

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

Title: **Wednesday, May 18, 1994** **8:00 p.m.**  
 Date: 94/05/18  
 [Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

**Auditor General Search Committee**

22. Moved by Mr. Day:  
 Be it resolved that the report of the Select Special Auditor General Search Committee presented to the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, May 5, 1994, sessional paper 656/94, be recommitted to the committee and that the committee for such purposes be revived to continue its original mandate pursuant to Government Motion 22, passed by the Assembly on Tuesday, November 9, 1993.

[Motion carried]

head: **Private Bills**  
 head: **Third Reading**

[It was moved by the members indicated that the following Bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

No.	Title	Moved by
Pr. 1	Mandy Anderson Adoption Act	Jacques
Pr. 4	Concordia College Amendment Act, 1994	Massey (for Sekulic)
Pr. 7	Scott Peter Lavery Adoption Act	Herard
Pr. 12	Travis Trevor Purdy Adoption Act	Renner (for Vasseur)
Pr. 14	Jody Anne van Overmeeren Adoption Act	Renner (for Bruseker)

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

**Bill 1**  
**Labour Boards Amalgamation Act**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. the Premier I move third reading of Bill 1, the Labour Boards Amalgamation Act.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?  
 The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of comments on Bill 1. We have indeed talked about the Bill at length within this Assembly and have tried to point the right way of perhaps dealing with some of the issues that the Minister of Labour wishes to deal with in terms of the amalgamation of the particular Bill. Unfortunately, we have not been as successful with Bill 1 as we were with Bill 4. I'm not sure if that is because of the inadequacies of my ability to articulate the particulars with regard to that Bill or whether it was stubbornness on the part of government to realize that in effect there might be a better way. However, we are at third reading. We have provided many amendments to try and make the Bill better. Unfortunately, the

government has not seen fit to look at those amendments in a favourable light.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

**Bill 15**

**Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity I move for third reading Bill 15, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?  
 The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to Bill 15 in its third reading. We have some concerns with respect to Bill 15. Bill 15 is one that would see the ERCB amalgamate with the PUB, creating one board. The right of the consumers in this case has been jeopardized considerably, in the opinion of members on this side of the House. We would like to just continue to stress that fact. I believe that someday we will be looking back at this and saying, "If we are going to make a Bill that's effective for Albertans, why isn't it that we are going to make one that would indeed be exactly what Albertans need?" In this case it's probably not what Albertans need.

There is much that happened in the last little while with respect to the elimination of protections for consumers. Mr. Speaker, we've seen the consumer and corporate affairs department of our government disintegrate. We've seen things like the Consumers' Association, which is a national association with roots in every province - it has come to a point where now the Consumers' Association, I know, in the province of Alberta because of a lack of funding has closed its doors and is functioning by way of a president of the association working out of her own home. That's how bad it's gotten in the province of Alberta.

I think the erosion continues with Bill 15. We have now seen the amalgamation of another consumer advocate organization that is now going to be connected with the ERCB. Mr. Speaker, this is probably in a sense a good idea with respect to trying to eliminate overlap and duplication, but in doing so, we are going to erode some of the consumer advocate portions of the Public Utilities Board. Therefore, it is my opinion that we ought not to have done that. We should have had some safeguards in there. There is no provision in the Bill itself that says that the Public Utilities Board can have any limit on board members. There seem to be no limits whatsoever. The open competition, again, for people to be on the board is not defined. With respect to overlap and duplication, it would make sense if some of the members of the board either on the ERCB or on the PUB were indeed eliminated. If we're going to have the same numbers, I question how much worth of overlap and duplication we'll actually save.

So there's something frightfully wrong here, Mr. Speaker, and I cannot in all good conscience support the Bill. I think that members on this side of the House have reflected that in their commentaries. With that, I will rest and allow other members to speak.

Thank you.

8:10

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

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Just for the members opposite, trying always to be co-operative I'll be fairly brief tonight.

The principle of this Bill has to be questioned. There is no reason one should not always seek to have some kind of efficiencies brought to government, but this is the tiniest part of the administration of this government in the way of conservation of energies and conservation of natural materials in this province. Here you have the Public Utilities Board, that has a totally and completely different mind-set, having to deal with the applications that come before them and having to decide on numerous questions, particularly with regards to applications. The one I'm most familiar with happens to be energy.

These are very, very critical to the deliverance of a continual supply of energy in this province in that they must decide who in fact is right when they're dealing with things like the next major plant to come on and the production of electrical energy in particular. Those that are next in line for the production of energy are in fact the ones that are pushing always to have the estimates of the need raised. Those on the other side that are not on the next order – and there are only three major generators in this province – are pushing to have the estimates reduced. This is a constant push and pull, and to confuse that kind of argument, that's held in a forum almost like a court of law, with a hearing that is dealing with the cleanups of old sites – that is a very, very different kind of a hearing. That is a government on one side and an applicant or in many cases a member of the public or a company that has come up against a regulation of the department of environment that they need appealed. Many times there are these kinds of hearings that are required. To combine these two, although very, very efficient, will, in my view, prove to be akin to putting a boxer out on a football field. I mean, it's a total mismatch of forum with the problem of public administration. I for one can't see the logic beyond mere optics in saying, "Yes, we have saved some money," and therefore will not be supporting this Bill, sir.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

### Bill 17

#### Treasury Department Statutes Amendment Act, 1994

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I would move for third reading Bill 17, the Treasury Department Statutes Amendment Act, 1994.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17 in third reading. A number of amendments have been brought through which we had negotiated with the hon. Provincial Treasurer. We think this Bill is now much improved, and I think it in a sense suggests that the opposition can be constructive, can work with the government to enhance the quality of Bills.

Three points I would like to make with regards to the Bill. One, the Bill increases the debt limit. This is a necessity as a consequence of the deficit that we're currently running and under the Deficit Elimination Act should eliminate within the next three years, but again it is a reflection I think, Mr. Speaker, of what happens when you ride the roller coaster up and you just spend, spend, spend. It's unfortunate that we have to raise the debt limit. We agree that it should be raised, and we hope that after a few more years we will not have the necessity, then, of coming back to the House requiring an increase in the debt limit.

The Bill also calls for the elimination of the capital funds division, and again that is something we support. We think that's a streamlining. The Bill also sets out a better reporting order within particular departments in terms of expenditure officers and signing authority, and we think that streamlining is important and allows for a more responsible and accountable civil service.

The Bill also deals with some issues of disclosure, and the amendments brought in by the Treasurer address our concerns and remove the element of discretion that we found most distasteful. There was one element of the Bill that allowed the Provincial Treasurer to deem disclosure as to those areas that he thought appropriate. That is no longer in the Bill, and we think that is certainly a good move.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I will conclude.

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

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be given the opportunity to speak to third reading of Bill 17. Bill 17 goes a long way in highlighting some of the areas, I think, that the Liberal Party has been trying to get the government to do for some time. We've often said that revenues should be included in the general revenue fund, revenues from all parts of our departments.

Mr. Speaker, we could have taken this a step further, and we could have included – perhaps maybe in the next session when we can once again amend the Treasury Department statutes – things like the lotteries to come into the general revenue fund. Perhaps we could start taking other investments that we have and other funds that we hold and put them into the general revenue fund.

There's no reason, Mr. Speaker, to have all of these different bureaucracies and all the administration that takes place in all of the different funds that exist today. You look at the motor vehicle accident claims fund, for example, look at the land titles fund, for example. There's one here called the Horned Cattle Purchases Act. There's the Forest Development Research Trust Fund Act. All of these different funds were in place. I think we've done a real service to Albertans by pulling it all together and bringing it in under one and bringing it into the general revenue fund.

I know that the department of Treasury worked in conjunction with the Liberal opposition this time around with respect to Bill 17. We've gone through the entire Bill. We've said what we thought was right and what we thought was wrong. We worked together. I felt it was in a real spirit of compromise and a spirit of a good working relationship when we set out to amend parts of the Bill that we felt were wrong.

8:20

My colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud alluded to this earlier, and just to give you an example, Mr. Speaker, section 28 of the Financial Administration Act read:

The Provincial Treasurer shall prepare a statement of all remissions, compromises and write-offs made or approved under sections 26 and 27 during any fiscal year, which gave the Provincial Treasurer in that section, as it presently was under the Financial Administration Act, the right to prepare this statement of all these write-offs, remissions, and compromises. But the way Bill 17 originally read was that the government wanted to amend it by saying: let's strike out "of all remissions, compromises and write-offs" and let's put in place instead of that "in the form the Provincial Treasurer considers appropriate, of remissions and compromises." So in other words, only what the Provincial Treasurer felt was right or ought to be disclosed will be disclosed.

Well, Albertans wouldn't have accepted that. Certainly the Liberal opposition didn't accept that. When we sat with the department of Treasury, they saw even when they read that part of it, and they said: well, you know, we believe we should change that; you're absolutely right. You know, in a spirit of compromise we did change it. We changed it to the betterment of all Albertans, and we made a much better Bill. That is the spirit of co-operation that I think can exist, because we've proved it right here in Bill 17.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would allow other members to speak or call the question.

Thank you.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

### Bill 19 School Amendment Act, 1994

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. Order please. Before recognizing the hon. member, the hon. Minister of Education would like to move third reading.

MR. JONSON: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, when one is so interested in the work of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move third reading of Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, 1994.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate your alertness. I thought we were going to be speaking to a nullity, but you caught it.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking to Bill 19 a number of observations. The first one I want to make is in fact a response to comments made by the Minister of Labour last evening. In *Hansard* at page 2038 and 2039 he had, as he often gets, the last word. He went on to talk about the 60 speakers that had spoken since April 12 on the education Bill, and he suggested that the cost is \$15,000 a day, and by his arithmetic that came to \$150,000. You know, what I found fascinating about that assertion by the Minister of Labour: I would have thought that the last thing this member would have wanted to address dealing with a Bill as important as Bill 19 would be the cost to the taxpayers of Alberta, because the reason we have been arguing and the reason we have had 60 speakers on Bill 19 is that it has taken this government, this Minister of Education seven full weeks to realize that the way they were headed, the direction they were moving was constitutionally wrong, was legally wrong, and, most important to that government, politically wrong.

So I think I might throw back to the hon. Minister of Labour: has he calculated the cost that the taxpayers of this province have been put to because this Minister of Education and this government couldn't get it right the first time? It's disingenuous for this hon. minister to tote up the cost of debate in this Assembly, suggest that somehow that should be laid at the feet of the opposition when in fact if the minister had done seven weeks ago what this caucus had urged, there wouldn't have been seven weeks of debate, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans have to know that, and I think we're going to make sure that Albertans understand that. When the hon. Minister of Labour goes around toting up costs, he'd better also be prepared to accept responsibility, because this clearly belongs at the feet of the government.

The Minister of Labour in his closing comments last evening made a preposterous assertion. His assertion was that he hadn't heard one remark directed to children in our school system. Well, I'm going to invite the hon. minister to go back to the comments I made at second reading, Mr. Speaker. What I said at that time was that the way I viewed Bill 19 was in terms of what impact it was going to have on that child that was attending one of the community schools in Calgary-*Buffalo*. I talked about the child about to embark in high school at Western Canada high school. I talked about the child starting junior high at St. Monica junior high school. If the minister would take the time to read the thoughtful comments that have been made by my colleagues, he'd appreciate that we have continually been talking about the children of this province. We've been focused on the impact that Bill 19 will have on the children of this province, and that's the reason that we have been aggressively fighting a Bill that we think is misguided, that we think is going to be destructive to public education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we now deal with the Bill with the amendments that we waited for for seven weeks, although they're not all there. I guess one would have to reflect and say: have we learned nothing in this province? As my colleague for Redwater is keen to remind us, if we don't learn lessons from history, we are in fact doomed to repeat them.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I think one would have thought that in the last 81 years in this province we would have learned some useful lessons about education. Eighty-one years to learn those lessons because it was 81 years ago that two major events happened in this province, events that should be fresh in the mind of the hon. Minister of Education, because one would have thought he would have looked back to see where we've been before he starts us down a different road.

It was in 1913 in this province that we had a major confrontation involving the Department of Education. It was 81 years ago that the Department of Education marched into the Ukrainian bloc in east central Alberta, and when they marched in – do you know that the Department of Education at that time was all powerful, like this minister wants to make it once again in this province? – they said to Ukrainian teachers and Ukrainian parents: even though we don't have any certified teachers that can teach Ukrainian, we're not going to allow the parents in the Vermilion-Vegreville area to hire noncertified Ukrainian-speaking teachers. You know, when we saw what happened . . . [interjections] Nineteen thirteen. I'm going to encourage the Minister of Education, the Minister of Labour to look at what happened.

MR. DAY: Wasn't that a Liberal government?

MR. DICKSON: In fact it was the Liberal government in 1913, Mr. Speaker. What it demonstrates . . .

**Speaker's Ruling  
Decorum**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it may or may not be another long evening, but we would hope that we could hear the hon. member who is officially recognized as being able to speak, to speak without having to speak over the comments of ever so many members.

**8:30 Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your assistance, and I'm delighted to report that it's clear that the Government House Leader clearly remembers and understands the lessons . . .

**Point of Order  
Decorum**

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is rising on a point of order. Could you share with us the citation?

MR. HAVELOCK: I've been waiting to do this for years. *Beauchesne* 329: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, if I'm not mistaken, is eating in the House.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, this is of importance to the debate?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, just as important as yesterday's comments on the paper cups on my ears, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: With that relevance in mind, we'll hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. BENIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would you please look at 329 and see what that has to do with what the member said? You know, I find it very annoying that the Member for Calgary-Shaw day after day puts on things in this House that are most improper in the way of decorum. Yesterday he put cups on both ears, and the Chair did not do anything until I rose on a point of order. He just sat there and smiled at the member.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Edmonton-Norwood. I think your rebuttal of the alleged point of order is probably on a par with it. I've heard better arguments in a grade 7 class. On both sides there is no point of order.

Please continue, Calgary-*Buffalo*. [interjections] There is no point of order. Do you wish to debate that?

MR. HAVELOCK: I would just like to know then: are members of the House permitted to eat in the House in the future, Mr. Speaker?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The answer is no, and 329 does not address what you were talking about.

Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to continue with the great 1913 . . . [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Calgary-*Buffalo* is recognized. [interjections] Hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, the Chair has found that there is no point of order, so a retraction is truly not needed. Both of you have made comments which may be considered relative to one another's behaviour that may or may not be accurate. The Chair is not omnipotent in being able to see all things at the time. However, both of them are at the moment inconsequential to the debate at hand.

We would invite Calgary-*Buffalo* now to speak and hope that there are no further frivolous interruptions.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your reining in those two members, although *Hansard* should reflect that our friend from Calgary-*Shaw* did look quite becoming with the cups on both ears.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, moving on. We were speaking of 1913 and the important lesson that all Alberta legislators should have learned from what happened then. I was relating a situation that we had in the Ukrainian community in that area in 1913. They wanted to be able to teach their children and have teachers, instructors, who could speak both Ukrainian and English. The all-powerful Department of Education said that they weren't going to permit that. You know, the only way it was resolved was when the Department of Education moved in with the kind of sensitivity that we expect from large departments and what we may expect to see from this department if this Bill becomes law. The only way it was resolved was when the government swooped in and seized the horses of the parents and the school teachers involved in trying to have the 13 women be able to teach Ukrainian in those schools. So, you know, when one thinks of the strong emotions that were involved, the strong tension that was involved there between local parents and educators who thought that they knew best what their children wanted and a headstrong, bureaucratic Department of Education, that rolled in and insisted that that department knew better, I can only expect that we're going to see an updated but recurrence of the same kind of tension when Bill 19 becomes law in this province.

I suggested there were two major events in 1913 that we should have learned from. I've touched on the first one, the business of the 13 Ukrainian teachers, or wannabe teachers, in east-central Alberta, but there is a second event. I'd expect also that the members opposite, and particularly the members in the front row who aspire to some kind of political longevity, would find instructive the second lesson. It was in 1913, in the September session, the First Session of the Third Legislature of this Assembly; the issue was the Alberta Great Waterways Railway. It was in that session that the government attempted to introduce legislation for huge loan guarantees. Mr. Speaker, does this sound familiar? In 1913 what the opposition at the time railed against was the fact that the government wanted to invest in railroads and support railroads. The government tried to jam that unpopular legislation through. The opposition put up a valiant fight: 27 amendments. They argued from 3 p.m. until 3:30 a.m. They fought, and they didn't win on a single amendment.

Ultimately the legislation went through, but the lesson that came from that experience with the Alberta Great Waterways Railway was that Mr. Sifton, who was the Premier at the time, lost the next election. The commentators and Albertans at the time made it clear that the reason he lost the election was because he believed in force and might rather than right: forcing that

unpopular legislation through. He may have won at the first stage. He may have got it through because he had the numbers in this Chamber, but ultimately in the court of public opinion he crashed and burned.

I think there's a lesson there that I want to offer to the hon. Minister of Education, to his colleagues sitting now smiling in the front row of the Assembly and remind them that there is no issue that we have seen since June 15 of 1993, absolutely no issue, on which Albertans have been as focused, as concerned, as exercised as the Bill we're now dealing with. If any member thinks that this Bill will be passed and we'll be out of here, whether it's tomorrow or next week or next month, that Albertans are going to forget and forgive, I think all members should reflect, because there's going to be a price to be paid for the dismantling of the public school system as we now know it, moving down a different direction, a direction that's been untried in this province, a direction that's been untested, and ultimately a direction that does not have the popular support of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I've suggested the two lessons that we should have learned from 1913, but there are lots of other reminders. I think also of 1935, when the Social Credit Party formed the government in this province and undertook a radical reformation or overhaul of the public school system. They ended up having to back off many of those reforms. Why? Because the reforms weren't well thought out, and because the reforms didn't have the support of educators, ultimately didn't have the support of parents, and maybe most importantly didn't have the support of Albertans. I think that what we find and certainly what I hear from my constituents and what my colleagues hear from other Albertans, people in other parts of the province, is that Bill 19 – the government may have the numbers now in this Chamber, and in the short term they may be able to pass this piece of legislation, but I submit that the majority of Albertans do not support the kind of reforms set out in Bill 19, and we have yet to hear from them. We've seen the petitions. We've seen the people sitting in the gallery. All MLAs know of the extent to which people have written and phoned and faxed. Well, we're going to hear more of that, Mr. Speaker. I predict that we will look back on this particular evening and all members will reflect on what we could have done differently to head off what I expect is going to be a crisis in confidence of Alberta voters.

**8:40**

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to me that when the Minister of Labour spoke last night – you know, I'm envious because he gets the chance to stand up too often and sum up after people have spoken; we may sit here and chafe when we hear him either misrepresent or in fact inaccurately reflect what he's heard from members on this side – one of the things that stood out in particular was his comment about parent councils. He acknowledged that we've heard concerns about parent councils in this province, but he said, and I quote, that we have implementation teams that will go throughout the province to discuss with parents. Well, we've seen the government attempt to consult with parents. We've seen the consultation when it came to health care. We've seen the so-called consultation when it had to do with education. I don't think Albertans are going to be impressed when a team of government MLAs goes around to try and sell the decisions that have already been made.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude by suggesting to all members that this isn't a question that this member is stuck in 1913. We've got more recent cases and events that we should be mindful of. When we start dismantling what I think has been an excellent

public school system, when we start to undermine a public school system that has educated most of us in this Chamber and many other Albertans, many distinguished Albertans other than members in this Chamber, you know, we have to wonder: are we really going to be able to do better with Bill 19?

If we look at Barrhead, the Barrhead senior high school team was the first team to go all the way to the national final of the Reach for the Top competition, an excellent opportunity for young people in this province to show what kind of an education they have. When they won that first national final, you know, not one of those students was a graduate of a charter school. Not one of those students was a graduate of some sort of stand-alone separate school system. Those students on that winning championship team from Barrhead were graduates or students from public schools in this province, Mr. Speaker.

I hope the Member for Barrhead-Westlock remembers that, and I hope that the Member for Vegreville-Viking will be mindful of what happened in 1913. I hope that every member in this Chamber, when they vote at third reading on this important Bill, will reflect on some of the lessons that we ought to take from past experience in this province.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. MITCHELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to reiterate and re-emphasize my concern with Bill 19. I think that a very significant moment for me, a very striking moment for me in this Legislature, perhaps one of the most striking and disconcerting moments for me in my experience in this Legislature in eight years occurred the day that the Premier was asked whether he could describe a charter school to this Legislature and to the people of Alberta. Not only was he asked to do that in this Legislature – and it wasn't as though that was a trick or a surprise question, because some three or four weeks before he was asked that question in the Legislature he had been asked that very same question in a public meeting in southern Alberta. What was very disconcerting was that not only could the Premier not answer the question in southern Alberta, but three weeks later, three weeks of opportunity to study and to determine what exactly a charter school might be, the Premier of Alberta couldn't answer that question in this Legislature.

Here the Premier of Alberta was launching this province on a massive restructuring of education. It was a key element of that restructuring, with grave consequences, possibly – at least significant consequences – for such items as private schools, as voucher systems, as the very nature of specialized schools. The Premier of Alberta could not describe that particular central feature of his education policy in this Legislature. Mr. Speaker, imagine the chief executive officer of a major corporation, the kinds of corporations that Conservatives love to admire, not being able to answer a question as seminal to the conduct of his or her business as charter schools is to the conduct of education policy on the part of this government. If ever we had an indication that this government had not planned properly, had conceived poorly its education policy, it was captured in that moment in this Legislature. Any member of that government should have been profoundly embarrassed and profoundly concerned that their leader, their Premier, could not answer that central question.

It's not surprising, seven or eight or 10 weeks later, that the Premier wouldn't be able to do that, because the Premier reflects

a true malaise about the development of this education policy in this entire government. Seven weeks after the original Bill is presented, Mr. Speaker, we find the Minister of Education bringing in massive amendments to the Bill, amendments that recognized flaws in that Bill – only partially recognized flaws in that Bill – which should have been fundamentally obvious to this government before they ever started.

In fact, one of the flaws it recognizes in the original Bill is the fact that it's not constitutional. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that if you were approaching the changing and restructuring of the education system, you'd at least be able to assess the constitutional implications of one of your proposals. How do we know for sure that they didn't? Because they brought the Bill in in the first place. How do we know for sure that they should have? Because they brought in massive amendments to address that problem. Either they were incompetent in the initial stages of the development of that Bill or they were profoundly arrogant that they could run in the face of constitutional law in this country, in the face of rights accorded in the Constitution of this country and do whatever they wanted to do. Take the fact that they didn't know what they were doing in the first place – the Premier couldn't describe charter schools – and put that together with profound incompetence or profound arrogance, and you know what you have? You have a classic recipe for disaster.

We go beyond the fact that it's ill conceived, ill planned. I want to begin to discuss the kinds of principles that it addresses yet fails to address properly. You know, classic Conservative ideology would tell you of the importance of the community, of the importance of a relationship to individuals at the local level. It was this very Premier who campaigned on that grassroots, organic kind of in-touch-with-people philosophy. Well, it's a lie, Mr. Speaker. That campaign was misleading. It does not reflect in fact what has happened. They don't believe in local autonomy. They don't believe in local input. They don't believe that the community has the responsibility, has the sense, has the intelligence to make decisions about education, which classically and traditionally in our society had been determined to be made best at the local level.

What did the Premier do, the Premier who couldn't describe charter schools, who couldn't figure out what the constitutional implications of what it was that he had launched this government and this province on? What did he do? Well, he said: you can't do it right; I'm going to take all that power up into central government, and I'm going to create even more of an empire.

#### 8:50

You know, how many years did it take them to create a \$33 billion deficit with only about \$8 billion or \$9 billion worth of income, real income, every year to spend? Eight years. And you know what they've done now? They've just grabbed another \$1.3 billion. It's a dream come true, Mr. Speaker, that this government with about \$8 billion or \$9 billion a year could create \$33 billion in debt. Now we're going to increase it by about 15 or 20 percent. Heaven only knows how much debt they're going to increase by the time this is all over. For them to say that somehow local authorities in this province misspent and needed to have their authority taken away is truly the kettle calling the pot black. I don't know of any education authority that's got \$33 billion in debt, or the equivalent of it, on a proportional basis. Does anybody in the Legislature know of that? No.

You know, the Premier steps up to the plate and says: well, none of them had the debt that we've created; we better take the money away from them and show them how to do it. They want

to run education policy because they feel the local authorities haven't run it properly. Well, the proverbial bottom line would beg to differ. This government has fundamentally been unable to manage the money it had and is now trying to deflect somehow or in its clouded arrogance is trying to say, "We can run schools and school boards and that local responsibility better than those school boards." Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is a frightening prospect to think that they've tried to grab all this money.

So they've run in the face of that fundamental tradition of this province, which is a respect for, an emphasis on, a belief in the importance of local autonomy, local input, local decision-making. There are many members of this Legislature who have been active at the local level in education and in municipal politics. Why? Because they had a belief in that kind of local enterprise, in that kind of local governance. Well, they've certainly on that side of the House simply cut those roots away. It was okay when they were there; wasn't it, Calgary-Currie? But it's not so good anymore now that they're up here because they want more power, they want a bigger empire, they want less government for everybody else but not for themselves. Inconsistency, Mr. Speaker.

You know, another inconsistency is that at a time when the world is pursuing an emphasis on education, what's this government doing? It is beginning to diminish the significance and the priority that it wants to place on education at a time when provinces across this country, when countries around the world understand that if they are to compete successfully in a global economy, they had better have the best education in the world. What model is thrown up so often by these people across the way? It is the Japanese model. And what do the Japanese people do? They put a profound emphasis on education. They don't reduce the number of hours that children get for education. They in fact have some of the highest number of hours of any education system in the world. On the one hand we know that the Conservative government wants to see that kind of back to the basics, tough, hard-nosed, keep those kids in that school for as long as possible; they're going to get a better education. But we don't see it. It isn't implemented in policy outcomes.

What do we see? Let's cut early childhood services by 50 percent. And they can't even do that right, Mr. Speaker. You know what? They can't even get that together, because in the process of doing that, you know what they've now done? They haven't just created a two-tiered education system. They have created – and this is going to be the accomplishment of this government; it's almost beyond comprehension – a three-tiered education system. In Calgary you're going to be able to pay for the other half of early childhood services. In Edmonton you're not going to be able to get it at all. You certainly won't be able to pay for it, and it won't exist. In other jurisdictions in the province you're going to be able to get it without having to pay extra for it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an accomplishment. Good for them. I hoped they planned. They must have planned that at the outset because it is almost incomprehensible that this could have happened by mistake. They either planned it, which shows that they are consciously and aggressively incompetent, or it happened by mistake, which means that they are unconsciously incompetent. The fact of the matter is that they are incompetent, and you see it in that particular policy initiative perhaps more than you see it anywhere else.

The Premier keeps standing up – this is his other philosophy, his other principle – and saying: get the money to the classroom; get it down to the classroom, where it counts. It's rhetoric, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't mean anything. Instead what we see are

layoffs of teachers, increasing ratios in the schools, fewer and fewer resources going to schools. We see a deterioration in the overall quality of the education system. The irony is that they think they're going to fix that through this equalization plan that runs in the face of rights, that creates a two-tiered administration of education – Catholic school boards and public school boards will be treated differently – that somehow they're going to fix this \$30 million problem, and they've admitted that's what it is, with a \$1.3 billion solution.

I guess the real indication of just how poorly conceived this education policy is is the proof which exists in the pudding. We don't have, Mr. Speaker, a consistent administration of education across this province any longer. We have two classes of education systems.

#### Point of Order

##### Questioning a Member

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

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to know if the Member for Edmonton . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you share with us the citation?

MR. McFARLAND: I just want to ask a question, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to know, with the statement that the Member for Edmonton-McClung made about hiring and firing teachers, if he would entertain a question.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, first of all, I didn't say anything about hiring teachers, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I was talking about how they had seen them laid off. And no, I'm not going to entertain a question, although I guess I entertained that first question, which was: would I entertain a question? I won't.

#### Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the proof is in the pudding. This government now has created a veritable mess in the administration of education. They have a three-tiered early childhood services education system, and they have very clearly a two-tiered local administration education system. Catholic school boards are going to be treated in one way – I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Currie is pretty happy about that – and public school boards are going to be treated in another way. In fact, the irony is that when this is over, when this Bill is passed – and I'm sure they will pass it – it's still not over, because the government still hasn't settled the problem. They will still have public school boards that may well have a legal basis for assailing, for confronting this particular Act.

If ever there was an Education minister who didn't think this through, who started a process and stumbled along to a result which is highly unacceptable, highly dangerous, and perhaps very, very corrosive of quality education in this province, we have seen a very vivid example of that, Mr. Speaker, in this Bill. I don't know how anybody who has any sense of the future, who has any belief that education is very important to how we're going to evolve as a society – the sense of strength, personal development of people, and how we're going to compete internationally in an economic sense – could do what they are doing to this particular education system. How different it might have been if the Premier of this province had had a full 12 years of experience

with the education system. Maybe he and his government might have appreciated it more.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot support this Bill because this is a fundamentally flawed Bill. It is creating far more problems than it could ever solve, it is probably driven by an ideological agenda, and it is founded upon a fundamental arrogance that somehow a government that created \$33 billion in debt is going to turn around and tell school boards that don't have debt how they should run their affairs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to just make a few comments in response to the debate that's gone on this evening on the reading of Bill 19. I guess perhaps enough references were made to my involvement with education that I should just congratulate the members in the House opposite. As I understand it, at the rally for 10,000 people that was electronically connected on behalf of the issues of education, those of you who received the credit for the amendments and the changes in the process in reviewing Bill 19 and bringing it to its substantial formation and presentation here are the Liberal Party. I find it ironic that the 10,000 people who recognize the work that you've done – you've completely discredited the efforts that you've made on behalf of the education community. I thought it was kind of interesting. The amendments that were debated last night and supported by you at the vote – it was a very different story from what you brought forward. As I've shared that with some of my colleagues in Calgary, they are absolutely astounded at the betrayal because of the issues they thought you would represent them with and the way you spoke last night.

#### 9:00

I want to bring to the attention of this House a couple of issues that you've touched upon, with respect to the level of personal support and the decimation of authority, and the variety of negative things that you've said about it. I'd like to refer to section 19 as presented in Bill 19, with respect to what we affectionately know as the Fritz amendment, which has to do with the opportunity for teachers and principals and a board to deal with students who behave inappropriately or bring difficult situations to the classroom with respect to their conduct.

You talk about the fact that there is no ability and no authority and no way for local communities to have a say in what happens in the education community. In the area of discipline the lack of ability for teachers to handle inappropriate conduct in the classroom has been a flaw in our education system, and it has been addressed in this particular amendment. I think it's high time you recognize that some of that local authority that is now going to occur at the very classroom level – that is, by the recommendations and concerns expressed by teachers – is now part of this legislation, and it's an extremely appropriate area of concern. Teachers know that they are educated and trained to provide a service. We expect them to do that, and in fact society relies on them to do so. The fact that they now can actually talk about and respond to the issues of students' behaviour in the classroom is significant. Parents also have a role to play in that, and that's articulated in section 19.

I think it's also important that we talk about school councils. As you know, in 1988, when the School Act was revisited, one of the issues that was addressed was the fundamental need for school councils to have a role to play. While I appreciate that we may

have different philosophies about education, I am most excited about the fact that this original proposal that was in Bill 88 is finally coming to fruition in this particular Bill 19 that we have in front of us. One of the reasons it has taken a number of years for the school council model, which was first identified and put in the legislation in '88 and now is enhanced in a very remarkable way in Bill 19, has a lot to do with that governance and that very authority you now shy away from and tell us is inappropriate. Why we have schools with no school councils or why we have school councils who have no ability to access and change the programs that are before their children is because of the system. There are principals and there are school boards and there are administrations who refuse to recognize the very necessary commitment that parents bring to that. That has been enhanced.

We can no longer in this community expect our students to take on the burden of education with the seriousness that we ask of them and the resources that we as taxpayers provide for them without allowing them to have any say in the system. I've sat on both sides of the table on this issue, and I cannot believe what I'm hearing, that you are offended and upset that we've actually said to parents that through their school councils they have a significant role to play. What you are purporting to believe and what you think should be out there is: "Yes, students, you are responsible, and, yes, parents, you pay the bill, but guess what? You're not smart enough and you have no say." The fact that that's now on the table and you're accountable and it's done in a way that is recognized as a very serious fiscal and educational responsibility that is in front of us - it just blows me away. I don't know whether it's damned if you do or damned if you don't, and pardon me if that's not a parliamentary phrase to use. But I don't think it's fair, not even in the smallest sense, to say that you can expect parents and students to deal with the responsibilities of education but that they have no authority. Now, who's going to have that authority? We're comfortable giving that authority to the school boards, and we're comfortable giving it administration.

I think if you start going through Bill 19 and look at the issues that are in front of us, any one of us who had the opportunity to go back and educate our children would be excited about the role we now have to play. I find it quite amazing, some of the comments that have come otherwise.

I think it's also important to put on the table the fact that the province of Alberta is responsible for the education of its citizens and not the Calgary Catholic board of education. We have had a tremendously strong lobby - there is no doubt about it - but they have brought to the fore one or two issues, and in the whole reform of education there are significant other elements that need to be discussed.

MR. MITCHELL: Name one.

MRS. BURGNER: I have just mentioned the role of parents. It goes way beyond constitutional issues.

I'd like to enhance a comment that was made by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. We have a serious concern about the layoffs of teachers. [interjections]

#### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung and hon. Government House Leader, I'm sure that you

have many opportunities to carry on a conversation, but Calgary-Currie is speaking and would like to be heard.

#### Debate Continued

MRS. BURGNER: I would like to just briefly mention the issue you raised about the layoffs and also about the ECS policy. I would like to just address the fact in very practical terms, that never once have I, as a parent who is a taxpayer in the school system in Calgary, been asked about how that board would implement particular policies affecting a 5 percent rollback or the ECS program. That's the very control that I think has to be dealt with, that a board would feel it could make a unilateral decision about taxpayers' dollars and program policy or the priority of policies and have no opportunity for the taxpayers and the voters to have a say. That is at the heart of this change. I think that in the end, when boards and parents work in a more collaborative model, we will see a number of successes, because the intentions of board members, the intentions of parents, of school administrators, and of the Minister of Education are all the same. It is to put the best resources together for the students in this province.

I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 19, having made those comments.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 19 at this time. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.  
Call in the members.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:09 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Magnus
Amery	Gordon	McClellan
Burgener	Haley	McFarland
Calahasen	Havelock	Pham
Cardinal	Herard	Renner
Clegg	Hierath	Stelmach
Coutts	Hlady	Tannas
Day	Jacques	Taylor, L.
Dinning	Jonson	Thurber
Doerksen	Laing	Trynchy
Fischer	Langevin	Woloshyn
Friedel	Lund	

Against the motion:

Abdurahman	Hanson	Nicol
Beniuk	Henry	Percy
Bruseker	Kirkland	Vasseur

Chadi	Massey	White
Dickson	Mitchell	Zariwny
Germain		
Totals:	For - 35	Against - 16

[Motion carried]

**9:20 Bill 21**  
**Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994**

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 21, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994.

MR. SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, might there be consent in the Assembly for the introduction of guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

head: **Introduction of Guests**

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you two individuals in the members' gallery. One is Pat Renner, the sister of Rob Renner. You can see who's got the looks in the family. The other is Al Hagen, a former employee of the city of Medicine Hat and now, I understand, an employee of the city of Edmonton. Could both individuals please stand.

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

**Bill 21**  
**Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act, 1994**  
*(continued)*

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. [interjections] Order. It seems to take a minute or two for the Assembly to settle down. We are back discussing Bills for third reading, hon. members.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would simply like to say that we are supporting this Bill. I am supporting this Bill because we have free votes over here. I'm not speaking for anybody else, but it is with some reservations. One of the reservations is that we are very concerned that the government is seeking to solve its financial problems by promoting gambling in this province in a way that will in the long run at an economic level cost much more money than it will ever generate for the government but at a human level will create great social costs and social problems.

I'm not alone in this concern, certainly. There are members in the government's own caucus. I know that the Member for Olds-Didsbury, on the day that this particular Bill was up for debate earlier this session, raised concerns in his question about the proliferation of video lottery terminals.

I think, Mr. Speaker, at best we can say that this is tokenism. At worst it is a politically cynical initiative to put a relatively small amount of money, compared to the level and magnitude of gambling addiction problems that are being created in this province, towards counseling for those problems so that the Treasurer and the minister of economic development can justify the continued proliferation, the continued expansion of gambling in this province.

It is therefore, Mr. Speaker, with mixed feelings that we would support a Bill of this nature. Certainly it does something, albeit perhaps not very much, to solve a very serious social problem in this province, a problem which affects individuals and families and children in particular. It flies in the face of common sense, and it is a cheap, I would argue, justification for the government's continued policy of expanding gambling, incurring the long-term social and human costs that that will certainly and surely incur.

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

MR. WHITE: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's not a great deal of pleasure having to speak on this particular Bill. It's akin to what an acquaintance once said: if you're in jail and someone throws a pork chop to you, will you take it and be happy for that? The difficulty is that you're still in jail after the fact. This is really, really ridiculous. Here we have a government that two years ago supported AADAC to the tune of \$32 million. Then in two subsequent budgets they're down \$4 million, and the largess of the government says: oh boy, we are such good people; we are giving back a million dollars a year to deal with an additional load now of gambling, which always should have been included in this. It's really a sad state. I didn't hear one bit of debate from that side of the House at all on the morality of gambling. Not once. Not once. It's unbelievable that you can just blow by that totally and completely. The amendments are reasonable to that limited end you're getting at but totally and completely ignoring the plight of literally thousands upon thousands of people that suffer from the lack of attention by this government.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

There's some \$350 million gross and growing ever so rapidly, the funds that are generated by way of gambling for this government; \$211 million this year alone are into general revenue. This is just a pittance relative to what should have been and could have been done, not just in the area of rehab and not just in the area of dealing specifically with this but convincing people that there are better things to do with their funds other than pour them down the government drain. One more method of taxation; just tack it on there.

Unfortunately, it's the worst possible area. You won't find the people that are in secure positions or in areas that have security that are gambling away their mortgage money. Very, very few will you find that are doing that. It's a lot of other people, a lot of little people that are doing it. I see some heads nodding on the other side, "Oh, that's not the case at all." You have not spent the time to go and look at it. You haven't spent the time to talk to people, to Gamblers Anonymous. You haven't talked to those people to really find out what the situation is.

I quite frankly find it just disgusting that people would sit on the other side, vote on these things, take the word of particularly a minister that understandably can't be here to hear this. It's unfortunate to take his word for it that it is okay, it is good, it is

a wonderful thing to do to tax these people. It is just a travesty of this government. I don't know how you say sorry after the fact. You're affecting a lot of families, not just affecting the breadwinner in the family. You're affecting a lot of other people, particularly the children, the ones that have no recourse to what to do when dad or mom are out there plugging the old slot machine. It really is sad, and this government just sort of nods and leaves it, doesn't really give a damn. You don't understand what you're doing, nor do you even care. [interjections] There seems to be some loud noise over there; I can't quite understand what it is. [interjections]

### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The custom of the House is that the person standing is allowed to speak hopefully without all of the interruptions that appear to be coming at the moment. So we would ask the indulgence of each and every member to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield out.

Edmonton-Mayfield on Bill 21.

### 9:30 Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the speeches in this House had to make sense, we would hear nothing, even less than we do from the other side. This government passes legislation and they say nothing about it. No, no; I take that back. Earlier tonight we did in fact receive some debate, albeit speaking in favour of our position, but it was well put. We heard from those members. You know, these members sit like bumps on logs when they're dealing with a matter that they really don't care about. They can just pass this off. They can take their little per diems and they can cover it all off. They can drive back to meet . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, would you stick to the Bill?

MR. WHITE: Pardon me, sir?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would you stick to the Bill? All you do is invite noise.

MR. WHITE: I am speaking to the Bill, sir. This is an amendment to an Act which I'm speaking to. These are people that are affected by this Bill. These are little people that don't have the wherewithal oftentimes to get here and to understand what these people are talking about. All they're doing is losing a lot of money, and these people seem to think that it's just fine. It's just a lovely way to tax so that they don't have to go back to their constituencies and say that we raised taxes. Well, we didn't raise taxes. We raised a few funds by just scraping it off gambling again. Gee whiz. If your grandmothers could hear you say those things now . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: If your mothers heard.

MR. WHITE: If your mothers. If you did that 30 years ago, you'd be strung up. And you think this thing's changed that much? Gambling and someone profiting from gambling have been illegal for as long as this province has been a province until such time as the government got into it, and now it's suddenly a wonderful thing to do. I can't believe you can do it just that easy and say that it's just fine. It's beyond me how anyone can sit

there and smile back and try and bad-mouth someone on this side simply because they say that it is wrong. You don't understand what it is doing, and it is too darn bad.

Thank you kindly for your time.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of the Bill, but it is with a degree of reticence that I do that. We have to acknowledge the problem that arises from gambling; we have to find a solution. Indeed, we have to ensure that we can fund the appropriate treatment programs for people who suffer from that addiction.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents have communicated to me in the past number of weeks and also prior to the election that they have a grave concern, that I also share, and that is what we're doing to the social fabric of the province of Alberta when we see this significant increase in the way of generating revenues through gambling in the province of Alberta. It saddens me when I get letters from community groups and particular church groups who tell me that they feel they're being penalized because it's not within their morals to accept moneys from gambling revenues to benefit their programs in the community. So there's a number of people within the province of Alberta, in particular in my constituency, that have a concern that, whether it's a CFEP 2 grant from lottery funds or other areas, somehow they don't have the same advantage that all Albertans have because it's against their morals.

I will support this Bill, because it's no different than any other addiction. We have to certainly address a treatment program for it. But I urge this government to take a serious look at the road we're going down. It's not a road that results in positive outcomes. So, Mr. Speaker, as I say, it's with reticence that I will support this Bill.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to speak to Bill 21 in second reading, and I didn't have that opportunity. Unfortunately, I wasn't here when it was in Committee of the Whole. As I result, I waited and waited, and I have now finally gotten the opportunity to speak to it, albeit in third reading, and I am thrilled to be able to do that. I know that in second reading I didn't get a chance because we were adjourned for some reason; perhaps there were too many speakers and the government didn't want to hear from too many people. But I am speaking in support of Bill 21, as I wanted to do in second reading and as I would have in second reading and in Committee of the Whole and as I am today on third reading.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I find it appalling that the government would on the 31st of January of this year put out a news release that says something to the effect that the Alberta government plans to curb and treat gambling problems, that AADAC has been designated as the province's lead agency in the program, which will include public education initiatives and referral information for problem gamblers at bingos, casinos, horse racing tracks, lottery retailers, and video lottery locations. Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say that we're going to spend \$820,000, that we're going to throw \$820,000 at this problem.

Now, what I find appalling is not the fact that we're going to throw \$820,000 at something, but why we picked \$820,000 is beyond me, how we calculated \$820,000. Why didn't we say a million? Why didn't we say \$750,000? But we picked \$820,000 because it sounds good. It sounds real, real good. The hypocrisy here, Mr. Speaker, is that what was happening in the province of

Alberta at the time – say, the first part of January when the news release was out about 2,600 video lottery terminals in Alberta – was that we would increase them to around 9,000, between 8,500 and 9,000. In other words, we're going to triple or so the amount of video lottery terminals in this province, yet we feel: "Well, you know what? Since we're going to do that, let's throw a little money at the problem." So we picked \$820,000, and that's what we're going to throw into the pot. That's what's appalling.

Another thing that's appalling is the amount of gamblers there are in the province of Alberta today. Statistics tell us that 93 percent of Albertans have done some kind of gambling. That's an appalling statistic, Mr. Speaker. Forty percent are weekly gamblers. Forty percent of Albertans gamble weekly, yet we figure that we're going to throw \$820,000 to curb the problem. It's quite clear in the press release. It says, "The Alberta government today announced plans to curb and treat gambling problems." Forty percent of Albertans: let us remember that in the years to come, in the months to come.

Mr. Speaker, gambling as I see it is nothing more than a tax on the poor. We continue to tax them. We continue to tax them in many respects. This is just another one. We encourage them to gamble, because we advertise so much. You look at any television program today, any channel, and I can bet a dollar to a doughnut there isn't an hour that will go by . . . [interjections] I'm one of the 40 percent. What can I say?

You will find some advertisement encouraging people to gamble. That is what I find appalling, Mr. Speaker. It encourages them and it urges them to gamble. It shows them how they could win all these riches. There isn't a time when you can't turn on the radio driving to work in the morning and it will tell you, "Lotto 6/49 today is \$2.6 million; don't forget to buy that ticket." I know the Provincial Treasurer listens intently to those, because I'm sure he buys only when it's over \$5 million. He doesn't buy when it's \$1 million, because \$1 million just ain't enough. So I find that very appalling.

9:40

Another thing that I find appalling – and this is the forum that I find I can speak to it at – is the fact that our governments in their infinite wisdom, being the federal and provincial governments across the land, decided that tobacco advertising ought to be eliminated, and it was eliminated. You don't see that any longer. You can't find it anywhere, Mr. Speaker. Magazines used to have the Marlboro Man; it's now eliminated, gone. We can't have advertising on television of tobacco products, and I tend to agree with it. But you know what I disagree with? In the same breath that we have tobacco advertisements banned, we didn't ban alcohol advertisements. I don't know of a family that has been damaged, hurt, disrupted because of smoking. We continue to advertise day in and day out alcoholic beverages, and AADAC has got its hands full. Every single day of the year and every hour of the day . . .

#### Point of Order Relevance

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

MRS. GORDON: Yes, *Beauchesne* 459. What is the relevance of cigarette and liquor advertising to this Bill?

MR. CHADI: Do you want me to respond to that, Mr. Speaker, or not?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, every member who is called on a point of order has an opportunity to speak to whether they thought they were relevant or not relevant or whatever the point is, and this one is relevance. So, yes, would you speak to that, and then I'll rule.

MR. CHADI: Thank you. It is very relevant, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act, and we're talking about addictions. AADAC is the commission that is set up to deal with addictions. We're talking particularly with respect to Bill 21 when we ask and suggest here that

the commission may carry out the objects referred to in subsection (1) as they relate to other addictive behaviours.

MR. HENRY: That could be smoking.

MR. CHADI: It could be smoking. It could be a lot of things. Mr. Speaker, that is my point.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Mike's got a problem with eating. Speak about eating.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Cypress-Medicine Hat, thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler has raised a point of order on relevance to the course of the talk by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. We have under consideration Bill 21, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act. With particular reference, then, to section 16, which includes "to operate programs" and so on, although we have within the present section that this is amending references to alcohol and other addictions, we have a particular reference here to gambling and "to other addictive behaviours designated." I think that while there is a point to the hon. member's call, we have allowed it because this section that it deals with has within it alcohol. Presumably the alcohol and smoking advertisement you're going to relate to gambling advertisement. In that light one would ask the member to continue.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If you were listening to my comments, you would know exactly what I meant. That ruling just verified and confirmed that. Thank you, sir.

#### Debate Continued

MR. CHADI: Now, when we talk about the advertising, of the possible addiction to gambling, we have to also look at the different types of addictive areas that AADAC has to deal with. Alcohol is the major one, and that is one area that I would really like to see tightened up someday. Perhaps maybe we could look at amendments to the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Amendment Act someday and look at advertisements with respect to things like gambling and advertisements for alcohol.

One thing that really drove the point home one day was when my little daughter, who was nine years old at the time, said to me that when she grew up, she was going to have a Silver Bullet. You know, Mr. Speaker, I thought and thought about that an awful lot, and I wanted to turn the TV off. It really bothered me to no end. What that did to a little nine-year-old girl and what it will do and can do to children throughout the province I think is appalling. We ought to consider doing something about that, and that's the point I was making. If Lacombe-Stettler finds that too much to ask for, then I suggest that she take a real sober second look at what I've said.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I will rest and allow others to speak. Thank you.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

### Bill 23

#### Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 1994

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 23, the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 1994.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question has been called. All those in favour, please say aye. [interjections] Order. Order.

MS LEIBOVICI: What would you like? A burger?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark, if we stay late enough, perhaps the Whips will provide food, but no orders may be taken here.

The Chair called order because there were a number of people who were insisting on talking after the vote had been taken. We would now like to hear the Table officers bring us the next item.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

9:50

### Bill 27

#### Rural Gas Act

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before moving the motion, I did want to bring the Member for Fort McMurray up to date with regard to the questions that he had asked the other night.

He brought up four different sections of the Bill, the first being the minister's powers. The minister's powers under section 3 are limited to the power of waiver only. These powers will only be used under special circumstances or where their use is necessary. I don't think there's any value in codifying or restricting when the minister will or won't use these powers. Very simply, the provisions of the Act will only be waived when it is in the public interest to do so.

Section 4 was conflict of interest in inspections. I did address this prior to the member's point about potential conflict of interest regarding inspection services. We simply don't believe there's any need for more provision in this area. There's certainly no evidence of any problems out in the field. In fact, the department tells me that co-ops and utility companies are handling inspection services properly, as the department inspectors monitor this area on an ongoing basis.

Section 4(4) was right of entry. With respect to right of entry provisions under section 4, we're satisfied that there is no conflict with the Charter of Rights. It's widely recognized that government inspectors sometimes need to have the right to enter land or premises if they suspect there's a danger to life or property. In this case we need to recognize that we're dealing with natural gas, which is an inherently dangerous substance. We also need to

recognize that this particular provision has been in place for the past 21 years, including the 12 years since the Charter came into effect. During that time there hasn't been a single complaint about an abuse of the right to enter land or premises.

The final section was 19, revocation of franchises. The other suggestion we received was that there should be a provision related to section 19 where a decision to revoke a franchise could be automatically stayed pending an appeal. I don't think it's practical to try to include such a provision. It's important to recognize that a franchise would only be revoked in a very serious circumstance where the chief officer was forced to act in the public interest. This is an important provision, and I don't think we should complicate it by including provisions to stay a revocation. If the circumstances are serious enough to justify revoking a franchise in the first place, I can't see why we would want to have the revocation stayed. What we're doing here is making sure that consumers of the rural gas utility are being protected against severe negligence or abuse of power by the utility.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 27, the Rural Gas Act.

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

MR. WHITE: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Although I do support the Bill, there are at least two areas that could in fact have been amended earlier or dealt with earlier. One of them is the all-powerful minister, the position that any provision of the Act can be waived by the minister. Now, the ministers change from time to time, and quite frankly I don't think any minister could in fact be all things to all people and know when it is reasonable to expect that you can waive a provision and what the ramifications of that are. That's one area where I think there should have been some grounds or restrictions put on that, because there are some fundamentals about dealing with natural gas and the deliverance of that from wellhead to customer that should be protected.

There's another area, section 4. It does not contain any statement to the effect that a producer and a distributor could and should be separated, particularly in the gas co-ops, so that preventing one from conducting, owning, or having equity in a production or in a distribution can have some kind of fiduciary interest in an inspection. That should have and could have been – it's not likely that would occur in any one municipality, but it could happen in one to another and therefore have some difficulties.

Other than that, Mr. Speaker, I think the Bill is a good Bill. It's reasonably well thought out, reasonably well put together. Unfortunately, those two provisions in fact could have and should have had the time in this House to deal with them.

Thank you kindly, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

### Bill 29

#### Nova Corporation of Alberta Act Repeal Act

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I move third reading of Bill 29.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

**Bill 32**  
**Fuel and Tobacco Tax Statutes**  
**Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 32.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak in support of the Bill. I want to make two points, though, before third reading is passed.

The first point is that certainly I agree with the direction of this Bill, to place penalties both on the demand side of the market and the supply side of the market. I think again, as I suggested in second reading, that we ought to enforce laws that are in place and not back off, because the issue then becomes where you draw the line and the signals that you send out that you will enforce the laws that appear to be generally approved and disregard those that are more difficult to enforce. However, I would want to make this point, Mr. Speaker. In part this Bill is a placebo, because many of the issues of enforcement are not dealt with in this Bill. In particular, you know, the 1-800 numbers and the ability for mail-order cigarettes: those are not dealt with in this Bill. It's federal legislation. I would think there would have to be a two-tiered move by the government, one of which is to have these penalties in place here but at the same time to ensure that something is done about the importation of cigarettes.

The second point I would make is that this Bill allows for the earmarking of funds, and it creates an incentive for police departments to basically interdict illegal cigarettes. On one hand, that's good; we all believe in incentives. On the other hand, what the hon. Provincial Treasurer has now done is introduce one set of market prices for enforcing this legislation but other crimes that are less valuable from the perspective of police forces may not be enforced. So you get these complicated problems.

In a period of financial restraint what may happen, Mr. Speaker, is that police departments will choose to shift resources out of the prevention or detection of crimes where there's no payoff into that where there is a payoff. For example, what happens is that less police effort is placed on street patrols and community servicing and more is placed on this, when from society's perspective it may well be better to have more police resources directed towards community police services. On the other hand, all of the incentives will now be for enforcing this legislation because there's a payoff. On one hand, one can say that you can cross-subsidize. With the funds that you collect from the enforcement of being able to tackle these big-time smugglers, you can in fact finance your efforts in other areas. But I would just say that as we move down this road, the Provincial Treasurer has to be aware that we now are in a sense providing differential payoffs for enforcing certain laws and that one has to be aware that there may then be a shift of resources from the prevention of some crimes to the detection of these crimes.

The analogy I would bring forward, Mr. Speaker, is the nature of orphaned drugs in the pharmaceutical industry. There are some drugs where the market is very small, and nobody invests in them because there's not a commercial payoff. On the other hand, for those people who have those types of potentially fatal illnesses, from their perspective this is clearly an area where you would like to place those funds, but the incentive system for pharmaceutical investment is such that you will put it where there's the largest market and greatest payoff. We are now

moving down that road in terms of crime prevention. I think we should be aware of it. While we can say that, yes, seen in isolation this Bill may make sense, we have to ask as we move down this road progressively: what are we going to do about the overall allocation of policing effort? So I would hope that these types of issues will be addressed if this issue does come up in subsequent legislation.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my comments.

**10:00**

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

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I made some comments earlier this month when we had Bill 32. I believe it was in second reading or in the committee stage. My concerns at that point in time – I did mention with respect to the disposition of seized cigarettes, I would imagine, or whatever goods that would have been seized. We had provisions in the Bill whereby it said that the merchandise or the seized goods would be disposed of or – I'm just trying to search for that section. My concerns were with regard to tightening that up inasmuch as having the word "disposed" maybe changed to "sold." Yes, here it is in 11.5. It says, "Things seized that are forfeited to the Crown in right of Alberta under this Act shall be disposed of or destroyed." Maybe we could have tightened that up a little bit with the proper terminology.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

My other concerns with the Bill – and I'm going to highlight them once again, Mr. Speaker, now in third reading. I think down the road when we do have some confrontations and perhaps maybe legal actions against the Crown, we could say, "I told you so." That is with respect to section 17.1(2). It says:

Subject to any administration fee determined by the Minister, any fine imposed in respect of a conviction for an offence under section 15.1(1) and (2), where the offence occurred in

(a) a city, town or village, other than on a primary highway, enures to the benefit of the city, town or village.

When it comes to things like the disposition or the sale of the merchandise, or the seized goods, does that in fact then become part of the funds that would go to a municipality, town, city, or village? Where do those funds go?

Another thing to bear in mind – let's assume that there's a vehicle as well that was seized in all of this and the Crown takes that and sells that. Now, where do those funds go? Clearly, Mr. Speaker, in 11.2 it says:

On the conviction of any person for an offence under this Act or the regulations any thing seized in respect of which the offence was committed shall, as part of the penalty for the conviction, be forfeited to the Crown in right of Alberta.

So if we've forfeited and we've got that as a penalty for that conviction, is that then considered a fine imposed once we sell off that asset and that would go to the city? It's not clearly defined. I don't think that is the intent in the Bill here at all, and I think sooner or later we're going to get a challenge. I had hoped that we could have had the opportunity to tighten that up.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

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

**Bill 35**  
**Seniors Benefit Act**

[Adjourned debate May 16: Mr. Renner]

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to return to my comments with respect to Bill 35. I had an opportunity to read *Alberta Hansard* and recap a few of the things that I mentioned the last time I had the opportunity to speak to this Bill. I think I made some very good points, and for anyone that may have not been here, I would just like to recap very briefly what I had to say last time and then perhaps add a few more comments to this Bill.

As I mentioned last time, Medicine Hat is in a unique position in the province of Alberta in that we have an abnormally high number of seniors living in Medicine Hat, and the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is really quite obvious. Medicine Hat is probably the best city in the whole province of Alberta to live in, so people choose Medicine Hat to retire. As a result, I have been very involved in this process, in the consultation process involving the seniors' benefit issue.

I met with a number of seniors throughout the entire process in the forum of public meetings, in the form of meetings in my constituency office, and on occasion I traveled to constituents' homes and met with them in their own homes with regards to this Bill. There were a number of concerns raised, and certainly when the issue was first brought up, there was a good deal of concern on the part of the seniors. That concern was brought about largely through misinformation. The seniors were riled up, so to speak, by members – I think we're all very familiar with who those members might have been – that were out there telling seniors that this was going to be the ruination of retirement living in the province of Alberta. Once we had an opportunity to talk about the plan and the reality of the plan, the concern of the seniors really came down to a number of relatively minor issues. Those minor issues have all been addressed in the revisions that the minister introduced when he introduced this program. You'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that the program was initially introduced as a proposal for consultation with seniors. The consultation took place and the minister revised the proposal, and this Bill is the result of those revisions.

The only area that the seniors had a good deal of concern with that in some people's opinion, Mr. Speaker, may not be totally addressed in this Bill, is in the area of threshold levels. The last time I was speaking I said that I think it should come as no surprise to anyone in this Legislature that people would prefer to see the threshold levels at higher levels. The seniors would prefer to see them at higher levels, and quite frankly, I would prefer to see them at higher levels, but the reality of the situation is that we cannot afford to have them at higher levels. We have a situation in the province of Alberta where we are addressing a universal program that was in place to support seniors living in this province. That universal program was introduced at a time when the province could afford such a program. The reality of the situation is that now the province cannot afford a universal program, but in order to be sure that the low-income seniors are protected, a Bill such as this needs to be introduced. I would urge members to support a Bill such as this, because what this Bill does

and what this program does is protect low-income seniors. It protects the seniors who most need the assistance.

We have in Alberta a program called assured income for low-income seniors. That program stays in place under this program. That program was always an income-tested program. It continues to be an income-tested program, but we've also rolled in a number of other programs that formerly were available to seniors on a universal basis, that being the program related to property tax reduction, programs related to renters assistance. Although those programs are still available for low-income seniors based upon income, they are income-tested. Low-income seniors will continue to receive the benefits of these programs, but as income levels rise, they will receive a decreasing share, a decreasing portion of the benefits.

The seniors that I spoke to, Mr. Speaker, agree with the principle of this Bill, and they agree that seniors should and want to participate in reducing the deficit of this province. I feel that seniors will support this program, but they would have supported it with much more enthusiasm at higher threshold levels. I am convinced that the threshold levels that are presented under this proposal are fair, are reasonable, but more importantly they are recognition of what the province of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta can afford. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this Bill.

I will take my seat and encourage other speakers – actually what I would like to do is call the question at this point in time.

**10:10**

MR. KIRKLAND: You surprised me, Rob. I can see the hon. minister of transportation not wanting to get up and debate the matter, and that's why you called for the question, but I think there's a lot to be said about the seniors' Bill. There's no one in this House that hasn't been very closely associated with seniors, be it our parents or be it our relatives. Certainly I think that brings us very close to the situation.

Mr. Speaker, when I review the Bill, I find myself speaking against it. I look at the Bill itself. If I could use the term, it is a bit of a hollow shelf, that really doesn't set aside or doesn't provide much in the way of guidelines. One more time we're looking at a Bill that will be driven by regulation. So as the seniors have been subjected to a bit of a merry-go-round in this entire process, I would suggest that the administration of this Bill by regulation will continue to keep them on that merry-go-round.

I would suggest that in some cases there are many seniors in this province that will be expected to eat more than the 5 percent guideline that the government of the day has set. There are many that will eat, as I understand it, up to 12 to 15 percent. I find that unfair. I do not believe that in fact they as a segment on a fixed income should be expected to endure any more sacrifice than the rest of us in this province.

It was the very week that the hon. Minister of Community Development released his report, Mr. Speaker, that I had the opportunity to meet with seniors in Beaumont and in Devon and also in Leduc. When I met with those seniors, I presented the final decision of the minister's last tramp around the province to solicit opinion and input one more time, and there was no jubilation with what I presented. I would suggest that there was just ongoing concern and some despair. The seniors, as you know, in most cases have been strong supporters of the Conservative government. They have conveyed to me that they feel they were let down in this situation. Seniors of our province certainly endured far more hardship than you or I in most cases will ever endure. They have worked and, I would suggest, have been much

better managers of money than the baby boomer group that I belong to. When they worked their entire lives and set aside specific amounts of dollars to deal with their last years and plan their last years around that and have it interrupted by the legislation of the sitting government, they do certainly feel very, very threatened, and they have a good reason to be concerned.

I would suggest that if we looked at the cost of the entire exercise to garner this information – and I would suggest that some of it is duplication to the extreme – that money itself would have been better spent by putting it into the Alberta seniors' benefit program. When we look at the levels that have been set – and one would try to find some positive in it – they were increased, if I can recall correctly from \$18,000 for a single senior to \$19,000. In the case of a one-senior couple where the partner may in fact not have reached the magic age of being a senior, a \$23,000 category was introduced there. I think that's positive, and I would suggest that I was encouraged by the government's recognition that they had overlooked that particular situation. I suggest that their addressing it certainly brought my commendation in that sense. When we look at the level of a two-senior couple at \$27,000, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that those that have gauged and set their standard of living around the very firm figures that fixed incomes generally have to deal with . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: That's exactly the starting salary my daughter had when she graduated from university.

MR. GERMAIN: The Minister of Health wants to debate again, from her chair.

MR. KIRKLAND: She usually debates from her chair.

When we look at the levels that are set – and we know, as I indicated, that that generation, our mothers and our fathers, were very astute at planning their retirement. They were born and raised and did not expect a government handout during their time. They looked after one another, and they looked after their neighbours. They have now, having evaluated the programs that are available to them and gauged their retirement accordingly, found themselves in the very untenable position, Mr. Speaker, of having their standard and their quality of living diminished. I would suggest that in some cases it will be very much to the detriment of their health if they do not have that extra \$5 to recreate or that \$5 to walk down to the coffee shop to have a cup of coffee and visit with their neighbours as they have set up a tradition over the years. Certainly their mental well-being and their health diminishes accordingly. Now, the hon. Minister of Health certainly knows that the long-term implication to the health care situation in that case is very, very significant.

As I indicated, they are on fixed incomes. That certainly puts them at a disadvantage. They do not have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to attempt to recover. If you or I take a 5 percent cutback, we certainly have the ability to earn extra income to make up. Most seniors don't have that opportunity.

Even the stress level. The concern that's been dealt to the seniors as a result of this exercise, I would suggest, has put them a great deal under stress that has worked to the detriment of their health.

When we look at the reduction of their fixed income by the government and we also calculate the reduction of their income due to the low interest rates that this country is presently experiencing, I would suggest that we've got a double hit there, Mr. Speaker. I'm not exactly sure how you'd deal with that, but

certainly I think we have to keep in mind that they are very, very much under the influences of the world money markets, and this only has a tendency to complicate their standard of living situation.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat spoke at length and eloquently about his fair city and the fact that he had a high percentage of seniors in that community. It is a fine city, and I would suggest that many seniors migrate to that area because of the climate. Those seniors, I would submit, are seniors that have the affluence to do that. There is a whole segment of seniors in this population that unfortunately can't avail themselves of the fine city of Medicine Hat. I would suggest that if the migration continues, some of his seniors will as a result of increased property values find themselves in hardships that we don't foresee today, simply by increased tax assessment and taxes that have to be paid by the seniors, a factor that is very difficult to work into the equation here.

When I think of the seniors, I would use my own father as an example, Mr. Speaker, a man that worked about 38 years on the railroad, one of the sluggers of the world, I would suggest. In his retirement he would be fortunate to have received \$16,000, \$17,000, \$18,000. Having raised a family of 11, he certainly was not able to build a nest egg to provide for interruptions to that standard of living that he could not foresee, or my mother could not foresee, for that matter, in the way of the move by the government today. Those people of their age and their generation are frugal and certainly know how to make a dollar go further than you and I. So now that they have been further squeezed, I would suggest that the sacrifices they will make will be in the way of recreation and probably diet, probably such little things as attempting to clear off driveways and sidewalks because they can no longer afford the \$3 or \$4 to hire the neighbourhood kid to do it.

**10:20**

Mr. Speaker, I understand the principle that certainly we have to find some efficiencies. I would have thought that when we're dealing with a group that is very vulnerable and certainly in a position where they can't recover from the vagaries of government policy, we would have been a little more generous on the initial introduction of such legislation and projected it over perhaps a three-year basis where we arrive at these levels. It would give those on fixed incomes the opportunity to plan and to revisit their finances, and I think it would give them the lead-in that we would all like to have when we're setting aside our dollars to look after our future.

The seniors in the lodges of this province, Mr. Speaker – we have heard that of course their rents, as a result of policies that are tied to this, will ultimately reflect 28 percent of their income and then move on to 30 percent of their income. If we were to speculate, as we have in the last months or 15 weeks in this Legislature, that lodges will be privatized, I would suggest that those people also will suffer dramatically not only as a result of the reduced levels that we've set but increased rents. There again we have a double whammy. It is going to be very difficult for those people to maintain the quality of living I would suggest they deserve and that I would suggest they planned very well for. It is the hand of this government that has disrupted their course and disrupted their path.

I have a very strong affinity to the seniors in this province. I think we all certainly are aware of the sacrifices they made to make this province very prosperous. I can see why they feel somewhat betrayed. They certainly, as I indicated, were strong supporters in the past of the sitting government. I'm under no

illusions there, Mr. Speaker. They feel that their friends of the past have turned their backs on them somewhat here by handicapping them in their later years of life. For that reason and the fact that we've got seniors on fixed incomes – they, as I indicated earlier, are presently having a reduced monthly income as a result of interest from when they were fortunate enough to save dollars. The government has handed them also a reduction, anywhere from 5 to 12, and in some cases by my calculation, 15 percent. I don't think it's fair, and I think the levels that we have set are not realistic. I do not think they're fair. If we could calculate or compute the long-term effect of the extra and the added health care cost as a result of the mental well-being of our seniors faltering as a result of their inability to maintain a healthy standard of living, a standard of living that includes some recreation, we are launching onto a self-defeating money-saving program here.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude. I would ask all members to ask very seriously of the seniors in your neighbourhood and your area exactly how it's going to impact and exactly how many dollars they have at the end of the month presently and where they expect to find further dollars when they have to start picking up such things as \$732 a year health care costs and the likes thereof.

Thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, since being elected to the Legislative Assembly, I've had several wonderful opportunities to go to the senior citizens' recreational centre in Fort McMurray. There are only a few senior citizens in Fort McMurray. They number about 400 in total, 280 of which, approximately, are members of the lodge. It is wonderful to go join the seniors at that lodge and to hear their comments about governmental issues and to hear their comments about thriftiness and hear their comments about not spending money you don't have. Some of those initially spoken ideologies seemed to fit in the government's program of restraint. However, midway through the fall and winter when it became clear that the government was going to be doing wholesale tinkering with seniors' benefits in this province, seniors began to be concerned about their futures and about the certainty of their well-being.

It's my honour tonight on behalf of the seniors of Fort McMurray and indeed the seniors all over this province to speak for seniors' benefits. It might seem surprising that a commercially based lawyer, a free enterpriser and an individual who believes in the free enterprise, capitalist system would be championing tonight the rights of seniors, but it is important that we all in this time of fiscal restraint vote in this Legislative Assembly both with our brains and occasionally with our hearts as well. I want to make a nonpartisan appeal to all Members of this Legislative Assembly to be careful before you vote in favour of this Bill and do not rush this Bill into passing, because what this Bill heralds is a fundamental change in the way in which we treat seniors in this province. For a long time hereafter it will be debated. It is like people sometimes ask you: "Where were you when President Kennedy was shot in the '60s? Where were you?" People will ask again and again: "Where were you when the fundamental changes to seniors' programs in this province took place? Where were you when the government of the day broke faith with their seniors and changed the rules in midstream?"

Why, just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I believe it was, the minister of the environment stood up and said so eloquently that why the government is respected is because we believe in the sanctity of a contract. Well, I must say to all Members of the Legislative

Assembly that no senior lined up on the Legislature steps in front of a red serge coated RCMP and signed for the seniors' benefits and entered into a written contract with the government of the day, but the seniors of the province of Alberta were promised certain benefits. As late as the last election they were promised that those benefits would not be tinkered with. They would be sacrosanct. They would be inviolate. Those benefits have now been altered drastically and have been altered in a fundamental way, which is an alteration greater than that pain that the rest of Albertans in some respects are being asked to bear as this government comes to grips with its historic and almost unprecedented financial errors of the past.

So tonight I stand up and I speak for seniors in Fort McMurray and everywhere in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I want to direct my attention and my comments to some aspects of this Bill that all members of this Legislature on a nonpartisan basis should be concerned with. [interjections] I don't know. I'm into my debate now. I don't know which of the hon. members over there is engaging in debate sitting down. [interjections] Vegreville-Viking, I'm told. They'll have an opportunity to speak to what they want to do to seniors each in their time.

First of all, we have a conceptual difference here that for the first time seniors' benefits will be in some way means or income tested in this province. That is a fundamental aspect of this legislation that bears close debate and scrutiny.

Now I want to talk about the second issue; that is, where the government believes that seniors become wealthy. I'm reminded of the cartoon that appeared in one of the newspapers some months ago where you had a senior and his wife in obviously rundown accommodation with the windows broken and boarded up. The male senior looked to the female senior and said: "See, Martha? I knew if we lived long enough, we'd be wealthy." He was referring to the government's description of what constitutes a wealthy senior, and that description is some senior who earns approximately \$10,300 a year, less than a thousand dollars a month.

AN HON. MEMBER: The benefits are going up. They're going up, Adam.

MR. GERMAIN: The thresholds at the top end went up, but the thresholds at the bottom end have not gone up to my knowledge. [interjections] Did they go up?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, Adam. They did.

**10:30**

MR. GERMAIN: Okay; that's fine. That's fine. That then simply begs the question whether that particular raised amount is enough. It also begs the question of why this government that is supposed to be caring and thoughtful and have a heart had to be dragged kicking and screaming across the finish line of change by the Official Opposition. [interjections] I always am grateful when people help me improve my debate even as I speak. Well, I mean, it hasn't happened yet because we haven't passed the Bill. I'm speaking to the very important issue right now, as I spoke in Fort McMurray and elsewhere across the province. So we have the threshold issue at both ends: the lower threshold and the upper threshold. These are of concern to seniors.

Now we have an illusory appeal procedure that bears some debate in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker. The illusory appeal procedure is in fact an appeal that we don't know what the criteria or the parameters will be. You have an appeal if you feel

aggrieved. Well, will the appeal tribunal have the ability to do equity, or will they simply have the ability to look into a set of regulations and say: "Nope, no error was made here. Nope, no breach of the checklist occurred here. Nope, all i's were dotted and t's were crossed here"? Or will there be a genuine appeal, where people with genuine hardship can come forward, ask for equitable appeal and equitable relief? If this government in its fairness and in its charity wanted there to be a genuine and legitimate appeal, then immediately they would move with lightning speed to amend section 3 of this Act to ensure that not only was there an appeal, there was an appeal in which the appeal tribunal could give equity, could bring about an equitable solution as opposed to a mechanical appeal that simply looks at the errors.

Now, the other disquieting aspect of this particular appeal . . . I see, Mr. Speaker, that the Galvinator has returned, smiling at me as he always does, encouraging me on into the night to greater heights, and I'm grateful for his encouragement.

MRS. BURGNER: Boy, you sure know how to make an entrance, Jim.

MR. GERMAIN: He does. He does indeed. For the benefit of the Galvinator, I wanted to point out that I was ready to start talking about palimony and that sort of thing.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk to them, seniors are very sensitive about their living arrangements, and it seems to me that a piece of legislation that encourages people to get divorced, encourages people to live out of wedlock . . .

MR. DINNING: Oh, Adam, that's poppycock.

MR. GERMAIN: . . . is not good legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, was I bothering anybody, Mr. Speaker? I was minding my own business. The Galvinator didn't have to come in here.

This legislation encourages people to live together in an unmarried state and claim two singles' benefits. [interjections] It does. Read it. Look at the numbers. Analyze the numbers and you'll see that.

MR. DINNING: And you'll charge them a fortune to do a divorce.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. GERMAIN: That's fine. That's fine. I want to tell you that if there's any senior that wants to do that, I suspect there'll be many members of the honourable profession that I come from that would do it free for seniors to ensure that seniors did not starve in this province. Members of the profession that I represent have for ages provided free legal service to the needy and the destitute and will never shirk that professional responsibility. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. He makes me do it. All right.

Now, one other issue is of interest in this Bill. People always say, "Make some constructive criticism." You're exempting alimony. Now, the interesting thing is: suppose that somebody's earning \$40,000 and they give \$25,000 away in alimony.

MR. DINNING: Just like the feds do.

MR. GERMAIN: That's going to be exempt. Thank you.

MR. DINNING: Just like the federal government does.

MR. GERMAIN: You know, the Provincial Treasurer has been here for eons longer than I have, and it certainly shows. He constantly wants to engage in debate, sitting there beside other ministers, debating from his seat, interrupting my flow and turning a 12-minute speech into a 20-minute speech. Shame on you.

I move on from the palimony issues, that are important. I suggest that the government take a long look at the alimony. Alimony does not affect income. Does the payer get to deduct it? That's an issue that we don't know. Could two seniors, by creating a palimony and maintenance arrangement, in fact end up both collecting the maximum benefits through the disbursement and transference of income from high-income earner to low-income earner?

The other issue that has occurred in this particular legislation is the increase in the drugs. That increase together with all of the other increases make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that the total hit that seniors will take on this legislation is greater than the 5 percent that other individuals have been asked to take by the government, and that should move some of the consciences over there to consider improving that aspect of this legislation as well. Now, what the government has done is create a costly and expensive system that deals with means testing, declaration of income, reporting provisions, and these are all areas that should be looked at carefully before this legislation passes. In fact, as we reach the dying days of this particular session, Alberta's longest session ever held, this would be a good piece of legislation for the MLAs to put in their briefcases, take back with them to rural Alberta, take back with them to Calgary, talk to some seniors and see if the seniors of this province feel that the government has treated them well in this particular legislation.

The minister in charge of seniors' issues needed approximately \$80 million to solve all of the seniors' problems and still move to a means-testing arrangement. He could have created a very attractive program with an additional \$30 million. He declined to do so, yet lottery funds have gone up an unprecedented \$100 million in this province unexpectedly over the last year. I urge all members to look at this Bill both with their brains and with their hearts.

Now, so that members will continue to be assured that I have the best interests of the Legislative Assembly at heart and that I give value-added improvements, if I could coin that phrase for the last time, I want to suggest to the Legislative Assembly that section 5(1) is unenforceable and meaningless. Section 5(1) says that if you've overpaid a senior, the senior can pay you back "as soon as possible." Well, what's the definition of "as soon as possible"? Where in law is that definition capable of meaning or explanation? Who gets to determine "as soon as possible"? Is it the senior? Is it the government? Or is it some third-party arbitrator? You can't trigger the appeal process, because if the senior gets to determine when "as soon as possible" is, I suggest that the government will find that section is meaningless.

If the government intended not to collect back from seniors when errors were made – there's a good public policy reason that maybe they shouldn't collect back if the government makes an error – then that section should come out completely. If the government intends to legitimately collect back from seniors, then that paragraph is probably a nullity, which begs the question as to whether this government is going to chase people into the estate

and into the ground for the recovery of overpaid seniors' benefits. If the debt is collectable, is the government going to advance a claim against the deceased's estate in the event that seniors pass on before those issues are resolved? Or are they simply going to track the benefits from other people who might get a seniors' benefit or by the person himself or herself who might get a seniors' benefit by deducting it off the top?

The other issue that is of concern is of course that we have gone to an income-testing approach. The Treasurer I know will be interested in these comments, because there is no definition of income here. Let's suppose that somebody now rearranges their affairs so that instead of interest they get discounted bonds only. They buy strip bonds or discounted bonds, bond coupons. Is the income that they don't receive going to accrue each year, or is the income in fact going to only be payable in the big year that they collect it? Could a senior organize his business affairs so that every five years he got the big income windfall and in the other four years he received no income? All of these areas are fraught with concern. So what we're going to see is we're going to have a government going to court and attacking seniors on legal issues that are of interest.

So those are some of the concerns from the brain point of view of this Bill. The emotional point of view of this Bill, however, is that this is a radical departure from the rights that seniors have enjoyed in this province. Whether rightly or wrongly, they have been given those rights historically, and if the government wants to maintain credibility, they should consider taking another hard look at these seniors' benefits.

There's an image that I have in my mind that I want to close with, Mr. Speaker: that is of a charming lady on Parliament Hill in Ottawa with her fingernails under the then Conservative Prime Minister's nose. She looked at the then Prime Minister and she said: Mr. Prime Minister, you cheated us; you lied to us. Well, that Prime Minister is gone. The party he represented is reduced to two seats in Parliament.

**10:40**

I want to say to all members of this House: the seniors of this province are a group that we should be very careful when we tamper with their hard-won rights and their hard-won income stream. There is nothing more disquieting . . . [interjection] Yeah, they've been given to them. It's a right, an entitlement that they got by custom and practice. Okay. So why would we want to tackle the seniors and why would we want to strike out at our seniors in this province greater than we strike out at others in society?

I urge all Members of the Legislative Assembly to vote against this Bill. Thank you.

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

**MRS. BURGNER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel compelled to respond to some of the inaccuracies that were identified by the previous speaker. Quite clearly, the particular Bill that we're debating, Bill 35, in no way makes reference to any means testing for seniors. I think it's absolutely inappropriate. If we're going to spend a great part of our debate concerning ourselves with the well-being of seniors both from a physical point of view with respect to the resources that we allocate or make available to them for their needs and also their mental health – and the hon. Member for Fort McMurray referred to that – there is absolutely no point in continuing to fuel the concern of a means test. That is a commitment of this government, and it is not mentioned

anywhere in this Bill. As he goes and speaks to his 400 seniors in Fort McMurray, I think it's important that he get his facts straight.

Secondly, there is no reference to the drug plan in Bill 35. That has to do with the fact that, whether the hon. member recognizes it or not, in the discussion with seniors a concern about the drug program, which did develop some savings for them when we went to the recommended plan of a payment of \$9.70, had to do with the fact that it affected those who had multiple prescriptions. In dialoguing with the pharmacists we came to some recognition of a more appropriate way to deal with that issue. Again, it's inappropriate for the members opposite to suggest that we haven't listened or heard the seniors. That was one of the very strong recommendations they made in this consultation process.

The third thing I would like to put on the table and recognize that is not part of this Bill but would give the member some comfort in dealing with the 400 seniors he's been speaking to has to do with the extended health benefits, which were initially part of the discussion but have been returned to Health for the very reasons that the member opposite identified; that is, the seniors are concerned with their financial resources to deal with health issues that affect them. I mention those in the beginning of my comments because I think it's appropriate to recognize that we have not denied seniors a role to play in the changes that we bring forward nor have we discarded any of their comments. In fact, it's been a very thorough discussion.

I would like to talk about some of the issues that seniors raised in the consultation process that are reflected in this Bill. One of them has to do with the efficiencies of taking several programs and putting them into one comprehensive benefit plan. The very simplicity of application form and access of payments and co-ordination of services, which are very important issues for seniors as they streamline some of the program access that they have to deal with, was something that was under consideration. The innuendo that there would be additional bureaucracy, et cetera, to administer is just totally out of line. The recognition was that initially there were four or five programs in the original benefit program that are now streamlined into one department. I fail to understand once again what the purpose is of making seniors have to deal with three or four different application forms. We've streamlined that through this particular Bill, yet we get criticized for making life hard for seniors. We've taken very seriously the comments they made, that as a group they access more programs than most members of our society and we should look at some way to streamline the processes that they have to access.

You highlight the issue of the appeal, and I'm pleased to see that was raised as a subject for discussion. I think some of the comments and concerns raised are valid, and when we get into committee I expect that they will be given further attention.

I think what's important in the philosophy that has been identified and the statements that have been made in this Bill is the recognition that there are over 230,000 different stories for seniors. While I appreciate the concern that some of the financial or actual resolution of appeals may be awkward and difficult for some seniors, there is a very serious understanding that each of their stories will be somewhat unique and each of their opportunities to access programs is going to require special attention. I think it's to the credit of the minister and to the recognition of the seniors that this appeal process has been focused and highlighted. They have asked for a way to protect low-income seniors and give consideration to those unique needs that seniors may have to deal with.

There may be seniors in our community who are slightly above the thresholds but because of circumstances of a dependent child or a particular medical concern they are going to need our care and assistance in assessing what benefits they may receive. Rather than belittle the process, I think it's important to recognize that we heard seniors' concerns on this one and have focused on it.

I think it's also important to recognize a very fundamental issue with respect to these entitlements and rights. One of the things seniors have identified to us is their frustration of the waste in some of our programs, notwithstanding some of the waste in the government's way of delivering but also in the abuse by seniors of programs they have access to. I think it's critical in the deficit elimination that seniors have participated in and are committed to and perhaps are more so than any other generation in our province at this time, that we must look at what we consider universal. Health care will never be denied anyone in this province, as you well know. But our resources and our ability to provide health care requires that we decide and make some decisions about what we can afford. Mothers and families have identified with respect to the family allowance cheques years ago, the federal government with respect to some of its claw-backs with old-age security. This is nothing new to seniors, and I think it's time we realize that seniors are well ahead of most Albertans with respect to the issue of universality. They are prepared to be involved, make a commitment, and find a way to assist us with this crucial area of financial planning.

What they've asked us to do is find a fair and equitable way for them to be involved and not treat them as if they had no role to play. The very fact that they have participated and they have said, "We are prepared to pay our share, but protect low-income seniors," is something that should not be discarded. For members of the opposition to simply say that you can't touch this sacred entitlement absolutely negates what the seniors said. I appreciate that you have been talking to seniors and they have a concern, but I will say to you that if you have been to a number of their meetings, as I have as chairman of the advisory council, and have reviewed an awful lot of the material that's come in, one of the critical things they asked is how they can play a role in this issue. The issue of universality and the sacred entitlements with respect to health care benefits is something that they're prepared to discuss. What is of concern to them is not the payment of health care benefits but the continued access to appropriate health care, and I think it's important that we shift the focus from health care premiums to access to health care. There are a number of issues that they've raised with respect to that which have to be dealt with and shall be dealt with in other forums. I think it's important that we recognize that they have a role to play.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, I've just focused on a few of the issues that were identified in the member opposite's comments. I appreciate that we are moving into another phase of this debate, and it's important that those issues that you have raised, hon. Member for Fort McMurray, do come forward in the appropriate channel in committee. I think most critical for me as chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council is to correct the mistake with respect to means testing with a commitment to not upset seniors, and to put those kinds of comments on the floor as fait accompli is erroneous and creates some hardship for seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**10:50**

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to make a few comments. Firstly, I would like to say to the Member for Calgary-Currie that I don't believe members of the opposition have ever said that seniors were not prepared to contribute, simply that the consultation of seniors seemed to drag along and a lot of it was after the fact from when the original proposal was put forward. We all realize how strong the seniors are in this province.

There are a number of things that have been mentioned by nearly everyone. The thresholds. Those of course are a concern to seniors as well as to the opposition. The reliance of the Bill on regulations for its substance. This does mean that people may well be subject to the whim of future ministers, future governments as to the eligibility, the thresholds, whatever. Lack of regulations doesn't give people very much security.

Another item that's been mentioned a number of times is the fact that seniors were told before that they would not have their benefits touched. I think the fact that the information came out so slowly – there was first this information that they were going to be cut. They didn't know much about it, and it was very slow. There were exaggerated rumours. So people didn't understand exactly what was happening, and things got a little bit exaggerated with people. It's unfortunate that the government didn't stop and think about that before they announced it, because you caused a bit of panic for awhile. Most of that has leveled off, but it was unfortunate.

I think we need to look at the fact of how different seniors are today than previous generations. There's the whole thing we talk about. There's a lot more of them and they're healthier and they volunteer more. They're also living in a time when they're having a difficult time financially. So are their kids. So are their children that they worked to educate, children that they thought would probably be professionals or have a trade or whatever. They felt often that their children were equipped to deal with the world and hence their grandchildren. They find now that they're not, and they themselves are feeling vulnerable. They have children, middle-aged children sometimes, who have become unemployed. They worry about them at the same time as they worry about their own security. They also worry about their grandchildren, with all the talk about the rising costs of postsecondary education or the insecurity about schools.

So I think we need to be a little more sensitive to the insecure feeling. It's hard. I know. I had a mother of 95, who died last year, and she had a terrible time keeping up to today's world. It just moved too fast. She couldn't comprehend that Alberta was not the same Alberta it was when there was an oil boom, when things were fine. I think we need to be very sensitive to that for seniors when we introduce new changes. Feeling of security is really important.

There's also this whole business of people worrying about their houses. We talk about wealthy seniors. The majority of seniors are in low- to middle-income areas. They made their retirement plans on the basis of their current benefits and the current house that they may have, people who saved for a long time and bought a house, and a lot of people saw that as their big investment and also as their security for their retirement. As I said before, there was no warning about what was coming. So low-income people who rely exclusively on pensions, maybe the \$10,000 to \$12,000

range, living in their own homes – they're older homes. They need a lot of maintenance. People had done all this planning. They're worried about the taxes going up. There's a lot of talk about municipal taxes going up. So you've got maintenance, you've got municipal taxes going up, and in many cases you've got kids without jobs.

I think, as I said, a lot of that has been what's caused resistance among seniors. I do agree that you have adjusted some things, but I think we need to be so careful to recognize how vulnerable trapped people are when they really are at the point where they're not going to make any more money and there's nothing they can do about it, either for their kids or for themselves, if things go down.

I was really sorry to see the municipal tax benefit for seniors go. I think that was a shock, and I think that's a great worry to them. A lot of them own homes, at least where I live, in older neighbourhoods, and the value of those homes is going up. That doesn't mean anything to a senior. They want to live there. All it means is that their taxes are going up. They know their neighbours, and they don't know whether they're going to be able to afford to stay there.

So those are my comments. Thank you.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sat here and listened with rapt attention when earlier this evening the hon. Provincial Treasurer talked about fairness, what Liberals knew about fairness. Well, I can tell you that Liberals do know something about fairness. We would have cut fat cat MLA pensions that many of the people that brought us to the \$30 billion debt are now drawing. But no, they're sacrosanct. You can go down the – Dick Johnston, Marv Moore, Ernie Isley. They're earning . . .

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

MRS. BURGNER: A point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is rising on a point of order. You have the citation?

MRS. BURGNER: *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. We are debating Bill 35. There is no mention of pensions in here, and I would like the hon. member to stick to the Bill.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, on the point of order.

DR. PERCY: Yeah. Obviously the hon. member across is thin skinned. She knows that seniors are not being fairly treated. She knows that there's not a level playing field between how this government is treating seniors and how they're treating their own. The issue, Mr. Speaker, is fairness. It's dealing with pensionable income. Why are there two sets of rules? One for MLAs drawing pensions, retirees, many of whom are below 65, and seniors who are retired. So I think the issue is dealt with in my comments.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: I guess if you wanted to talk about just about anything, you could do so. However, if we're talking about benefits, we're not strictly talking about pensions. This is benefits supplementary to pensions, is it not?

DR. PERCY: Yes. It's the principle of fairness, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh, I see. You were talking about the principle of fairness. Well, hopefully we could keep it relevant to the Bill.

#### **Debate Continued**

DR. PERCY: So, Mr. Speaker, we sit back and we ask and we assess this Bill in terms of simple criteria. Is it fiscally responsible? Is it fair? And does it deal with issues at hand? I think in terms of principles it fails on all three counts. Let me talk about how it fails on each of those counts. First point: is it fair? When 68 percent of our seniors have an income less than \$15,000 a year and the poverty level in Edmonton and Calgary is \$15,000 a year, is it fair that the cutoff starts and the change in income starts at \$10,432? No, it isn't. It is not fair. They do not have any clear definition of what fair is.

MR. DINNING: Benefits have gone up.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Provincial Treasurer, we can all hear you.

MR. DINNING: I've been galvanized, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Provincial Treasurer, we look forward to your comments once Edmonton-Whitemud is finished his.  
Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: So, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of fairness does this deal with seniors with due regard to what we know the poverty level lines are for the major urban centres? The answer is no. It gives them the shaft. When you have a program that starts clawing back at \$10,432, that's not my definition of fair. It's theirs. It's the Provincial Treasurer's, who lives in Glenora. No problem there.

#### **Point of Order Questioning a Member**

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is rising on a point of order and will share with us the citation.

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

DR. PERCY: No.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Whitemud.

#### **11:00 Debate Continued**

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They are continuously interrupting me because they don't want to hear about fairness. They're trying to detract from our time, but of course we're here for as long as it takes to make sure that this Bill is modified in Committee of the Whole to be fair.

Now, one of the hon. members rudely interjected that it's going to be dealt with in regulation. Well, the reality is that virtually everything in this Bill is going to be dealt with by regulation at the discretion of the minister, when it suits their purpose. The legislation will be passed. The House won't be in session. What may happen, Mr. Speaker? Well, you can bet that in fact there

will be a lot of discretion employed. I mean, the reality is that legislation is supposed to set a structure. It's not supposed to be a skeleton. It is supposed to provide some sense of security that the rules of the game are set out very clearly. But in Bill after Bill after Bill, in this Bill, in Bill 19, what we see is government by regulation as opposed to government by legislation, and this Bill is perhaps the most blatant example of that move. The move to government by regulation as opposed to government by legislation then detracts from the power of all members of this House – private members on that side, opposition members on this side – to do their jobs and to represent their constituents.

I, too, have talked to many seniors both in my constituency and elsewhere in this province, and they have legitimate concerns. They had planned on a given set of rules of the game. Many of them no longer have any mechanism or means whatsoever of earning additional income. They're locked into whatever they have in place now, and suddenly the rules of the game are changed. Not only are the rules of the game changed in terms of the programs that fall under the seniors' benefits, but in health care, in lodges. The whole range, Mr. Speaker, is changing, and it's coming at them from all directions. To say that they feel insecure in this environment is an understatement. They feel in fact threatened, because they do not know from one day to the next where the claw-back is going to come from.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we are going to talk about fiscally responsible, the obvious answer in being fiscally responsible in this is to say that seniors have a legitimate claim on the resources of our society because they built this society. They worked when there were often in many cases no pension plans that they could invest in. It was their work, their effort that in fact has created this province. Now, what could the government have done if it wanted to in fact be innovative, if the government wanted to be truly committed to restructuring the way government performs? Well, they easily could have gone to some type of harmonization with the federal government and a guaranteed annual income for seniors and tried to bring the whole array of seniors' programs under one package, as opposed to a threshold here, a threshold here, a claw-back there.

The reality is that when you talk about a guaranteed annual income, there are often disputes of whether or not there are disincentive effects from those types of programs. Many legitimate and in fact right-of-centre policy institutes, like the Fraser Institute, now firmly endorse programs that lead to a guaranteed annual income, because when they weigh the gains from a more efficient provision of government services, they far outweigh the disincentive effects. In the case of seniors, Mr. Speaker, there are no disincentive effects because in fact many seniors are not working once they reach retirement age and they're not really at that margin where they're going to be weighing the trade-offs between the flow from a guaranteed annual income program as opposed to what they can earn from employment or self-employment.

So the reality is that if we wanted to be innovative, if we wanted to restructure the provisions of this program, why not go the whole array and look at a guaranteed annual income for this segment in our society, have a look at the entire array of programs that seniors must draw upon and try and harmonize it? Even the members on the other side will agree that when you go through this Bill, there are a multitude of thresholds, depending on the program. There are a multitude of individual programs that have to be monitored and scrutinized. Why not try and put this in one coherent package so that seniors would have some

sense of security that two arrays of programs – one from the federal government and one from the provincial government – were harmonized? I mean, at some point ultimately we may be going down this road as we re-examine our unemployment insurance, social assistance programs, and the like. But an easy first step, Mr. Speaker, would have been to focus here, because you don't have to worry about the disincentive effects whatsoever.

It's then an issue of targeting and trying to ensure that in fact those that have the least in our society but may have contributed the most are looked after. Nobody can disagree with the principle that is embodied in the Bill that there should be better targeting. Nobody can disagree with that. In a period of fiscal restraint one has to ensure that you allocate your resources to the highest needs. I mean, we've heard that time after time from the minister of social services. It's a reality. Does that program do it? Well, in some margins it might; in many other margins it may not. So it really does, in a sense, in many cases penalize those who are on squeaky wheels and allows a number of individuals to fall between the cracks.

A focus on a guaranteed annual income for seniors and trying to work with the federal government to get a harmonized program might have allowed the province, then, to be a leader in this regard, because, again, we are dealing with a group that has no other options. They're locked into whatever income they have in place.

That brings me to another point. Again, dealing with principle, I think a Bill such as this, which changes the rules of the game for a group that has no other options, ought to be phased in rather than introduced full phase, because it would at least allow for better planning on the part of seniors to cope, particularly those that are going to lose under the program. That's the group you have to worry about, because they don't have that many options.

Now, the hon. Provincial Treasurer had objected to the fact that there were incentives in the program that would lead individuals to rationally choose to divorce rather than live together. Well, the reality is, if you look at the numbers, that two seniors sharing accommodation have a threshold level of \$10,432 times two, so that works out to \$20,864. Two seniors who are married face a lower threshold level of \$16,918. There's an incentive there. There is a discrepancy there that in fact will lead to those types of perverse incentives. It's clear nobody wants to try and build those types of incentives into legislation. They may argue, "Well, we'll deal with that through regulations." Deal with it in legislation. Ensure you remove those disincentives. [interjection] It's not a laughing matter. The Provincial Treasurer may in fact find that this type of hardship imposed on a married senior couple is laughable. We don't on this side, Mr. Speaker. It's a serious issue that ought to be dealt with in the legislation and not left to regulation. So many of the issues in this Bill are really, you know, going to be dealt with by regulation. Deal with it in legislation. Try and in fact harmonize across these programs rather than the differential array.

The hon. member said: "Well, look with regards to health care premiums. We've now introduced a thousand dollars more for a single, \$2,000 for a couple." Well, the original marginal tax rate, Mr. Speaker, was 61 percent when it was introduced at \$17,000. They've reduced it somewhat, but it's still equivalent to the taxation rate you would find in Sweden at that level of income.

I mean, some of the harsher facets of this Bill have been dealt with, but the reality is that they still haven't dealt with the issue that concerns most seniors. This is a rolling wave that is continually buffeting them. They don't know who next is going

to reach into their pocketbook. When will the Minister of Municipal Affairs or the Provincial Treasurer? Why not target it, set up some type of guaranteed income, harmonize all of the thresholds, provide a degree of security to seniors, and phase in the Bill over a three-year period? If there's only one amendment that the members on the other side would accept – if there's only one – let it be that this program in its existing form, even if we don't like it as it exists, is phased in over a three-year period. Surely this society, this government can afford to phase in a program like this that has such significant, negative effects on a large number of individuals who have no other options than the income they draw from government.

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

## 11:10

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, having been lured into the ring by your invitation and having been galvanized by the MLA for Fort McMurray – and I refer to my definition of galvanized here as one who has been stimulated as if by electricity or roused by shock or excitement. That is me tonight after having listened to the barrister from Fort McMurray and from the professor on the hill, both two very fine and honourable gentlemen but who come from the hallowed halls of cloistered life and have no understanding of what real life is really like out there. [interjections]

I have to remind the Member for Calgary-Shaw that as much as his idea that the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud give up his universities academic pension plan – he's not going to do it. He won't stand up in this Assembly, as good an idea as the Member for Calgary-Shaw has put forward. Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw that it is not wise to ask the members . . . [interjections]

### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, I invited the Provincial Treasurer to speak on this in part as a ploy to get him to stop badgering you.

MR. DINNING: It worked.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: It worked. Unfortunately, I'm hoisted on my own petard because I cannot invite you to do the same, but I will extend the invitation when you may properly do so in third reading. Now, as interesting and as important as the barbs that you have, I wonder if we could hear from the Provincial Treasurer in a forthright and perhaps less provocative manner.

### Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, if I were Ray Martin, I'd say I was shocked and appalled.

I would just give some friendly advice to my colleague and friend for Calgary-Shaw when he chooses to ask a question while the hon. members across the way are speaking. If he didn't hear them, they quite rightly said: "They lost. We won. They get to ask the questions." It's rough justice, but it's rougher for them than it is for us.

Mr. Speaker, I rise because I believe the kind of program that the Minister of Community Development has brought before this government and brought before the people of Alberta and is now asking for approval for in this Assembly is one that has been based on a unprecedented array of consultation around this province, not only by himself and by other members of the

government caucus and by members of his own department but even by, I believe, members of the opposition who attended various meetings around this province and listened to concerns by seniors but in many ways heard comments from seniors saying: "Look; we know that this province is in a serious state of affairs. We're quite prepared to carry some of the burden. We're prepared to carry our fair share of the burden so as to eliminate the deficit and begin to work on the debt."

I heard the hon. member say that seniors feel threatened. I'm aware of that. That concerns us, and that is why we took the steps that we did to alter the program, to amend it so that the income thresholds – we raised the income thresholds. We advanced the rate of implementation of the health care insurance premium payment requirements so that it was a 15 percent phase-in. Mr. Speaker, what I heard a lot of Albertans say, seniors and nonseniors, is that while the member may be right about a small degree of being threatened, what's more important is that we think about the threat that we are imposing on those who have no voice, on those who are unable to voice their concerns at the polls, and that is the children of this province. I'm proud to say that I have four of the finest children on the face of this earth. One of them I hope will be coming to visit the members' gallery tomorrow and will have a chance to witness democracy in action, especially if the Liberals are fewer in number. I believe that we cannot take lightly the threat that we are imposing on our children and that indeed the threat that the Liberal government in Ottawa is imposing on this country by their policies based . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Which government?

MR. DINNING: The Liberal. That's right, Mr. Stony Plain, the Liberal government in Ottawa. Their policy can be summed up in one word, two words, three words: tough decisions mañana. Mañana, they say. Those are the kinds of policies that governments across this country – and I regret to say even this government's policies sometimes in the past have been a case of, "We'll look after it tomorrow; we'll grow our way out of this problem." It's a house of cards built on false hopes. Seniors who benefit under this Act and under this program have said: "Mañana is no good. Mañana is no good anymore. It's time to make the tough decisions. We will bear some of the burden. We will carry some of the share in reducing the cost of government."

Mr. Speaker, I speak just briefly about this important program in that it is a cash benefit program on the one hand combined with a phased-in from zero premium to maximum premium, from a minimum income in this province for a senior today of no less than \$12,400 and change because of the generosity of taxpayers in this country funding the likes of the guaranteed income supplement, the old age security, the Canada pension plan, and an array of very expensive but very caring-based programs that enable many of our senior citizens to live with dignity in their older years. It isn't a large amount of money, but in fact it's more money than we have in our bank account. The fact is we are writing cheques in this country, we are writing cheques in this province on a bank account that doesn't have enough money in it to honour those cheques. That is something that is anathema to the seniors in this province. They are not willing to put up with it anymore, and they've finally found a government who has the guts and the courage to stand up and say that mañana, like the Liberals' policy in Ottawa, is no good anymore.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear about what this program does. It provides cash benefits to single seniors, income up to the point

where they're making \$18,000 for single seniors, \$23,000 for one-senior couples, and \$27,000 for two-senior couples. If I may jump, let's be clear about when they start paying. They start paying health care premiums at that point, but let's be clear where they pay full health care premiums. In the case of a single senior, he begins to pay full health care premiums at \$20,560. For a one-senior couple they begin to pay premiums at \$28,120, and for two-senior couples they begin to pay full premiums at \$32,120.

I think that is a kind of program that we on the government side will go to any senior in this province and say, "This is a fair program." This is a fair program under the circumstances, under our financial and fiscal circumstances. This is one that Albertans, Alberta taxpayers, are able to afford and able to afford over the longer term. It's one that the Alberta economy will be able to generate sufficient wealth in order to pay for such a program. But we're cheating our kids; we're cheating those seniors' grandchildren and great grandchildren by continuing to live under the Liberal myth that we can just say: "Don't worry. It doesn't matter what's in our account; we'll just keep writing the big cheques and tax the living daylight out of future generations."

The Member for Lethbridge-East knows this. He lives in one of the more pragmatic, more fiscally responsible areas of this province. I admired the gentleman when at a town hall meeting with Edmonton-McClung and, I believe, my colleague from the Clover Bar area he said: you're right; the people in my part of the world think this kind of a program – this kind of a government policy and comprehensive program to eliminate the deficit is exactly what his constituents were saying to him. He had the guts to stand up in a town hall meeting in somebody's – I think it was in the Broadmoor area where he proudly stood up and made those kinds of comments. I admired that from the hon. gentleman across the way.

#### 11:20

Mr. Speaker, I have to take issue with my colleague from Fort McMurray. You know, his kind of language is the kind of Liberal language that we've grown accustomed to. The Liberal leader says that the Premier can't get into the doors of Ottawa, so he's going to get into the backrooms and help Ralph Klein to make the government's issues and policies known in Ottawa. It's that kind of backroom politics. It's called the reward and punishment kind of politics that Liberals like to practise. I heard the Member for Fort McMurray standing up and trying to pit seniors against nonseniors and saying that we're singling out seniors for this kind of a program. Well, the reason why seniors are not falling for that kind of claptrap, that old-line, old-style politics that's promoted by the Liberal Party is because those senior citizens – Aunt Agatha who wagged her finger at Brian Mulroney in May 1985 on Parliament Hill, what would she be saying today? She'd be saying, "By God, we're not being singled out."

We have a government saying okay; we're turning to all Albertans and asking them to take their fair share of the burden. We're asking farmers; we're asking the oil and gas industry; we're asking all members of the public sector who receive a dollar of income – their wages, their salaries come from the taxpayer's pocket – whether they are teachers or school support staff or administrators or nurses or doctors or health support people. We're even talking about judges, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about people who are in the construction business, people who run our buildings, people in the social services area. They are all bearing some of the burden that has been asked of them, asked of Albertans, to crush this deficit and to stop the mortgage from growing.

I am heartened, Mr. Speaker, when I hear the comments directed to our Premier about the kind of initiatives that we have taken. They're tough. We've never promised that it was going to be easy. We've never misled Albertans to believe that this is going to be painless and without sacrifice. I am heartened when I go to a town hall meeting in Calgary-Lougheed or when I have a chance to visit with people on the streets of Calgary-Lougheed or any street in this province or any senior citizen centre in this province, when they say: "We don't like it. We're going to find it a little difficult over the short term, but we're willing to buy in as long as you stick to the plan that you promised, as long as you don't single one group out and pit one against another," like the Member for Fort McMurray was suggesting we were trying to do. Those seniors are exactly right.

I hear the comments from the hon. members across the way, and I regret, Mr. Speaker. I know they must be frustrated. I see some of them having entered in the class of 1986, fellow members of the class of '86. By golly, there's only one over there today, and he isn't the same person today. He's older, and if I didn't know better, I'd say he's going to be eligible for this program sooner than he had planned to be. All I can honestly say: I don't envy the group across the way having to stay in opposition for a minimum of another 49 months, because we're going to implement this plan just like we said we were going to do. We're going to do what Albertans told us to do, what seniors told us to do, and we're going to implement this plan. We're going to listen to what Albertans say, just like we did in building the Alberta seniors' benefit program. We have a Minister of Community Development who went from one end of the province to the other to listen to Albertans and what they had to say, and that's why we have a better program today than the one that was announced on February 24th. We'll continue to work with and listen to Albertans with this program and all of the other initiatives that this government takes to make sure that we get back on the non-Liberal, the non-mañana track and make sure that we live in a fiscally responsible environment that Albertans expect us to do.

MR. CHADI: That's why you had those seniors on the steps of the Legislature.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, Edmonton-Roper. You'll have your chance.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I would so request that all members support second reading of this important Bill.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill 35. The first thing that comes to my mind when I look at Bill 35 is: what happened to the so-called caring and listening Conservative government? I also want to say that I sat here with pride at being a member of the Official Opposition. Why do I say that? Because I sit here and listen to the hypocrisy that our Provincial Treasurer has expounded for the past number of minutes.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

Why would I be proud to be an Official Opposition member? Well, I'll tell you why, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker. Because it's through the democratic process of having a strong opposition that we may bring some integrity back into government in the province of Alberta, that we may indeed be able to open up government

and remove the disaster that Conservative governments have not only done in the province of Alberta but in Canada. When I refer to caring and listening in Bill 35, I remember well listening over the years when I came to reside in the province of Alberta, hearing about how seniors had earned the right to our respect, to society's respect. To retain their pride, they needed security and stability. Who was the individual that spoke those words, that we as a society owed our seniors a debt, we owed our children a debt? It was a man called Peter Lougheed. How quickly we forget what that Premier said about our seniors and how we as a society should treat them.

Now, this government certainly didn't uphold any of those fine words of Peter Lougheed's when they went about looking at seniors' programs. What did they do? They decreed. They didn't care. They didn't listen. So when I have to sit here and listen to the hypocrisy coming from the Provincial Treasurer trying to say that it was Liberals that created this, and we look at the federal government scene and we look at the provincial Conservative government legacy, that indeed is hypocrisy.

Now let's take a look at what indeed this government did when it came to the seniors. I certainly did not go out and entice our seniors, as was being suggested by Calgary-Currie. The first I heard about the deep concern that our seniors had – and for the benefit, Mr. Deputy Deputy Speaker, so that the Provincial Treasurer . . .

MR. WOLOSZYN: It's Mr. Speaker.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Is it Mr. Speaker? I stand to be corrected.

MR. CHADI: No, Madam. You don't have to be corrected by him.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Oh, I don't mind being corrected.

MR. CHADI: Absolutely not. He is Deputy Deputy Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No, he's not.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Are you Mr. Speaker?

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Just on a point of clarification. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Order please.

**11:30**

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I did not intend any disrespect. I thought I was being correct.

Getting back to the comments relating to Bill 35 and the comments from the Provincial Treasurer, if anyone has created divisionary politics it has been past Conservative governments and the present Conservative government. The whole philosophy of this present government has been to pit one segment of society against another, be it seniors, the professional groups – whether they be teachers, whether they be doctors – or our adolescents.

Now, if we're talking about common sense, the people of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan have indeed got a lot of common sense, fitting in with Lethbridge or, I would imagine, Grande Prairie or High Level. It certainly does not belong in just one geographic part of the province. So when my seniors tell me that they've got a deep concern about what this provincial government is doing through Bill 35 and the first phone call I get is from my retired United Church minister, you bet I listened. What he was

telling me – and I shared it with this House in a member's statement. His whole security was threatened. His whole plan for his retirement was indeed threatened, the security that he had looked forward to and that he felt he had earned through his contribution to the province of Alberta and indeed to the community and to the greater community of Alberta through the fact that he is an historian and has had published three books to this point in time.

I listened, Mr. Speaker, and what he said was: how could a government who campaigned on caring and listening suddenly turn around and betray them by coming in with what was going to affect their security without consulting them? That is when you start getting into divisionary politics, and it's this government that has indeed done that.

I'd also remind you that each generation is indeed judged by the way they treat their elders, and when it's been suggested that we went around somehow and enticed seniors into communicating their concerns, whether it be through the media or on the steps of the Legislature, that couldn't be further from the truth. I went to three meetings in Sherwood Park and Strathcona county and sat at the back of those meetings and listened to the concerns of seniors. At one meeting I was invited to sit on the panel to ask questions. I went into a meeting in Fort Saskatchewan that my constituency office initiated. We had just under 200 seniors at that meeting, and what happened, Mr. Speaker? Suddenly the hon. minister appeared at the meeting unannounced. That was fine with me. It was great that he was there, but what happened was that he took over the meeting. Now, the thing that we as politicians have to learn is that when we are in our communities, we'd better listen to what our constituents are saying. We don't stand up there and orchestrate the meeting. Well, you know what happened? He was asked to leave, and he was asked to leave by certain Conservatives that were . . .

MR. DINNING: By you.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: No. And you would know the gentlemen, hon. Provincial Treasurer, and so would the hon. member sitting to your right know the individual very well.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Through the Chair please.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, he made the statement himself: do you want me to leave? And do you know what the reply was from our seniors in Fort Saskatchewan? "Yes, we do," and he had to leave.

Now, the reason that happened in Fort Saskatchewan was because he wasn't there to listen. He came in to tell the seniors what a wonderful program it was and what a wonderful job this government was doing. They didn't buy it, and they still don't buy it. These, Mr. Speaker, were people of all political stripes. That's the significant part of what I'm saying: they were of all political stripes, and they were giving a message to that minister. So when I have to sit here and listen to the arrogance that somehow other people are out there enticing seniors – give me a break. Albertans don't even buy that.

Now, when I compare my mother, who is 88, still living in her own home in Scotland, with how we are going to be looking after our seniors possibly over the next decade, I have a great deal of concern about the seniors here in the province of Alberta. When you look at that lower benefit of \$10,432, I mean, that's below the poverty level. To me that's not reasonable. I think what we need to do even at this late date is raise it to a more realistic level

that will ensure that our seniors keep their pride, that they have a degree of security.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what's 1995 going to bring? What's 1996 going to bring? That's what my seniors are asking. What's going to happen in the next provincial budget and the one after that? Are you going to tell me that we're going to get a commitment from this government tonight that what we put in place through Bill 35 is going to remain intact for the next three, four, five years? Or are we also going to possibly be seeing some incremental increases in the lower levels and raising the upper limits? Are we going to hear that? I don't think so. I think every senior has a right to be concerned that we really don't know what the future holds.

Now, one thing that we have to learn is that we made a mistake when we started to institutionalize our seniors. That was when there was money galore, and it was no object. You didn't really look at what was good for people. You threw program after program at people. You built senior citizens' lodges all over the province. We built hospitals. We took away the independence that seniors treasure, but they didn't realize it at the time. So what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that we must do everything in our power to ensure that there are the necessary programs and indeed an income level so that we can retain our people in their own homes.

Now, that's a little bit more difficult in the type of climate we live in in Alberta in comparison to Scotland. We have to ensure that the sidewalks are clear of snow, and to protect our seniors, we have to ensure that there is no ice on the sidewalks. But I would say, Mr. Speaker, that having the appropriate programs for our seniors and keeping them in their homes and keeping their independence indeed is less costly in the long term.

So, Mr. Speaker, just adding to what some of my colleagues said, it's not just the fact that our seniors are concerned about themselves. They are indeed concerned about their own children and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, because we're living in very insecure times. Many seniors see their siblings being retired early, being unemployed. That does not give them a level of security or stability. When you're 78, you have no idea whether you're going to live another 10, 15, or 20 years, and you truly do not know whether you've set aside enough income to keep you at a level of comfort. So we have to rely on government to ensure that we will be taken care of if indeed that happens.

You know, we hear all this sort of joking going back and forth about pensions, and I think it's sad when we start making fun of something that really was obscene. Whether one member on this side of the House is getting a pension at 65 or whether it's past cabinet ministers or whoever it is, we know we made serious errors in the past. Let's get rid of all this joking and nonsense that goes on. Let's clean the slate and move on. But I don't see that happening. I still see this divisionary politics. I still see people through patronage getting benefits that the average . . .

**11:40**

MR. DINNING: Muriel, that's how you got your appointment.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: I know I did. I'd be the first to admit that, and I don't apologize.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459: relevance. We are not talking about pension benefits. We are talking about Bill 35, and I'd ask the hon. member to focus on the debate on the Bill.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Do you have a reply to that?

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Speaking to the point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would say: what relevance? We heard in earlier debate tonight the Provincial Treasurer raising pensions. I think it's very relevant. We're talking about seniors' programs and the instability and insecurity regarding that. The relevance was that indeed we have to ensure that there's fairness in the system, and through pensions and through patronage you do not create fairness when you're dealing with seniors.

When the Provincial Treasurer started to indicate certain appointments that I had had, yes, I have no hesitation acknowledging those, Mr. Speaker. I felt I was well qualified for them, and I accepted them without hesitation.

But moving on, when you're looking at the . . . [interjections] You're not excited?

MR. DINNING: Galvanized.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: I think part of the situation here is that the hon. member is allowing herself to be distracted by others, and perhaps she would continue through the Chair.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, to know that the Provincial Treasurer wants to pay such attention to me, can you blame me for being distracted? [interjections]

**Point of Order  
Imputing Motives**

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

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The Provincial Treasurer on a point of order.

MR. DINNING: On Standing Order 23, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned only about imputing false motives. [interjections] I know. It's difficult for me to get it out, but, boy, I would ask the hon. member to perhaps alter her remarks.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, it's very distracting when a man keeps staring at you, and it just so happened that it was the Provincial Treasurer. I will certainly try and speak through the Chair, but I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that I could please not have the Provincial Treasurer continually interrupting me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Debate Continued**

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Getting back to a more serious note and indeed to Bill 35, I think that while we've seen some humour while we've been debating this, in all honesty, Mr. Speaker, I think our seniors will have to also have some humour because indeed through Bill 35 there is a degree of instability, insecurity being created. I'd ask this government in all seriousness to reconsider what they're doing in Bill 35, because I firmly believe they have betrayed our seniors. I think that that lower level certainly has to be increased and the upper limit also increased.

I'd also ask that within those two lines we be as generous as we possibly can when it comes to all support systems.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I did not look on the right. As it is tradition that we go from one side to the other, the hon. Minister of Health.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make a few comments in regard to this Bill. I probably have a constituency that has one of the highest number of seniors in Alberta per population, and I'm proud to say that I probably have the most independent, the most proud, the most resourceful, self-sufficient seniors there are in this province as well.

Mr. Speaker, I spent 28 days, as other members in this Legislature did, campaigning in an election less than a year ago. I campaigned across a constituency that is about a hundred miles square and talked to seniors. Contrary to the Member for Fort McMurray, I had the opportunity to visit with seniors in lodges before I was elected, not just when I was trying to win an election, and the message was consistent wherever I went. That consistency was: don't spend more than you have, get hold of your financial affairs, and be fair. Seniors want to be a part of the solution to ensure that this province is a sound province. They have children, they have grandchildren, and they care very much about their future.

The seniors in Chinook also understand the reasons for the difficulties this province is in financially. They remember very well the national energy program, the downturn in the energy industry that took billions of dollars out of this province, and they understand that perhaps we should have taken tougher measures then, but because of other things, like agriculture being on the ropes, they understand that these things did occur. [interjections] The hon. members are really anxious to talk about NovAtel, but, Mr. Speaker, they do not talk about the \$60 billion that the Liberal government in Ottawa took out of this province with the national energy program. [interjections] That's what started it. [interjections]

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

MR. HENRY: What about the GST, Shirley?

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre, please.

MRS. McCLELLAN: In the discussions with seniors, Mr. Speaker, over the period of time of consultation on this program, seniors said: be fair. They said: ensure that seniors who need assistance will receive more; those of us who can afford to pay our way are happy to help. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, my father became a senior in this province some years ago, and I recall him saying when he received his first pension cheque that there are many young people out there, including, I think, maybe one or two of his own nine children, that could have used that assistance just a bit more than he could at that time. [interjections]

#### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Health, I hesitate to interrupt.

We're not in committee, and I would appreciate it if members on both sides would pay attention to that fact and not have these discussions going on when in fact we understand very well what the rules are.

Thank you.

11:50

#### Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, those are the types of people that did build this province and built it proudly. That gentleman raised nine children – I'm one of them – and he never expected the government to educate them, to feed them, or to clothe them. He expected to do that, and he did it with very few resources in the early years, I can assure you. But he still felt, at a time in his life where he was able to manage a bit better on his own, that he would have liked to have seen that assistance go to some younger people or those of his own age that were less fortunate and maybe had not had the opportunities that he did.

He's not a unique person in my constituency. Many seniors are like that. They have worked hard and they have put away and they understand savings, because the area that I represent, a large part of it, was quite involved in the Dirty Thirties. A lot of people lost the title to their land because they couldn't pay the taxes, but they stayed with that land in many cases, leased it, worked hard, and have provided for their families and have built it up to be a place in the province that many of us are very proud to call home.

Again, Mr. Speaker, these are the types of seniors that we have in Alberta all over this province, not just in my constituency, although I'm more familiar with them and I'm certainly proud of them. If they can, they want to help. They want to help the young people in this province, many of whom start out with young families and don't have \$27,000 a year income. They want to ensure that those young people do have a future in this province, and they feel the best way to do that is to ensure that our financial house is in order.

Mr. Speaker, that was the commitment that this government made to the people of Alberta, and it was the mandate that the people of this province gave this government on June 15 last year. We did not promise big spending. We promised one thing, deficit reduction and a deficit-free province, and that we would do it in consultation and we would do it in a measured, reasoned way. This is a part of that program, and it is a part where we feel, by working with seniors, that we've listened to them. The seniors asked to have the extended health benefits returned to the Department of Health. We accepted that recommendation, and we have agreed to work with seniors over the period of the next months to ensure that whatever is involved in extended health benefits benefits the seniors in this province in the most effective way. That's a commitment we have made, and it is a commitment that we will keep.

This Bill talks about fairness. It talks about helping those who need help the most. It talks about providing for seniors that cannot provide for themselves, ensuring that those who truly need help get more and that those who can help themselves do with a little less.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the best place in Canada today to be a senior. We're proud of that, and we're proud of our seniors. We provide programs and assistance for our seniors in this province that are not matched anywhere in this country, and we're proud of that too. The seniors in this province also understand that we have made a commitment in this province, albeit other provinces perhaps have not seemed to make that commitment yet, but they should and they will. They're simply putting off the inevitable. With the help of seniors and others in this province we will

balance our budget, and we will all have a province that we can be proud of for our children and our grandchildren.

This is what this program talks about. It talks about fairness to seniors. It talks about ensuring that those who have lower incomes and less opportunities will have a higher benefit, and those who can afford to assist those who have less are quite happy to do that.

When you talk about listening to people, it is not just a matter of listening, Mr. Speaker. You have to really hear what they're saying. And you have to hear the silent majority, the proud seniors that are out in this province that do believe in Alberta, that do believe in the future, and that do want to have a future for those young people in this province. Many of those people believe this is the right way. They were raised on financial responsibility, on fiscal responsibility, and they know that if you continually spend more than you have, you get into big difficulties. They're saying: please don't do that.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, I campaigned as others in this Assembly did for 28 days across my constituency, and in fact I had a couple of brief visits in others. The message was the same. It was the strongest from the seniors in my constituency: "Get your financial house in order. We are willing to be a part of the solution. Be fair, but ensure that those seniors and those people in our province that do not have the opportunities, that cannot help themselves get a larger benefit from the programs that we have in this province."

Mr. Speaker, that's what this Bill ensures for the seniors in this province, and that's why I certainly support it. I believe the majority of the seniors in Chinook constituency support it. Certainly from the information and the feedback that I've had from those people, they do.

Mr. Speaker, none of us likes change. It's uncomfortable. We would all prefer, I suppose, not to have a great deal of change in our lives, but the very people that we're talking about tonight in the seniors' Bill have encountered and undergone more change and faced it more courageously than I suggest any one of us has ever been challenged to do at this time. Many of these people have been through a war; many of them have fought for their country. Many of them have worked very hard for what they have today, and they value it. I think we owe those people something, and what we owe them is an honest discussion of what this program really means to seniors.

If I was distressed about anything during the consultation process, it was about the information that they had been given from someone, somewhere, and usually not fact, by innuendo, like I heard an hon. member say in this House tonight: these programs are means tested. I ask the hon. member . . .

MR. CHADI: He said that they're income tested.

MRS. McCLELLAN: No. Read *Hansard*. It says means tested. Mr. Speaker, I challenge the hon. Member for Fort McMurray to check *Hansard* and to put on the Table in the Legislature tomorrow where a program in this is means tested.

Those are the types of things that are very unfair to seniors. These are income tested; they are not means tested. They are not means tested for a very specific reason: we want seniors to be able to stay in their own homes. We want seniors to be able to enjoy their independence in their homes. We understand that many seniors in this province have worked all their lives to have that home and that they have precious dollars to maintain it, to stay in that home. For that reason these programs are not means tested; they are income tested.

12:00

That is the type of information that is very difficult for seniors. They hear a little story here and a little rumour here, and pretty soon it's presented as fact, and that creates uncertainty. I suggest that that type of information is unfair. I could use a stronger word, but it might not be parliamentary. It's unfair to use a segment of our population for political means. I would hope no one in this Assembly on either side of the House would do so. They are a segment of our population to be respected and to be honoured. I believe that we as a government have done that by consulting with them, by talking to them, by explaining to them if we couldn't provide all of the things that they would have liked to see. We have told them what we can do, and where we couldn't, we have told them why. That's what seniors in this province want, Mr. Speaker. They want fairness, they want honesty, and they want this government to live up to the promises it made on June 15 to balance our budget to make sure this province is deficit free and be a leader in Canada in that.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I would adjourn debate.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 35. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[At 12:03 a.m. on Thursday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

