my mind as I read through this Bill why they didn't use that same approach here. They seem to have gone away from their mandate of getting the government out of the affairs of the province, and here what they're doing is building it in more. What we end up with is basically a system that's gone against their other activities. They're doing the education system on the idea of trying to promote what they term school-based management. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this is only a functional way to deal with changes in the education system if you provide incentive to that school-based level of decision-making.

There is no incentive in this Bill. I would hope eventually that as the regulations are brought forth, possibly we'll see some incentive built in to the school council mandates, the school council structures.

When they talk about business and business approaches to the way our government runs, they start using concepts that deal with effective management and efficiency managements, but they don't carry it far enough. They don't carry it to the point where the unit that's making the decision has responsibility for its action and has reward for its action. What I would like to suggest is basically that they re-evaluate how they have organized the system and look at the idea of their school-based management, but let's give the school council, which is the controlling unit at the school level, or even let's be a little more generous and leave it at the regional level, where the flow through of funds will be channeled to the schools – let's create some incentives for proper management and efficiency of the system at this level.

Now, how do we define efficiency within the context of a school system? This would have to be done in terms of the measurement of performance of the students; in other words, are the students being provided with an education that will help to make them effective and efficient and participating members of Alberta's future? We're basically using the grading system to do that right now, but while we deal with this efficiency, it has to be tied back to the dollar base.

Well, let's start with a school board or a school council that's given an allocation of dollars. They have a mandate to provide a curriculum education to the students that attend. Okay; if at the end of the year they haven't spent the entire allocation of their money, that means they didn't need or didn't utilize all of it. As long as their students are getting the education that's required, why not then say: "Okay; a certain proportion of what you saved us this year you can use for extracurricular support next year. You don't have to have so many cookie sales or magazine sales. You can use some of these dollars now to promote these kinds of things in your school district." The rest of it then goes back to the province. So what we end up with then is over time as these school divisions become efficient they get incentive to carry their dollars over, but the province also gets a benefit because some of those dollars come back to the general revenue fund, or they aren't distributed out, whichever way it works, because we're using end of the school term payments so that it's just adjusted on that basis.

Mr. Speaker, I ask: in the regulations why can't we put incentives for these school boards or school councils to operate under the true concept of centre-based management, which they're dealing with here when they talk about this school-based concept? We could even carry it farther in the sense that possibly the principal at the school level or maybe the chairman of the school council or even, if we want to get it carried far enough, the superintendent at the regional level can have performance and incentives built into their employment contract. If they save a little money for Alberta Education, they get a little of it back.

Mr. Speaker, we're dealing here with efficiencies. We're dealing here with trying to create responsibility and accountability. We have to do it within the context of the way people make decisions. In terms of the reward, we have to be able to recognize the people who make those decisions and reward them accordingly. It's basically an important part, that that kind of structure be set up and be put in place within our school system, and then I would feel more comfortable that school-based management may be an operational characteristic that we can support, that would work, that would give us an authority.

The way I interpret the wording in the Bill – again recognizing that a lot of the regulations are still somewhere out here in never-never land coming down before the school year starts. What we're going to have is a school-based management system that works by threat not by co-operation. Mr. Speaker, if we want efficiency at the local level, we've got to allow these people to buy into the system, we've got to allow them to take ownership of it. The threat of firing the school council, the threat of firing the superintendent, or replacing if we want to use a more appropriate word, are not strategies that are consistent with good centre-based management. We need to have those people at the level that are making the decisions take control and move to the future, move to an effective way of running our school system. What we want to do, then, is build in incentives not threats when we deal with these at the community level.

We also need to deal with the concept of amalgamation or regionalization from a fiscal responsibility basis. If we were to allocate part of our budgets to the local regional authorities for education on the basis of a fixed allocation for administration, it would soon become evident to some of the smaller school districts that they cannot operate and carry on effective administration without amalgamating. The process of amalgamation was put in place in the previous school amendment Act, and we had many school districts come out and suggest that they would like to participate, that they would like to negotiate with their neighbouring school division to discuss the possibilities and look at options in terms of amalgamation.

Mr. Speaker, people doing things voluntarily, doing things because they see a need for it provides a much better strategy than coming along and saying, "You've got until the 1st of July to get it done, or we'll do it for you." It's not the appropriate way to make decisions, and we need to be sure that the people in Alberta are given the opportunity to buy into these systems and to become part of the decision-making that will give us the fiscal responsibility that we want, and that's the mandate the people gave to this government on the 15th of June.

We talk about the funding process that the government is going to use to get equity in terms of opportunity for each of the students in the province. I agree with this, Mr. Speaker. Equity of opportunity, equity of funding is very important. As I said earlier, a tax grab at the central level is not necessary to do that. There are many ways that we can build the Alberta school system using the current structure of collecting funds, the way we can bring together the taxation principles. The government has mandated a tax reform hearing series. They went out. They listened to the people of Alberta. What they need to do is build from that now and create on a regional level an equitable taxation base; in other words, define the school taxation base equitably across the province and allow the school districts to use that as the base against which they apply their mill rates. They don't have to deal with it from the perspective of the inequities that are currently built into the system that come about because of regional preferences and regional allocation of business decisions and where they're going to build a plant or where they're going to

build a factory, the concentration of industry. These things create inequities, and we need to define an equitable base for taxation for education, then use the rest of the tax base to create the equities that we want to deal with.

5:10

So, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that there are a lot of ways we can deal with creating equity both in terms of the funding that's available for these schools to conduct their function, which is education, and an equity which is appropriate for the taxpayers of the province so that some taxpayers are not carrying a burden which is heavier than the rest of the province.

I also have some questions in terms of why we deal with the 3 percent add-on by referendum which operates only for a three-year mandate. How can we expect school divisions, school regions to operate effectively when they have a short mandate for additional funding? It would be almost inconceivable, Mr. Speaker, for me to envision a situation where a referendum on additional funding for a short period of time could be approved by taxpayers. Which voter would agree to provide a two- or three-year authorization of a mill rate to fund a program at a school which will only serve the students who are going through that system at that time? We want to see funding for education so that it's available for all students all the time. So in essence when you know that it's only going to be for three years, your students now one or two years old won't get it when they're six years and get into first grade. Maybe your children have now left school. Are you going to vote for an allocation of a mill rate when you know that it won't be effective for even your grandchildren? So there are a lot of problems associated with the system of trying to get an add-on tax by referendum.

Basically, the next issue that I'd like to address for a minute is the issue of the kinds of programs that are put in place within the structure of this Bill to deal with incentive for change, new curriculum, new teaching techniques. It appears that the major focus that this is going to take is through the charter school system. What we'll be seeing, then, is a gradual increase in the number of new initiatives that are given to education through different curriculums, different teaching techniques, different focuses of the education system all being done through a charter school. These charter schools either have to be approved through the mandate of the local school division or else through approval by the minister. How can we evaluate the effectiveness of these charter schools when they're always under a mandate for a need for renewal? It says in the Bill that these will be chartered only for a specific purpose only for a specific time.

How do we evaluate these? Let's say they get a five-year mandate. Let's say they even get a 10-year mandate. A student doesn't go through the school system in 10 years. How do we evaluate them until the student gets all the way through the system, gets out, participates then either in the postgraduate education system, the universities, or goes out and takes a job and participates in society? So to get people through these systems, we need long-term commitments to these charter schools, and I would suggest that a much better process is to build these into the current school boards and allow them to set up one or two experimental schools within their own mandates.

This idea of renewal creates uncertainty, which basically gives us a situation where they don't know and they can't plan for the future. So I have some questions of using the charter school system for this idea of new curriculum and new teaching techniques. If you leave it under the mandate of the minister for the final approval of the charter schools, effectively this is still going to put most of the new initiatives for education under the direct

control and the direct mandate of the minister. I think that this needs to be left more in the mandate of the school boards to deal with.

The next issue that I want to address for a few minutes is the channel of authority that's being built through this Bill. Basically, we're telling the people of Alberta through this Bill that parents are going to have control of their education system. The local community is going to be the centre for decision-making. Yet we look at the process of control, and we see that basically the school council has to deal with the principal at the local level. The principal is not responsible to the school council. The principal is hired by the regional authority, the regional division. So what we've done is create a conflict there: a principal who's not responsible to the people who are giving direction. We also, then, look at the school division, and we find the same thing with the superintendent. The superintendent is responsible to the regional school board, but they're at the mercy of the minister for their ability to stay in position. So what we've done is gone through and developed a set of relationships where we have nonaccountability in terms of the mandate to be given to the person and the groups that are eventually able to control or to dismiss the individual involved.

Basically, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go on just to one more issue here. If we deal with education, we see some rural concerns come up in southern Alberta that I hear quite frequently, and this is the amalgamation process. How are they going to deal with the issues of the local school system? What's going to happen to the small schools? Will the school boards, the regional authorities, be making decisions in the best interests of the community when they deal with location of schools, closing of small schools. I think this has got to be considered very strongly as the regulations come forth.

Just in closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to basically say that the mandate that we have for education in Alberta must be based on the fact that we want to create opportunity for all children, all the young people of Alberta. This opportunity has to be based on equity of access and equity of curriculum and equity of opportunity once they get out of the system, but built within that, we also have to show compassion for those that have a disadvantage. I question whether or not some of the changes that are coming about through this new amendment to the School Act will give us those kinds of opportunities on an equitable basis showing compassion for the people who don't have the standard opportunity.

I would like to suggest that for those reasons I'm going to have a difficult time voting for this Bill, and I probably will vote against it on second reading. Thank you.

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

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak in favour of this Bill. I've found a great deal of difficulty sitting back and listening to the debate and hearing the misrepresentations, the fear mongering, the total lack of understanding, and I would strongly recommend that all members in fact review the legislation.

To underline, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out very strongly that in the area of charter schools, for example, the school board or the minister establish the charter school.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not witches.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Not witches. The school board or the minister. The other criterion - I think this is exceedingly important - that's being very blatantly left out is the fact that even

the community in which that school is to be located is going to support it, and I would say that it would be very, very irresponsible on the part of the minister or this government to take and establish a very long, unending mandate for the school.

Now, the Member for Lethbridge-East I'm sure was sincere in his concern that before you could evaluate, you'd have to have a student start from the beginning and go through to the end, and he estimated it may take 10 years. But he's overlooked something. If the charter school were a high school, if that student takes 10 years to get through it, then we have a problem with either the school or the student. If the school is an elementary school, it may be six years, maybe five, maybe seven to follow a student through; I don't know. But we're also making the assumption that all the students were there. The other assumption that's being made with respect to charter schools by saying that you have to have an unending mandate is the fact that there would not be – and this is totally wrong – a proper review system and the fact that that charter would likely be renewed if it were meeting its mandate. If it were not meeting its mandate, then obviously you wouldn't extend it.

5:20

So I would suggest that if the hon. members across the way would read the legislation, would have the faith, and wait for the regulations that accompany it, most of their fears would be allayed. Now . . .

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker?

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

MR. GERMAIN: Will the hon. member answer a question?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under 482?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes, definitely. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The Chair is as excited about this as you are. We must contain ourselves and allow this question under *Beauchesne* 482 to go forth.

Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: Will the hon. member be one of the 10 with courage that votes against Bill 19?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I thought I had a question coming which I would have gladly entertained, but that silly statement I think should even be struck from *Hansard* to protect his reputation or what's left of it. Answering that frivolous, silly statement, I would say: read *Hansard*. My opening remarks were that I was standing in support of this Bill. Obviously I will be voting for it, as will 50 other members of my caucus, I'm sure.

Mr. Speaker, in view of the hour, I would beg to adjourn debate.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

