

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 3, 1994**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 94/05/03

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated. Order.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
 head: **Second Reading**  
**Bill 19**  
**School Amendment Act, 1994**

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Sapers]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking about the power grab that Bill 19 represents. This Bill does nothing but reinforce this government's craving for total control over the lives of all of its citizens. They do this, of course, in the guise of being more caring, open, transparent, and listening. Those people whose job it is to review these things for a living, such as the members of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, have certainly caught on to this contradiction. In their Fast Report on Bill 19 they state, and I quote:

The Bill completely ends the role of school boards as quasi-autonomous bodies . . . In general, the Act significantly enlarges the regulation-making authority of the Minister and extends this authority into new areas . . . The discretion of the Minister is increased.

Now, how can this possibly be compatible with the rhetoric we hear from the government benches about how this is really going to support local decision-making and give more control back to parents and communities? Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the hypocrisy of this part of the Bill is certainly clear. I know that we'll be proposing some amendments about that, and we'll be looking forward to debating those in committee.

MRS. BLACK: Then get on with it. Get on with it.

MR. SAPERS: The Minister of Energy is encouraging me to get on with it, and if she will stop interrupting, I certainly will.

Mr. Speaker, we hear the government often talk about the necessity to cut the deficit at any cost. Apparently this includes at the cost of a child's education, because what we see is that the push to cut spending has just been so broadly based that they're willing to go across the board even into those areas that they previously campaigned on protecting. The Premier, when he ran for leadership of his party, campaigned on protecting education. When he ran for election in the June 15 general election, he ran and campaigned on the principle of supporting education to a higher level of funding than current.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen that this isn't true. We see that the government business plans call for what they call about a 12 percent cut in spending. We know that by the time you factor in inflation over the three years of the program, by the time you account for all of the fuzzy accounting that's present, when you look at what they're doing with pensions, we know that this is almost going to be twice as much. It's going to be closer to a 24 percent cut in current dollars in what's available for education. I think that this kind of presentation of the facts on the part of the government has got to be challenged. I know that, again, these will be things that'll be debated when we come to the section-by-section review in committee stage.

The government talks about the need to control the deficit, and they justify cuts to education because spending is out of control. Just as recently as this morning I heard a member of the government backbench talk about: spending in education is out of control. Well, the only thing that's been out of control in recent memory has been the growth of the debt, and the only people that have been responsible for that out of control growth in the debt, Mr. Speaker, have in fact been the Conservative governments of this province, and this current government is no exception to that. The reason we have to cut \$2 billion out of our budget is because of this structural deficit that this Treasurer and Treasurers before him continued to build into the budget. If we didn't have to deal with that structural deficit that Conservative governments have brought to this province, we would be able to maintain the integrity of our education system and we wouldn't be trying to put it on the backs of children. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Treasurer will find it within his soul to rise and speak on his feet as opposed to from his seat. This of course is the Treasurer that talks about the need for transparency. Well, I think Albertans are certainly beginning to see through him.

What we're talking about in this Bill is nothing short of destructive social engineering on the backs of Alberta school children, and I think that this cannot go unchallenged. Earlier the Member for Stony Plain stood in his place and talked about how all members certainly want to support this Bill and how he knows that all members want to bring this quickly to a conclusion. Well, I want to go on record as saying that this member doesn't support the Bill and that I think this Bill is so important that it deserves every minute of debate that we can possibly accord it in this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, it's beyond reason that any private member in this Assembly would simply stand up and dismiss this Bill as just a set of amendments that should pass without debate, because we all know better than that.

With those comments at this point I will yield the floor to one of my colleagues who has other insightful comments to make on the intent and the principle of this Bill.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no surprise tonight that I'm going to speak against Bill 19. The only good thing about it is that it will certainly bring about the demise of this government.

I'd like to talk first about the financing of education. There's no doubt that it's time that equity funding was addressed. That's something that's been done, but I certainly don't agree with the way it is being done. I would like to at least consider, as suggested by the hon. member for — which side of Lethbridge is he from?

MR. SAPERS: The right side.

MRS. SOETAERT: The right side of Lethbridge. He had a good suggestion as to how to work out equity funding. I also appreciated the fact that lottery dollars have been used in the past. What an excellent way to use lottery dollars. When we're talking financing, why take away the board's power to tax? I don't really believe that this is ethically correct. The other thing that I would like is a guarantee that every dollar taxed for education stays in education. I'm sorry to say that this government just isn't credible when it comes to spending tax dollars.

Now I'd like to speak for a while about superintendents. I have to disagree with the Member for Highwood when he says that of

course you can have two bosses. Well, you know what? You should answer to one person, and the superintendent ultimately is going to have to be responsible to the government. Do they have to take orders from the minister and make sure they are implemented? Yes. The superintendent will have to ensure provincial policies are implemented. So much for this government's commitment to local autonomy and community decision-making. Superintendents should be customer-oriented, focused on the needs of students, parents, teachers, and trustees. This reform, then, ultimately makes the minister the only client. Does this mean that the minister can bypass the boards and just work with the superintendent? I'm afraid it does. It makes me wonder how this government perceives school boards. You've taken away the right to hire and fire superintendents. You've insisted that the CEO, the superintendent, does not have to answer to the boards. You've taken away their right to tax. What role is left for the school board?

I'd like to address for a few minutes school councils. When you talk about school councils, what will their role be in these decisions? Now, I was up in Peace River, and the school boards said: "You know what, Colleen? We can handle the cuts; we can do our best with the cuts. We'll lose the quality of education that we've had, but at least we can handle them. What we can't handle is why they are having the big power grab." At the same meeting a chair of one of the high school councils was there . . .

#### Point of Order

##### Questioning a Member

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the hon. member would entertain a question during debate?

MRS. SOETAERT: No, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

#### Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: At the same meeting in Peace River a chair of the high school council was there, and she said: "We're active. We enjoy our role within the school, and we don't want to make those extra decisions that we feel trustees are entitled to do."

Now, you ask: who is the council accountable to? Well, they haven't been elected. Anybody can be on a school council.

#### Point of Order

##### Questioning a Member

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: I was wondering if the hon. member would take a question during debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to make my 20 minutes; watch, guys.

#### Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: I was talking about school councils. Now, there's a real fear of school councils that have their own hidden agenda. For example, if there are a few very vocal people who would like to kill the fine arts in a high school and dominate that council, then that school could lose some of those wonderful courses that are essential in our society. So we've got to watch

what kind of control we give a council that is accountable to no one. They're not elected.

I think our trustees have a role, and I take comfort in the fact that they are elected and responsible to the area. A school council will only care about their school. A trustee has to look at the whole picture, not just the school area that they represent. So he has to think globally.

I'd like to speak about amalgamation and regionalization. Definitely needed. I am quite proud of my own constituency where Spruce Grove Catholic and Stony Plain Catholic have amalgamated. This regionalization has been in the works for a long time, and that's the key. This took time and co-operation. Well, other school boards need that time, too, in order to join amicably, and I would hope that the government will reconsider the deadline.

I'd like to talk for a while about what this Bill could mean to small rural towns. I was up in Berwyn; it's got a small school of 100 students from grades 1 to 9. If I could compare it for a while to the community where I was raised, in the small town of Villeneuve. We had three rooms and about 100 students from grades 1 to 9, and eventually it was decided that that school would close. So what they did to those students was send them to the nearest neighbour, which was St. Albert. When we got to St. Albert, the Catholic kids went to one school system and the other students went to another school system. So we were divided up from a small community. What they did then was: my sister was in grade 2; they put her in one school where it made the numbers go up enough to make two classes, and then I was in a different grade, an older grade. Are we surprised?

AN HON. MEMBER: A slow learner?

MRS. SOETAERT: A slow learner?

AN HON. MEMBER: You jumped a grade.

MRS. SOETAERT: I jumped a grade? No, I didn't. They put me in a different school so that it would make two classes there. Eventually families were divided up between three or four or five different schools. My mom went to four different interviews one night for children that were all in elementary school – not quite elementary, primary.

So what I'm saying is that Villeneuve was broken up as a community and spread out all over the place, and had it not been for a strong Catholic community and strong people of other religions who got along well and at least could work in the hall together, that community would be gone. That's a tragedy, when we start affecting rural Alberta like that. So I really do show some concern for these small rural schools that are threatened to be closed by this government.

I'd like to talk about boundaries for a while. These open boundaries I know are open to regulations, but I sure would like to see those regulations before this goes into place. For example, I live in the county of Sturgeon, but I live close to St. Albert. My children go to Sturgeon composite in Namao. That's a much farther site. By the way, Namao is an excellent school serving our communities well, has excellent teachers, programs, and, most of all, excellent students.

MR. N. TAYLOR: And a great MLA too.

MRS. SOETAERT: And a great MLA, an excellent MLA.

Now with this new Bill – and the regulations are unclear – many people living in Sturgeon may choose to go to a closer school. Likewise, people in Edmonton or St. Albert may choose

to go to Sturgeon composite where there are some excellent programs offered, which all seems reasonable enough. How does that affect a major rural high school or even the city schools? How do they plan, not knowing who will go where? I see this as an administrative nightmare, to make sure that everyone is in a classroom by September 1, staffing in place and programs in place. I'd like to see these regulations, but no one has seen them yet.

A pity that kindergarten is not entrenched in this Bill as a must, a 400-hour program for our kids. I see the two-tier system for kindergarten happening all across this province; in fact, one of the biggest tragedies. Someone came up to me and said, "Hey, Colleen, did you hear how they solved the Grande Prairie ECS problem?" I said, "Well, what did they do?" "We're having teacher aides teach the program." Well, that's a pity. That is a pity. Only someone with a four-year degree in early childhood is qualified to teach kindergarten, and that's how little this government values kindergarten.

So many questions and concerns with Bill 19; it's just not fair to Albertans. They deserve better than to live with so much uncertainty and fear. You know, Mr. Speaker, for the last few weeks every Sunday I've met people in my parish who fear Bill 19. They come to me, and they say: "What's happening with Bill 19? Are they going to go ahead with it?" You see, my community is concerned about Catholic education. Many years ago our group of parents agreed to join in with Sturgeon on the condition that religion would be taught in the school that we attended, a public school system that promised Catholic education. Well, for a few years religious instruction was offered from grades 1 to 9. Eventually it was 1 to 6. In a few more years, well, who knows what will happen. Is this the intent of Bill 19, to eventually phase out Catholic education in this province? Well, that's a shame. I know of people who are not Catholic but are Christian and send their children to Catholic schools because of the values and morals included in everyday aspects of their school day.

Well, one more point, Mr. Speaker, about testing. More testing is not the key to better education. If as a teacher I want my kids to pass one test, I can gear the whole year to that one narrow test so that they will pass it. But I ask you: rote learning, memorization work, is that learning? No, it's not. We teach children to learn how to learn, and that's the key, not more testing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I speak for many Albertans when I say that Bill 19 is not fair. It is vague. It is a power grab. In fact, I can't help but compare this tax grab, curriculum control, and top-down administration to Nazi Germany when they took centralized control of the school system and dictated curriculum to the nth degree. Well, if we don't learn by history, then we are doomed to repeat it.

I urge all members of this Assembly to look deep within themselves and admit that this Bill 19 is ethically wrong. Ultimately, we should all oppose it. Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to provide my input into Bill 19, the proposed changes and, I guess, the overall impact to education within the province.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair sincerely regrets interrupting the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but could there be unanimous consent to introduce a guest?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to this House a young lady who's very concerned about education. Every time we have a debate on education, this young lady is here listening. I believe she lives in Edmonton-McClung, and she's here representing the ATA tonight. Her name is Shelley Russell. I'd ask if she would stand and be recognized by this House.

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

8:20 **Bill 19**  
**School Amendment Act, 1994**  
*(continued)*

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you'll deduct that portion of time from my allocated time.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at education and we look at the importance of it in terms of other priorities, I don't think there's any question that virtually every Albertan would say that in terms of a program, in terms of a delivery of service that would have the greatest benefit not only today but next year, the year after, the next decade, and so on – everybody, virtually everybody would say education. It is recognized that education, a high-quality level of education to compete on a national basis, to compete on a global basis – and when we see the globalization and such, more and more we recognize that it's not just a question of students graduating from Alberta that have to compete for employment opportunities with students from Ontario, Quebec, wherever. We're talking in terms of a system now that sees global competition. We have to look at educational systems in Germany and Japan and so on.

I haven't had a great deal of experience as an educator, although I did have the opportunity to be a part-time instructor for three semesters at Grant MacEwan College teaching a course called understanding government. I had a couple of members of the government come and speak at some of my sessions. Mr. Speaker, during the three sessions I had a lot of adult students. It was very, very important to them that they be provided that opportunity after having gone out and worked for a while and realizing that with the education they had previously, if they wanted to improve themselves, if they wanted to take advantage of opportunities that may be out there, they had to do better. They had to do better than they were doing at that time in terms of their background in education. They were a good group to teach in the sense that they were there for a reason. They were there because they wanted to learn. They were there because they wanted to better themselves.

I had the opportunity myself, Mr. Speaker, to go back to school. As an adult student, through the Alberta vocational training program, I had to start back at grade 9. I took my business administration at NAIT; then I went to university. I was fortunate. I was thankful that I had that opportunity, that second chance to go back, get the education that I didn't bother to get when I was younger.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that in the past in Alberta we had an educational system that we could be proud of, that other provinces would envy. We had a system that not only at the elementary

level, at the advanced educational level respected education and a system that brought the parents and the students and educators together to develop programs and keep improving that quality of education and provided for those that did drop out early when they wanted to go back and have another shot at it. The door was open for those that really, really wanted to learn. I'm not saying it's closed totally yet, but slowly we see that happening. We see just a total restructuring of the educational system, and I'm not sure that there is a long-term plan in effect that would ensure that there aren't going to be some very, very severe consequences.

The unfortunate part: it's sort of like rolling the dice; it's like a gamble. We gamble with our children's futures today, but we don't know about next year, five years down the road. We don't know; it could be 10, 15 years down the road till suddenly people sit back and they say: we made a major, major, major mistake going back 10, 15, 20 years in allowing the government of that day to do what they did in terms of restructuring the educational system, because now we find ourselves in a situation where we've been left in the dust in terms of other provinces and other countries.

When we look at education, Mr. Speaker, and we look at it from the point of view of educators, if government took the time to really sit down with them, to really participate with them, to really consult, also of course with the parents, I think they would find out that the number one priority, the number one concern to educators, to parents is the quality of education within the classrooms. That's of ultimate concern. They want to see the educational system at the elementary level preserve a more global type education, not to go back to the so-called basics of the three Rs – reading, writing, and arithmetic – but to retain, to recognize that there are other programs such as the fine arts, such as drama, and a number of others in addition to those so-called hard-core programs.

The system we seem to be heading towards, if it is achieved by government, if it's imposed by government – I think we're going to end up with a two-tier system. We're going to end up with a system where the children from some families will have the resources that they'll be able to go out and get those additional programs: buy them through the private sector, whatever. Those children that come from lower income families even though they may live across the street from the other family are going to find that the resources aren't there. So when those children graduate, they're going to graduate on a different level.

If there is one thing that should be universal, if there is one thing that should recognize that every child should have the opportunity to participate fully, that has to be education. I am sure that virtually every parent in this province would agree with that. Educators agree with that. I don't understand why members of the government have some difficulty in recognizing the importance of education.

I can look, Mr. Speaker, at my own son who has gone through the system, about 20 years of it. He went during a period of time when it wasn't that difficult, when he was able to access student loans, when he was able to get into the U of A here. He was able to get a master's program down east. But now I look at my grandchildren. I wonder. As my grandchildren go through the system, the first barrier they're going to run across: is there going to be a kindergarten system in place at that time, or are they going to in fact have to have that disadvantage of losing that opportunity that children in recent years have had? If there is a kindergarten system, will the parents have to pay for that fully? Will they pay 50 percent? Will it be 50 hours? Will it be 200 hours? What is going to be in place there? Are we going to see it stripped down slowly, slowly, slowly till there is virtually nothing left?

Getting beyond the kindergarten system, when we get into the elementary school, are they going to be in a classroom where they're going to see 40, 45 students, where there are going to be educators, teachers that are not able to give attention to the children because of the ratio that may be imposed upon them, the ratio that does not allow those students to get the type of attention – and again some students are brighter; some students have a better learning capacity than others for various reasons. Does it mean that we're going to find some students that are left behind, that don't have that same opportunity?

No matter how I look at it, Mr. Speaker, that same theme keeps recurring. In my mind there's a fear that the educational system is being restructured, that there is not going to be equal opportunity for children. That could have been avoided from day one. Some of the basic mistakes that I felt that this government made were: getting hung up in haste with the across-the-board type approach to budget reductions; imposing on various other authorities, such as hospitals and school boards, reductions without studying the implications of those reductions; in turn directly or indirectly telling teachers that they're going to have to take a 5 percent rollback or they're going to face this many layoffs, the school sizes will increase to this. That whole process of sitting down and trying to consult, trying to work out something, even though it would have taken longer – I acknowledge that; it would have taken longer – the government chose not to do it.

In fact, they insisted on getting onto this road of "Don't blink; don't blink at any cost." Blinking for some reason is now seen as an evil by the government even though it is recognized – and I think there are members on that side that have an educational background, that as parents have to have some concerns. They must be thinking to themselves or talking in the backrooms that maybe education is something we should just blink on a wee bit. Maybe we should slow down. Maybe we should involve the teachers, the educators, the parents just a bit more. Maybe trying to ram through this Bill 19 is not the way to go.

**8:30**

Mr. Speaker, when we look at Bill 19 and we start to look in principle at some of the concepts and some of, I guess, the broader implications, when we talk in terms of a restructuring of the school board system and the financing, it is very, very massive. It's very massive. When the government sets upon itself to collect all the taxes and then redistribute those taxes, many people would view that as a tax grab, a fear as to how many of those dollars are actually going to go back towards the educational system or how many of those dollars may be siphoned off for other purposes. Now, the government at the same time allows a provision in there for local requisition, and of course local requisition does raise additional dollars, but then of course there are those out there who are going to see that as another means of taxation. Whether it comes at the local level, the school board level, the provincial level, it's still dollars that they fear would come out of their pocket. So to simply pass down a responsibility of collecting a tax is not really resolving the problem.

If we go back in history, go back to 20 years ago, and if we look, then, at the educational dollars that were raised through provincial revenues, though local requisition and if we equated that in terms of a formula as to what was achieved at the provincial level and what was achieved at the local level and you look at that today, the impact, the difference is very, very significant. More and more as government has gone along, they've shifted more and more of that burden onto the local school board to have to collect those dollars, to increase those taxes.

Now, this particular system is interesting in the sense that the provincial government really becomes the tax collector, except

that they do allow that one provision to requisition at the local level. Then at the same time there's a bit of a squeeze play in that if separate school boards opt out of the pooling, they've got to pay a price, and we all know what that price is. That price is loss of revenue or loss of dollars, loss of funding in terms of other school boards and again a major, major impact in terms of the standard or quality of education that can be provided by that particular school board.

We look, Mr. Speaker, at the question of the management of the school districts, the superintendents, the people that will be in charge. In the past we've had a system where we've had school boards, and we've recognized that those school boards are a form of government, that they have a right to make decisions, that they have a proper right to hire and a proper right to fire. We've recognized that all along. It hasn't been resisted, because they're the ones that are on the front lines in terms of education. They're the ones that can relate to the parents of the students that they teach.

That same philosophy, Mr. Speaker, holds true with municipal government. The provincial government may give municipalities grants and such, but it's still recognized that there is an elected body there, an elected body to make decisions at the local level. It's kind of ironic that on the one hand we have a Municipal Government Act that comes forward that gives more power to the municipalities, which in my opinion is good. It's like one minister is saying: I recognize that decision-making at the local level, more at the grassroots level, is good. Then on the other hand with another major, major program of the government, education, the government starts taking away that decision-making authority, and they start to grab it and put it in their own hands.

It's kind of ironic that within the same cabinet these two philosophies come out. It's sort of like somebody has made the decision that municipalities, elected representatives at the local level, alderpersons, councillors, are capable of making decisions or running their own affairs. In fact, they're so good that we're going to give them more chances to do it. But for some reason the government is demonstrating that they've lost faith in school boards, in trustees, who are also elected to run those affairs. Why that occurred I really don't know.

The government seems to be concerned enough on this particular issue that they not only grab the collection of taxes, but they also at the same time grab the power of the school boards by retaining the final right in terms of appointing superintendents. In other words, is that superintendent responsible to the government, or is that superintendent responsible to the school board? I don't understand the rationale as to why a Minister of Education would feel that he or she requires that type of legislative authority or has that type of knowledge in terms of education in all parts of the province that one could take it upon themselves to even want that kind of power, to even want that type of veto right to appoint superintendents.

When one stops to think about government having the final say in the appointment of superintendents, whether it's real or not, the perception that would be there by many, many taxpayers, by many parents: would there be equal opportunity in terms of persons that are qualified to become superintendents? Or would there be a fear there that you've got to be a card-carrying member of the right party, otherwise it's going to diminish your chances of becoming a superintendent? You could find yourself vetoed.

The open boundaries have been addressed very astutely by my colleague to the right, so I'm not going to dwell on that a second time. I want to talk briefly about chartered schools. I guess that as you travel throughout the province, you would tend to get a different reaction on chartered schools. The concept of teachers

and parents getting together and setting out certain programs and making certain decisions and saying that this is what's good for this particular district, that this is what's good for our children does have some merit to it. It has some very, very interesting concepts. It's similar, I guess, in philosophy to many of the private schools. But when we talk in terms of the charter schools, we have to look at what impact that has on private schools and where we may see private schools in the future, Mr. Speaker. Are we going ahead with this charter school philosophy to a system that I've heard some members of government propose or suggest in the past, a voucher type system? In other words, a system of education in the province that is so split up that it's difficult to even get any comprehension, to even provide a standard so that whether here, there, whatever, one does have that access to that education.

When I look at charter schools, I have to wonder to myself: has the government already got some type of model in place? For example, is the School for the Deaf in Edmonton earmarked to be one of the first chartered schools? That's one of the thoughts that's bouncing out there right now. That's a possibility. So when we talk in terms of charter schools, again it's one of those areas where because of the haste on the part of government, because of the failure, I believe, to consult sufficiently with those that are impacted, the educators and the parents, there are many, many questions that can't be answered at this particular time.

We can look, Mr. Speaker, at amalgamation, where the government wants to reduce the number of boards from 140 to 60. Generally speaking, that's good. I think, again, that Albertans, being as astute as they are, recognize that we can reduce school boards, that we can reduce costs. We can do it considerably by reducing administration, by reducing the number of school boards. We have school boards in the province that don't have schools within the district. Those students are bused out to other districts. So, yes, there is support for a reduction in the number of boards throughout the province or an amalgamation. That leads us to last fall with Bill 8. Bill 8 was set up to establish a framework for boards to voluntarily negotiate and achieve these things.

Thank you. I'll conclude on that note.

**8:40**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Leduc.

**MR. KIRKLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rush back from the annex to address Bill 19 here this evening. I will maybe take a little different approach from some of the commentary you've heard here tonight. I probably will lapse into some of the same as well, because often you have to repeat these things many, many times before it sinks in.

As I started my analysis of Bill 19 – and I would admit here today that I did not get through the entire Bill, but I would like to point out some of the deficiencies that I feel in fact exist. When I started to analyze the Bill, comparing the old to the new, I stopped at section 15 first. There was a rather subtle change there that caught my attention. That subtle change, to me, put what I would call a sneaky tone to the entire Bill, so I tried to be a little more analytical and a little more scientific when I approached the matter, Mr. Speaker.

One of the first deficiencies that I would speak to or perhaps one of the first twists in a strategy that's being applied to this Bill came to me, as I indicated, in section 15. I'll be very specific. When we look at the old Bill, the old School Act, and look under clause (h), we say that "A principal of a school must . . . evaluate or provide for the evaluation of the teachers employed in the school." If we look at the new amended version, it states after

"evaluate" in that clause that we should remove "or provide for the evaluation of," which really leads us to say that the principal should now evaluate all the teachers employed in the school. Well, Mr. Speaker, that appeared to be a very subtle change to me.

I got to thinking of my Canadian air traffic control union days, and I tried to apply a little logic in that sense. It struck me that what we are attempting to do here in, as I say, a sneaky way, if that's a parliamentary term I could use, is to really remove the principals of the schools from the Alberta Teachers' Association. Now, we have heard in the past some thought from the side opposite that there has to be a change in the ATA. I would share with you that certainly I would also think that there are some changes there that I will not expound upon or elaborate on at this point. But this told me that that being the case, we remove somebody that's presently in a union, and we take him out.

I attempted to further extrapolate that impact by looking up the definition of a principal. It is pretty wide open. In looking at it, if we have a principal of administration and then we go to a principal of curriculum and perhaps a principal of evaluation, we now have three members in a school in the teaching profession that would fall outside the Alberta Teachers' Association. I would like to think the Alberta Teachers' Association is aware of that, and I would like to have their input and their comment on it. It perhaps is the right way to go. I won't argue the merits or the debate of it, but it struck me that it was subtle and it wasn't up front and therefore caused me some anguish in setting the tone to the Bill. I don't think that anybody on this side is really adverse to change if it's a good, positive change and it's a change that is going to ultimately reap benefit for all of the students in the province of Alberta.

I moved along from section 15, and when I moved over to section 8, I was attempting to get a handle on this new body that has been created called a school council, exactly what their mandate would be and how they would fit into the process. As I looked at it, very clearly it outlined that the school council would input as far as

- (a) the nature of the programs offered,
- (b) the expenditure of money,
- (c) the education standards to be met by students, and
- (d) the management of the school.

They may be involved in making bylaws and also "may develop and implement policy respecting school councils" themselves.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Well, that certainly sounds like it's a quality idea. Unfortunately, in the next clause, clause 7, what the Act gives, the minister promptly takes away with clause 7. I would suggest that it is a collection of power at the minister's desk that is not healthy. We see it throughout this particular Bill. I've heard members speak of the appointment of the superintendent, and I should stand corrected there. The ability to fire the superintendent if the board appoints really is a moot exercise, I would suggest. Anyway, that school council, as I viewed it, had their mandate somewhat clarified and then had it promptly removed by the minister. I think that's a bit of a contradiction.

As I attempted to work through the guidelines and the responsibilities of the board as opposed to the school council, I found that there was some contradiction in their particular areas of responsibility. When I make that statement, I would take you over to section 9 of the Bill. The old Act indicates exactly when a student can be expelled or suspended. In the old Act a teacher was able to suspend a student for one class and a principal was able to suspend a student from

- (a) one or more class periods,
- (b) one or more courses . . .
- (c) school, or
- (d) riding a . . . bus

but the board that presently existed had the ultimate say, and there was a mechanism for appeal if the student found himself in that position. The new Act gives that power of suspension or expulsion – and I'm just going to backtrack for a minute here, Mr. Speaker, because I may have confused the Assembly. The principal only had the opportunity to suspend. The ultimate authority to expel fell with the existing school board.

In the new proposed Act that expulsion power has been broadened so that in fact

A student may be suspended or expelled

- (a) if in the opinion of the teacher, the principal or the board, as the case may be, the conduct of the student does not comply with section 7.

That broadens it considerably. That gives the teacher the right to expel a student. It doesn't give a time frame involved here, and in looking through the Bill, it does not give a clearly defined appeal process. I had a concern with that. That tells me that the teacher, with all due respect, in fact could usurp the powers of the school council, which I indicated had a role to play in the management of the school. I would have to ask if it does not also usurp the powers of this board that is to oversee all the education faculty. It did cause me a concern, and I would suggest that when you look at the Bill, attempt in your own mind to clarify if those channels of power are clearly defined. If they are not, I'm sure one and all in this House can realize that we are going to move into some confusion if in fact we don't.

As we moved through here, one other thing that caught my eye time and time again was that the minister in many cases would determine exactly where a school or a school board or a school district or a school system in the province would go. We refer frequently in this new proposal that the minister will make regulations, which of course in a lot of cases are not clearly defined here. I would suggest that if we're looking at running a school on regulations, we will end up with a very large inconsistency throughout the schools, first of all because of lobbying and political pressure, which we've all been subjected to.

Secondly, if we're going to have education by regulation, if I could use that term, Mr. Speaker, we will end up with an increase in the bureaucracy, I would suggest. When I think of the philosophy that has been put forth by the side opposite here, they continue to say that they would like to reduce government involvement in business. One has to expect that they would also like to reduce the numbers of bureaucrats presently employed, with all due respect to those bureaucrats. We have seen it in many of their departments. On the other hand, we have a contradiction here because the minister involves himself in so many different aspects of this particular Bill with regulation that we cannot avoid but expanding the bureaucracy itself. That contradiction certainly does not sit well with me.

**8:50**

As I further traveled through this Bill, trying to understand it, one of the areas that did cause me concern – and maybe it's because I've heard some chat in this House recently about accountability, in debates in the last little while when we're talking about students or we're talking of the youth. I look at the old section 28, which I would suggest is far more flexible on attending different schools than the present one is. I know that there's some thought that there's a voucher system here and that there should be open boundaries, but when I actually read the clauses associated with it, it's very clear that one cannot leave

school district A to go to school district B unless you have the consent of all the boards and school councils involved.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Presently we have some students in the school systems of Alberta that are not able to carry on their education in one particular institute for some reason. It may be a personality conflict between teachers; it may be that the parents themselves perceive the education system not to be offering their children what they would really like to see. There is some flexibility, certainly in the city of Leduc, where you can change school systems, and I think that flexibility turns out to be a positive flexibility more often than not. I would suggest that the new Bill is going to be more restrictive than that. I would suggest that that being the case, we will probably see a larger number of students involved in not carrying on with their education if there are choices not available to them.

I know that many members have spoken of the centralization of tax collection. I would suggest that that erodes the autonomy of the local school districts. With due respect to the school councils, I think that from the way I read the Bill, the board certainly will lead those in most cases. In some it appears not: the minister and others. If we have a board that is not attuned to the wants and needs of the parents, I'm not convinced that that centralization of tax collection will work to their benefit when they're attempting to capture school programs that are very needed in specific areas, whether it would enhance those areas. I can think of some areas, such as the hon. Member for Fort McMurray's, who could elaborate, where we have a high industrial area there in the school program. If I understand correctly, it is in a bit of a partnership with some of the industries to ensure that the product that the school turns out is attuned to the needs of that particular industry in that area.

I indicated earlier in my opening comments that I thought it was a bit of a moot exercise when the board can hire the superintendents and the minister has the right to remove. If I could use that term "fire," that probably is what ultimately would happen. Again, I think that deprives the school councils and I would suggest also the boards of really capturing an individual that understands and has a strong feel for a school district. We know that many school districts have some unique needs, unique desires because of a geographical positioning, perhaps because of the number of schools in a special district or area. I have a concern that if the board cannot keep a person in place that wants to pursue the same aims as the council and the board, we will lose on an individual basis and the autonomy associated with it.

I have a concern. I have attempted to understand the charter school system. I would suggest that I see positive there. I would offer a bit of a warning that we have to be cautious as to how many charter schools we actually move to. Certainly the public school system will not be hampered or hurt by competition, but if we do not watch the charter school development in this province, I have a large fear and concern that it may erode the public system. I would suggest that the public school system has provided a quality education probably for about 95 percent of the members in this House, so it has not done a bad job. If you look at your own children today, I would suggest that the majority of them have fared well in the public system, so it would be a shame to lose it. If charter schools proliferate in this province, I would suggest that public schools certainly will erode. If there's an underlying thought that this is a way again to bring the Alberta Teachers' Association in line, I would suggest that it's too much of a sacrifice to make if we let the public system erode.

I do have a concern also, though initially I could envision that it was a positive offering, and that was the 3 percent levy that a school board may seek or requisition once every three years. That I foresaw as being able to capture some unique programs that may be adapted to a specific school such as the situation identified in Fort McMurray. The concern to me is the experience of British Columbia, where nine such requisitions were tried, and I believe it was two that were successful. I have to assume from that example that it was those that live in affluent areas that were able to withstand the added 3 percent, thereby approving them. That tells me that if in fact it's simply the affluent areas of provinces that can actually implement that 3 percent and collect it, what we end up doing is creating a school system that is not equal throughout this province. That causes me a concern, Mr. Speaker.

I think a goodly percentage of debate has occurred on Bill 19. Certainly we don't want to reiterate the points time and time again, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate I didn't get through the entire Bill on my analysis of it. The few examples that I pointed out certainly are worth taking into the entire context. There's a clarity of responsibility and powers here that yet has to be defined. There is a relationship between the school councils and the boards that has to be defined. I express a large concern about the education by regulation that the minister seems to enter into more often than not in so many clauses of the Act. I have a concern that without clarification of those, we are going to turn the school system over to some turf wars that will tear apart some communities as we attempt to implement the changes that are forthcoming, because they are large and they're certainly far reaching.

The other concern that I had with the Bill: when we look at amalgamating several school districts, if I could use my own as an example, we will probably pull together the county of Leduc, the city of Leduc, the town of Devon, probably the county of Wetaskiwin, and the city of Wetaskiwin. I do not see the mechanism within the Bill that ensures that each one of those participating bodies will have a fair and equal say. I have also trust in most of the people that are elected to boards at municipal levels. I would think they'd keep the students' interests in mind at all times, but I can see where there is opportunity for manipulation if in fact one area or one agency that comes together in the amalgamation happens to have a dominant position on the board.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I will conclude tonight, and I will turn it over to one of my other colleagues here.

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

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I finally have the opportunity to speak to this Bill, and I'm sure I'll have more opportunities to speak to this Bill as the weeks pass on. I hope I can hear some comments from the members opposite. I look forward to hearing some of their rationale for this Bill. [interjections] You know, I always like it when they wake up. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat I think is in between chapters, and he's finally going to say something. He might even get up to speak here yet tonight.

You know, Mr. Speaker, of all the Bills this Bill has been the most interesting in terms of its evolution. When I first saw this Bill, my reaction was: I can't believe they've come up with this. I mean, they can't be that foolish. And yeah, they were; they were that foolish. I went to that first rally at Bishop Carroll, and there were in excess of 5,000 - I don't know, 6,000 - people there.

MS LEIBOVICI: In Calgary; right?

9:00

MR. DALLA-LONGA: In Calgary, at one school at a meeting organized over three days.

AN HON. MEMBER: It must have been a PC convention.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Yeah. You might have thought it was a PC convention or something, eh?

AN HON. MEMBER: But they weren't drinking Kleinenken, were they?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: No. There was no beer there, so that wasn't a Tory convention.

You know, those people got up time and time again and reiterated the issues.

AN HON. MEMBER: Were there any four by fours?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Yeah, there were some four by fours. There were some Tories there. There were a lot of Tories at that meeting. I should say former Tories. That's where I said: I can't believe they're making this mistake. [interjections] It's okay, Mr. Speaker. They're not bothering me. Don't worry. It just reminds me of a bunch of seals.

I said to myself: how could the government possibly be coming up with a Bill like this when so many people are opposed to it so quickly? Then I find out through the grapevine – as you have to find out most things from the government – that it actually wasn't this government; it was their deputy minister who came up with this brain wave. I daresay, I even think he's Italian. [interjections] That's right. A shot at myself, eh?

And I said to myself, Mr. Speaker: well, what could possibly motivate this government to go along? You see their members attending these rallies as well, and they're just getting thrashed to a T night after night by the people in attendance.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You should come to Medicine Hat, Dan. The school board likes it.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat says I should come to Medicine Hat, but I know as well as he who is the president of the school board down there. [interjections] We know where she stands, eh? [interjections] Yes.

So we go to these rallies. We see lurking in the background the government House members trying to sort of not be seen, and they get picked out. [interjections] Am I not speaking the truth? No, I think I was there. As a matter of fact, I heard one of your own members say that if they had had a rope, they would probably have hung us. Do you remember me saying that before? So we came out of these rallies, and I said to myself: who's in control here? Is it a deputy minister, or is it the people, the electorate?

This government here is supposed to be in the middle of a deficit reduction mode, and it brings out a piece of legislation such as Bill 19, which has nothing to do with deficit reduction. Now, let's talk about this deficit. How did we get there? Yes, how did we get there? Under the guise of saving money, under the guise of this new government . . .

#### Speaker's Ruling Relevance

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair was just wondering, if Bill 19 has nothing to do with deficits, how come we're slipping into a discussion of the deficit, hon. member. Relevancy.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, as I've learned in this House, one has to be patient because sometimes things take a while to come around. You know, quite frankly, with all the interruptions I might have to start over again. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I really like it when they're listening. It really bothers me when they're sitting there reading books and magazines and all that sort of stuff. This is an important issue, and therefore it's important that they listen.

So this government comes up with this Bill in the middle of a four-year deficit reduction mode, and I ask: what is their motive for doing this? I wasn't sure. And I know that many of the members across the way really don't support this Bill. They feel uneasy about it because they know, especially those ones in Calgary, that this is going to affect their re-election chances. Their constituents are going to be watching how they vote. So I guess the thing is, Mr. Speaker, that what we have to do is to try to maybe convince them to see that Bill 19 is not the way to go. [interjections]

You know, they're all waiting for the opportunity to get up and offer their constructive criticism. Right now they're just acting like a bunch of seals and just flapping away. We'll have to throw them a fish here pretty soon.

I know that they're required to toe the party line and act like they're really in favour of this Bill, but you know, Mr. Speaker, what really bothers me are the comments from, for example, the Member for Stony Plain, who said: you're just fear mongering. Well, our caucus . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: If you guys keep this up, I'm going to have to repeat it again tomorrow night. We're going to keep repeating it till you get it straight.

Mr. Speaker, they say we're fear mongering. We've filed in excess of and received in excess of 50,000 letters to date from people in this province that are not in favour of Bill 19. We went through this farce called the roundtables, which everybody by now knows was a farce. We knew it was a farce.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Especially when it was populated by squareheads.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh. Racial comment. Racial comment.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Raise a point.

#### Point of Order Improper Inferences

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

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

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 23 in a number of different places makes reference to casting aspersions and drawing allegations. The member opposite from Calgary-West just referred to the roundtables. Now, it's one thing to say that that was a farce if that's what he wants to believe. However, the



Member for Redwater said that those roundtables were populated by a bunch of squareheads, and I think that's a severe offence to the people from all walks of life who took part in those roundtables. I'm sure he'd like to take the opportunity to correct himself and withdraw the statement.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, unfortunately, the hon. Member for Redwater didn't have the floor, and it's doubtful that that comment made the record of the proceedings this evening.

If we're on that subject, I'm sure many honourable members on both sides could be called to order. The Chair would remind all honourable members that there should only be one person speaking in this Chamber at one time. At the present time that happens to be the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the real reason was that the hon. House leader wanted to get it in *Hansard*.

MR. SAPERS: He's a tricky one, Dan, but he's without point.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: He's so tricky that you've just got to keep an eye on him all the time.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there were squareheads at those roundtables. I think they were honest people being fooled by a government into thinking that they actually had input into the process.

MR. N. TAYLOR: It was run by squareheads.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Yes, if it was anything, it was run by squareheads.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I'd like to get on to the . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's okay. They don't bother me.

Several weeks ago rallies were held in Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. Not Medicine Hat; we all know why there wasn't one held in Medicine Hat, though, don't we? These Catholics got together advocating the rights to Catholic education in this province. There were in excess of 6,000 to 7,000 people at the rally in Calgary alone.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You said that once before.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: No. That was Bishop Carroll. Pay attention. Quit reading your book and pay attention.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Which school was this at?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: This was at the Corral; okay? Now these people . . . [interjections] See, if you had been there, you'd have know about all this.

9:10

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Through the Chair, hon. member.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: You know, Mr. Speaker, these people were saying the same things; they hadn't changed. The government had gone out, tried to do their meetings, tried to convince them, and they hadn't changed. People did not want the two basic

changes to this Bill. The members across the way continue to put on a brave face about this Bill and they know full well that they're not in support, but we know the truth. We know what they'd like to do to a certain deputy minister for getting them into this mess, and the opportunity exists, because when this comes down to a vote, their constituencies will be watching, and they've told us they'll be watching. It's going to be a standing vote, and come election time they're going to make sure that they get even. We know that these MLAs who are unhappy and are feeling a little bit uneasy have been told by their leaders: "Don't worry. The Catholics didn't vote for us anyway. By the next election they'll forget. They'll forget all about this. We'll be on to other things. We'll have our deficit under control supposedly. They'll forget about this budget. By the time the next election comes around, it'll all be past." But I don't think so. I'm betting, Mr. Speaker, that they won't forget. And you know what? They're just waiting for that vote, to see what happens. I think we might have some government members yet who might vote against this Bill. At least they'd better not vote for this Bill if they know what's good for them. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, this is getting too controversial. I'm going to move directly into the Bill here.

In this Bill we have two major issues, in case you didn't already know. Some of the members are just starting to pay attention now, so we're going to go over it again. We have two major issues. We have the centralization of school taxes; that's number one. Number two, we have the appointment of superintendents or lack thereof.

#### Point of Order

#### Questioning a Member

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the member opposite would entertain a question.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, I'll entertain any question they have. There is no guarantee whether I'll give an answer or not.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted, after trying on numerous occasions to ask a question. Thank you for accepting this. During the election the Liberals advocated assuming primary responsibility for funding kindergarten through grade 12 education in this province. My question to the member opposite is simply this: where would those dollars have come from, and how would the Liberal program have been implemented?

#### Debate Continued

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Now, under the first issue, centralization of taxes . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, under the centralization of taxes, you've got to ask yourself: why would we want to put any

more money in this government's hands? Why would we want to do that? I mean, even the members opposite know what the past has held for us with their spending habits. We've got all these nice little fiascos that came up like the NovAtels and Gainers. Here we go. Another point of order.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

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

DR. L. TAYLOR: Point of order, relevance. He's not talking about the Bill. He's getting into the past. He's not talking about the principles of the Bill. He's getting into past behaviour, which you've already corrected him for, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage you to correct him and put him in his proper place again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair wouldn't characterize the actions of the Chair in that way. The complaint was that the hon. member was backsliding on relevance.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Could I speak to that point of order? I want to draw attention, Mr. Speaker, that he was trying to emphasize the type of conduct that was going on. To describe anybody's conduct, you've got to describe their past.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, we'll leave this to the hon. Member for Calgary-West to establish the relevance.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, I was just talking about why we would want to put more money into the government's hands, and I was just going over what had happened when money was previously put in their hands. I don't find it to be irrelevant at all. Maybe he missed a part of my presentation here. I don't know.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Just to continue along, Mr. Speaker, you've got to ask yourself: will these moneys be handled in the same manner as they've been handled in the past? This is the question that they asked at these rallies. Why would we want to give this government any more money? Give them the little bit that they've got left now, and see what they can do with that first before we give them some more. All the sorts of things that could come out of centralizing these taxes, centralizing the collection of them, comes up to Edmonton, and then we start having all the possible little games that can go on. Manipulation, like we have with the CFEP grants, all of the allocations that we don't know how they happened, the building of roads, the building of hospitals, et cetera: all those things.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Dan, if you come and join us, we'll let you in on the secret.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat says if I join the Tories, I might be in on a secret. Well, I don't want to be in on a secret. I just want it to be fair, Mr. Speaker. I think that centralizing the collection of taxes is not the way to go.

First of all, this government's got a big problem. They've got to learn how to spend the money that they're currently collecting. Don't give them more money; they'll just blow it faster. The government, coincidentally, in this Bill doesn't set out a formula for distribution. They haven't said how these moneys are going to be spent, distributed. Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of school

boards in this province are vehemently opposed to this Bill. [interjections] Yes, the vast majority of them are opposed. With respect to the Catholics, all of the financial benefits that they've acquired since 1905 will be taken away.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Wrong.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: No, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite say, "wrong." But that's very true.

What about the taxes for undeclared marriages, mixed marriages, non-Catholics, corporate reassessments, et cetera? An olive branch was offered by being able to raise money through a plebiscite. Any moneys raised through a plebiscite will have to be spent according to how the minister wants it to be spent or according to what the regulations say. Where are these regulations? That's another problem. We keep talking about these regulations. These regulations are so fundamentally important to this Bill, and they're nowhere to be seen. Is that by design?

AN HON. MEMBER: You make regulations first, do you?

**9:20**

MR. DALLA-LONGA: It doesn't matter. The regulations should be out when we're trying to pass the Bill.

Anyway, in the course of all the discussions, Mr. Speaker, the government has seemingly offered two concessions. The first concession is that the school divisions could, as I said, requisition up to 3 percent of their total budget in addition to the provincial allocation. Now, what was wrong with the separate schools' initial proposal, where they said: well, if some of the rural school divisions or whatever, urban school divisions, are sort of have-not school boards, why don't you reshuffle the allocation from the province such that they get more and the haves get less? But no, that wasn't accepted, Mr. Speaker. I think that fundamentally sent a message. It sent a message to the people running the school board.

**Point of Order  
Questioning a Member**

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, thank you. Based on the last scintillating response I received, I'm wondering if the member would entertain another question.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Same offer.

MR. HAVELOCK: Does the member understand that the disparity between the rich boards and the poor boards in this province is expanding and will continue to expand? Unless this is addressed in the way we've suggested, we will not be able to ensure that all children in this province receive an equitable education and have access to an equitable education. Does he understand that?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do understand it. Against my normal policy of not answering questions, I do understand it. I just finished saying that the offer was made to reallocate the provincial funding.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, that was flatly rejected, wasn't even looked at, wasn't even considered. So you

have to ask yourself: what is their real agenda here? You know, this thing about this 3 percent additional tax that can be raised by way of a plebiscite: first of all, you have to have a plebiscite, which is a hassle. You're going to have to have it every so many years. I can't remember how many years it is. Secondly, this was tried in British Columbia and was relatively unsuccessful. There were a couple of boards that were able to get this thing passed, but by and large this was relatively unsuccessful.

Now, the second concession was that . . . [Mr. Dalla-Longa's speaking time expired]

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this evening to rise to speak in support of Bill 19. [some applause] The hon. members from across should not get excited, because we've heard in the discussion on this Bill so far some polarizing views on both sides, very opposing views. I think the government members probably will support this Bill one hundred percent, and I believe that the Official Opposition will go the other way and oppose it totally. I want to give you a very independent viewpoint of the whole Bill.

I believe the Bill is a move in the right direction. It's a great improvement on the present School Act that we have in this province. I know that it's not perfect, but there's nothing that's really perfect in this world when it's made by humans. I think it's probably the best that we can have at this time.

There are two reason why we have to look seriously at some of these Bills. One is to improve the education in our province. The other one is to minimize the costs and try and balance the budgets of this province.

There have been many comments made by the Official Opposition that always refer back 10, 15 years and why we have this problem today and why we have to have new Bills to cut costs. Everything is blamed on the past. I think we all know that we have a problem. We all know that the past government made some great blunders, some bad financial management decisions. But we cannot live in the past; we have to look to the future. I think in the June 15 election all candidates who ran for election realized that we had a financial problem, and everybody promised that we were going to balance our budget and that we were going to go forward. I think that we have to look at the future, and with Bill 19 we have to look at the future.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: What's this got to do with balancing the budget?

MR. LANGEVIN: Well, it has to do with good financial management for the future. We always have to be accountable for the dollars that are spent. You'll realize that I don't have the luxury in my caucus of having a prewritten statement prepared by expensive researchers. I have to make my own statements here.

There were comments made that this Bill is contrary to . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has the floor, and members from the other two caucuses should give him the courtesy of listening.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were comments made that this Bill is very detrimental to rural Alberta. It might be in some sections. I don't know all of rural Alberta, but in my constituency in the town of St. Paul we had four school boards that were operating in a town of 5,000, including some

population of the county in the area, and also the new francophone school board. So in a town of 5,000 we were looking at five school boards.

I think it was about time that something was done to reduce the number of school boards in this province. The people in my community were not too opposed to it. They took the challenge right off the bat. They started negotiation, and I think they set an example for the rest of Alberta. We have a Protestant separate school board in St. Paul, which there are very few of in this province. We have a public Catholic school board. We have a regional school district No. 1, which is the only district in Alberta that operates under that role, and then we have a mixture of all the ethnic backgrounds that you can think of. The Ukrainian, the French, and the aboriginals are probably the largest ethnic backgrounds, but we have people of all races, colour, religion, and creed in our community. These four school boards got together and made a proposal to the Minister of Education, and on March 19 there was a news release prepared by the Minister of Education, and I quote from the news release. The minister said:

I am extremely pleased to be able to approve in principle this first major step in the process to reduce the number of school boards in Alberta.

This was the initiative put forward by the four school boards in my community.

I don't think that all of rural Alberta is opposed to this Bill. There might be some that are very opposed, but I know that the communities that I represent are in support of the Bill. They realize that the amalgamation, or regionalization, is not without pain, but they're prepared to work at it and make it work. I think they're making such progress that they'll probably be prepared to amalgamate by September 1 of 1994 for the next school year.

As far as religion is concerned, the Protestant separate school board had some of their religion taught there, some type of Sunday school that they used in their school. This will be preserved. The boards are entering into some agreements wherein the public Catholic will continue to offer Catholic education in their school, and the Protestant separate will continue to offer their own style of religion in their own school. I think that they're protecting what they had before. Instead of operating four school boards - before they all wanted their secretary, their superintendent, their offices, and all their little empire things - these things are all going to be amalgamated under one. There are going to be tremendous savings that are going to be shown in that. Their estimated cost of operation overhead for administration office and superintendent's wages are going to be in the neighbourhood of 8 percent of the total budget, which I think is quite acceptable to that style of operation. So I'm quite pleased to see that they've taken the challenge and are proceeding with that.

### 9:30

I also like different sections in the Bill, and one is section 6, which says that "a board may establish an attendance area for a school," and certain students in that area should go to that school unless there's some serious decision that they have to attend another school.

I was raised on a farm. At our farm there were three different school buses driving by. My sisters and brothers were going to one school. There was a neighbour that wanted to go to the St. Paul school. Another one wanted to go to the Glendon school. There were three school buses for about 10, 15 years that were crossing the same road picking up families and going to totally different schools. I think this was just a very costly procedure. Some of these schools were 15 miles away. The closest one was four miles away. People just crisscrossed with the school bus and

traveled half the county to attend the school of their choice and often to attend a school that offered the same education as their neighbouring school, because they showed preference of students, had friends there or family links. I don't think we can afford these things.

If you look at section 7, I'm pleased to see that it's going to be the obligation of the principal of a school to evaluate the teachers employed in that school and not to provide for evaluation by an outside evaluator or outside forces. I think this is a step in the right direction.

Under section 9, I one hundred percent support that section that says "a student may be suspended or expelled" from a school. I think in school we have to have some authority that is exercised by the teacher and the teaching staff. We have to go back to the basic principles of respect and discipline, and that's what is lacking often. We talked about young offenders last week. We talked about all kinds of problems in their society, but the discipline starts in the school system. It starts at home to start with and carries on to the school system. In order to have discipline, I think you have to authorize the teaching staff that they can have authority in the school.

Under section 24, the charter schools, I have some problem with that one. I would advise the minister to be very cautious as we move to private schools to keep evaluating this and to monitor that very carefully. If there's a problem that develops, we should look at this part of the Act in the future. I'm not totally convinced that this is a good step.

#### **Point of Order Decorum**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, rising on a point of order.

MR. BENIUK: I was just wondering if we were in Committee of the Whole because I noticed the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was sitting in another person's chair. He was sitting in the Member for Calgary . . . He left the House, but he was sitting in another member's chair.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, we will watch for that.  
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 94 I see no problem with the way that superintendents are going to be hired. I think that if they were appointed by the minister solely that would not be acceptable. Under this section the school boards will be able to recommend a superintendent. If a Catholic school board has a Catholic superintendent with the proper qualifications, I have no fear that the minister should appoint this person. If he doesn't, I'm sure he's going to have to bear the flak from this community, as long as the person is well qualified.

I'd like to go to the collection of taxes. There seems to be a lot of concern about collection of taxes. I was mayor of the town of St. Paul for seven years, and I remember that at the annual meetings of the AUMA every single year we had a motion that came to the floor that asked the government to take away the responsibility of the municipal government to collect school taxes. Every single urban municipality in this province was not happy to have to collect school taxes, to receive a requisition from the school board and have to collect it on their tax bill and then be requisitioned by the school board. I think that most municipal governments, if not all, will be very pleased to see relief from this burden of collecting those taxes. When we made a resolution at

the AUMA convention, it was always suggested that either the government or the school boards themselves collect the taxes, because the elected officials of urban municipalities felt they were always blamed by the public when there was a rise of taxes, and they had nothing to do with it because it was a requisition from another board. I think this is going to be quite acceptable to urban municipalities, and it's going to be quite acceptable to the public at large.

As far as the government collecting all the taxes, it will alleviate the difference of mill rates between two schools in the same jurisdiction. In my community if the Protestant separate was two mills lower, most people would come into the town office, sign a release card, and have their taxes transferred to the separate school. When they had to make some expansion and their mill rate went a mill or two above the Catholic public school, people would move back to the Catholic public school. They really didn't move back and forth because of religious reasons. Often they moved back and forth because of financial reasons. One year they could save \$50 on their tax being with the Protestants, and one year they could save \$50 being with the Catholics, and they kept coming back and forth. It created an enormous amount of work for the municipality, because you have to account for all these changes. If the taxes are collected by the government and it's the same mill rate all across the province, it will alleviate these differences, also for the rich boards and the poor boards. The rural area in Lac La Biche has really poor boards, and they've been struggling for years and years. Then we see other boards in this province who have surplus money, and they're really floating with money. I think that by having an equalized mill rate across the province, it's going to give a more equal education to all the students in this province.

I would urge all members of the House to support this Bill. I think it's a workable document. I'm sure that after we've implemented all the regionalization in this Bill, if there's a part of the Bill that creates grave concern, then this House in the future will be ready to look at it and rectify any problems that may exist. So I would urge all members to support the Bill.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the members opposite for their very warm welcome as I stood up. Their applause was most gratifying.

Mr. Speaker, I must speak against this Bill, and I do so for a number of reasons. As I look at these principles as the main provisions of this Bill, there are contradictions that I have a great deal of difficulty with, and I would look forward to the Minister of Education explaining how these contradictions will assist establishing a better school system than what we now have. On the one hand, we have a school system where the boards are not going to be able to raise any money. They will be able, once every three years by plebiscite, to raise 3 percent, but the minister has veto powers. He has to give approval how that money will be spent. So in actual fact what we have here are people elected to a board who have no power over how much money they will be able to spend and how they will be able to spend it without the approval of the minister.

Now, once any company, once any board, once any institution loses control over its revenue, it becomes extremely vulnerable, which leads me to the second point. The number of boards will be reduced from about 140 to 60, and the reduction in the number of boards has some merit, providing the geography and the size of the boundaries of the new school board areas are logical. But

as we have a situation where the number of school boards is going to be diminished and where the collection of taxation by school boards becomes zero, except for that 3 percent – and the minister has approval over how the money is spent – we find that at the same time there will be created two other institutions. One is called a charter school. So while the existing school board is being reduced in its power, within these boards will be created pockets of mini school boards, because they will be headed by things called school council authorities.

What you have is the school board being the meat in the sandwiches. It's being attacked, if I could use that word, by the provincial level and being attacked from below through the creation of charter schools, by a potential voucher system and parents and other people getting involved in an area which now is more the jurisdiction of a school board. So the school board becomes very powerless.

**9:40**

As the Deputy Premier is an historian, I think he would appreciate it if I referred to how I would perceive the school board being. It would be like in the course of a battle, the human shield before an army. They will be the most vulnerable. If people are unhappy, this government will say, "It's the school board's fault." If the people below are unhappy, they will blame the school board. The charter schools will blame the school board. The school council authorities will blame the school board. The provincial government and the lower groups, lower being the charter schools and the school councils, will make it very difficult for the people on the school board to operate. They'll be powerless, they'll have no control over money, and they'll be under constant attack. To be very blunt, a person would have to be a masochist to want to run for the school board.

For the benefit of the minister of agriculture, Mr. Speaker, I noticed that last day when I mentioned that I had agricultural roots, he was overjoyed and stood up and spoke. I would like to point out to him that my brother had been for over 20 years on the Lac La Biche school board, most of that time as the chair. He passed away in the early '80s, but if he checks, it will be confirmed without any problems by the people in the Lac La Biche area. So I am aware of some of the problems that have existed in the school boards in the poorer areas of this province.

As I looked at this Bill, I flagged a few problems that show that being on a school board will be very, very difficult. But what concerns me also is the fact that a great deal of power is going to be centred at the top, at the provincial level, and I really am concerned about that. One extreme example of how far this can go is if you look at any state that has had a totalitarian past. It's mind boggling how important it is for there to be a separate level like a school board level to insulate the students and the local communities from total control by a higher authority like the federal government or a provincial government, the provincial government being our case.

To reduce the number of school boards, like I mentioned, is commendable in certain areas, but if the objective is to be more efficient, then one has to take a look to make sure that the geographic boundaries of the new school board are logical. I question, having sat through a few meetings, if all the school boards that are being born are logically being created to be efficient. There will be some very serious problems, and I hope that the minister will be flexible to take a look at these geographic boundaries to make them more efficient as time progresses, with the consent of the local people.

The creation of a charter school is very interesting because while the Catholic school board feels it is under attack – and it is

losing a great deal – the creation of charter schools is being created to target a specific interest group or a number of interest groups. So what we have is that while the established school system is becoming vulnerable, special interest groups are being allowed under this legislation to start to flourish. This imbalance is going to create some very serious problems. What even compounds it more is that within both the public and the Catholic school systems, charter schools will be created, further weakening both the Catholic and the public schools.

If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Speaker, in the Bill or in some other literature the minister had passed over earlier – I believe it's in the Bill – the charter schools will have funds allocated for both operating and capital. So we have a situation here where the provincial government controls all the money. It will decide how much money the school board gets, and it will decide how much money the charter school gets for capital and operating. This will create additional conflict at that level. I fear that in the end what will be happening in this province is that the school boards will cease to exist, and we will end up with a provincial authority and below that provincial authority will be your charter schools and other groups like the school council level, et cetera. The school boards, if they do exist, will become virtually powerless, and they will end up acting as a shield.

Now, I notice that the Minister of Health feels that this is humorous. I can assure her that if she went into a certain – I gather your smile and giggle were directed to . . .

**AN HON. MEMBER:** She would never smile at you; don't worry.

**MR. BENIUK:** She never smiles? Then history was made.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation. We're dealing with two school systems, the Catholic and the public, that work. What's going to happen is that we are dismantling a very important level, the school board level, by taking power away, giving massive power at the provincial level, and allowing certain institutions to be created at the level below the school board – like I mentioned, the charter schools being a classic example and the school council authority being the other example – that will nibble away at what's left of the school board. To visualize the implications if this insulation level that now exists, which is the school board, is taken away, the total control of the education system in the hands of one person, the minister, is mind boggling. Every state that has gone that route has resulted in a school system that leaves much to be desired.

Our school system is far superior, and I would encourage – I'll just make a comment – that to realize the full impact of this, the minister should go over to the republics of the former Soviet Union, and I assure you that he will understand what I'm saying. I have been overwhelmed by how many books over there had "Marx and Lenin said."

It's one thing for this government to say that what it is doing is reform, but keep in mind that the reforms, to use their word, that they are putting in place will carry forth for decades. These ministers will not be in power. Governments change. Democracy is very, very fragile. This has been proven in almost every country in the world.

The implications of centralizing the education system by taking away taxation from the school boards sets in motion a chain of events that will be very, very difficult to stop. The members opposite might be optimists, but I can assure you that they will be questioning their optimism before too long. You cannot do the things that they're doing without major repercussions. To zero in as they are doing and justify everything by trying to reduce the costs when there is no guarantee that the costs will be reduced in

this case means, I suggest to you, that there are other criteria, and the number one criterion is to centralize the school system totally under provincial authority, wiping out the powers of the school board.

The superintendents are a classic example. The superintendents carry out instructions from the school boards. Now the minister wants control of this crucial administrative level. So it's not only that the school boards' powers are being eliminated; it is the fact that what one could call the chief executive officer, the person that's going to be running the day-to-day affairs of the school board, of the district is going to be completely under the control of one man who has the power to hire and fire if that person displeases him. So not only do we have a situation where revenue is taken away from the school boards, where they are totally dependent on the minister; we also have a situation where the people carrying out the school board administration are under the control of the minister. These are very serious concerns, and I would appreciate it very much if the minister would address them.

### 9:50

I would like to ask a crucial question. There might be another Bill a year or two years from now, but I am convinced that the end product of this entire legislation will be to bring about the evolution or, if you want, the revolution, as the Premier has referred to his administration as revolutionary – the objective will be to dismantle the present school board system and to create a unitary school system that is totally under the control of the minister. Whether there are Catholic and public segments to it or just one would not change the end product, the end product being total control by the minister through his deputy minister over every single school in this province, with in the end no middle elected body protecting the people at the local level.

In a province of this size, Mr. Speaker, this is crucial, because what we have is a vast geography. From the Northwest Territories to the U.S. border is a long distance, and local criteria vary. In some areas what's good in how to deliver education to the people would be awkward in other areas: urban, rural, highly populated rural, low populated rural, et cetera. So local school boards have played a very important part, making sure that the interests of the local people are in fact protected and that the best education is provided at the local level.

It is one thing for this government to ensure that there is equal funding for all students across this province. It is another thing to create such a centralized system that one man, regardless of how good his intentions are – I am not saying that the minister doesn't have good intentions. I am saying that one man will have too much power, or one woman if a woman becomes Minister of Education. The point is that one individual will have too much power. The deputy minister will have too much power over the education of every single person in this province. That includes the textbooks that are going to be used. That includes how the teachers are hired, who is hired, the superintendents that administer the school system: the whole works. To give so much power to a central authority I find very disturbing, especially having seen the consequences of such a centralized system in eastern Europe. I am sure that if I had visited some other countries in other parts of the world, the same would apply.

I am firmly committed that a decentralized system, properly funded, would be far superior to what this Bill envisions. When you look at what the school council is going to do, it sounds, on one hand, very democratic. On the other hand, it totally undermines the power of the school board.

The charter schools. I mean, you can have within the present school system schools that cater to the special needs of individ-

uals. The charter schools are in fact, I suggest to you, a creation to nibble away at the powers of the school board. I repeat and I stress this, because I am convinced that what we're seeing here is a Bill that sets in motion events from the provincial level, from the local level to weaken and eliminate the school boards.

This Bill I find very regressive. I would urge virtually everybody on both sides of the House to take a very serious look at the long-term consequences of the events that are being set in motion. I am trying to be very objective, and I really would appreciate it if the minister would stand up and explain why my comments are not right on. I am convinced that my analysis is correct. I would urge the minister to, at the present time, respond to my concerns.

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

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to stand and participate in the debate on second reading on Bill 19. Of course, our purpose in debating second reading of this Bill is the principle of Bill 19.

I want to open my remarks this evening, Mr. Speaker, by suggesting that there is probably no greater debate that we can hold in this Assembly than a debate that deals with our public education system. I think all members agree that our public education system is in fact a very dynamic system. It is constantly undergoing change. It is constantly having to face new worlds, new challenges. We see that yearly; we see it daily in how schools and the education system have to respond to the changes that occur in our society.

It is very appropriate that the government comes forward with amendments to the School Act to attempt to stay contemporary with what public education has to do to serve the residents of Alberta and in fact how it does that. So from that perspective it's important that we do see tabled occasionally in the House amendments to the School Act and other pieces of legislation that affect public education in our province. The difficulty I have, Mr. Speaker, with this Bill is that it does not appear to address those kinds of changes that members felt, that their constituents felt were the changes we needed to see to make our public education system work better, work more efficiently, and be a proper vehicle for all citizens of this province, for the children of this province going through the public education system.

There seems to be a trend these days, Mr. Speaker, for various organizations to attack the public school system and to take the position that our public school system is no longer functional and is no longer effective. I think that probably there is some valid criticism of the public education system. There are probably things in that system that are not working well, but certainly there are things in that system that are working extremely well. I daresay that most of us in this Assembly are beneficiaries of a public education system, whether it's in this province or other parts of Canada.

We have to, then, go back and I think take a look at why and how we get to the position that we're in today. We have to realize and appreciate that it wasn't the students and it wasn't the parents that brought about changes in education. It was the Department of Education. It was through consultants and it was through advisers and it was through bureaucrats that various changes in education were brought about, were implemented, and – you know, let's be frank – were experimented on, because we felt that they would be better approaches to public education in our province. We saw open schools and then closed schools. We saw write an exam whenever you feel like writing an exam; if you feel good today, you write an exam. We've gone through all of these various processes. Some worked and some didn't work.

Teachers who were in the schools, frontline workers, administrators in the schools saw what worked, saw what didn't work, recognized that the process is dynamic.

**10:00**

We've had to now, unfortunately – not that we've had to, but we have turned teachers into not only teachers but mentors and pastors and nurses and psychologists and advisers. They have to be so many things to the students that they teach now, Mr. Speaker, that it's no wonder there's a stress and a strain on the system that requires some attention, certainly by legislators, on how these changes can be made and how the system can become much more functional and serve the citizens on a broad basis.

The difficulty with Bill 19, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, is that it does not in any way attempt to deal with the difficulties that are facing the public education system. That's from an overall perspective, because there are parts of Bill 19 that in fact do that. We have heard members from both sides of the House speak in favour of moving towards a much more equitable funding arrangement. Clearly, that's something that is supported by all members. We have to find ways to remove the disparity between boards that have greater funds and boards that have lesser funds and try and equalize that out.

So there's no question that moving toward that process is important. But we already had a process, or we had an agreement, at least in principle, amongst the Alberta School Boards Association members. While they may not have all been totally in agreement with it, there was some harmonization with an approach as to how equitable funding could come about without having to do it through this top-down approach, this centralization, and this tax grab that we see appearing in Bill 19.

We had a process in place. It was accepted by those who are on the front line in the School Boards Association, but that was rejected. Now we see this process coming down in Bill 19, so we have an issue that we've got to deal with. It was dealt with; it has been dealt with previously. It's been dealt with over the last few years. Those processes were rejected, and now we get this centralized, top-down, power grab approach to the question, the issue, the difficulty with equitable funding for various boards around the province of Alberta. Bill 19 does not, in my view, in my estimation, deal with this in an appropriate fashion.

We have, Mr. Speaker, heard a number of people talk about the fact that they don't think this Bill 19, the government's policy and direction on public education, is part of an overall plan. Well, I think we've also heard other people in the Assembly in debates on Bill 19 suggest that there is clearly a plan. I support those who say that there is a plan. I don't think there's any question that the plan which has been illustrated by the tax grab and the power grab and the seizing control of public education is clearly an effort and a path that this government is taking to create a two-tier education system in this province. It is being done deliberately to set up a two-tier system. It is being done deliberately to create or promote the proliferation of private schools in the province of Alberta. It is deliberate in its attempts to undermine the whole structure of public education in the province of Alberta. The essence of that is why this Bill cannot be supported. It's because of the fact that it is deliberately attempting and setting the stage to undermine public education in the province of Alberta; no question about it. No question about it.

Everything that this Bill does will undermine how the public education system will function, so parents looking for a better education for their children will not find it from a government that is supporting and promoting and improving public education. The parents of those children will see a government that essentially is

saying and sending out a message that says: "Don't send your kids to public school. We'll set up a mechanism for you to send your kids to private school if you want a better education. We'll give a basic education in public education, but anything more than that we can provide for you in a private school." Mr. Speaker, I think that's exactly where Bill 19 takes us, and it is not promoting the improvement of public education, which we all recognize is necessary. Public education must be improved in the province. Our constituents tell us that on an ongoing basis, but as I've said, it is a dynamic process and we do have to do that on an ongoing basis. This does not do that. It in fact undermines public education in the processes and in the provisions of Bill 19.

I have already spoken, Mr. Speaker, about the centralization of power in this Bill, where in fact the minister will decide the dollars that come in and how the dollars will go out. We have heard other members talk about the regulations that appear in the Bill and the fact that we don't have draft forms of regulations to understand exactly how a lot of these will be implemented. Even in terms of how the dollars will be spent out of the new Alberta school foundation fund, the dollars will go out of that fund as decided by regulation through the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Nothing to tell us how this is going to happen. Now, presumably there are negotiations going on between the government and the Catholic boards on sort of essentially moving back to a per student grant process. We don't know whether or not that's in fact the case, and we can't know as we debate this particular Bill at second reading stage.

The other examples that other members have spoken very eloquently about are specifically the school councils and the charter schools. The difficulty, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that the school councils in the form that they're presently in seem to work very well. It leaves it to the parents of a particular school to decide whether or not they wish to participate in some decision-making processes by setting up the school council and in fact liaising with the school on matters that affect the school. Under our new section 17 in Bill 19, every school in the province of Alberta will in fact be required to have a school council, so it's no longer a volunteer process. Parents are no longer entitled to volunteer to participate in their child's education. Now parents, in some form or another which we don't know, will be forced to form a school council by this government in exercising its power over the community. It's interesting that in the Bill it says, "The majority of the members of a school council shall be parents of students enrolled." Of course, it says nothing about the minority. Now, that's consistent with what was in the School Act as it stands now. But again, how do we in fact force parents to become volunteers? Well, the way this is supposed to work is that the regulations – and in fact they're ministerial regulations; they're not even regulations by order in council – would allow the minister to decide whether or not these folks will be elected or appointed. Are they going to be forced to run for election? I guess what will have to happen is that they'll have to be appointed by the minister. I wonder what the appointment process will be. Certainly nothing in the Bill tells us what that process is going to be.

We also see that the role of the principal in the new clause (c.1) in section 15 is to "ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister." Well, that's supposedly part of the responsibility of the principal under the Bill, but in fact as we see in the school council provisions, that's the responsibility of the parents. In the school council provisions in this Bill we now see that parents take full responsibility, and presumably full liability if they don't do what

the Act says they must and they shall do. Parents now take the full, total, complete responsibility for the operation of that school. Is that what's intended? I think another hon. member indicated that that's not what parents have asked for in terms of their role in school management. They want to be part of a process, but they don't want to take the full responsibility for operating that school, which is what the Bill says has to happen.

#### 10:10

How do they do that? Well, the Bill in section 17, under school council, says here's how you're going to do this: you're going to make and implement the policies, and you're going to decide the nature of the programs, and you're going to decide how the money is expended, and you're going to set the educational standards, and you're going to manage the schools. That's what it says, section 17(4). That's how parents in the community are going to decide how this is going to happen.

Now, the Bill does not, of course, set out how in fact this will happen. It may not happen that way. In fact, the regulations may establish a process, may establish a structure that has some checks and balances built into it, but under the Bill as it stands right now, the door is wide open for the minister to use his complete, total, full, and ultimate power to control every school council in the province of Alberta. That's what we see in the Bill under school councils, and obviously all Albertans are going to have some serious concerns about leaving it that vague, leaving it that wide open as to how school councils will operate. That's a serious, serious concern.

We have heard other members speak of the serious concern that Albertans have about the charter schools. You know, the one component of that, Mr. Speaker, that caught my eye under charter schools is that we had been told previously and we were to be convinced that charter schools would not have any opportunity, would not have any ability to restrict enrolment in their schools. Well, we see in Bill 19 under the proposed section 24.4 that the charter as it's written must now include a statement as to the "conditions, if any, respecting the enrolment of students in the school." So, in fact, the charter can be selective. The charter here says that we can build private schools; we can have private schools in the province of Alberta that are publicly funded. The charter school provisions set out how in fact the charter school can be set up so long as the minister is of the opinion – and of course he will be – that the school will have support in the community. We have no idea what "community" means, and "the program" – it doesn't say curriculum; it says program – "to be offered . . . will potentially improve the learning of students as it is measured by the Minister. Of course, the minister is going to measure it to say, "Of course you can have your charter school." It opens the door for tremendous potential abuse in setting up charter schools, and that's what I'm referring to when I say that what this Bill does is undermine completely the integrity and the accountability of the public school system in this province as we know it.

Mr. Speaker, on that basis, I would like to move an amendment to the second reading of Bill 19. I propose that we amend by striking out all words after the word "that" and that we substitute:

Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, not be read a second time because the Assembly finds the Bill to undermine the integrity and accountability of the public education system in Alberta.

It is my pleasure indeed to move an amendment to the second reading of Bill 19, and I look forward to debate on the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak in support of this amendment at the second reading stage of Bill 19. I think we've now had an opportunity to hear members from all parts of this province outline concerns they have with this particular initiative in Bill 19, and I think it's worth while to focus a little bit on the feedback that we've got and certainly I've got as the MLA for the downtown Calgary area.

I've had the advantage of attending not just meetings in my particular constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, because in fact we have a fairly small population in terms of school-age population. We have more seniors than young families. I've also had the opportunity of traveling to schools in Calgary-Montrose, in Calgary-Cross, in other constituencies and participating in those meetings. I guess what I wanted to share with members was some of the frustration, some of the feedback that I've received. I want to be clear that we're not talking about a special interest group, we're not talking necessarily about teachers, we're not talking about school trustees, although I don't think it's fair to disparage their perspective and their points of view because they are beliefs genuinely held. What we hear and certainly what I hear – and many members, including government members, have attended some of these discussions, debates, meetings with me – is that parents are fearful of where this government is taking us in terms of education. I think the concern that parents have is heightened when they look at what evidence we do have from New Zealand. I mentioned the other day some of the commentary, some of the analysis that's been done in New Zealand by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. In fact, I note there's a representative of that organization currently in this city.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I read the analysis in the *Herald*, too, and the *ATA News*.

MR. DICKSON: Well, some of us don't do our research in the newspaper, unlike the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. We prefer to meet resource people and get the information firsthand. I'd invite all members, and particularly the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, to find out what happened to New Zealand when they decided to charge into something equivalent to the charter school model we're talking about here.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You can always go to Texas instead, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, Texas has some interesting experiences too, Mr. Speaker, and I'd be delighted to talk about that, but I haven't had the benefit of speaking to a Texas educator or a parent who is knowledgeable about the problems of the Texas school reform. I have had the chance, and I have constituents – I can think of a couple of teachers who moved from New Zealand. One of the prime motivating factors, one of the prime reasons was that they became very disenchanted with the public school system as it was being revised and reformed in New Zealand. To their considerable dismay, they find that they've come to Alberta and they now see that the provincial government is charging at a frantic pace down exactly the same road of reform. [interjection]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

The comment's been made by others so I can't claim authorship, but one is put in mind of sheep when we talk about New Zealand. That's certainly what we seem to be witnessing in this Chamber, particularly because we have so many members of the government party who have been getting enormous feedback from their constituents, I expect. I can't speak for all constituencies,



but I know that the Calgary MLAs, the MLAs for Calgary-Fish Creek and Calgary-Montrose, are getting the same kind of feedback from their constituents that I am. I'm expecting that at some point in this debate those members will stand up and engage in debate on this Bill. I'm anxious. I'm anxious to hear from the Member for Three Hills-Airdrie, because I've had a chance to talk to educators and to parents in the Airdrie area as well. I know that what's interesting, Mr. Speaker, is those parents . . .

**Point of Order  
Imputing Motives**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Fish Creek is rising on a point of order.

*10:20*

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, a point on 23(i). I take exception to the fact that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is guessing what is going on in my constituency. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. That would pertain if there were some false or unavowed motives that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was describing in you. All he's doing is saying that he imagines that you are receiving these, but that's hardly a motive.

MRS. FORSYTH: He doesn't know what's going on in my constituency.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: That's then a matter of debate, and I would think you would have opportunity to address that.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually glad for the intervention from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek because it's important to say that I get in my constituency office calls not just from residents of downtown Calgary, but I get calls from people that live in Calgary-Fish Creek, and I get calls from people in Calgary-Cross. You know what's interesting?

AN HON. MEMBER: None from Medicine Hat yet, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Not yet, not yet.

What's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, is that one of the frustrations that these people communicate to me is that they've been to their own MLA. I say, "So what reaction do you get from your MLA?" There's a litany of excuses they get from their government MLA, but it often comes down to the fact that: "We're doing as best we can. We're communicating these concerns to the Minister of Education. We're communicating these concerns to the cabinet. We're talking to the Premier. We're hopeful that on the Catholic school issue there can be some change, some revision." And so on. You know, these constituents end up calling my office and my colleagues in Calgary-West and Calgary-North West because they can get no measure of satisfaction. They can get no measure of satisfaction from the government MLAs. You know, I've been to forums where I've listened to government private members. I don't question their genuineness when they've said this. They've said, "You know, this isn't a done deal yet." At that point they would say: "We haven't seen the legislation. Wait until the legislation is introduced. You've got concerns about Catholic education in this city? Wait until you see the Bill. You've got concerns in terms of where we're going with public education? Wait until you see the Bill."

Well, the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we see the Bill. It's as bad as we might have expected, and barring some sort of last-minute revision by the government and by the Minister of Education, what we're going to get is exactly what parents, educators, and Albertans are fearful of. At the same time – and this is the great irony – that the hon. Premier and the Deputy Premier travel around the country touting Alberta and touting the Alberta advantage, they must recognize that the Alberta advantage is little other than the fact that we have the best educated work force in Canada. Now, that's something I would think that all Albertans would be proud of. It's certainly something that I would think all MLAs should be proud of. Yet in effect what we're doing now with Bill 19: we are seriously undermining, we're seriously compromising, that very public education system that has provided us with the Alberta advantage. In perhaps the ultimate irony what we've got is that the one marketing feature that ought to be most important is the thing that we're in fact dismantling.

Mr. Speaker, another observation. I started out by saying I wanted to talk about the feedback I get from Calgaryans and from Albertans. I had an opportunity to attend a workshop in the Chinese Cultural Centre in downtown Calgary. In fact, it was the Calgary Chinese community project. This was an effort to do what had been done in Vancouver in the past in Chinatown. In the Chinese community in Calgary there's something in the order of almost 200 different organizations, clubs, associations. There was an effort to bring representatives of these myriad organizations together and see if it were possible to identify a common interest so the Chinese community in Calgary could speak as much as possible with one voice. I was in a group where the focus was education. That was the topic we looked at. With the men and women in my group we talked about the values that were important for our children, what these people wanted to see in the education system. Now, there were a number of people in my group educated in Hong Kong, in Taiwan, in Malaysia. Perhaps not surprising, at least to me, a number of the parents, a number of the people in my group expressed concern that our public school system they felt wasn't rigorous enough when it came to maths and sciences in particular. They thought that was something that we ought to do better in in this province. I guess I'd heard that comment before, so that didn't surprise me.

What surprised me, I guess, to some extent was that although there was agreement in this workshop group I was in about the need for a bigger focus on maths and sciences, there was also an appreciation that one of the things we do very well in the Alberta school system is the fact that we do things to promote the self-esteem of students. We actually treat it as a concern, as a goal, as a priority in our public school system to give children a good sense of themselves and a good feeling of self-esteem to the extent that's possible in a school, outside the family. I was impressed by that, because what I heard these people saying – and I assumed they were all parents. They were certainly all businesspeople in Calgary with a keen stake in where we're going with public education. What I was impressed with was that although these people wanted to see changes in our education system and they wanted to see perhaps more rigorous expectations in maths and sciences, they didn't want our public school system – when I say "public," I mean separate and public combined – to lose that focus on giving children a good sense of self-esteem and worth.

I guess that put to me a kind of perspective that I've seen and I've heard of in studies and surveys, Mr. Speaker. Often what you find if you ask people, "What do you think about the state of education in this province?" or "What do you think about the state of public education in Canada?" people will say, "Huh, it's in a shambles; it isn't working; it's got to be torn down and rebuilt;

it's a mess." Then you ask these same respondents, "Well, how do you feel about the quality of education being provided in your neighbourhood school?" What's interesting – and this is in a variety of studies. It's been replicated in all different areas. What's significant that comes from the study is that people say, "Well, you know, we're pretty happy with the education we get in the neighbourhood school; we're pretty satisfied with the kind of education that we think our local school is giving our children."

I think that since to a large extent Bill 19 is an attempt to respond to a perceived dissatisfaction with the public school system in Alberta, we be mindful of that. It may well be, Mr. Speaker, that the public school system of course can be revised, can be strengthened. There are things that can be done to make it more effective and to make it a better system to produce better educated young Albertans. But let's be clear before we totally destroy the public education system we now have: it has many strengths. I regret that there are not enough Albertans speaking about the strengths we have in the public school system. You know, I daresay that most of the 83 people sitting in this Chamber are the product of the public school system in this province. [interjection] There may be a few exceptions. Well, you know, I hear one member say that maybe that's proof of the need to change the system. Well, I don't agree. I have a lot of respect for every one of the 82 other members in this Chamber.

**10:30**

MR. N. TAYLOR: Bless their little pointed heads.

MR. DICKSON: Even without the more colourful description that my colleague from Redwater would apply.

Mr. Speaker, the point I'm trying to make is that we can get caught up in Bill 19, looking at the detail, and we can look at certain principles in terms of separate school funding. We can look at principles involved with school superintendents, but at the end of the day what we have to weigh is: is our public education system going to be stronger or weaker? Is it going to be advantaged, or is it going to be more adversely affected? That's why not only do I support this particular amendment, but I encourage all members to recognize it. What we are indeed dealing with here is the integrity and accountability of the public education system in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I've said in this House before that I have a keen interest in education and I'd been involved in a parent advisory council in a public junior high school in Calgary. It's one that the Member for Calgary-Bow in fact has come and spoken at, and those parents appreciated that. When I look at those parents and that particular junior high school, how tremendously involved the parents are, those parents to me represent one of the strongest commitments you're ever going to find from a group in the public school system, yet those people don't want to run their own school. What they want to do is partnership. What they want to do is work in a collaborative effort with the school principal. They want to work in a collaborative effort with the counselors and the teachers in that school. When I look at Bill 19, I don't see that kind of effort promoted. I don't see that kind of effort expanded or encouraged. Indeed, what I see is that that kind of effort is going to be made more difficult.

The other point I want to raise – and to some extent this is where I put on my hat as the opposition human rights critic. I think we sometimes make a mistake when we talk about education and we see education as being targeted to meet the needs or perceived needs of business, of employers. I understand that, and I don't diminish the importance of wanting to produce young

people that can be accommodated as easily as possible into the economy of this province. After all, we want these people to be working. Alberta needs their energy and their talents. But you know, Mr. Speaker, in doing that, it's important that we also recognize that the community has some needs and that it puts some demands.

The public school system is absolutely the very best vehicle to try and foster tolerance and understanding of children that come from different backgrounds, families with different beliefs. I think it would be a tragic thing for not just education, not just for the young people, but for the bigger Alberta community if what in fact we have is a balkanization and what we look at is a school system with a small, underresourced public education system and then a series of islands of charter schools, of private schools, of home schooling. What we will have achieved, whatever the academic qualifications are of those graduates that come out of that school system, is that the community will have been disadvantaged. It will have been disadvantaged because we will have allowed children to be separated on the basis of the economic circumstances of their parents. I see this happening already in Calgary, where it becomes unattractive for many parents – they see a problem with sending their children to inner-city schools. So what they will do under Bill 19 is start sending their children to charter schools, to private schools, to other schools not in the area, and what you're going to find . . . [interjections] I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm just trying to finish up here, but we've got the government Whip that's so anxious to engage in debate, I expect that he'll get up as soon as I step down.

I think what we're talking about . . . [interjections] Sometimes one assumes that the member that makes the most noise is the Whip. I stand corrected.

The point I was trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to promote tolerance and understanding in our public school system.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-McCall, are you speaking?

MR. SOHAL: No, sir, I'm not.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. In going back and forth in debate, if you're standing at your place, then one is assuming that you're going to speak.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely correct.

I would very much like to speak to this particular reasoned amendment to Bill 19. This amendment finds that the Bill undermines the integrity and the accountability of the public education system in Alberta. It certainly undermines the integrity of the public education system, because the government is attempting to take a firm, centralizing hold on our educational system. I think this is particularly deplorable, because this Bill flies in the face of our traditional democratic principles of local governance, where local boards are truly accountable to the local voters. We elected them. What this Bill is intending to do is change that immeasurably, to such an extent that we probably won't recognize it anymore.

Mr. Speaker, we've had this local governance, this democratic right to elect our local governors, for years and years; I think in this particular area, around 100 years. In other countries it has been much longer in existence, of course. Now, with a snap of the fingers this government intends to take it away. We do strongly oppose this erosion of local autonomy.

Now, this Bill is not, as some of the members on the other side have said, a much-needed change to the educational system in response to parental concerns and complaints. On the contrary, it does not deal at all with any improvements in education itself. It kind of takes away the governance, and if it takes away the governance, the financial ability to raise taxes, it also takes away the control that the local people used to have over their education. It does not solve any problems that are part and parcel of the educational system, education itself, Mr. Speaker. That is really sad, because it purports to do so. People, I think, might therefore take a second look at it and then of course find out that it doesn't solve any problems, really.

Let's look at some of the problems that it does not solve. Is it going to make students read and write better, those who have trouble learning that now? No, Mr. Speaker, it won't. Does it improve any lack of discipline that appears to be around in some cases? No, it does not. Does it replace the original way of dealing with people who could not measure up? Does it replace retention with anything that makes sense? It does not do that either, because the teachers are not provided with more resources to deal with the problems at hand, as you well know from your former life. We have subscribed wholeheartedly; we have embraced the notion of integration. It is good by itself, but there is a need for support people to help teachers deal with those particular students who need the extra help. That is falling by the wayside too, especially since this government has seen fit to cut funding on every front. I think that this particular Bill is not dealing with the problems at hand at all.

**10:40**

What it does do, however: under the guise of this Bill the government does grab an enormous amount of taxes that formerly were in the hands of the local governors of education. The government determined that it needed to change the tax structure. I find this amazing, because it did in its wisdom appoint a tax reform committee. I thought that was really good. But the tax reform committee came out with recommendations that have not been paid any attention to by the government. It doesn't even have the decency to wait until that committee has died and been buried. It has started already by proposing changes to the educational tax system. I find it amazing that they could do that. Why did they not include any changes to the educational tax part in other tax changes and take an overall look? Of course that would have meant a thorough study of the whole situation, and that's one thing that this government does not do. It does not plan very well. I hate to say that, because I do not like to be negative at all, but it does not plan very well. So this particular move, to grab hold of \$1.23 billion and a bit in change – which, by the way, was not at all recommended by this tax reform committee – is obviously not a move to straighten out the tax system. It is just another item to grab hold of the control over the educational system.

Now, typically, Mr. Speaker, the way this government seems to have moved is that they fire and then they aim. It kind of comes after the fact. It is putting the cart before the horse. In the case of the Catholics particularly, the Catholics were very much antagonized not just by the tax grab but also by the inherent loss of their particular democratic rights. That was all done even though the ASBA, the Alberta School Boards Association, came out with a proposal that gave the minister a pretty fair way out and was in fact supported by most of the boards. But, no, the government decided to steamroller ahead right over this particular proposal and thereby antagonized the Catholics very, very much. Total control. What really amazes me – it reminds me of the

government shooting itself in the foot. Actually, I think it's worse than that. I think they've shot themselves in the vitals, if they have any, Mr. Speaker.

The litany goes on of items that do not make sense. I have about 10 pages here, I think, in speaking to this particular amendment to Bill 19. When we get to the formula for the dispersion of the funds that will be acquired by the Minister of Education, we don't know of course how that's going to be done. The minister has promised that regulations will be drafted in due course, and therefore we have really no say over the matter. I find that particularly problematic, because the minister is asking us to trust his government, and I'm not sure that this government has demonstrated that it can in fact be evenhanded in dispersing favours or hospitals or you name it. There is really not a very good record when we think of Westlock and when we think of jails that are going to be closed in certain areas. The evenhandedness of the approach appears to be lacking greatly.

Now, I realize of course, Mr. Speaker, that the government is fond of saying, "That was then, and this is now," but I'm afraid that in terms of patronage, I think the then is still now unfortunately.

Mr. Speaker, I already spoke about the Catholic situation. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke about the Catholic situation, and I've said that they weren't very happy about the way things have been going. Now, apparently there has been an agreement finally arrived at after ruffling so many feathers. I would be very glad if there were an agreement, but I would like to see it first. After all, we've seen before that certain segments of the government caucus have turned down an agreement, and they might well be ready to do that again. I'm not sure how much clout the minister has in this regard.

On we go, Mr. Speaker, and we reach the appointment of the superintendent, which is of course an item that the Catholic as well as the public school boards are particularly unhappy with. The minister has assured us that the boards will in fact be able to select and appoint their own superintendents. All they need is prior written approval from the minister. Of course, we know that the minister is a reasonable man, and he will of course always go along with the wishes of the school boards. However, we would like to be certain of that just in case we get another minister who's less reasonable. We don't like to see that particular item there, quite frankly, nor the ability that the minister seems to be giving himself of firing the superintendent whenever he sees fit.

MR. SAPERS: Or judges. Whatever comes up.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Or judges, yes.

Again, for a less reasonable minister, it would be truly an enormous weapon in his hands. I think that in terms of the superintendent, who is supposed to be responsible to the minister or perhaps even worse to the deputy minister – I'm not sure – and at the same time is to be responsible to the boards, it is going to be probably of the same magnitude as a saviour or a sheep with five legs, whatever you want to call it. This is going to be really difficult for this person to do, to be responsible both to the minister as well as to the school board that has some say in electing him. I find that amazing. In speaking to several superintendents, they say that they would not cherish a job like that and under those circumstances, although they do realize that they have to eat, and that makes it even more problematic.

Then we go on to the school-based management, Mr. Speaker. I find the principle there laudable. I think everybody's aware that it has been used in several jurisdictions for quite a while, particularly in the city of Edmonton, which I'm somewhat familiar with. Also, it has been used in my neck of the woods by the Yellowhead school division. Under that particular form of governance, if I can call it that, I think the city of Edmonton can justifiably boast of having established a great number of reforms, almost charter schools, one could say, without actually a charter. They prove that those kinds of special schools are certainly possible under the existing system.

Now, the school council, though, again seems to contain a mass of contradictions. When I look at the way the Act has been written, a school council can "make and implement policies" in regard to "the nature of the programs offered." What's meant by the word "nature"? All schools are required to use programs in accordance with Alberta Education curriculum, so amplification here is needed in respect of the use of the term "nature." It could cover a multitude of sins of which we're not aware.

In regard to section 17(4)(c), the school council is to "make and implement policies" in regard to "educational standards to be met by students." This is unclear. You know, the minister appears to be setting standards, so what kinds of policies will the school councils be able to make in order to have the students meet those standards?

#### 10:50

At the same time, of course, the principal is charged with the same kinds of duties. The local school boards, the regional school boards are as well. So it gets to be a very confoundingly confusing situation, I think, for anyone to be involved in that kind of a situation. Having been a school administrator, I shudder at the thought of having to deal with all those various bodies, Mr. Speaker, as I pause to take a refreshing drink. Having truly found new energy out of the Edmonton water, I carry on undeterred.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I think of those school councils – the point has been made before, I think, but I haven't always listened attentively I'm afraid. The minister will mandate that these particular school councils are going to be established. We all know, I think, that there are lots of schools that don't have one as yet and unfortunately parents who are not necessarily interested; nevertheless the minister is going to mandate that. [Mr. Jonson left the Chamber] Just when I come to this crucial point – I hope you will be able to read my remarks.

One gets the feeling that the minister is bound and determined to mandate that certain parents will serve on these councils almost as a punishment for having wayward kids. Now, that would be a new thing indeed. Sentencing of wayward kids: that's what it is.

Then we get to discipline. Now, I really find this one puzzling, Mr. Speaker. When we get to the discipline section that is going to be changed, the proposal in Bill 19 is:

A student may be suspended or expelled

- (a) if in the opinion of the teacher, the principal or the board, as the case may be, the conduct of the student does not comply with section 7, or
- (b) for any other reason the teacher, the principal or the board, as the case may be, considers appropriate.

I'm sure that lots of teachers would love to have that particular power. Again, having laboured in the vineyard of education for many, many years, I do assure you that it is always good that the teacher, too, has a pause that refreshes before he would mete out that kind of punishment.

Mr. Speaker, I'm kind of . . . [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Could we let West Yellowhead continue to develop his . . .

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've lost my train of thought here.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure whether I'm reiterating or iterating, but I'm doing something right I think here. We were talking about discipline, I remember. Yes. I'm reiterating here, but I'll start iterating any time now.

This particular change I think, Mr. Speaker, is totally out of whack. I was just holding forth on the fact that teachers do need time out, so to speak, before meting out a judgment, before meting out punishment. It should not be left up to them to actually expel a student. That is what this Act says at the moment. I'll have the hon. members know that the way present legislation dictates, a teacher may suspend a student from his or her class for one class period. That's in the high school. Then a principal has the power to suspend a student from his or her school for five days maximum, and he or she may make the recommendation to the regional school board that that particular student be expelled. I think those are very good steps, because at every step of the way there is a process of appeal.

Where the problem has always lain – and I hope that the minister will eventually pick up on what I'm saying here, because where the problem has always rested is with the minister. The Minister of Education over the years, upon almost every occasion when an appeal has reached him, has sided with the appellant. Therefore regional school boards have decided that it doesn't make much sense to keep on expelling, if the minister overturns the decision. That has filtered down to the schools, hence the problem with discipline, in addition to that fact of course that society as a whole appears to have problems with discipline.

I still have a long way to go, so I shall carry on with regionalization. Mr. Speaker, I would like to be on record as having agreed with the idea of regionalization. I'm sure that both House leaders will be ecstatic about the fact that I'm supporting one small item of their Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have much more to say, but I'm sure I'll get a moment later. Thank you very much.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to take a few short moments to address this amendment, the amendment which suggests that the School Amendment Act, 1994, as presented is going to undermine the system. What we're talking about here is an absolute classic debate, a classic clash of values. I'm talking about the input here from the members opposite. I'm not talking about the input from the people of Alberta, which has been considerable.

#### Point of Order Decorum

MR. BENIUK: Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, have you got a . . .

MR. BENIUK: This is serious. The Member for Calgary-Shaw ripped up a piece of paper and threw it up in the air. If you check, it's all over the floor there. It's a disgrace to this House.

MR. DAY: I also just observed one of the member's own members throwing something at him, and there was no complaint on that one. So get your head together there.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Let's just have a little order in the House. If members continue to throw papers, which is totally out of order – it seems like everybody's accusing everybody else, so let's just not throw any more papers in the House.

The hon. Government House Leader.

### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're talking about here is a classic clash of philosophies, and it's been very evident with the remarks that have come out. Looking at the amendment, we can very clearly see what types of things the Liberals are concerned about from a philosophic point of view, and they need to be addressed, because that's what the amendment is all about.

The debate that we're hearing can be distilled down very distinctly to some very basic motivations here. Look at the items that are in the amendment Act itself, the items that make the members opposite upset, concerned, so concerned that in fact they want to bring out a reasoned amendment saying: junk the whole Bill because it's going to undermine the system. They're concerned – and they have gone on record, and this needs to be clear – about things like testing of students, school/parent councils. I am just overwhelmed to hear the concern about marauding bands of parents who are going to sweep in like the proverbial Huns and ravage the system. I have heard member after member, Liberal after Liberal, stand up and, in fear and trembling, talk about the devastation that's going to come as we allow parents a little bit more responsibility in the system.

The Act talks about schools having to report how they do and having to report their outcomes. They're in fear and trembling; Liberals are in fear about it. The fear and trembling that I've heard about charter schools – that's where a group of citizens in a community, the parents and the trustees, would get together and ask to have a school that would have certain distinctives, and I hear fear and trembling because it breaks the monolithic mold. It allows for some diversity, and who knows – are you ready for the really nasty word that Liberals just go white on? – it might allow some competition. It terrifies them. It terrifies them. We're told that the regulations in the Act, that's supposedly going to be undermined, are going to deal with home schools and with independent schools. That strikes fear in their hearts.

11:00

Mr. Speaker, they totally ignore the statistical reality, and I'll just refer to the home schools themselves. They ignore the fact that now we have after almost two decades a significant rise in home schooling in North America, a million students, by the way, right now being home schooled in North America. A million. The statistics out now show that any way you want to measure it, in terms of social development, self-esteem, academically, home school students do better on average than public students. Now, I'm not putting down the one system. I'm talking about the statistical evidence. Universities like Harvard, which by the way to this day is not an accredited institution because it stands on its own merit, are now specifically advertising for home schooled students because they know they do not come from a monolithic mold but in fact will bring some diversity into the system, and that strikes fear in the hearts of these members.

I heard the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talk about eroding the system in this amendment. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo stood in his place and, I quote, said: graduates from the independ-

ent school system will result in the community being disadvantaged. That was an atrocious statement. The Member for Sherwood Park, who has one of the largest independent schools in his riding, said that that is undermining the public system. The Member for Leduc, who has an independent school in his riding – and I attended a fund-raising banquet where he stood in support of that independent school – said that independent schooling is going to undermine the public system. I will be sending . . . [interjections] Yes. Oh, he'll want to clarify this.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

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

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. DAY: I want the citation. I don't want you covering your butt.

MR. KIRKLAND: *Beauchesne* 319.

MR. DAY: No, wrong.

MR. KIRKLAND: *Beauchesne* 429 and Standing Orders 23(i), (j), and (h). The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that by appearing at a function in a community does not give whole-hearted support to the claim that the minister has made here. I certainly . . .

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, obviously you haven't got a point of order. There might be a misunderstanding or a difference of opinion.

The Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Thank you for the wise ruling, Mr. Speaker, very wise.

### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: Now, the member opposite has stood in his place. He's concerned about the system being undermined because of his support for this ridiculous reasoned amendment. He's said that by the fact he attended there, he doesn't want anybody there to misinterpret that he might actually be supporting them. Well, I was there that night, Mr. Speaker. I spoke, and he did not stand up and say, "Folks, I just want you to know that me being here doesn't mean I like what you're doing." No, no. He was shaking hands, and he was patting on the back, and he was applauding. His constituents will be getting a copy of this *Hansard*, I can assure you, as will all the other members.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who mistakenly prides himself as a person who comes from a reasoned point of view, talked about the community being disadvantaged by children graduating from the independent system because of the dollars that are involved and insinuating that there are only wealthy people who can send their kids to these schools. Well, in the face of statistical analysis that shows clearly 60 percent of independent school families make less than \$30,000, and 60 percent of the general public make more than \$30,000 – as a matter of fact, the wealthy make up a smaller proportion of the independent school community than the general population. There are wealthy people, certainly, who support the independent system, and there are wealthy people in the public system, but this member has made a broad-brushed, biased statement saying the community will be disadvantaged . . .

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Point of order, hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: The point of order, Mr. Speaker, is *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. It says that "relevance is not easy to define." It's a borderline case, but in this particular case the main motion is on Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, which doesn't cover private schools. In the amendment here, "because the Assembly finds the Bill to undermine the integrity and accountability of the public education . . ." – this says "public education." The Bill's on public education. He's off on one of his pet hobbyhorses. It's like a Sunday morning in the pulpit, but it's got nothing to do with public education.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Redwater, I think we've all sat here during discussion on Bill 19, and I don't think there's hardly a member in this House, especially the members on my left, that hasn't strayed away from the principle of Bill 19. If we're going to get that picky, then we've got a lot of problems.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Two wrongs don't make a right, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Then I guess we've got a lot of wrongs, and we'll . . .

MR. N. TAYLOR: They've got to wake up sometime.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I guess we've had a lot of wrongs, and I guess we'll continue to have a lot of wrongs. The hon. Minister of Labour.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DAY: I'll again say in response to comments from members opposite who have talked about independent schooling – and quite properly they have. As I've said and they've said, this amendment Act is dealing with the amendment Act and the regulations which govern all that. We've heard their fear mongering responses, and now they'll listen to mine. I don't know about any hobbyhorse. The only member of the equine family is the donkey across the way who keeps standing up.

**Point of Order  
Questioning a Member**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Can I be permitted a question of the member?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No, no, no.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order. Order.  
Hon. Minister of Labour, would you entertain a question?

MR. DAY: Absolutely.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Could the hon. member tell us what clause in Bill 19 mentions independent schools?

MR. DAY: I'll say it again a little slower this time, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring, as this member's colleagues referred, to a number of items addressed in the School Amendment Act, which will also include regulations. His own members have

talked about home school, charter school, independent school. That's exactly what I'm referring to. If you go back to sleep, Nick, you'll wake up a little more refreshed. You may understand better.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DAY: Now, it's very interesting. It's fascinating, Mr. Speaker, to hear members from this side – this is what I'm talking about: the very basic differences between the two parties. Members from this side of the House support diversity. They support initiative. That's why members from this side support, for instance, the concept of a charter school. We don't rise in fear about that. That's why we support the notion of an independent school system or even a home school. We don't shiver in fear over what diversity can bring.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I would say, has a lot of accounting to do to thousands of young people around the province who will graduate this year from independent schools. He says that they are going to disadvantage the community. I will be sending that to the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges to make sure that when he goes to their meeting the next time and meets with their representatives, as he has in the past, and puts on his phony face and says, "Oh, yeah, I kind of support and it's not bad . . ." – it's an absolutely atrocious statement for him to make.

Now, going on down the list, the amendment Act also . . . [interjections] Oh, my, they do appear to be stirred up, Mr. Speaker.

**Point of Order  
Reflections on a Member**

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: *Beauchesne* 481(f), "make a personal charge against a Member." He accuses the Member for Calgary-Buffalo of having a phony face. Also, Standing Order 23(j), Mr. Speaker: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I think that says it all. I would like the member to withdraw those remarks.

**11:10**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order. I haven't got a list of the words or statements that are unparliamentary. However, if the minister wants to withdraw that, he's certainly entitled to do so. But it is strictly up to him unless somebody could give me – I've never heard that word too many times, but as far as I'm concerned . . . [interjections] Order. You want me to make a decision? The Minister of Labour can or cannot.

Oh, excuse me, I've got some information here. [interjections] Now tell me the word. Okay, we'll just continue on, and we'll make a judgment after.

MR. DAY: I can help you, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 490 very clearly says that it has been ruled parliamentary to use the word "phony," and I will add to it two-faced, duplicitous, and any other thing.

Mr. Speaker, I must object most strenuously. When I hear a member say certain things in here late at night thinking no one's going to hear – like the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Leduc, the Member for Sherwood Park – and when I hear that and I know they say different things when they meet with other groups of people, I have a struggle with that.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 481(f), (e), pretty well every section in the book, I think. I really have difficulty, first, making myself heard, and secondly . . . [interjections] I must admit that having to listen to remarks from the other side by the proverbial bull in a china shop there from Cypress Hills – I think we deserve better than that. I'd like you to make a ruling on this, because I think the House leader is getting particularly insulting and abusive.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's obviously again not a point of order. What we have is a disagreement. We hear it from this side not agreeing with that and these members not agreeing with this. That's, I guess, what we call politics.

Now, the way we're going, it's going to take about three-quarters of an hour for him to get in his little 20-minute speech. The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. DAY: I didn't know my speech was that little, Mr. Speaker. My voice is cracking with emotion under that last ruling, but I'll try and deal with it.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: The amendment Act goes on to talk about responsibility to students. If someone would wake up the Member for Redwater, you could show him that. It's right in there, responsibility being devolved to students. It talks about evaluation of teachers. Now, I know that a huge percentage of the Liberal caucus are teachers and maybe they don't like the thought of evaluation, but every other job has its evaluations with it. They shouldn't be shivering on that one. It talks about audits. It talks even about plebiscites.

Mr. Speaker, everything that is being talked about in this Act clearly talks about devolving power away from a central state-controlled monopoly and putting it in the hands of the local communities, parents, teachers on the local level, principals, elected trustees, and students themselves. That's what this Act talks about, and that's why the members are opposed to it, because a classic Liberal philosophy believes in the power of the state, not the responsibility of the individual but the power of the state.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment refers to undermining the system. [interjections] Boy, you can dish it out, but you sure can't take it.

#### Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, it is 481(e) this time. The hon. House leader hasn't got a clue about Liberal philosophy, political or economic, I think, and I suggest that he go back. It is not the state that is all powerful there. On the contrary . . .

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, obviously there's again a disagreement. I've heard many statements from one side to the other side, and certainly we don't all agree with each other. But certainly there's no point of order again, hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Minister of Labour.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obviously not a point of order for somebody to stand up and say that he doesn't

understand my philosophy. I mean, I don't know where the member's been, but I think he'd better clue in.

What it does go to show is that we sit here by the hour, day after day, night after night, into the wee hours of the morning listening quietly to members opposite; they beg us to stand and speak, and when one of us does, they shatter, they disintegrate. All they can do is scream wildly. So I would suggest that they just hang on to their seats and get educated for a minute here.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the very debate we're having in the House tonight about the erosion of a system didn't start tonight. It didn't start a year ago or 10 years ago. This debate was raging 250 years ago when the father of liberal thought and of the modern education movement Jean-Jacques Rousseau was enunciating the very underpinnings of the philosophy that the Liberal members ascribe to now, the exact same philosophy. That's the same debate we're having tonight on this amendment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, their forefather, said very clearly that the state had the answers. The state had the answers, and don't let parents be involved. Give those little children to the state, and the state will culture them. The state and the general will, as he called it, which cannot be challenged by an individual citizen, is the great salvation factor of humankind. It's the very debate we're having tonight on this Bill.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, incidentally, to reflect on the principles of the debate we're having now – it's very fascinating to know historically why he thought the state should control the raising of children, because history shows very clearly that at the hands of his mistress he had 5 children out of wedlock. Every one of those he took to an orphanage, literally left on the doorstep with an instruction that they could be cared for. So in defence of his own moral position, he came up with a philosophy in his *Social Contract* which says that the state should take care of the children.

He also was very opposed to competition. That's what this amendment is all about, Mr. Speaker. What they're saying is that any kind of diversity, any kind of accountability in the system will erode it. That's exactly what Mr. Rousseau said. He said that we cannot have a competing force in the population; it has to be the general will, and any competing force, any voice of diversification needed to be snuffed out. That's what we're hearing from the members opposite. They want their independent schools. They don't want those independent schools getting any money. No, no, no. That would be a very, very bad thing. The independent school parents already pay and support the public system. They already pay out of their pockets, but no, that's not enough. The Liberals want it all snuffed out. And no charter schools, as I've already said. That erodes the system. A little bit of competition erodes the system.

The very debate we're having tonight was a debate that was started by their forefather, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 250 years ago, and it still rages. The record clearly shows. Soon following Mr. Rousseau, of course, was the French revolution. The state was all power. The state had the answers. The state would culture the children. The state would culture the citizens, and any opposition to that: off with their heads. It's the exact same argument tonight.

What we're hearing tonight, Mr. Speaker, is a classic debate between those who speak for personal initiative and responsibility and those who speak for state control. Don't let parents get involved. Don't let teachers at a local level be involved. Don't let these nasty, evil charter schools ever come upon us because that would bring diversity. What we're talking about is devolving power away from the state. That is the very simple issue.

11:20

Mr. Speaker, the dollars are not an issue here because the province has looked at the fight that has been going on with equity funding, the fact that many boards can't support it and many boards can, and the province has said that we will take in the dollars and distribute them equally around the province and then allow that local diversity to take place and allow some positive pressures to come into the system that will result in better results, more accountability, and a system in which, whether we're talking public or whether we're talking independent, the people involved in those systems can hold their heads high and be proud of it.

You know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker. There are hardworking people in the public system. There are excellent teachers in the public system, and the public system has some flaws. There are hardworking people in the independent system. There are hardworking teachers and students in the independent system, and it has some flaws. But the view from the Conservative side of the House is: let both those systems exist. The view from the opposite is: snuff out any diversity; wipe out anything that would challenge the state.

Mr. Speaker, I hear in meetings around the province, I hear from good administrators – and I say that sincerely, good administrators – some of the same fears that are echoed here. I want to assure people in this province that the members of the governing party have trust in the parents of this province. They have trust in our elected trustees. We have trust in the community. We don't think the almighty state has to come swarming in and be the only kind of voice that's heard. We think there can be some diversity. It's a difficult time because there's transition involved. There's going to be a time when people in the communities kind of have to feel their way along with this new system. That's going to be happening. But Albertans are people of responsibility and people of initiative, and Albertans will make this system work.

With this Act we will see a better public system, we will see a better separate system, we will see a better independent system, we will see a better home schooling system, because we're not afraid to let those positive forces work and energize and bring about the positive changes that we need to see. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I believe my speech tonight has struck a chord in heaven for I hear the angels singing.

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that all the debate from the members opposite has been negative, fearful, not offering anything constructive except – what? – to abandon the debate, then I will partially listen to that request and, given the hour, move that we now adjourn debate on this amendment.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour has made a motion that we adjourn debate on the amendment to Bill 19. All in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

**Bill 20**  
**Regional Health Authorities Act**

[Debate adjourned April 26]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order. I wasn't in the Chair then, but it shows I believe that Calgary-Buffalo was speaking. Am I right there? You weren't. Okay.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did a get little frightened because Madame DeFarge over there started to yell at me as soon as I got up. I had a little trouble. I had one speech prepared for Bill 19, and if I was going to be as relevant as the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I would go ahead and give it anyhow and nobody would notice the difference. But I think I will switch to Bill 20. I move to constraint though. I'm hard put to see my old hero Jean-Jacques Rousseau getting a raking over by somebody who's even over to the right of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. We must remember that Rousseau was fighting the divine right of kings at the time that he was taking them on. It's rather interesting that we finally find what their philosophy is. They're still proposing the divine right of kings. Now, I thought we got rid of that in the British parliamentary system when we beheaded Charles II, but apparently his ghost still walks the land here. So I guess we'll have to call Rousseau back here to do something about it.

Now, when it comes to Bill 20, intriguingly enough this is absolutely the opposite of 19. It's going to be a real test of skills for members on both sides of the House how they work it, because what's happening in Bill 20 is we're getting rid, we're pushing out and going to a system of local government which we said doesn't work for schools. We said: "No, we can't have the school boards running their areas. We can't have the school boards setting their own tax rates. We're going to take over the thing and centrally control the thing and make sure there's equity in schools all through the community." Then we come to 20, and we do the opposite. We say: "No, we're not going to run our health system out of the centre anymore. We're going to push it out to these enlarged boards, and they're going to have the right to fix tax rates." So if anybody came here from Mars and was trying to listen to the debate in this House, they'd have every reason to wonder whether we had all gone crazy or not because the two Bills do absolutely the opposite to each other.

Bill 20 is supposed to correct and make possible a better health system by pushing taxing down to local authorities. Education is supposed to become better by taking taxing away from central authorities. So it's very interesting indeed. I can see why the Member for Red Deer-North left in a hurry, because if his philosophy backs taking all control into Edmonton, then how's he going to justify 20. I guess being consistent has never been one of the virtues of the parliamentary system, least of all this government here.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

When we go on and look at the regional health boards, this seems to have been put together in a hurry. For instance, my own constituency is split in two: one to one health board and one to the other. One health board doesn't seem to be causing too much trouble, the one centred in Vegreville-Redwater country. But the one in around Sturgeon is very intriguing because the very hospital itself that was named after the Sturgeon MD is now divorced from the people who built the hospital, supplied the land, and did the landscaping. They've taken that hospital out and put it into the Edmonton area with very little or no consultation.

So far there have been over 2,000 people who live out there that have all signed petitions. I don't know how many of them



were Tories, because the Tories didn't do that well against me last time, but there must have been some of them who sent in petitions asking that – as a matter of fact, there's an old saying of the member for Grande Prairie: I whupped them.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. N. TAYLOR: Whupped. That's w-h-u-p-p-e-d. When you get a chance and you've looked that up in the dictionary, an icon that I'm sure the Tories use over there, you'd find out. But in that particular area, it wasn't even close. That's the area that is now trying to set up a board or take the Sturgeon hospital and move it south into Edmonton rather than in the area. So there has been very little consultation in the area set up to look after the citizens of the area. It's only natural that they come southward into Edmonton, yet their hospital will be north, in the opposite direction.

**11:30**

The other thing, while we're talking about the regional health authority's mandate: this Act appears to set up appointed health boards. Now, there again I compare it with the school boards. You say that the school boards are going to be left, but the authority goes to the deputy minister. The Deep Six is leaving just when I thought I was going to be able to give them a little lecture. There must be something in that pizza tonight. That's the first time I've ever heard of marinated mushrooms causing as much trouble as they have over there tonight, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, they may not have been marinated; they just may have been picked out here behind the Legislature. It's quite possible.

When we get on to the area of Bill 20 and the boards and how they're going to be set up, these health areas are large enough that there should be some sort of a ward system. How's the appointment system going to work? I know that one of the requisites for the future, if we can judge at all on the past actions, will be that everybody will have to have blue and orange underwear. Outside of that, there is still the question – Madame DeFarge wrinkles her nose at me here, Mr. Speaker. It's clean underwear. I don't know why she's worrying.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Reflections on a Member**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, order. The Chair is unaware of any member from DeFarge. We do refer to each other by the seat that saw fit to elect us. I don't recall such a member. I've looked at my lists and can't locate it.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it could have just been problematical, in the gallery or anything. I would think that you might be hyper if you think I'm referring to somebody down here on this floor at all. You never know. Madame DeFarge is a very well known character, as you know, that knitted profusely as her opponents' heads hit the floor all the time.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. N. TAYLOR: Anyhow, back again to the debate on this issue. If we're going to have appointed people – and don't forget these people will have the right to tax. Now, this is something that should stir the blood of even the most rabid Jean-Jacques Rousseau fan: the people will have a right to tax. Mr. Speaker, that right disappeared with the Boston tea party, or should have disappeared in North America, but here this government in Bill 20

is going to have appointed people have the right to tax property to keep our health system going.

There's no question that we maybe could do with more enlarged health areas than we've had, but to give them the right, first of all, to have the people that are going to run these health areas appointed – and what often happens, Mr. Speaker, in this government or any other once they're appointed is that they quite often think they're anointed. It's one of the problems that you have in the democratic process.

We should have in this Bill some means by which we elect the people that operate, if they had the right to tax. If we take away the right to tax, as we did with the school boards, then they possibly can be appointed. They have a real dichotomy here: how can they argue that the school boards, who are elected, do not have the right to tax, then come around and set up people that run the health thing, and they have the right to tax? I mean, if you came here from Mars, you'd have every right to pull your hair out, because in a representative democracy the idea is that those that have a right to tax should be elected. We've done the opposite in both cases. The elected one can't tax if they're a school trustee; the nonelected one can tax if they're a member of the health board. So that's one of the first things that we have to look at.

The second area is: surely if there's anything we want from this province, it is some sort of uniformity of health care. Whether we are in Medicine Hat or up in Redwater or in Peace River, if we have a car accident and we get rushed in, there should be a rough equality of care. With the right to tax and the right to set user fees, it'll be very important where that ambulance dumps you or where you get hit on that road, because what we're going to have is varying classes of medical care. The one in Medicine Hat may well decide they should be putting all their money into environmental education and keeping the air pure. The Redwater area may well decide that the money should go into the very best of hospitals and surgery. The point is you're going to get different care in each province. If there's anything I think we deserve as taxpayers around this province, it's not only equality in education – I'll give this government a tribute even though I don't agree on how they're doing it. They're trying to make equality of opportunity.

Why doesn't that principle of equality of opportunity take over into the health field? What system are they going to use with appointed health centres that have the right to do their own taxing, that have the right to set their own user fees for some sort of uniformity? It costs me \$50 if I go into the Vermilion hospital to get my broken finger fixed up after playing with my grandchildren, and it might cost me only \$5 if I go into Redwater, because one area has user fees and the other area doesn't or has a smaller user fee. All that is in this legislation, that these trustees will have the right to set compensation. So when you look at that, you start thinking, "Surely this government wasn't that obtuse or that far out of phase that they would put in a system whereby local unappointed trustees had the right not only to tax property but set user fees in motion." It looks to me like a gigantic off-loading from the central government onto the local taxpayers of the cost of health. They've already done that in a way. If you try to find some consistency between the two Bills, both of them do the same thing: they off-load onto the taxpayer at the local level a great deal of the responsibility that used to be the province's, under the idea that if the local taxpayer has to pay and is closer to home, they will start to cut expenses and cut quality, and we in the Legislature will not get blamed for poor health care, for poor education.

So it seems the only thing that you could tie the system to is an awfully involved, almost underground method of trying to keep

the personal income taxes, the corporate income taxes, and the oil and gas royalties all for the central government, whereas local governments will have to run the health care system and will get education dollars assessed on their property. So the property owner is going to be in a very, very beset position. Then to add to this, you see their fine policy, the Machiavellian technique. It might be the Treasurer. Maybe this is accident. Maybe it's some deputy minister. We have the new municipal Act coming in that's going to give them a lot more freedom to tax. So you start suddenly realizing that the taxation – what's happening is that the provincial government hasn't got the courage to go out there and tell the local government that they're not going to get their share of the oil and gas royalties and the corporation taxes, the personal income taxes; they're only going to get what they can tax. The municipalities apparently are even going to be allowed to put in a fuel tax, so the price of gasoline will vary from one pump to another, from one town to another.

So the whole question of Bill 20 is that we're going to try to download onto local government the cost of health care. While we're on the health care area, the health care policy, there are a couple of positive things about it. I can see where wellness centres rather than hospitals could become the mode you're looking after, that you would actually have doctors and nurses on salaries rather than on the present system of the more people they treat, the more prescriptions they go through, the more money they make. I can see wellness centres or what you would want to call hospitals without walls working, but I think a good system, Mr. Speaker, is one that we used to use in education before it got out of whack to have an evenness of education. I think the Liberal Party would look much more strongly on something where we built up to an acceptable per capita level the amount of money that would be spent on each of these wellness or health areas so that we'd have equality of care throughout the province, admittedly jockeyed to the wealth of the area.

#### 11:40

Now, the other thing when we're looking at Bill 20 for the health areas is environmental problems. I know the minister may think environment is just in the science end, but environment is probably connected more with health than nearly any other factor of human existence, you might say. So when you have regional health areas, are they going to be able to sit in on all the environmental problems that occur in the area? For instance, in the rural areas our air is becoming more and more polluted as we develop more and more hydrocarbons. Before you get panicky and rush off and say that somebody's advocating a carbon tax, there is nevertheless a wellness quotient here that has to be looked at. Anybody around southern Alberta remembers the Pincher Creek examinations of the health problems they had on the huge sulphur plants down around there. To this day, I think, most of the people that were involved around it felt there was some detriment suffered to their health. Wouldn't a health area or a health board have something to say? How do we solve that conflict that would occur between a health board that wants to have a cleaner environment and the Department of Energy in a government that wants to have more royalties and the oil companies in between? That seems to be strangely silent in this Bill. This Bill covers much of the whole wellness concept, but it seems to leave out things like environment.

Then I think we can go even farther than environment. Mental health is a problem that seems to be becoming increasingly common as our society becomes more and more industrialized, more and more complicated, you might say. Yet the mental health area is left out of the Act, as to who's responsible for that.

If I may touch on another area that seems to be silent, even these regional health boards, if they were to work as perfectly as the government envisages – and I don't for one moment think they will – and were able to keep a certain uniformity of care and able to keep the process going, there is still the question of . . . As a matter of fact, you destroyed my line of thought. When I see food at this time of night, I find it hard to think at the same time, Mr. Speaker.

MR. FISCHER: Sit down then.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Oh, no. Are you trying to insist that you have to know something to stand up in this House? You'd destroy both sides of the House here; you know that. Especially that side.

The fact of this is that when you put Bill 20 together and you have these regional areas that are financing different health things, how about things like heart surgeries, for instance, or heart replacements? Who's going to look after it?

MR. DINNING: You've been on that side of the House for eight years?

MR. N. TAYLOR: I hear a certain amount of chattering over there, Mr. Speaker. It's the same with all Treasurers. You give them a sharp pen and a few billion dollars, and they think they know something.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: He's a teller.

MR. N. TAYLOR: A glorified bank teller over there, yeah.

MR. DINNING: You've been over there for eight years.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Eight years. Well, pretty good.

If the hon. Treasurer knew anything about his history, he'd realize you had to make seven tries before you got anywhere. David didn't take Jerusalem until after his seventh try, Bruce didn't drive the English out of Scotland until his seventh try, Diefenbaker didn't win till after his seventh try, and I didn't win till after my seventh try. Now this wee broth of a lad that's still wet behind the ears has got the nerve to get up and start talking.

Mr. Speaker, the only lottery that's been won around here was won by the Treasurer when he got that appointment. There was no other way he would have been able to sustain himself in the style that he has become accustomed to, which I only hope is for two years.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the last two are a couple of hard acts to beat, aren't they? So I'm just going to go straight.

I'm speaking to Bill 20. In order to maintain your universality, regionalization of health care seems to be the way to go in Canada, and most provinces are moving in that direction. But there are a number of pitfalls. As I understand this Bill, regionalization will allow integration of community- and hospital-based health services. Boards, which currently function under the Public Health Act, are included in this Bill under definitions of an existing district authority, but I don't see any reference to them further on. There's no indication whether or not public health will continue to exist. If not properly handled, the upcoming

changes could result in a diminished public health system in Alberta to the detriment of the whole population.

Many people think of community-based services and public health as one and the same. In public health people think of home care and well-baby clinics and school health services, but it's easy to ignore or forget the lower profile but equally important responsibilities of environmental protection, health promotion, prevention, and public education programs, all of which require professionals with skills which are not taught in medical and nursing schools but are equally important to the population of this province. If we are to lower the cost of keeping Albertans healthy, we must not only deliver illness and injury treatment services with efficiency and effectiveness, but we must give equal priority to those factors that cause us to be a population less healthy than one would expect given the universal access to treatment since the Canada Health Act came into effect.

Public health by its very nature is a low-key system based on the promotion of healthy life-styles, well babies, child care, public education, self-care, and strong preventive measures. Improving the overall levels of health in communities in Alberta will require healthy public policy, which in turn needs the co-ordination of social, cultural, economic, and physical planning. It embraces a very broad understanding of health, one which goes far beyond the mere absence of illness. Included are such factors as discrimination, poverty, violence, environmental concerns, housing, transportation, accidents, and injuries. Local boards of health were organized in Canada about a hundred years ago to deal with the concerns about communicable disease control, maternal/child health, sanitation, and the effects of poverty. All of these are still at issue, but new problems exist such as waste management, water pollution, and the global AIDS epidemic, all of which compromise the health of our communities, as does the increase in chronic illness.

The practice of medicine in North America today is primarily curative, highly technical, and very expensive. People usually go to the doctor after the symptoms of a health problem have occurred. Alberta has an international reputation for training highly skilled physicians. We have excellent research facilities and staff who have made important discoveries and saved thousands of lives. With all of the well-deserved publicity that goes along with our high-quality treatment, we must not lose sight of the fact that many health problems could be avoided if we paid more attention to the impacts on personal health of life-style, environment, and public education, as well as taking a lot more responsibility for our own individual health practices. This is not to play down the role of the many progressive physicians practising in this province who not only treat illness but do take the time to inform their patients about prevention, self care, and the broader aspects of health. Given the cost of complex surgical procedures, diagnostic equipment, and the years of costly training required to produce qualified people to implement our highly technical treatment system, it becomes obvious that the prevention of illness, accidents, and injuries is also a key factor in the management of an effective health system that remains accessible to everyone at a cost that the public purse can maintain.

**11:50**

Implicit in public health policy is the understanding that many public health issues in larger cities are quite different from those experienced in rural areas. In 1992 the health boards of Edmonton and Calgary produced a report called Urban Health Issues, which was submitted to the then Minister of Health. This report reminded us that from the mid-19th century to the 1950s the connection between poor housing, for example, and health was

well understood. Overcrowding, among other things, was linked to respiratory disease and especially to tuberculosis. As our standard of living increased, a certain apathy toward the topic of substandard housing followed, because housing standards were higher as a result of a generally vibrant economy.

During the past decade it has become obvious that poverty is increasing significantly, particularly in the big cities, and with that has come a recognition that tuberculosis is also on the rise again. This significant increase in a disease that we had for years assumed to be nearly stamped out has been a cause for concern in many of the big cities and in both Edmonton and Calgary for the past three or four years. The recent discovery of a type of tuberculosis that resists treatment has alarmed many people. Other physical and mental health issues continue to be related to overcrowding and to housing deficiencies. These include trauma, substance abuse, hypertension, diabetes, vascular disease, skin diseases, inadequate prenatal care, and of course tuberculosis. The increase in population in urban centres also places pressures on hospital beds, increasing the demand for early discharge often without the supports necessary to avoid a relapse or a return to hospital.

Family violence is a growing concern according to the 1992 report, and it seems to have been increasing since then. It found that 28 percent of girls, 10 percent of boys, 10 percent or more of women, and 4 percent of the elderly suffer family violence. Abuse often plays a significant role in teenage pregnancy and prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and homelessness. These are all public health issues.

Urban land development issues have a bearing on public health, as does waste management. Canada is a wasteful nation, producing 1.7 kilograms of waste per person per day. Health units have a major role to play in the communitywide process needed to introduce integrated systems of waste management and to convince the public to cut back on their waste. This role includes both public education and risk assessment to identify hazardous wastes at disposal sites. An important land development issue in cities is the identification of contaminated industrial and commercial sites as well as waste management sites.

I have mentioned only a few of the public health issues in Alberta today. We have Bill 20 before us, a Bill that will set the stage for radical changes in how the Department of Health serves the people of this province. I urge the minister to consider that the health of the population can be greatly improved and millions of dollars saved in the future through an adequately funded public health system, a system that is administered by people who are trained in the broader field of public health and not in the delivery of treatment services. An effective public health system involves co-operation and collaboration from three levels of government and communities of many kinds throughout the province. For example, the healthy cities program begun by the federal government about 10 years ago has been successful in many urban areas across the country. I urge the minister not to integrate public health to the extent that it loses its identity and gets swallowed up by the treatment system.

Thank you.

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

**MR. GERMAIN:** Thank you very much. First of all, Mr. Speaker, as I address the Legislative Assembly again shortly this morning, I will cross the day barrier in this debate: start on the 3rd and conclude on the 4th of May. I'm grateful to the House leader for allowing me the opportunity to do that by adjourning the debate on the School Act and moving to the health Act. It

allows me to make comments on a Bill that to this point in time is one of the two most profound that have been filed so far in this Legislative Assembly and indeed since the June 15 election. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs would rate liquor privatization right up there, but clearly this Bill, that reaches to every corner of the province of Alberta and deals with amendments to the manner in which the essential service of health is distributed in this province, is an important one and should be debated both at length and in a calm and rational and competent way.

Now, the minister of agriculture during the course of the debates over the last few days has suggested: tell us what's wrong with the Bill. He likes that straight-speaking, blunt approach, as you'd expect, coming from rural Alberta. Since I come likewise from rural Alberta, I hope to respond in kind tonight and outline in straightforward terms those aspects of this particular Bill that should give all responsible Members of this Legislative Assembly some pause for concern and some second, reflective, sober thought.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, every time that I rise to my feet in this Legislative Assembly, one of my objectives is to recognize that the government members in their infinite wisdom can certainly marshal the arguments that indicate what is good or desirable about the Bill. One of the objectives is to put before the Legislative Assembly those areas that should set off warning bells that would allow people to take a second look at the legislation. Against that backdrop, that's the approach that I intend to take this evening.

Inasmuch as this is debate on the second reading of the Bill and it deals with issues of philosophy, I intend to touch into the corners of the province and talk about the philosophy of health and the philosophy of this particular piece of legislation. The first philosophical debate that legitimately Members of the Legislative Assembly and indeed members of the public may agree to disagree on is the philosophy of whether the Bill itself was necessary. Now, there are different ways of nibbling around that hunk of cheese to determine whether it's necessary or not, but one of the areas of concern – and because we are talking about health regionalization and we're talking about medical and health issues tonight, I'll try to restrict my anecdotes to the health field.

The plain question that begs to be answered is: is this Bill in fact an amputation of a fairly sound and well-functioning health system that exists in the province today before the home remedies have been tried? Now, using that health analogy, there is a growing number of people that are of the view that good health is as much a matter of life-style, dietary interests, the consumption of legalized but perhaps dangerous narcotics and dangerous substances such as tobacco and alcohol. There is a growing number of people who indeed say that if we can correct life-styles certainly at an early age, we can solve the health problems that many of us face.

### 12:00

There are numerous good books written by competent medical practitioners that I know the Member for Bow Valley, being a medical practitioner, will have become familiar with, that indicate that to a large extent much of the medicine and medical treatment that we enjoy in the province of Alberta today is as a result of human weakness in our lifestyles and is as a result of perhaps a lack of attention to good personal care. Nevertheless, a health system does exist in the province of Alberta that is the one thing that unites people from the deepest south to the furthest north.

I have had the honour of addressing this Assembly from time to time on health issues as they relate to northern Alberta, particularly the small capital project that was required up in Fort

Chipewyan, a \$150,000 expenditure to bring in a mobile home so that the people of Fort Chipewyan felt that they were getting as good a range of health service as was practical in light of their regional isolation. We have talked about the capitalized cost of health. We have talked about the issues of doctors, and we have talked about other care professionals that are trying in their own way to provide solutions to the problem.

Now, one aspect of this particular legislation is that it allowed the minister to divide the province into various regions. I'm happy to report to all members of this Legislative Assembly that the health unit boundaries and the hospital boundaries and the proposed regionalized boundaries of the area in Fort McMurray, the constituents that I represent, were based primarily on the recommendation from health care workers in that community. I am grateful to the Minister of Health and to the Member for Bow Valley for the effort that they put into attempting to accommodate the regionalized wishes of the residents of Fort McMurray.

This particular piece of legislation goes way further than lines drawn on a map in the province of Alberta. The minister clearly is aware that there has been some sensitization to where the boundary lines are. My heart goes out to the minister because it is difficult to draw a map, divide up the province into a few regions, and have everybody pleased. I recognize that from time to time as we debate Bill 20, members of this Assembly from both sides of the House may well rise and may well talk about and may well debate whether the boundary was correctly drawn in their particular area of the province. It appears, however, on initial feedback at least, that the minister can take comfort in the fact that in the Fort McMurray and northeast area of the province that particular boundary appears to have been met with general approval.

Now, assuming that the Bill is necessary, we have to then ask ourselves why the Bill is necessary. This government, when it returned to power on June 15 after 20 years, more or less, of continuous power in the province of Alberta and taking over from a previous conservative-leaning government, spent 20 years in the Legislative Assembly unable to criticize any old pesky members of the opposition who might be delaying legislation, who might be wasting time, unable to lay the blame on anybody whatsoever in the province of Alberta for what left this province on the eve of the June 15 election with the largest deficit the province has ever had, a deficit on a per capita basis that was growing faster than any other in any of the provinces of Canada and an annual deficit and a long-term debt that was staggering.

That was the problem the government faced on the eve of the election, when Albertans went to the polls, so that is the colouration that tinges the philosophy of this particular piece of legislation. This legislation and its accomplishments and the trauma that it will inflict on the citizens of the province of Alberta until the rocks of the rough shore, to use the Premier's phraseology, are completed, lie solely on the fact and are a direct result of the fact that for 20 years in the province of Alberta we had a government that was unbridled by the reasonable and responsible debate of an effective and efficient opposition.

It is my hope that when the Members of this Legislative Assembly hear debates on this and other Bills, they will always remember that it is a high level of personal arrogance to assume that no piece of legislation that is tabled in the House can be ever improved. Certainly I can tell you and all Members of the Legislative Assembly that there is nobody that I know in my circle of acquaintances that would be so flawless, so without error of composition or personality or temperament that could lay before the House each time, every time a Bill that was absolutely perfect. Against that backdrop and since the Minister of Health recognizes,

I believe, the impossibility that the Bill laid before the Assembly, this Regional Health Authorities Act – the minister, I am sure, from a spirit of honesty will recognize that this Bill cannot be perfect, because of course it is unlikely that a perfect Bill could ever be laid before the Legislature. The question, then, is: what are the most troubling areas of this particular legislation? I want to use the remaining segment of my time in this first opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly on this Bill to point out some of the most glaring ones.

First of all, it is arguable that this Bill does remove a certain amount of grassroots democracy from the health and hospitalization aspects of the health system in the province of Alberta. Now, members opposite will argue in fact, "No, no, quite the contrary; we are entraining more power down to the local level and giving the local authorities more independent freedom and more right to move." Well, we will have to take a hard look at those who make that submission, Mr. Speaker, because in point of fact this particular piece of legislation clearly is a movement from a health delivery system in the province of Alberta that is run by independent election conducted every three years concurrently with the municipal elections in the province of Alberta to government by the Department of Health.

Now, earlier tonight we had a most interesting speech, that will travel the width and breadth of this province, from the House leader of Her Majesty's Government in which he indicated that there was a desire to bring democracy back to the people and to allow parents to take control and allow local groups and boards to take control. We were talking there about education. When we come to health, it is clear that there is only one person who is in control of the health system of the province of Alberta, and you need go no further than section 14 of this particular legislation, where the minister can enter into any agreements with the government, and further in this particular legislation, section 10(1), where the minister can "by order dismiss all the members of a regional health authority or community health council." "By order dismiss." Well, I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is clear that if you have a scheme, no matter how elaborate and no matter how it appears to involve grassroots democracy, if one single person has the power to dismiss that grassroots democracy, then that grassroots democracy in fact is an illusion only.

So philosophically we may get into interesting debate. I know that the Provincial Treasurer has come. I heard a nasty rumour outside that the Provincial Treasurer had entered the Assembly only because he heard that I was due to speak tonight, and I'm grateful for that vote of confidence.

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

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer is rising on a point of order.

MR. DINNING: That is imputing false motives, and I would ask you to have the hon. member withdraw those kinds of remarks.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, would you like to respond to the point of order?

MR. GERMAIN: Yes, certainly. It was rumour only. I'm happy to withdraw. If the hon. Provincial Treasurer indicates that he did not come to the Legislative Assembly to hear me speak tonight, then I accept that he came for reasons other than to hear me speak, and I withdraw the comment.

12:10

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. GERMAIN: Let's move on then. Let's move on. I spent some time dialoguing with the Provincial Treasurer about grass roots. It gave others sitting further back on the government side a chance to suggest that I do certain things with certain parts of my anatomy. Difficult physically, but nevertheless I'll do my best, struggling against overwhelming odds.

I want to also continue by bringing to the Legislative Assembly's attention another serious concern with this Act, and that is the dramatic use of regulations. Ladies and gentlemen of this Assembly, in this piece of legislation we have hit the mother lode of government regulation. There is no legislation here except to permit by regulation everything to be done in the health system. We've got volleys of regulatory individuals. The Lieutenant Government in Council can make regulations in section 19, the minister acting alone and unbridled can make regulations in section 20, and throughout this particular piece of legislation the minister and other members of the government can make regulations. We have government by regulation now, and it comes to a new high in this particular Bill. Philosophically we have to consider whether that much government by regulation is appropriate.

Now, there's a further insult expressed here, Mr. Speaker, and that is poking at us almost like a stick at a barbecue moving too close to your eye. [interjections] That was another medical analogy. In section 2(6) we see that not only do we have government by regulation, but now we have the Regulations Act not applying to some particular orders that can be made under this Act. Now, what is the Regulations Act? The Regulations Act is a piece of legislation that provides disclosure. You will see that at least in subsection (6) the minister can actually alter or cancel a health region in Alberta and need not even publish that in the official *Gazette*, because that's what I understand the Regulations Act applies to. That is of serious concern as well and should be to all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

We also have the issue of qualified power in this particular legislation. Now, what we have is an opportunity for the government to allow health boards to do what is in fact the ultimate payoff for the years of misspending in this province, and that is that regional boards can go out and close hospitals and close facilities. Of course, I suspect that at that point, Mr. Speaker – and I may be wrong – the argument will be and the way that that will be spun is: "Well, the regional authority made those decisions, and the regional authority closed those hospitals, and the regional authority, Mr. and Mrs. Albertan, dealt you that terrible blow to your accessibility to health care, not the government. By golly, we gave you participatory democracy, and they did the down and dirty cutting." That is what is found in section 5 of this particular Bill, and that is very interesting, the qualified ability to do the dirty work.

Now, labour laws are interestingly absent in the commentaries on this Bill. One need go no further than section 2(3) to see that the minister will protect the interest of creditors and debenture holders. The government in their infinite wisdom saw fit to protect the creditors who may exist but did not see fit to mention any aspect of the employees or the labour laws of this province of Alberta, irrespective of what one might think about those labour laws.

We then move to an area where the government will have the opportunity to approve plans. Earlier, Mr. Speaker, I worked on a thesis that this was in fact illusory control only. One has to look again at section 8 of this particular legislation to see how illusory the real control is, because what can happen in those

sections is that the approval of the plans – if a regional health board submits a plan to the minister, the minister has this option: "amend the proposal and approve it as amended." So the control is illusory only, and that should be of concern to Albertans who have in the past at least had some grassroots democracy in elected hospital boards.

Perhaps it is inappropriate in second reading of a Bill to go into the transitional problems, but if you look at this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker – and I'm sure all Members of the Legislative Assembly will look at it – why would a Member of the Legislative Assembly want to wed him or herself to legislation that isn't the best it can be? Why would you do that? Why would you go back to rural Alberta or to Calgary or to Edmonton or anywhere and say, "I took part in a debate where the legislation wasn't the best it could be"? I urge all members to think about this legislation and wonder if it is the best that it can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've had a chance to get a lot of feedback from constituents with respect to Bill 20, and I can tell all members that there's a great deal of concern about where we're going in terms of health care planning and hospitals in downtown Calgary. Let me just relate to you some of the particular kinds of concerns and groups that I've met with and the kind of representations that they wish me to make on their behalf while we speak to Bill 20.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, there are a very large number of seniors living in downtown Calgary and a lot of low-income Albertans. The east village, particularly in the east part of Calgary-Buffalo, has some very large apartment complexes which are seniors' buildings. One of the buildings has over 430 seniors, simply in the single building. Thirty-one percent of the families in Calgary-Buffalo live below the poverty line.

The other reality about downtown Calgary is that the greatest number of trauma cases originate in downtown Calgary. In Calgary-Buffalo we really have 43 percent of all of the major trauma cases in the city of Calgary occur in the downtown area. That's a reality, and that's one of things that I factor into my analysis when I look at Bill 20.

To prepare for debate on Bill 20, I've had the opportunity to meet with the administrators and the staff of the Holy Cross hospital in Calgary-Buffalo and also to meet with the staff of the Alberta Children's hospital. In fact, just last Thursday I had the opportunity to spend the morning touring the hospital and talking to physicians. I can indicate as well that I've had a large number of parents of children who have attended the Alberta Children's hospital, received treatment there, who have expressed to me various concerns.

Then, finally, in preparing for debate on Bill 20, I've spoken with people with the city of Calgary, people involved with planning the emergency response, the ambulance service in that city, people concerned about the needs of low-income Calgaryans who reside in downtown Calgary. There are some things that are apparent, Mr. Speaker, when I look at those facts, that reality, and then I examine Bill 20 and see what kind of an impact this is going to have on my constituents in downtown Calgary.

I agree with the principle of a single regional authority with a single board. That makes good sense, and I have no difficulty with that. But when we look beyond the governance – and I have certainly some issue with the way the governance is going to take place, even though the principle may be a reasonable and an

acceptable one – I'm concerned about what now exists in terms of the bed ratio in the city of Calgary. There is no uniform bed ratio that applies across the province. The provincial target, I understand, is 2.4 beds per thousand. This would be 1,950 beds in Calgary, but Edmonton, I note, is 3.1 beds per thousand. The Hyndman report projects 2.1 beds per thousand, or a total of 1,815 beds, for the whole city of Calgary.

12:20

There are some specific concerns in terms of specialized treatment that seem not to have been identified and factored adequately into either the report done by Mr. Hyndman or the other concern that was done by the acute care study. I'm thinking here, for example, with forensic psychiatry. There are plenty of questions in terms of whether the government understands the importance of having a centralized forensic psychiatry clinic in the city of Calgary and ideally within the downtown core, because the largest number of patients for that particular service actually live in the downtown area of Calgary.

Some concerns with respect to what I'll call institutions, and I guess I start from the premise that there needs to be an acute care hospital in downtown Calgary.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Does this have anything to do with the Bill?

MR. DICKSON: It has everything to do. I'm glad the Minister of Health is paying such close attention. Bill 20 sets out a framework, and I would expect that the Minister of Health would be the first person in this Chamber to say that the purpose of Bill 20 is to in some fashion provide a better delivery of health care service to not just Calgaryans but people whether they live in Taber or Grande Prairie. I assume that that's what motivates the minister. All I'm doing is suggesting – what I think people in Alberta are interested in is how this Bill is going to impact on them at the level of health service. [interjections] While the geography lesson continues apace, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to continue with my observations.

Now, it may well be that we cannot justify in the city of Calgary two acute care facilities – the Bow Valley centre and the Holy Cross hospital – in the downtown area, but it makes absolutely no sense to follow the Hyndman recommendation and have no acute care facility in downtown Calgary. That would mean that we would be the only major urban centre in North America without an acute care health facility in the downtown core. Now, we're going to have an interesting response. Last time I spoke we saw an almost immediate response from the Minister of Labour. I'm hopeful that my comments and observations are going to provoke just as spirited a response from the Minister of Health. I'll try and keep it relatively brief, Mr. Speaker, so she'll have the opportunity that I think she's anxious to exploit.

When we talk about acute care health facilities and the reason why we need that in downtown Calgary, as I said before there's a large number of low-income seniors. If in fact those people have to go to the Rockyview hospital to get health care, consider some of the concern. Firstly, there's the cost of getting to the Rockyview hospital. How are they going to do that? Mr. Speaker, many of these seniors have told me that what they're going to end up doing is phoning an ambulance because they can't afford a cab, so what you have right off the bat is an inefficient use of the finite dollars we have available for the health care system.

You know, the government has talked about and certainly one of the proposals in the Hyndman report was that we have a geriatric health care centre situated where the Holy Cross hospital is now. But surely it would make more sense to talk about small geriatric clinics, and maybe we should locate those clinics where the seniors live. Instead of just trying to justify the Holy Cross hospital and the facility that's there, maybe what we should be doing is putting one of those geriatric clinics in the east village, where we already have this huge concentration of seniors. That makes sense. I think it's something that's logical, and I'd encourage the minister to consider if we're able to deal with it on that basis.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

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

MR. HERARD: Yeah. I hate to interrupt this great discourse for the purpose of the transcripts, but *Beauchesne* 459 in terms of relevance. I think we really should be talking about the Bill and the boundaries and not all of the specifics that the hon. member thinks are right or wrong about the Calgary situation.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Well, certainly, sir. I can think of nothing more relevant than talking about what the impact ultimately is going to be on the people who live in my community and indeed in every other community in Alberta. What we're talking about is health care for people. Now, governance only exists for one purpose, Mr. Speaker, and that's to provide health care. These boards don't sit around simply to collect fees and to hold meetings. They're only there to provide health care for Albertans. If we cannot talk about the service and the ultimate goal of the Bill, then I think we're in a futile exercise and the government might as well scrap this Bill and come up with some other vehicle. Albertans want to talk about health care, not about governance, so that's why we have to deal with both.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, the Chair has some sympathy for Calgary-Egmont speaking about this. If this Bill be on how one goes about regionalization in anticipation, you're into it. However, in reading *Beauchesne*, it reminds the Chair that "relevance is not easy to define." It sounds a little bit like beauty: it's in the eye of the beholder or, in this case, in the ear of the objector. "In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt," and since the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has tied it somewhat into this, can take that.

I'm getting imprudent signals that I should hurry, but if the hon. member who's so signaling realizes it, the clock is stopped during the time of a point of order.

The Chair would recommend that Calgary-Buffalo continue and I'm sure is making it relevant to the Bill before us.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much for that. I appreciate not only the direction from you, sir, but the gratuitous advice from the Minister of Health, who is also anxious to give me direction.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, let me address another one of the concerns. I talked about the concerns that I have with the recommendations of the Hyndman report. I guess I wonder, if we have a regional structure with a single board for the city of

Calgary, whether we're going to see decisions and recommendations that make as little sense as those we've seen from the Hyndman task force.

One of the concerns that has to naturally arise from Bill 20 is: what happens with public health? You know, we see at least potential in Bill 20, that once again we've focused all of our energy and our resources looking at the least effective and the most expensive part of the health care system; namely, the acute care hospitals at the back end of the system. You know, to those of us that read the original Hyndman report, The Rainbow Report, and saw things in there that made sense – a commitment in terms of preventative health care, a focus in terms of encouraging wellness, encouraging Albertans to lead healthier life-styles – that's got to be more than rhetoric. If we want to somehow arrest escalating health care costs, we have to be prepared to invest in those things. We have a public health system in this province that I think can play an important role in doing that. There's no provision in Bill 20 to ensure that the boundaries we currently have for our public health units are congruent with the boundaries of these regional health authorities. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, it would have been absolutely essential to tie those things together.

**12:30**

The other provision we've got is that we have these provisions for regional health authorities, but I think many of us have a concern that once again they're going to be dominated by the acute care facilities. They're going to be dominated by the hospitals, and what's going to happen is that those low-cost preventative clinics, those efforts by a whole range of groups that are interested in saving health care dollars are certainly going to be given short shrift in this overall health care planning.

You know, I talked before about concerns I have with acute care facilities in downtown Calgary. The other concern that has to come up is the Alberta Children's hospital. My concern is that in fact the final decision on what happens to the Alberta Children's hospital is contingent on passage of this Bill and contingent on creation of a new regional health authority for the city of Calgary. Now, my concern with the Children's hospital is that in the report by Hyndman – and we don't know until there's a Calgary regional health authority whether that recommendation will be continued – the recommendation was that the Alberta Children's hospital effectively be picked up and transported across the river to the site of the Foothills hospital. That makes absolutely no sense, Mr. Speaker. What we've been told is that we may be looking at a minimum – a minimum – of \$120 million to be able to take the current plant, if you will, or facility at the site on 17th Avenue S.W. in Calgary and transport it over to presumably one of the current parking lots at the Foothills hospital.

Well, if this is the sort of thing we're going to see from one of these regional health authorities, then I've got an enormous problem with that, because that's compromising the health care of children not only in the city of Calgary but throughout southern Alberta. What we have now at the Alberta Children's hospital – and I observed this when I had the tour through it last Thursday – is that there are all kinds of things that cannot be easily picked up and moved across the river. The cost to taxpayers to be able to duplicate the whole facility is an enormous one, so there's no cost saving in doing that. The only way it would make sense from a financial point of view would be to move the Children's hospital across the river and then not recreate all of the facilities but in fact use some of the adult facilities, whether it's in terms of radiology, whether it's in terms of some of the other equipment, some of the other departments, and those things would be rolled together and combined.

Well, I'm fearful of that, Mr. Speaker, and the reason I'm fearful is that there's an entire focus at the Children's hospital on children, and it's apparent in a host of ways. Before I deal with some examples of why the Children's hospital ought to stay where it is, I think it's worth while to remind all members that 40 percent of all of the children in Calgary that are treated at an acute care hospital are treated at the Children's hospital. Forty thousand visits last year; 40,000 visits. Those are people from Lethbridge and Medicine Hat and Cochrane and Taber. All of those people use that facility.

What we've got there are things that don't exist in large hospitals like the Foothills hospital. There are waiting rooms outside a number of the different labs and operatories and different wards, waiting rooms for siblings, for other members of the family. That doesn't exist in an adult hospital because you don't have the same problems. In a children's hospital you often have a mother arriving with other siblings to attend to a sick child. Well, some members may think this is of little consequence. Some members may think this isn't that important. We're talking about governance; we're talking about saving the taxpayers' money. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what we can find is that at the Alberta Children's hospital there are ultimately economies. Because they've been able to do it efficiently, because it's a modern institution, because they've got a committed staff, they're able to do things that can't be done in a larger hospital.

We can't forget as well that there are \$3 million to \$4 million that come to the Children's hospital through estates. In the last few days, in the last week, the Alberta Children's hospital received over 100 calls from potential donors who have indicated they are not prepared to give their support to the Children's hospital if it doesn't continue to exist as a stand-alone facility. I think that's a problem, Mr. Speaker.

My concern is that when I look at Bill 20, I see a regional health authority that may be dominated by acute care hospitals, that's not going to be able to address some of these particular concerns that certain groups are going to have, like children, like seniors living in the downtown area. I think if that were to happen, then Bill 20 represents a huge step backwards.

Now, it may be that when and if we are able to see the regulations, even in draft form, we might have a greater measure of comfort with this Bill. But we haven't see those regulations even in draft form. I have to say we've often heard members opposite suggest that if we understood anything about law and process, we'd understand that the statute is enacted first and then the regulations come, but I think we have to recognize that in most other jurisdictions they come in front of the Legislature. They bring forward a statute that gives a clear direction of where the government's going. It doesn't leave so many important decisions to be determined by way of regulatory authority.

Since we don't have an active, indeed an alive Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, members in this Assembly have absolutely no assurance that any of the regulations that are provided for in this Act are ultimately going to be congruent with the objectives and consistent with the objectives in the legislation. I don't think we want to see court challenges; I think all members are anxious that the Legislature assert its leadership. The way it does that is to make draft regulations available, publish them in advance, and when we're going to do something as important as health care restructuring, give us more of the detail, give us more of the flavour in terms of what's contemplated. Then we'd be able to deal with it with hopefully a much greater measure of confidence than we have now.

One of the other questions with Bill 20: what happens to the assets of the foundation of the Calgary General hospital and the

foundation for the University of Alberta hospital? Not provided for in here. There are substantial assets in both those two foundations. I've heard no indication from the hon. Minister of Health of what's going to happen to those assets. It's not provided for in the Bill. I would have thought that would have been key. If there are potential donors in this province, they're certainly not going to be prepared to support those foundations now if it turns out that it simply accrues to the general revenue fund. Is that the case? I don't know. It's a serious omission from Bill 20. I don't know how many Alberta donors and perhaps donors from outside Alberta have contributed to either the University of Alberta foundation or the Calgary General hospital foundation, but I think it's an important consideration and ought to be addressed, Mr. Speaker.

The last thing I'd just like to say is that it's been suggested that by moving the Children's hospital we would save this enormous cost of transporting patients from the Children's to the Foothills hospital, but I'll come back at a later stage, Mr. Speaker, and finish off that thought.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you ready for the question? No? Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

12:40

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Are you rising on a point of order, Provincial Treasurer?

MR. DINNING: I'm just waiting to sit down and bow.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh, wonderful.

Order. We would like to continue this lively debate, and I would ask all members to save their energy for the moment when they're able to stand in their place and carry on the debate in their own name.

Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the valid point that you've just made, that we have a lot of nattering that seems to go on in the Legislative Assembly, but very few individuals from the government side of the House have the fortitude, shall we say, to actually get up and have their comments recorded in *Hansard*, especially when it comes to situations and to services that are provided. With regards to education and health care I'm sure that each and every one of your constituents would like to know what your remarks are on these Bills. I'm sure they'll be asking you, if they aren't already, how you stand and why you stand in a certain way on each of the Bills.

MR. DINNING: It's in the Bill.

MS LEIBOVICI: I believe this government said that they were a free and open government, and I hear the hon. Treasurer indicating that it's in the Bill, which seems to me to indicate that there is no freedom on that side of the Legislative Assembly.

What I'd like to talk about is this ill-thought-out, ill-conceived, and once again the cart before the horse kind of Bill that we see here. We see it from a government that says that they won't blink, and that's because they don't think, and that's because this Bill stinks.

Now, when we talk about Bill 20, the principle . . . [interjections] Parliamentary language? I can just read you some



comments from the hon. Minister of Labour – I'm so glad that you brought that up – in terms of what people's faces were like and trust and donkeys and various other parliamentary comments that the Minister of Labour provided us with about an hour or two hours ago.

What the fact of the matter is that we're not in here to call each other names. I would hope that's not why you got elected. What we are here in this Legislative Assembly for is to debate the merits of particular Bills that come forward, and what we are debating right now is Bill 20. Just for those members who don't know what we're on, it's the Regional Health Authorities Act.

What that Bill seems to talk about is the establishment of regional health boundaries and authorities. Well, in reality what it does is look at various things such as privatization, user fees, taxation without representation – and if the hon. Minister of Labour wants to talk about Rousseau, he can then move into both the French and the American revolutions, which were fought on taxation without representation. Bill 20 talks about government by regulation, and it talks about essential and nonessential services. Now, these are the kinds of things that we're looking at in Bill 20.

We've heard lots of rhetoric from the government about various issues such as liberalism, such as trust, such as saying: "Well, trust us. We know what's good for you in Alberta. Trust us. Trust us as to what the regulations will put forward." Yet what we see is that we're moving one step from privatization of health care. When this government gets to eliminating its deficit and it's sold off all its assets, what's left but to privatize education and health care? That's the framework that we're seeing. I see some members from the government side nodding their heads, and I'm sure that the people of Alberta are waiting to see their health care system privatized.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

What we're seeing is systems being put into place with no backup. We're seeing mental health patients who are sent out into the community, and there's no backup. We're seeing patients who are sent out into communities before they are ready to go out into the communities, and there's no backup for them in the communities. So what we're seeing is individuals who are readmitted to hospital with much higher costs in terms of the readmission. Those are the kinds of things we see because of the ill planning that has occurred within the health fields these days. Under what guise is that? It's under regionalization. We're going to get rid of the hundreds of boards of community health clinics, ambulance boards. We'll just get rid of them all, and we're going to have 17 boards in this province. Now, talk about a top-heavy organization. Just think back. You're going to amalgamate all of those boards with this little piece of paper. Within this little piece of paper is there any outline as to how that's going to occur? No. It's going to be regulations. So: "Once again, people of Alberta, trust us, just as you trusted us with NovAtel, just as you trusted us with MagCan. Trust us once more with your health now and your lives." This is not dollars; this is health and lives. "People of Alberta," you've already said, "trust us with education." What do we see? Kindergartens gone. We see community schools. There's a wonderful exhibit . . . [interjections]

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

MR. DAY: A point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. House leader has a point of order?

MR. DAY: As a suggestion, Mr. Speaker, in terms of relevance. A lot of the statements made in the last several minutes have nothing to do with Bill 20, and if she could be called to order on that.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Did you want to speak to the point of order?

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes, I was going to speak to the point of order. I think it is extremely relevant because all of these Bills are put forward with the implicit assumption that the people of Alberta should trust. What I am indicating is that the people of Alberta should not trust, and there are a number of reasons why there should be no trust. Bill 20 is one of those reasons, but I'm just expanding and rounding out as to what the other reasons are.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. member. I will listen intently to make sure that you are tying it in. Thank you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you.

#### **Debate Continued**

MS LEIBOVICI: I was just going to make one other point in terms of community schools. There's a wonderful exhibit for any of you who have gone towards the Haultain Building. There's an exhibit that says that community schools have now had 10 years of life within this province. This province is cutting that funding out.

Now, with regards to Bill 20 . . . [interjections]

MR. GERMAIN: You were setting the stage beautifully.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. Thank you.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. GERMAIN: They'll clip this out for their own debates.

MS LEIBOVICI: Exactly.

We have, much as we've seen with some of these other Bills, committees that wander around the province. There's a committee or maybe two or three. I've lost track of how many committees the Member for Bow Valley is on. This one particular committee is going to decide what is essential and nonessential. Again, why that's relevant to Bill 20 is that on page 11, when you look at section 20(a) – so you see I have read the Bill – it talks about the minister making regulations to define health services and health related services. Well, really in effect what that is is essential services and nonessential services. It's the minister making those regulations.

As well, when we look within this particular section, we see where the minister can authorize regional health authorities and community health councils to charge fees for goods and services. This is a blanket statement for user fees if I've ever seen one.

Again, in Bill 20 we look at the appointment or election. It's just mind boggling. The government says we want to empower people. We want to empower people, yet when you look at Bill 20, what does it say? It says in section 4(1) that "the Minister shall by order appoint the number of persons the Minister considers appropriate." Now, that's real empowerment.

Then it moves on to section 4(2) about successors after the first term of office. Now, if we wanted to talk about real

empowerment, we would then put into the Act that there will be elections. [interjections]

12:50

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order please.

MS LEIBOVICI: You know, the Minister of Labour once said to me: when you're losing an argument, get loud and get shrill. That's exactly what we're seeing from the opposite side. I want to thank you for that.

AN HON. MEMBER: They don't argue; they chirp like gophers.

MS LEIBOVICI: They chirp like gophers.

Now, what we see is that "successors are appointed or elected." If we were going to have real empowerment, why wouldn't you put in here that every three years there will be an election or every four years there will be an election? Why should you have appointments? I'll let you know why. I had the pleasure of being at a city of Calgary council meeting where the Edmonton regional facilities planning commission and the Member for Bow Valley were present. I had to answer some questions from city council. Basically, when they were asked, "How are members appointed, and why are they appointed?" the answer was, "Well, we need to have control." This is empowerment. The answer was: we need to have control. Why do you need to have control? So that there aren't special interest groups that take over health care. [interjections]

#### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Order please. [interjections] Order please. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has the floor. Now please give her the courtesy to speak. [interjections] Hon. members, order. Order please, both sides. We're not going to get anything done by bickering back and forth, so please give the hon. member the opportunity to speak.

Hon. member.

#### **Debate Continued**

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that there are certain members in the Legislative Assembly that have a hard time with the notion of elections, democracy, have a hard time with the notion of listening to anything other than themselves. That's part of an arrogance that we've seen within this government; that's part of an arrogance that afflicted the last government, the last Conservative Premier that you had. I would just caution the members that that's an attitude that the public pays a lot of heed to.

Now, as I was saying, in terms of the appointment and election of members to the regional health authority, if there was a serious interest in empowerment, if there was a serious interest in decentralizing, then the elections would be in here. I think if we look at other sections within this particular Act – when we look at section 2(3) that talks about ensuring that "the interests of creditors and debenture holders" are looked after, the question arises: well, what about labour? Is anyone looking after that?

We look at section 5 that talks about the regional health authority having absolute and final authority determining priorities. Again this goes to the guts of whether or not we are dealing with a true empowerment.

Then we look at section 7. What it says there is that "the Minister may give directions to a regional health authority." So which is it? Does the regional health authority actually have

absolute and final authority, or is it the minister that gives that direction and tells the regional authority what to do? Which is it?

When we look at the setting up of the regional health authorities and then we talk about this idea of a community health council, which may well be a good idea because we do need to move from an illness model into a wellness model . . . [interjections]

#### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, perhaps if we can't keep order, we should recess for a few minutes until you're prepared. Now, we can maybe try this again, but if we can't keep order, then I suggest we will recess for a few minutes until order is restored.

#### **Debate Continued**

MS LEIBOVICI: I guess I bring out the best in the government members.

When we talk about the community health councils and the regional health authorities – just to reiterate so that I make sure that nobody really loses their train of thought. We are talking about a wellness model with regards to the community health council as opposed to the illness model. When I look at Bill 20, all it says is that "A community health council shall be established, and [of course] the members of it shall be appointed or elected." The government can't seem to make up its mind. Should we trust citizens or shouldn't we? Should we trust these people or not? But it doesn't really say how the two interact. It doesn't say what this council is supposed to do. It doesn't say what they have indicated the interaction is between the health authority and the community health council. It's very, very vague. So where does that lead us in terms of this particular Bill? It leads back to the first comments that I made in terms of the Bill being ill thought out, ill conceived, and having the cart before the horse.

What the government has said in this Legislative Assembly is: we will cut funding from health care, and in order that nobody gets hurt in terms of delivery of services, we're going to reorganize. That reorganization is seen through this Regional Health Authorities Act. So the premise is: we will reorganize, we will amalgamate, and therefore there will be these immense savings that will accrue so that people's health is not damaged. Well, that is not the fact. That is not the fact, because there are no systems that have been put in place to pick up any of the slack that has been cut from health care. What we're seeing is an attitude that says that, well, we don't know if health is an essential service. We know that workers can't strike in health, but we don't know if it's an essential service. What health should maybe do is be privatized. One of your own members, Dr. Dennis Modry, can't wait to get his hands on a hospital. I have yet to hear the Premier stand up and say, "No, that's wrong." What I've seen is a lot of vacillating. What I've seen is: well, maybe we can, and maybe we can't. The fact of the matter is that the Premier should just say no to Dr. Dennis Modry, but he's not going to do that because Dr. Dennis Modry goes to your conventions, doesn't he?

Now, health is an essential service and not an industry. It is not an industry that is set up to create a need for its services, and that's what happens when health becomes privatized. It becomes profit oriented not patient oriented. I don't think we need to follow an American style of a health care system when they are looking at our health care system. We don't need to see nurses become patient hostesses and patients having to pay for boxes of kleenex. That's what it means when you go for health care in the United States of America. We don't need to see that. What

we're seeing, though, is that the government is saying: sure, shop around for your health care. So what, you might be in the middle of a heart attack. Shop around for your health care. See who's going to give you the best service. It doesn't have to be the closest hospital; you can go to another hospital because you can shop around, and we want those hospitals to be competitive.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shop till you drop.

1:00

MS LEIBOVICI: Shop till you drop; exactly.

Well, let's get back to what health care is supposed to be. It's an essential service that's provided within this province. I think that in terms of my comments – and I'm sure we will be speaking to this particular Bill again – I've covered most of the items that I had wished to cover. I would very much appreciate hearing what some of the members on the government side have to say to support this Bill. It could well be that I've misread it. It could well be that within these lines where it says that the minister may make regulation, there may be some invisible ink that if I throw water on it, perhaps the words will magically appear and be able to tell me what that means. It could well be that you have that information, and if you do, it would be wonderful if you could share it not only with this side of the Legislative Assembly but with the people in the province of Alberta so that they don't need to worry about user fees, so that they don't need to worry about the Dennis Modrys of the world having private hospitals.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand up and speak to Bill 20 for the first time at 1 a.m., whatever day of the week it might be. I should also indicate that I have visited a hospital in the last week or two. That doesn't mean, as the Member for Redwater-North would suggest, that I support this particular hospital plan.

I would suggest – and it's been stated before in this House – that the Liberals have always been proponents of regionalization. They were bold enough to suggest it in '86 and again in '89, and we would support a good Bill that outlined quality regionalization today. Unfortunately, this Bill doesn't capture that. There's no question that we understand that there're efficiencies to be gained when we deal with regionalization. Certainly we understand the merits of it as well. It is the correct direction to move, but the operative word we're dealing with here, Mr. Speaker, is "correct." This Bill is not moving in the correct direction. There are deficiencies in this Bill. I think even those on the side opposite, if they took the time to look at it, could themselves even discover them.

First of all, we've got a regional health authority here, Mr. Speaker, that has been given the broadened powers to requisition dollars from the public. Now, previously hospital boards had this right, but it was generally limited to site improvements. It has since been opened, and I would suggest that by opening it, we are moving very clearly towards a two-tiered health care system. I could give you a hypothetical situation here. If we could deal with a hospital, let's say – we'll pick on my particular constituency – the Evergreen area or region and the Drayton Valley hospital desired that in fact they wanted to become the asthma centre of Alberta.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I thought that was the Liberal Party.

MR. KIRKLAND: We should only be so fortunate that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat would get asthma and perhaps keep some of his comments a little lower and to himself.

DR. L. TAYLOR: You should never wish sickness on another.

MR. KIRKLAND: I don't have to. I think the member has the market cornered on it.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Through the Chair, please.

MR. KIRKLAND: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My apologies for the diversion there. Occasionally I'm distracted.

As I was indicating, Mr. Speaker, Bill 20 does not outline specifically when we're dealing with representation on the health regional board. There is no avenue to ensure that all areas of one particular health region are covered, and I will use the Evergreen, the one that falls within my constituency for the most part. We have in there the Wetaskiwin hospital, we have the Leduc hospital, the Breton hospital, and a Drayton Valley hospital. We also have the Millets, the Calmars, the Thorsbys, the Warburgs, the Beaumonts, the county of Leduc, the county of Wetaskiwin, the county of Brazeau. So it is lacking in definition when we attempt to structure that board to ensure all interests are so aligned.

As I was indicating earlier, if the board were to be hypothetically stacked in favour of Drayton Valley, that appointed board or some members in some instances would then have the right, Mr. Speaker, as I read that Bill, to requisition dollars from throughout the Evergreen constituency. Now, it's particularly galling that an appointed member or members of that board would have the right to requisition dollars from the public, because there's no accountability if they are not elected. As a consequence, the public would be at a loss to attempt to demand accountability from that particular board. The only way they could address that accountability is probably through petitions to this Legislature or letters, but we've seen how the government responds somewhat less than enthusiastically about the people speaking through those mediums in this particular Legislature.

The example I was attempting to put forth was that if in fact that board were stacked by Drayton Valley, with all due respect to the Drayton Valley residents, they could requisition dollars from throughout the rest of the Evergreen area. They could model their hospital as being the only one to attend in the region, thereby disadvantaging the others that are there. There has to be a mechanism or process in place, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that does not happen. This requisitioning power I would suggest is an abdication of provincial responsibility. If we stop to consider also the new provisions coming down in the Municipal Government Act, which gives the municipalities the right to impose a tax to entice physicians to their community, I would suggest that that is just a further step into the cowardly approach of making tough decisions in this province and also shows a lack of leadership on something as critical as health care in this province.

When I say lack of leadership, I would suggest that that leadership comes into question when we look at the boundaries that have been drawn to some of the regions. It is clear that there are self-serving members sitting on the side opposite that were simply looking after their own areas. We've had that come up in question period, particularly pertaining to Cereal and Oyen. It's quite evident what the strategy was there. The Member for St. Albert has spoken at length about the inclusion of the Sturgeon hospital in the Edmonton region. Clearly, the public of Alberta can see that as a manipulation to ensure that the centre of Alberta, as it is described by some on occasion, Barrhead and Westlock

hospitals are protected. I would suggest that the plan does not give due credit for intelligence to the Alberta people in this matter, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DAY: Don't fade on us now, Terry. Come on.

MR. KIRKLAND: Oh, I won't fade, Stock.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Another nine minutes, Terry.

MR. KIRKLAND: Well, then I'll just take my time. Thanks very much for the warning.

Bill 20, the Regional Health Authorities Act, Mr. Speaker, also gives the power to charge for fees for goods and services. I'd indicated that there were several areas in this Bill that are moving towards a two-tiered system. That, I would suggest, is another example, and those on the side opposite should give serious thought to whether that does not create a situation where the less efficient rural hospitals will have to start charging fees for their services. When that occurs, I would suggest that when you have hospitals only a few miles apart, hospital shopping would certainly take place. That would further the erosion of some of the rural hospitals, and I submit that ultimately you will see some close.

Well, I think we talked about leadership some time ago, and I think we were about 10 years ahead of this particular government when we suggested that regionalization should occur. Of course, at that point the side opposite was most alarmed and concerned and used their fear mongering tactics. So, as I indicated, if in fact we're into fees and services and some actually have to charge fees to remain financially viable, we will see that erosion occur. People will travel a mile or two to access a hospital that doesn't provide a charge.

#### 1:10

The other thing that was very large and looming and concerning to me in this Bill was that when I analyzed it, I did not see a definition of any provincial medical programs, Mr. Speaker. We deal with the dialysis aspect or the transplant aspect or the cancer aspect. These are very important. There are other provincial responsibilities that should be addressed, but these are extremely important, and the Bill does not address nor does it identify the contractual obligations, again if I could use the example, between Evergreen and the city of Edmonton regions. This contractual responsibility or obligation as to whether Evergreen has to forward the dollars for treatment to the Edmonton region, as I would suggest in the case of a cancer patient – it's not defined whether dollars will follow the patient or how that particular aspect will actually be resolved. I would ask: does the Edmonton region invoice the Evergreen region? If that is the case, does that put the Evergreen region in a situation where they are attempting to determine exactly whether they can afford to treat somebody that may be terminally ill with cancer and perhaps delay the treatment or deny the treatment? Those things are not clear as I read that Bill, and I think they have to be clarified before we move on to this.

Further, when we examine Bill 20, it authorizes the Minister of Health or the regional health authority or the community health council to make payments directly to individuals. I would suggest in most cases, Mr. Speaker, that this will turn out to be a subsidy to the rich, who will use those dollars to shop for health care where they want or where they feel they get the service that they require, again a two-tiered system undoubtedly.

Another area in the Bill that clearly has to be defined. I spoke of the inability or the lack of definition in the Bill trying to protect

the different interests within the regional health authorities. We know this province for years has been driven by acute care hospitals. I do not see the protection that is required to ensure that the public health units get their due respect and their due dollars in this situation. We definitely, Mr. Speaker, know that preventative medicine and a preventative approach to health save dollars in the long term. I suspect that when we look at those that manage, the gatekeepers of the health care system in this province, they are the doctors. That's not arguable. The doctors, I would suggest, can play a large role in ensuring the system is successful. Unfortunately, when you look at public health, it has a tendency to impact on their wallets somewhat negatively. So I have a concern that their interests will be foremost in this particular instance, and I think it's extremely important to set a process in place to ensure that a specific percentage of the dollars associated with each health region are definitely spent on public health. This government has indicated that it's preventative medicine that we should move into, yet they have failed to address that specific issue in this Bill.

It has been brought to the Assembly's attention several times that as we are dealing with education by regulation, we are moving clearly into medicine by regulation. That, as members have spoken to before, will again lead to inconsistencies from health region to health region. I do believe that difference between health regions is not acceptable to Albertans, and I would suggest that we certainly have to address that matter.

Just to reiterate a couple of points that I think are extremely important. The move that this Bill is making without defining many of the areas that I've identified, Mr. Speaker, heightens several concerns that I have made. One that I've stated on three or four occasions is the two-tiered system. Clearly, this Bill will result in that. That is not arguable. I do believe, being a rural MLA, that I foresee that it will impact negatively on rural hospitals. I would go as far as to predict that they will be closed as a result of the necessity to introduce fees to stay financially viable. I think that's very unfortunate. I think it's an underhanded way to close down rural hospitals, and I would suggest that it's a hidden agenda by this government, and it should be bothersome to all rural Albertans.

This Bill as implemented will be the ultimate demise of the health care system that we Albertans have come to enjoy and respect, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that it is a radical departure from what Albertans want. We have seen the rally at the Grey Nuns hospital pertaining to opposing that closure. That should be a clear indication to this government that health care is of extreme importance and is very dear to the hearts of Albertans. That rally was certainly not premature; that rally was preventative. If we go ahead with this Bill, I would submit that we will see many thousands of people march, attempting to change the decisions that Bill 20 makes.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments tonight, and hopefully we will have a member from the side opposite give us their perspective on this particular Bill. [interjections] Well, we would not shout at any members if they had the least bit of decency and courtesy, but when they stand with the arrogance as if they're at a pulpit giving a preach to each and every one of us in this House, then in fact – there are some of us that actually, in spite of our rookie status, have learned to embrace some statesmanship and decorum in this House. Some of the seasoned veterans have yet to learn that. It is really, truly unfortunate.

MR. DAY: Point them out.

MR. KIRKLAND: Usually the ones that are the noisiest, asking you to point them out, Mr. Speaker. Seeing as we have done that now, I will conclude my comments.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a most inspiring evening to listen to everything from ulterior motives that have been accused to hidden agendas and bogeymen coming out.

With that, Mr. Speaker, and keeping in mind that it is now 1:19 on Wednesday, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 20 for tonight.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, all in favour of adjourning debate on Bill 20?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[At 1:20 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

