

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, March 26, 1996 **8:00 p.m.**  
 Date: 96/03/26  
 [The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

**head: Government Bills and Orders**  
**head: Second Reading**  
**Bill 15**  
**Hospitals Amendment Act, 1996**

[Adjourned debate March 26: Mr. Bracko]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 15. I have one primary concern with Bill 15. Although the intent appears to be responsible and in particular fiscally responsible and something that I would support, I'm concerned that this Bill, if you go beyond its appearance, won't really be a cost savings to Albertans.

I guess the way I look at it is that we do have to do a cost benefit on every Bill. Although it may be that government will continue to take the same amount in terms of taxes – or if there is a reduction, I would expect it to be fairly minimal – Albertans will continue to pay health care premiums. I expect that those would be maintained at the current levels, and if the trend continues, as has been the case in the past three years, we may actually see an increase in premiums in the remaining days of this government's term. When you take a look at those two, the net benefit to Albertans isn't realized. I guess from my perspective it doesn't really matter who's collecting the dollars. The bottom line is that my constituents will be expected, I would daresay, to pay more as a result of this Bill. From the fiscal perspective, I'm very concerned that in majority they wouldn't be supportive of paying additional moneys.

Now, one would say, "Well, it doesn't say it anywhere in the Bill, and in fact the Bill appears to be going quite the opposite direction for the wrongdoer." Wrongdoers would be liable for an increased amount of hospital costs or associated medical costs as a result of their actions. Now, in appearance, I guess that's a noble direction to go, but we've seen this sort of case before that the costs are never or seldom passed on to the consumer.

Essentially, if this Bill had one single focus or one main purpose, I would have assumed it would have been to reduce the cost to the taxpayer. I don't see that. In fact, what I see from this Bill is an increased amount of administration, and as a result naturally there's an increased cost for that administration. As soon as you see those two elements, you see an increased cost to all Albertans through insurance premiums that they're not now paying to government but rather that they're paying to private-sector insurance companies. So this, I would think, would even be a difficult Bill for some of the insurance companies because it would require additional administrative efforts on their behalf. I'm not convinced that they would be wholeheartedly supportive of this Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, on those few points that I've made, those are my greatest specific concerns with this Bill. Although in appearance it's a good Bill, I'm more concerned with how this Bill will translate into a service or a savings for Albertans. I'm not

convinced that may in fact be realized. I guess I would need a level of assurance as to exactly how that would happen, how Alberta's taxpayers would realize savings from this and if there has been some form of studies done by the government. Maybe the sponsor of the Bill will enlighten me with where this direction came from. Once again, though, I do support the intent. I'm concerned that it may not translate, that the intent may not be realized once this Bill, if passed, comes to be.

So, with those few questions and those few concerns, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place and permit another speaker to address the Bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. To close debate, then, the Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: I've listened intently to the discussion at second reading, and a number of issues and questions have been raised. I think quite honestly many of the questions raised would more appropriately be addressed at the committee stage of this Bill, and I will be more than pleased to address those questions at committee stage. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I will have some opening remarks when we get to committee to address most, if not all, of the questions that have been raised.

I would just like to make one clarification because there has been a lot of discussion on the principle of the Bill in that the debate has centred around whether or not taxpayers in the province will in fact be paying more through their insurance as a result of this Bill. I made the point when I introduced the Bill at second reading that this Bill amends Bill 46, which was before this Legislature some two years ago. This Bill streamlines the process in Bill 46. This Bill in and of itself will not result in an increase to the insurance rates of Albertans. In fact, this Bill in all likelihood will result in less of an increase that would be passed on to consumers because it streamlines the process. It saves money for both the insurance companies and for government.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will move second reading. I look forward to a lively discussion at committee stage.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

### Bill 16 Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River on behalf of the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague for Pincher Creek-Macleod I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 16 at second reading. The Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act of 1996 continues to fulfill the commitment this government made back in 1993. At that time this government stated that it was getting out of the business of being in business. Wherever possible, we've strived to deregulate and repeal legislation that creates impediments to business being able to get on with the task of wealth and job creation in this province. This is important because wealth generation and job creation are part of the cornerstone of our commitment to people, prosperity, and preservation. This Act repeals the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act of 1990 and the Tourism Education Council Act of 1988.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation as it helps

to achieve what we have set out to do: to clear the path for business to create prosperity in Alberta and remove the government of Alberta from being in the business of business. When Alberta got into the telephone business back in 1907, our goal was simply to ensure that Albertans got what the industry of the day referred to as POTS, plain ordinary telephone service, at a reasonable price. Well, that has been accomplished. In fact you might find it surprising to learn that Alberta is one of only two or three jurisdictions in all of North America that has complete single-line service without party-line service.

We accomplished the job of providing the so-called POTS, but in the meantime telephone companies, including our own, have grown and evolved into telecommunication companies, and the telecommunication industry has become increasingly competitive. It was the judgment of this government that it did not belong in the telecommunications industry nor did taxpayers need to be exposed to the inherent risks involved in our being in the telecommunications business. The government has no further interest or ownership in Telus and no regulatory jurisdiction over the company's activities. Therefore it makes sense that we remove ourselves from any position of perceived influence or control.

#### 8:10

By repealing the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, Mr. Speaker, we continue our commitment to Alberta business to eliminate burdensome regulations and to get out of the business of being in business. Doing so will afford Telus the opportunity to compete more effectively in the world of global telecommunications. It will also ensure that the company's plans for future generation of wealth in Alberta is a goal that is attainable.

There are two parts to the Alberta Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act, Mr. Speaker. The second is the repeal of the Tourism Education Council Act of 1988, which I would like to address now briefly. In April 1987 the Alberta Tourism Education Council was established, and in May of 1988, Bill 7, the Tourism Education Council Act received Royal Assent. Bill 7 legitimized ATEC's role as a co-ordinator of tourism education and training. The Bill also established the tourism education fund, which enabled the council to solicit and receive alternate funding, which was a key element of the council's long-term funding. With the Alberta Tourism Education Council firmly established, it moved ahead developing occupational standards and certification. In August 1993 the council developed a three-year business plan that called for increasing industry funding and decreasing reliance on the government. In February 1994 the government announced plans to reduce funding from the period 1994 to 1996 and to eliminate direct funding to the council in 1996-97.

Mr. Speaker, ATEC has developed the plans and put the agenda in place for further operations as a nonprofit society. The Alberta Tourism Education Council has now been incorporated under part 2 of the Canada Corporations Act effective September 14, 1995. This is an excellent example of how privatization creates opportunities that lead to wealth generation and job creation. Under their new organization ATEC will continue to provide needed services to Alberta's tourism industry. These services will ensure that members of the Alberta hospitality industry are well-trained ambassadors for the province.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 16, the Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act, will allow both Telus and ATEC to move forward. The enactment of this Bill will allow these two organizations to get on with the job of providing services and generating

wealth and jobs. I hope this Bill receives a positive response from every member in this Assembly. I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 16.

Thank you very much.

MR. DAY: Question.

MR. BRUSEKER: I do have a few questions, hon. Government House Leader. I did want to make a few comments on Bill 16, the Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act, 1996.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that I will support Bill 16 when it comes for the vote at conclusion of second reading tonight or tomorrow or whenever we get through this. Bill 16 itself is actually quite a short piece of legislation, as the introducer of the Bill has mentioned. It simply repeals two pieces of legislation, one being the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act and the other being the Tourism Education Council Act. In debating the Bill, therefore, one must look back at the pieces of legislation proposed to be repealed and eliminated by the legislation.

I think that when one looks over the issue of, first of all, the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, there are a number of good reasons to repeal this piece of legislation. First of all, when one looks at the legislation that created the opportunity to privatize AGT, which is what the purpose of the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act was, it created a number of restrictions on the corporation. One of the major thrusts for the privatization in the first place was – I guess there were a couple of reasons. One is increased costs. AGT and all telecommunications industries, all telcos, are moving into an age of new technology and increased competition, and of course that was one of the major thrusts for the government in introducing and ultimately passing the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act as it was passed at the time, chapter A-23.5.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another one of the reasons for the privatization was the fact that AGT was facing significantly increased costs, and the figure, as I recall, was in the neighbourhood of 1 billion dollars' worth of increased expenditures that were going to be put upon the corporation in order to make it competitive in the international marketplace. Certainly there is little that is more internationally competitive than, of course, the whole idea of telephones and telecommunication.

So what we had in repealing this piece of legislation was the idea that we would make a company that would be one of those ones that could grow and become competitive. But in fact one of the restrictions on the corporation in section 5 of the Act was that it could not carry on any kind of business in another jurisdiction. By eliminating this piece of legislation now, in fact one of the concepts that was proposed was that maybe we would see some point where – and in fact we have seen some amalgamation within the province of Alberta now where AGT has purchased Ed Tel. Well, that's making a little bit larger corporation. Now maybe one of the things they may need to look at would be to merge with Saskatchewan and make a larger prairie telecommunications company – I don't know what the name would be – perhaps into Manitoba as well, and expand the range that they have to interact and make a bigger, more dynamic, and hopefully more financially successful corporation. In fact, it was kind of a curious restriction that I commented upon at the time when the Bill was introduced, and I guess I would comment on it now that we're repealing the Bill. It seemed to me to be an odd kind of thing to introduce in

the Bill, so it's a good move by the government to eliminate that restriction on the corporation.

Another section of the Bill allowed for the Lieutenant Governor in Council – i.e., the cabinet – to appoint directors to the corporation. When one reviews government involvement in a whole long list of corporations, which I won't bother reciting here because we all know them, I think that literally in this case, as the Member for Peace River has pointed out, for the government to get out of being in business is a good move. So by repealing the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, as Bill 16 proposes to do, it will eliminate the need and the requirement for cabinet to appoint four directors of the corporation. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that would be a good move as well.

Mr. Speaker, one of the restrictions – and it was a curious restriction at the time – was that the corporation had to maintain its head office here in the city of Edmonton. That was also a piece of the original Bill that is now going to be eliminated. Again, certainly if government is intent upon getting out of the business of being in business, there's no reason in the world why the government should be dictating where a head office of a corporation should or should not be maintained. At the time – and of course the situation was a little different then – the head office was here in Edmonton, but the majority of AGT's clients and customers were everywhere but Edmonton. Of course Ed Tel was a privately owned city corporation at the time. That has changed, of course, since the Bill was introduced and is now being eliminated.

Mr. Speaker, there is one concern that I do want to raise with the idea of repealing the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, and that is that in the current Bill we have before us, there is a section that restricts the beneficial ownership of shares by non-Canadians. In fact, the section says that nonresidents of Canada shall not hold in excess of 10 percent of the total number of shares of the corporation. Now, a question, then, that I would put to presumably the Member for Peace River, since he introduced it, is: if we repeal the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, is there going to be any kind of a control mechanism to ensure that the majority of the ownership of the shares is going to remain if not within Alberta at least within Canada? Or is it going to be simply wide open to the market, whoever buys it buys it?

I raise that concern simply in that it may well be the situation that we may find ourselves with pension funds from the United States, or offshore for that matter, Mr. Speaker, buying into AGT and taking over the ownership of our corporation. Now, I guess for many that might not be a big concern. I'm not sure even that it is a concern. I'm simply asking the question: is there going to be anything to replace that section of the Act that is in force today that restricts ownership by nonresidents to a maximum of 10 percent?

**8:20**

Along the same vein, another section in the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act restricts individual ownership to a maximum of 5 percent. I recall well the debate that raged on in this House for many days when AGT was being privatized. The idea was that with the ownership of this corporation, when it was owned by the government, it was owned by all Albertans. Now that we've privatized it, the ownership was going to be in the hands of a much smaller pool of people who bought shares and bought into it. But no one could own more than 5 percent at the time. That was the argument made by the hon. Fred Stewart,

the minister of technology, research, and telecommunications, who was the minister responsible for the privatization at that time.

Now, if we repeal the Act, the arguments made by that hon. minister when the privatization was proposed of course are now going to be gone, and the control of this corporation could end up in the hands of an even smaller number by elimination of the 5 percent rule. I'm wondering if any consideration has been given to that restriction, if you will, by the cabinet, by the member introducing the Bill, or by whomever. Indeed to my way of viewing it, Mr. Speaker, that is a significant change in the policy of the government. I'm wondering if we could get some explanation as to why it is the argument was made in one case by a government member in this Legislative Assembly for one situation and for one type of creation of a piece of legislation and now by the same government – a different member – we're getting a different argument. Those two arguments, I would argue, are not similar arguments. They do not take the same philosophy, they do not take the same orientation as to how this corporation should be organized and carried on.

Mr. Speaker, the repeal of this Act will allow AGT, or Telus, as the holding company is known, to pursue its own destiny unfettered by restrictions of government. That may well be the primary thrust for putting forward this particular piece of legislation, and that may be the overriding argument that pushes those concerns aside, if you will, with respect to the non-Canadian resident ownership and with respect to the total ownership being not more than 5 percent. But I think those are questions that it is incumbent upon the government to answer to the people of Alberta, because by repealing this piece of legislation, it is changing and will change forever the system under which AGT operates and under which it continues to operate today.

One would also have to ask the question: if we repeal this piece of legislation and if indeed there is no position for the government to have an involvement with this corporation by the appointment of directors and if the government no longer has the golden share and no longer has any involvement, will there then be a change of name from Alberta Government Telephones? If it is no longer a government organization and the government no longer has any influence over this corporation, as it doesn't with so many corporations in the province, then it begs the question of continuing on with that name.

Now, the holding company, the structure that is set up, is called Telus, and within that, their primary operation is AGT. When you get your bill at your home, I'm sure it says AGT on the top, and that is Alberta Government Telephones. But if we now repeal this piece of legislation and if there is no longer government involvement in any way, shape, or form, then the name of the corporation does not accurately reflect the true nature of the corporation. Certainly it is a telephone company, certainly it will continue in telecommunications in the province of Alberta, but the implication that it is somehow related to or endorsed by the government of the province of Alberta is no longer there once this Bill is repealed. I think that, too, is an issue, perhaps a small one, perhaps merely a technical issue, Mr. Speaker, but I think it is one that should be addressed by the provincial government before it proceeds willy-nilly with this piece of legislation to repeal the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act.

The second half of the Bill, of Bill 16 that is, the very short piece of legislation which we are debating this evening, is to repeal a second piece of legislation called the Tourism Education Council Act, also known as ATEC for short, which was created by this government to help put into place training and standards

for those individuals employed in our hospitality industry. Mr. Speaker, that, as you know, has now been privatized, and that is a corporation which is now self-sufficient, does not rely upon government finance to proceed. I think that a program like Alberta Best, that has been produced by ATEC, has been well received by both members within the industry and those of us, you and I and everyone else, who go and enjoy the hospitality industry in our travels across this province.

Certainly I think when one reviews the workings of ATEC, the things that they have managed to achieve, the courses that they have created both within high school, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure you're aware that ATEC has been involved with the creation of a tourism 10, 20, and 30 curriculum at the high school level – with the idea of promoting tourism as a viable career and a career path that young students in high school might choose to follow, I think that is something that is a noble achievement by ATEC. Certainly in many European countries to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, be that in the restaurant business, in the hotel business, or in any other related kind of business – ski hills, golf courses, any of the many kinds of things that we assume to be part of tourism – is certainly considered to be a noble and certainly a viable career. I think from that standpoint the creation of ATEC, their role over the years, and the tasks that they achieved were certainly a very positive step and certainly one that I have supported.

So I must confess, Mr. Speaker, a little bit of maybe it's only nostalgia to see that we are I guess wrapping up one phase of ATEC by repealing the Tourism Education Council Act. I'm a little bit nostalgic to see that going, but I am certainly encouraged by what I hear from the industry to be a very positive step, that ATEC is going to be proceeding and that it is going to be fully supported by the industry, that they will continue on with the kinds of programs that they have had and have introduced in the past.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have kind of mixed feelings on that one. I would say that as long as we can continue on in Alberta with the Alberta Best training program, as long as the industry continues to support ATEC and the objectives of ATEC, then I think we will see a growth in our tourism industry. I think we will see a growth in the number of Albertans traveling within their own province, in the number of people from outside of this province and outside of this country indeed who come to Alberta because of the tremendous tourism hospitality we can offer in the province and also of course the tremendous natural resources we have with the tremendously beautiful Rocky Mountains, both Jasper – I expect my colleague from West Yellowhead will want to comment on this – and of course Banff – and we have the Member for Banff-Cochrane here as well. I have to say that I've spent many a happy time in both of those constituencies and enjoyed the hospitality of the folks who work in the tourism industry in both of those areas.

**8:30**

MR. EVANS: And a gracious welcome from them.

MR. BRUSEKER: And a gracious welcome from them, and typically, of course, the Member for Banff-Cochrane is standing there right at the park gates welcoming people as they come by.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's the bear; right?

MR. BRUSEKER: He's the bear and kind of growls once in a while. [interjection] And they even let Liberals in, Mr. Speaker.

That's important too. That's how hospitable ATEC is. I'll tell you, that's a marvelous program.

Mr. Speaker, I think this piece of legislation, Bill 16, is a move in the right direction. I do intend to support it. There are a couple of concerns that I have raised with respect in particular to the first Act to be repealed, the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act. I hope that those answers will be forthcoming from the government side, hopefully at the Committee of the Whole stage.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my chair. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not devote any time to the first part of Bill 16, that which deals with the repeal of the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act. I think that my colleague from Calgary-North West has dealt with it amply. But I'd like to devote a little time to the second part, which is the Tourism Education Council Act. I hope that the Member for Peace River will be able to answer my questions, because I do have a few.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to echo the remarks made by my colleague from Calgary-North West, that the Alberta Tourism Education Council has done a great job in proselytizing, if I may say, the way in which tourists ought to be treated. They certainly did their best to educate the people involved in the hospitality industry to do that. I think the Alberta Best program is known far and wide. I've been told that other provinces are ordering that program and are willing to pay for it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions. I start by looking at the second section, subsection (1):

There is hereby established the Alberta Tourism Education Council consisting of no fewer than 9 members appointed by the Minister.

My question is this, actually: why is there only a lower limit? Is there no upper limit? In other words, if the minister feels that he would like to appoint 53 people, that would be possible under this Act? That's one question I have.

Subsection (2):

The Minister shall designate one of the members of the Council as chairman and another as vice-chairman.

Just a simple question there. I wonder whether that implies that only males will be selected for chairman and vice-chairman. That may just be a slight oversight. I don't think that the minister, whichever minister is responsible, or the Member for Peace River is by nature a sexist.

Subsection (3), Mr. Speaker:

The minister may prescribe the term of office of any member of the Council and the term of office of the chairman and vice-chairman.

I find that hard to understand. This gives the minister a tremendous amount of leeway to extend or to cut short any term of any of the members at any given time, and I think it would severely curtail their ability to do any long-term planning because they never know whether they will satisfy the secret desires of the minister.

All this, by the way, Mr. Speaker, of course, is being repealed, and that's good.

The questions I have for the Member for Peace River are: what are going to be the controls put in place on this new body, and who will ultimately bear the responsibility? Which minister is it we can turn to in order to find out what's happening with the

Alberta tourism council? Those are the questions that I have.

There's very little said that I can see, but I look at the business plans of the Alberta tourism council, which still cover the term up to '97-98. Under the objectives – let me see here:

To enable 60 per cent of Alberta students in secondary schools the opportunity to take an ATEC "Career Awareness" program.

MR. SEKULIC: You can't do that if it's repealed.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Right. That makes it a little difficult. Now, I'm not sure whether the business plan is being repealed as well. So that is my question to the Member for Peace River: is this business plan being repealed? If not, then I do have a few questions on it. I'm not sure. Maybe I should fire off those questions now just in case it's not.

MR. CHADI: Yes, absolutely.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yeah?

MR. CHADI: Oh, yeah.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, I will simply proceed, and the Member for Peace River will set me straight later on, in due course.

Now, the tourism 10, 20, 30 courses, of course, are part of the career technology skills program that's available in high school, which is an excellent program, and I would just like to see that the minister responsible – and I'm assuming that's still the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism – will really communicate with his colleague from Education and emphasize the need that this particular program really be sold in the high schools, really be promoted, because I don't think at present it is taken all that often.

Another question I have for the powers that be is: why is there no mention in this business plan of any promotion of the need to get people in the hospitality industries to learn foreign languages? Mr. Speaker, I always find it strange when I go to Jasper, which, as you know, is part of my riding, and there are certain businesses that have actually acquired the services of a Japanese interpreter. It is amazing how that improves and promotes the business of that particular person, and consequently in Jasper there is quite a knowledge, quite an understanding of the need to learn, for instance, the foreign language Japanese. The same thing, I'm sure, is the case in Banff, and it could also be the case in Edmonton or Calgary. So in general I would like to see the promotion of the learning of foreign languages so that these tourists can be greeted in their own language. Nobody needs to have an enormous degree of fluency but just to be able to put these people at ease in some cases and to be able to converse at a basic level.

Then I turn to – actually it's page 28 of the business plan. It's still assuming that the business plan remains in force. It needs to be updated because there's a reference to TIAALTA, which of course has been put to rest now and has been replaced more or less with the Alberta Tourism Partnership.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen a contract yet that has been signed between the Alberta Tourism Partnership and the government. We know it has been signed, I think about a month ago, and it's taken almost a year for it to be put together and signed by both parties. I don't know whether it's just an oversight or whether there's this tremendous secret, but I think it's important that all of us get to find out what the details are of the contract,

and perhaps we can find out in what sense, if any, there is any link with ATEC. So if I could get a copy. Again I'm asking the Member for Peace River, because he is the one who is on the hot seat at the moment. Perhaps he can do that for us.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've reached the end of my Latin here, and I will simply fold my cards and let someone else speak. Thank you.

8:40

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A couple of comments with respect to Bill 16. One of the things I guess I've wondered about is that we're going to lose sections 3(3) and 25(4) in the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act. Those provisions were significant because that was the principal means by which there was some assurance that there wouldn't be a degradation in telephone service to rural telephone users. I continue to hope that the mover of Bill 16 will explain how it is that people in rural Alberta are now going to be better off relying on the Canadian radio-television commission to protect their interests in rural Alberta than they would be with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, where they elect a member to.

The reason I say that is we've probably had one of the most successful telephone systems. Seventy percent of revenue for the telephone service has been generated by long-distance toll charges, although that will be less now with deregulation and the increased competition. What happened is that those moneys were used to a large extent to provide perhaps one of the best rural telephone services anywhere in Canada, with three features: extended flat rate service, individual line service, and modest telephone rates.

We should recognize that with the loss of Bill 16, we're now left to rely on the CRTC. That becomes the safeguard for those people living in the smaller centres. Those people living certainly in Calgary and Edmonton, where you have large markets, will always have a high level of service provided by any privatized outfit. But I do have that concern in terms of what will happen to rural telephone users.

The other thought I have when I look at Bill 16 is that there's always a cost to privatization, and once we look beyond the label, privatization doesn't always represent advantages. I think this is probably a good move, but I have this concern in terms of what the cost is going to be. I mentioned specifically rural telephone service. People involved with Telus now argue that their competitiveness is hurt by the current regime with the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act. I guess I expect a for-profit corporation to say that sort of thing, and I don't suggest they don't mean it, but is that the only test? Is that the only question? There's still this issue of ensuring a high level of service.

The safeguard, I suppose, before in the Act was that a majority, two-thirds, of the directors on the board of directors had to be ordinary residents of Alberta. So you assumed that way that those people at least were mindful, cognizant, all the time of the needs of rural Albertans. We're going to lose those provisions, we're going to lose those safeguards, and one wonders what's going to happen to rural telephone service. People may say, "Well, there already is a good system in place", but, as I think everybody recognizes, particularly technological systems require upgrading, they require servicing, and they require maintenance and material replaced and that sort of thing to continue to be effective. The question will be in the future, if it's strictly on a profit basis, on

a profitable kind of assessment or criterion, whether there will still be the need and the reason to spend money upgrading rural telephone services and ensuring that it maintains the very high quality which admittedly exists now. So I have that concern.

I suppose the other significant thing about Bill 16 is that it really caps the end of a pretty sorry saga in this province: a five hundred million taxpayer dollar loss with NovAtel.

MR. BRUSEKER: Six hundred and forty-one.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm reminded in fact that it's \$641 million. I suppose all Albertans should celebrate that we're now to the point of being able to cap that.

The other concern I think with respect to the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act has to do with the provision for head office. Now, I certainly never agreed that the head office should remain in the city of Edmonton, but one hates to see the loss of the head office outside the province. I think we have to be mindful and recognize that that may very well be what happens as a consequence of this Act being repealed. I think there are some ways that it becomes useful, some ways that we would have leverage if it were still an Alberta company. I'm thinking here of the issue that came up with Bill 204 where we were talking about protection of information in the private sector. When you're dealing with a telephone company, that's a very key player in terms of collecting data, personal data on individuals, and then being able to trade in that type of commodity. Recognize, members, that we lose that control when Bill 16 passes. We may soon be relying on somebody in Toronto or Etobicoke telling us what decisions they have made in terms of information on Albertans that will accrue through provision of telephone service, and that's a concern as well.

So those are my chief concerns. I think on balance I'll vote for the Bill, because I think that for the reasons that were mentioned before, it represents a step forward. I'd like the mover or at least somebody on the government side to address those concerns I had, Mr. Speaker, and offer me some assurance, offer me and rural Albertans some comfort that there won't be a degradation in service as a direct consequence of Bill 16 being passed.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that in principle I will be supporting this Bill, but I do have a few questions that I'm hoping can be answered before it comes to a vote. While this Bill repeals the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, it also removes government control over the Alberta Tourism Education Council Act, and that raises a few concerns for me. Not because the council hasn't done a good job; it's done a very good job in this province, and I believe that it will continue to do so. The problem comes in with the \$600,000, give or take a few thousand, that the government has subsidized it over the last couple of years, over the last year, specifically. I'm wondering specifically what steps this council has taken to make sure that they are not going to be operating at a shortfall in the coming year and in the coming years.

**8:50**

When we take a look at the overview of the strategies for ATEC, they talk in terms of things like "the greatest likelihood of success and positive impact," "determining a date at which revenues must exceed expenses," "drop programs that do not achieve their financial targets," and introduce new services to the

marketplace. These items raise a host of questions in terms of being able to break even or in fact run a profit. I'm wondering what ATEC has done on their own or in conjunction with the government to determine that in fact they will have not the greatest likelihood of success but every likelihood of financial success, that they do have a date already at which the revenues have exceeded expenses and not just some potential hope for this in the future, and how it is that they're measuring programs that do not achieve their financial targets.

Having listened to a representative from this council just a few short weeks ago, she was indicating that the prices for the seminars they put on varied over a wide range of dollar figures depending on who was accessing the program, the number of employees they had, who the person was that was delivering the program on their behalf, and what kind of association the organization had had with ATEC in the past or in the future. So all of these variable factors were a determinant in establishing what the price would be for the seminars.

Well, that's quite different from how it normally happens in the private sector with an organization that is providing this kind of a service, so I'm wondering how realistically they have taken a look at what their market is and how they're priced within that market. I have some concerns that in the future, if there are shortfalls, they may try to make those shortfalls up by charging more from some sectors than they do from others on an uncompetitive basis. Specifically my concern here would be for government agencies that use the services of this council. I'm hoping that there is something within their mandate which will regulate that and will ensure that the taxpayers of Alberta get the same sort of competitive rates that everyone in industry does.

I'm sure that ATEC has answers to these questions, and I hope that as they make the full transition from some government control to being an independent organization, they have considered and certainly have answers for us in this area. There's no doubt that over the years they've provided a very valuable service to the industry. I have yet to meet anyone who has any serious or significant complaints. It is a big change, going from some sort of government control or assistance to being quite independent in a competitive environment, and I'm hoping that they have given serious and due consideration to those kinds of factors.

There are a few concerns for me, too, in terms of the AGT part of this objective where they will be completely privatized. One of those concerns is about potential reduction of service in rural areas in this province. There is no doubt that we have some large and sparsely populated expanses in this province that deserve just as much as anyone in one of the downtown urban centres to have very good telephone service to their homes and to their businesses and to their schools. We're concerned that with this full privatization these may now not be cost-effective centres to maintain and operate over the years. In fact, there's been a number of people in rural areas throughout the province who have brought this to my attention. They are very concerned that on a cost-recovery basis they will be unfairly disadvantaged when it comes to hookups or to maintenance.

I still have not, even having read the notes when this came under discussion back in 1990 and the information that we have before us, seen this specific issue addressed. I don't know that the government can give any guarantees in this area when we're now talking about private enterprise taking over the full operation, but I think there needs to be some sense delivered to the people in these areas of commitment on behalf of the new privatized agency that they will meet the needs of rural Albertans in a

manner that is competitive with other Albertans, not necessarily competitive in the marketplace, given where they have been located. I'm hoping that the member who introduced this Bill will address that concern for me, because certainly he has some people in his constituency who share this very concern. When we're talking about maintenance of these lines in the long term in these rural areas, how is that going to be done in a cost-effective manner that is not going to unfairly disadvantage those people in that area? That is a concern that I need him to address before I feel comfortable supporting this Bill.

Another one of the concerns we have is something that the AGT management had brought forward as a fact: having government control over this company has scared away many potential investors. That may be true, but the concern for us as Albertans here is who those investors were and what kind of potential is there here for either international corporations to take over a majority of the shares and control of the company or some other kind of foreign ownership. When I speak of that, I speak even of a majority of the shares being owned outside of Alberta. Alberta Government Telephones has a long history in this province, and they have done a pretty good job. There's no doubt that a private company will undoubtedly make more money than what the government did running this, and there's nothing wrong with that.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just about anybody would.

MS CARLSON: Just about anybody would, as my colleague has said.

We're looking forward to being able to see that on their balance sheets in the coming years. This has always been an Alberta-based operation, and we would hope that Albertans would maintain a high percentage of ownership in this company because we believe that would be in the best interests of Albertans and that we would have some concerns about foreign ownership in this regard. So I'm hoping that will be addressed before this Bill actually comes to a vote. It had been addressed in the past. Section 11 of the Act had placed a 10 percent cap on foreign ownership of the company, and that wasn't necessarily a bad thing when you consider the diversity of the province and the kinds of needs that the people in this province have had from a telephone service over the years. We want to ensure that all people will continue to have equal access.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Another concern of mine is with section 4 being repealed as this Act changes, and that was that both the registered and head office of the corporation remain in the city of Edmonton. We would like to see the head office stay here. I think they've done an effective job from this location and could continue to do so in the future. If the head office is moved outside of this area, then we feel that there needs to be some degree of consultation with the people in this area and the people within this province. Now, that would particularly be of major concern to us if they were to move the head office outside of Alberta. I don't feel and perhaps my colleagues also don't feel that the needs of Albertans for this telephone service will be adequately met if the head office were moved outside of the region. Certainly it makes them less accessible to the people and less aware of what the needs of the community are. So I am hoping that that can be addressed too.

In the past, under section 3 and section 25, the provincial cabinet had always appointed four directors of the company for a

specified term, and under section 3 and section 25 two-thirds of the board of directors always had to be people who were "ordinarily resident in Alberta." I'm hoping the majority of the board will continue to be Albertans, because who better than us know the needs of the community? So I'm hoping there will be some sort of commitment on behalf of the organization that that kind of status will be maintained and the appointment of new directors will be an open process so that people who have some very great concerns about the service and commitment to the telephone service within this province will have an opportunity to participate.

9:00

One thing I just can't pass by without talking about is the issue of NovAtel. If the government will remember, while privatization of AGT was generally successful, many dollars were lost in NovAtel back when this was first discussed. NovAtel was originally included in the entities being privatized with AGT, but a clause there then in the privatization agreement allowed AGT to give responsibility for NovAtel back to the government, which saddled the government with huge loan guarantee losses. We would hope that there is nothing in the near future that would saddle the government in a like situation. Clearly this government and their predecessors, who had the same kind of background, did not make very good businessmen and did not enter into very good business deals in this regard.

So we're hoping there are a great many safeguards which will stop this from happening in the future because definitely NovAtel was one of the largest financial disasters this province has ever seen and is a great deal of the reason we have the kind of deficit that we have in this province right now. It's something certainly that we don't want to see continued now or at any time within this province. I would be remiss in my duties if I didn't remind the government that this was exactly the situation and lack of foresight on their part and lack of good sense when it came to making deals that led us into that fiasco, over \$800 million worth, and that they need to ensure and guarantee and commit to the people that those kinds of things do not happen again.

I'm sure if the introducer of this Bill can address these few questions for me, I will be able to support this at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hadn't realized that you were in the chair now tonight. It's always a pleasure to see you sitting in the Speaker's chair.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that I need to say a few words with respect to this Bill, Bill 16, the Economic Development and Tourism Statutes Repeal Act, as it relates to the Tourism Education Council Act and to the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act. Firstly, I would like to speak about the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, and I suspect that the Minister of Family and Social Services is egging me on to speak in Cree from here on in. [remarks in Cree]

Mr. Speaker, I, as many members on this side of the House and members of the Liberal caucus, in 1990 and prior to and of course after, supported the privatization of AGT. I think it was a very good move at the time, when you see all of the information. The technology is changing so rapidly that governments ought not to have been in the business of being in business, particularly when competition is so great. I do think that at the time Alberta

Government Telephones came about because there was a real demand, a real need for northern parts of this province and rural parts of this province to . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Would the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services be at his proper chair, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have a good eye.

The rural parts of this province were, of course, in real need of that utility, the telephone services. I grew up in a little area in northeastern Alberta, and if it wasn't for the mandate at the time of Alberta Government Telephones, I suspect we wouldn't have had telephone service in that little home town that I had in Lac La Biche and particularly outside of the community of Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: You'd have had to use smoke signals.

MR. CHADI: Well, in my younger days we used to try tying a string to two tin cans. Sometimes it worked. It seemed to have worked, Mr. Speaker. I know that smoke signals were used in the past in the north until that technology came.

Alberta Government Telephones have made it very much possible for us to put away our blankets and our smudges. At the time that it did, we were extremely grateful. I can recall as well – it wasn't so long ago – the little community of Fort Chipewyan in northeastern Alberta, the extreme northern part of the province. We had telephones, and dial telephones they were, right throughout the parts of the province that I grew up in, the northern part. In Fort Chipewyan, in particular, we still had in 1975 and the latter '70s, Mr. Speaker, the old style telephones where we still had to turn this handle and get the operator on the other side. The operator had to connect you through. It wasn't until probably 10 years ago that we actually had the telephones whereby we could bypass the operator and just dial direct. You know, you think of it being now 1996 and that 10 years ago – that's only how far away it was that that technology arrived in Fort Chipewyan. So I'm grateful to see that Alberta Government Telephones played a very important role in this province and of course will continue, in my opinion, to play an important role.

When the privatization of Ed Tel came about – it's a utility of course owned by the city of Edmonton at the time – there were many, many, many people opposed to the sell-off of Ed Tel. I, for one, thought that what we needed to do in this province was try to sell it off to AGT to try to make an Alberta enterprise, an Alberta corporation, a company based in this province even stronger than it could possibly ever get. I can't imagine AGT growing to the extent that it is today without acquiring some company like Ed Tel. I think that Ed Tel would have been just a prime jewel for any telephone company not only in Canada but throughout North America. I'm certain – and I'm certain of this, Mr. Speaker – that if Ed Tel and the city of Edmonton, the mayor and council of the day, would have tendered that corporation out to the highest bidder, I suspect they'd have gotten a lot more than the \$575 million I think it was that they got.

I recall talking to one of the councillors in the city of Edmonton about two years ago, I suspect. It was just prior to the sell-off of Ed Tel. I said: tell me, how did you arrive at a value of \$575 million for Ed Tel? He says: well, that's what it was appraised at . . .

MR. JACQUES: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459. I appreciate that the member may have a lot of historical reference with regard to what Ed Tel may have done and what city council may have done and what the council of the day may have done and on and on. But that is not what the intention of this Bill is. We are in second reading on this Bill, which is repealing a very specific Act. That is what this debate should be focusing on, not a rambling discourse with regard to AGT and Ed Tel and city council and \$459 million, and on and on it goes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### 9:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. member.

MR. CHADI: Exactly, on the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to see the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti actually rose to his feet, probably woke up too. I'm grateful to see that my debate encouraged him to stand to his feet. I would encourage him to debate this Bill.

I'm out here debating exactly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 and the principles of Bill 16. I'm talking about the historical part of the Alberta Government Telephones Reorganization Act, and that is part and parcel of this Bill because we're about to repeal it. I'm talking about the good parts of it, and I will talk about the repeal of this. Just bear with me because this is a debate. I would encourage the hon. member to rise to his feet and debate me.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: You should have been only talking on the point of order. When you got onto the subject of "This is a debate," well, absolutely, when you're talking on a point of order, it isn't a debate. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has a point. However, we are very lenient. This certainly has a connection with repealing this Act. So I'd ask the member to try to keep a little closer, but it is in connection with it because we are talking about the principle of this Bill.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, I take offence, of course, to the comment made by Grande Prairie-Wapiti that Ed Tel only sold for \$459 million or \$465 million, because actually it was somewhere in the range of \$575 million, just to set the record straight.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: But he's an accountant, you know.

MR. CHADI: Well, I understand that he is an accountant. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti is very much in favour of counting the number of times that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert rises or – what does she do? – heckles members on the other side. So I wonder if we could have a firm like Ernst & Young or maybe Peat Marwick just to confirm those details that you've come up with.

#### Debate Continued

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, going back to Ed Tel. I really must talk about Ed Tel for a moment and its acquisition by Alberta Government Telephones, the reason being that Alberta Government Telephones, in my opinion, would have been swallowed up



by corporations like AT & T, like Sprint, like the companies larger than AGT, like Bell, et cetera. To grow by acquisition in the 1990s was exactly what AGT had to do. When I asked about the acquisition of Ed Tel by AGT, I supported it wholeheartedly for that reason. I knew at that point we'd have an Alberta corporation that would remain in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't so long ago that I started a corporation where I required a 1-800 number. When I went to . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: Did you say 900 or 800?

MR. CHADI: I have news for the Member for Calgary-Shaw. I have never dialed a 1-900 number. Of course, he's offering me advice as to how to do that now. You may be able to do that after we debate here tonight, hon. member.

I was in need of a 1-800 number for this corporation. You know, Mr. Speaker, I could not get through AGT the allocation of this 1-800 number, the number that I wanted because I needed it to correspond to a certain set of words. I had to go through AT & T, I had to go through Sprint, and because I was an Albertan, a Canadian, because it was a corporation here in Edmonton and in Canada in Alberta, I couldn't get that number. But you know something? All members of the Assembly ought to know this, that there's a new series now called the 888 numbers. It's toll free, because all the 800 numbers have all been used. So the series of 888s are all of a sudden all out now.

I was told by AGT that what I should do is reserve. So, Mr. Speaker, back in November 1995 I reserved five 888 numbers. Do you realize – and every member in this Assembly ought to know this – that after reserving them five months ago, to this day I can't get any of those numbers. Why? Because the American big firms have taken them. They're all gone, and AGT couldn't do a thing about it. I would think that what we need to do is to see more acquisitions like Ed Tel to AGT. I want to see AGT grow unbelievably, because the best thing that we've ever done in this province was privatize it. Now it's got legs, now it can move on its own, and it's functioning well beyond the expectations, I think, of all Albertans and perhaps maybe the government of the day.

MR. HAVELOCK: Sine, was that 888-vote?

MR. CHADI: It wasn't during the leadership of the Liberal Party, Calgary-Shaw. I didn't require it then. This was only five months ago. I wish I had reserved more 900 numbers though. In retrospect I could have done that. I'd have probably gone broke trying to reserve all of those too. [interjection] I know the Member for Lesser Slave Lake voted for me. I know that. That smile on her face tells it all.

Getting back to the Bill, please allow me, Mr. Speaker. Please, you must make this ruling and don't allow these distractions to take place, because I really have some meaningful debate on Bill 16 that I want to continue, and I know that I don't have much time left. I really don't.

MS CALAHASEN: Order, Mr. Speaker. Order.

MR. CHADI: Thank you. Thank you. I don't want to talk about Ed Tel anymore and I don't want to talk about AGT, because those are wonderful corporations. I want to talk about the Tourism Education Council Act. This is near and dear to my heart, because growing up in a northern area, a northern part of this province where tourism and agriculture seemed to be at that time the only means of income that were really worth while, I can

tell you, Mr. Speaker, without hesitation that as president of the chamber of commerce of that little community I can recall setting up little workshops whereby what we would do would be to train some of the people, particularly the ones that sat in the tourist information booth in our little community. We did it on the recommendation of I think it might have been economic development at the time. They were sending around people to tell us how to improve ourselves, whether it was in business or whether it was in tourism. One thing we did do was that we started to train our people, train them to be a bit more polite, train them to smile every once in a while, train them to say thank you.

I know the Minister for Family and Social Services loves McDonald's food, and I can tell you that one time I passed through the window of a take-out McDonald's shop, and I happened to notice the Minister of Family and Social Services inside, but that's not the point. The point I'm trying to make is this.

MS CALAHASEN: Did you have a beef burger?

MR. CHADI: Absolutely. I had a hundred percent all beef, and it wasn't mad cow diseased either. It was good old Alberta beef. And, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that got to me that I won't ever forget . . .

#### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think everybody was testing my patience, which is usually quite good. We don't need all this back and forth. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper has the floor. I know he kind of enjoys it, but that's not what we're here for tonight. Edmonton-Roper, stay on the Bill and don't pay any attention. Please, let's have some order in the House.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

#### Debate Continued

MR. CHADI: I'm trying very hard. I'm trying very hard, but when somebody offers me a hundred percent all-beef burger or even suggests it, especially at this time of the night, Mr. Speaker, you know, my mouth starts to water. I start to salivate at the thought of a beef burger that is not made from mad cows, but the point I wanted to make was this. When I handed the lady the money at the window, she took the money and handed me the food and then gave me the change. [interjections] Listen to this. We can all learn from this. She handed me the change, and you know, it was just force of habit that I said thank you as she handed it to me. And do you know what she said? She said: "Oh, no. Thank you." You know . . . [interjections] Don't make me laugh. They're not taking this seriously enough.

I'm talking about the Tourism Education Council because that is exactly what we needed here in Alberta. That's the kind of words we needed here. That's the kind of action we took. It was training. It was the training that McDonald's gives their people. And what we try to do and I think what this council tries to do . . . [interjections] This council, Mr. Speaker, does exactly that. It trains those young people. It trains those people that are in business today on how to be better businesspeople, how to cater to the tourism industry, how to cater to those people that come to that drive-in window. Each and every one of us could take a lesson from that individual, that one young lady who said that to me, and I'll never forget. You know something? In my businesses today after a deal is made and somebody says thank you, my people say: "Oh, no. Thank you."

9:20

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot more to say about the Tourism Education Council Act. I start to look at what was expended last year. When you look at last year's '95-96 forecast, I look at \$602,000 spent by the Economic Development and Tourism department, yet this year we're repealing that very important Bill, that important Act that was law in this province, and we're saying that we're going to do away with it. Why we're doing away with it, though, is because we think that it has now become self-sufficient, that the council will be able to take care of itself. We won't have to any longer spend any more money in there.

I would hope to think, though, that there was some monitoring that would take place to ensure that the education of our young people, the education of the students in our schools would carry on, because it is vitally important to the tourism industry in this province and it's vitally important to every business owner. I think every business owner ought to take the Tourism Education Council into account, because there's so much to learn as to how we can better ourselves.

You know something, Mr. Speaker? Today I was walking through one of the malls in downtown Edmonton, and it was close to the hotels where the figure skaters were staying. I noticed a shop owner, and I walked in and I spoke to him. I said tell me about . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no. Thank you."

MR. CHADI: I'm getting there. I know the hon. Minister of Labour knows that I'm absolutely right. I'll bet you anything now, Mr. Speaker, that he's going to go into his constituency and he'll relay that same message to different businesspeople. Perhaps he'll use it himself in his own business someday. I'm certain he will. After politics is all over, I'm certain that one day after somebody says thank you to him, he's going to say: "Oh, no. Thank you." Because it is those individuals, it's those people, our customers, that keep us in business.

So in speaking to that individual today, this shopkeeper, I asked him: "How was the world figure skating championship that took place here in Edmonton? What was it like in terms of business for your shop?" He told me that it was unbelievable the amount of people that came into his shop and spoke highly about Edmontonians, spoke about Albertans and Canadians and about how polite they were, how honest they were, how hospitable they were, that in fact many of them wanted to take them out for lunch. Some of them had said: "Why don't you come over if you haven't got a place to stay? Please, stay an extra day. Stay with us. You don't have to take a hotel room." It was incredible, the stories that took place in that individual's shop and that he relayed to me, because I believe that Edmontonians are hospitable. They're very polite, and they're very honest, and they're very straight-up.

Mr. Speaker, it's because of education like this, it's because of education provided through the Tourism Education Council that young people throughout this province and business owners throughout this province could benefit from such an organization.

With those comments, I thank you very much. Thank you, everyone, for listening to me.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

**Bill 22**  
**Appropriation Act, 1996**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Bill 22? Thank you, Mr. Speaker – Mr. Chairman. Mr. Speaker. I'm just a little rattled here. I'm starting to gain my composure after that presentation. Anyway, I'd like to say a few words about Bill 22.

MR. DAY: What's the title? Start with that. I just want to see if you know it.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I see the Minister of Labour is acting up again.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we've talked a lot about is the new form of debating the estimates. Now we're going to pass these estimates, and I think that a few comments would be in order about the amount of time and the limitation that we felt, certainly on this side, with regards to having access to all of the various departments. Although the Minister of Labour vehemently opposes our position and thinks that the new system is working just fine, I think we've seen some instances of where we've had some concerns about our ability to debate.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's coming back.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: He's coming back, and that's great.

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, it's strange that you'd come walking in and then have a point of order. But the point of order?

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

MR. DAY: A very serious point, Mr. Speaker. None of us mind working into the late night hours taking seriously the business of the people of Alberta. What is before us is Appropriation Bill, 22. I realize it took the member opposite quite a period of time to even discover that, and he appeared not even to know the name or the title of the Bill. I would ask, citing *Beauchesne* on relevance, that the Speaker would very clearly guide the member, who is somewhat disoriented, it appears, to make his statements directly to this Bill, not to the highly successful estimates process which we've just completed but in fact to the Bill itself.

AN HON. MEMBER: Could I speak to the point of order?

AN HON. MEMBER: I'd like to speak to the point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No, no, no. We're not going to waste the House's time.

**Debate Continued**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We have a problem with this Bill as it is right now though. We have not had a mover for second reading, and I guess that was probably the Speaker's problem. So I would ask the Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Again, with the lightning speed at which the member opposite leapt to his feet, I automatically assumed we were going to hear a moving from there, but all we saw was the movement of the jaw and nothing come forth.

So I would on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer move second reading of Bill 22.

9:30

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I may be disoriented, but at least I'm not walking around in the House looking like I don't know where I'm going, and that was precisely my point, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Yeah. Maybe now that he's moved it to second reading, he can go for his walk again.

Anyway, as I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the debating process that we've gone through was somewhat – oh, there he goes – disoriented I thought, to use the word of the Minister of Labour. There were people running into one room, out to the other, trying to decide what was going on, and through it all we find ourselves here now with Bill 22 to approve these estimates. You know, it's ironic. I mean, this is probably the most important Bill that we pass in this House. It is the Bill for literally the entire expenditure of the government for the whole year, and we can't even get the Minister of Labour to move it to second reading, and I'm wondering why there's a little bit of confusion.

I felt, for example, with the Department of Energy that my colleagues weren't able to properly have time to give their comments to the estimates, and I think the same thing happened in some of the other departments. One of the things that happened was that the time seemed a lot more compressed, and while it is costly to run the Legislature, there is time required to digest the figures, digest the estimates, and to go from one section to the other. With this new process, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it allows us to do that. Really while it may seem that we spend a lot of time debating the estimates and getting to the numbers, one of the things I found was a problem was that with this compressed time the ministers of the departments themselves were having a hard time getting back with their responses.

What's the point of asking all of these questions if we don't get the responses back? What are we doing here? It may necessitate asking the question a second time. If we could get the proper amount of time allocated to these estimates, the questions get asked, they get responded to, they don't get asked again in Committee of the Whole or get re-asked by someone else. The process would be more streamlined that way. I mean, I still don't have some of the responses back to some of the questions that I asked, and I don't know if I'll ever get them back.

I try to ask questions that are meaningful and things that I think are of interest to my constituents and things that I think I'll get asked about. I don't even have the responses to them yet, and here we are on the Appropriation Act. We're going to pass this Bill, and we don't even have the responses to some of the questions. What's the purpose of going through this whole process?

MR. FISCHER: Then give us your McDonald's story.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: I'm sorry; I don't have any McDonald's stories, hon. minister of supply and services.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you getting hungry, Butch?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: He may be getting hungry, but he's going get a lot hungrier before the night's over.

Anyway with regards to the figures themselves, we've debated them, and I think I'll allow someone else the opportunity to speak to the appropriation Bill. [some applause] They want more, yeah. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West on the Bill.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to Bill 22, the Appropriation Act, 1996, I have to say that I have some difficulty with this particular piece of legislation before us today. I guess where we always start is with the title of the Bill itself, Appropriation Act, 1996. I just asked for a dictionary, because I just wanted to check it out once again. It says, "Take possession of." Well, that's certainly true. It says: especially without authority – I thought: well, I suppose that's true – and to put money to "special purposes." Well, that's where we're going to. But it also says, "suitable or proper." The question I guess we're asking: is this a suitable or proper expenditure of money?

Now, if we are starting to debate the Bill, I thought perhaps we could start with a short discourse on the words "appropriate" and "appropriation," because of course that's where we're starting, Mr. Speaker, with the title. I have some problem with the appropriate manner of expenditure of money that this government proposes to do. Therefore, I think probably the title of this Bill could use a little work itself. So maybe the Treasurer might take that under advisement for the next time around.

The Liberal opposition has raised a number of concerns with this entire process that we have now gone through. We have gone through 20 days – and I use that term somewhat colloquially – to go through the budget estimates. Now we have before us today, Mr. Speaker, a Bill that proposes to expend nearly \$11 billion. We see one-line items; for example, under government expenditure: Advanced Education and Career Development, a little over \$1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, when we start going through the Bill, you can go through the Bill very quickly. You can read this Bill in very short order because of what the government has excluded from the Bill rather than included in the Bill. In fact, there's so much missing from the Bill that one must refer back to the estimates documents themselves in hopes of gaining at least a little bit of information. But even there the dearth of information that this government chooses to provide for members of this Assembly to be able to debate the \$11 billion of expenditures is absolutely ludicrous.

The single department of the Department of Health in this Bill proposes to expend about 3.7 billions of dollars. We have budgets, entire provincial budgets, that are smaller than that which get considerable more scrutiny, considerable more debate, considerable more question-and-answer than this one department. We in the Official Opposition have the opportunity through our Standing Orders, of course, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, to designate a maximum of five departments, and we have in the past designated the Department of Health. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora certainly has raised on numerous occasions, both in question period and during estimates debate time, countless questions, that he had the time for, within the estimates debates. Yet here we are this evening. We face under Standing Orders, yet another clause of Standing Orders, closure. Even if we debate until midnight tonight – we started this debate at approximately 9:30 – it gives us about two and a half hours of debate tonight to pass an entire budget of \$11 billion and within the Department of Health, in and of itself, about 3.7 billions of dollars.

Quite frankly, I think the amount of time that this Legislative Assembly and its committees are assigned to deal with estimates is insufficient and should be broadened significantly. To that end, I would suggest that the entire budget process, including the debates on these Bills, the appropriation Bill that we have before us today with three readings and of course the committee reading in between there and the automatic closure on each of those, is simply insufficient.

Having said that, there are a number of issues that I think need

to be raised that I hope at some point will receive answers, but given the very accurate comments of my colleague from Calgary-West, sometimes the answers come, sometimes they don't come at all. Sometimes they come and they only have half an answer or whatever portion of an answer that ministers choose to give.

With respect to the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of concerns raised, that I have raised along with other colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, with respect to Viscount Bennett, a school in the city of Calgary that deals with adult education. These are students that have basically dropped out of the mainstream of 1 to 12 education and now are trying to return to a school in the city of Calgary to gain their education. Yet when one reviews the budget document and when one looks over the pages of estimates devoted to support for adult learning, one finds no mention at all of Viscount Bennett, and when one reviews that, you have to ask the question of why that is the case. The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development says that's because the students will eventually see the dollars that support those students at Viscount Bennett transferred over to the vocational college, in particular the Alberta Vocational College in Calgary, yet when one reviews that budget line item in the department and looks at the net expense proposed for the next fiscal year, 1996-97, which of course is the year we're debating, one sees only a very modest increase of \$3,000.

9:40

Now, the obvious question is: how far and how many students are going to be benefited by the addition of \$3,000? Yet all of those students are going to be transferred from one location to another. When we look at the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, we see no money allocated in that budget line item for improvement to the facility that will be required by the Alberta Vocational College. So within the city of Calgary – and of course I represent one of 20 constituencies in that city – we have a whole group of people who are going to literally fall through the cracks because this government has dropped the ball literally with respect to adult education. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this government should be ashamed at that opportunity.

They keep spouting a phrase they like to talk about, which is the Alberta advantage, and I would have to say for these individuals who are going to fall through the cracks that this government has created – this is a huge crack that the government has created and is pushing wider – that the advantage is rapidly disappearing, if ever there was one. That is just one section of the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development with which I take some considerable concern.

Mr. Speaker, we can move down the road a little bit to the Department of Community Development. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Creek is the minister responsible for that department, and we look at expenditures that are being proposed in this particular area that also raise a number of concerns. The total department expenditure is seeing a modest increase, but just recently we've seen the abolishment of the women's advisory council, a council that was appointed by this minister, that was appointed by this government to provide advice. So on one hand we have the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism proposing a Bill through the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont creating the Economic Development Authority – he says: let's create this new authority – yet we have another minister over here saying: well, gee, we've got this other group on women's issues; let's not give them any money; let's pull the plug on those

folks and to heck with them. Where is the consistency? Where is the consideration for those who perhaps need a little assistance?

Speaking of assistance, Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has spoken about financial assistance to the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation. This is a company that helps to spur and develop and foster the motion picture industry in the province of Alberta. There has never been enough money in this budget to anywhere near underwrite any significant movie within the province of Alberta. What this corporation does and what it has been doing very successfully is simply networking, getting the message out to those people who do have the money, who do have the expertise, and who do have the talent to bring the other dollars to this province, simply networking with those individuals, and the end result has been that we have seen some very significant motion pictures developed in this province. We've seen the development of a real pool of talent, we've seen the development of technology to support the motion picture industry all occurring within this province, all creating jobs, all working on economic development in the province of Alberta.

Now we see that this government is saying: no, we don't want to help this industry; we don't want to help that network continue on; we're going to pull the plug literally on this industry, and we're going to allow this industry to be attracted by the likes of British Columbia and Saskatchewan and other American states that are looking to bring the movie industry into their relative jurisdictions. The end result is that we will lose a tremendous part of our economic drive in this province and we will lose talented people. This is a marvelous industry, Mr. Speaker, from the standpoint that it is environmentally friendly, it is high tech, high skill, high wage, and therefore has a tremendous positive impact. This government, by canceling the support for the Motion Picture Development Corporation, is I think being simply shortsighted. That's just one in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism that I wanted to raise. We see that in the past, in fact, it has raised more revenue than what the expenditures have been in the past.

The Motion Picture Development Corporation came forward with a proposal that supported its privatization and said that this was something they could continue on but that they needed some time, some leeway, some latitude to allow them to put that privatization into place. The government has said: no, we're not going to give you that latitude; we're not going to give you that leeway; to heck with you; that's the end of the story. Very, very shortsighted, Mr. Speaker.

One of the concerns I have – and this again is one that I've long been concerned about and continue to be concerned about – is the whole issue of Education, yet another line item within this Bill 22 that we have before us today, the Appropriation Act. This, too, of course was one of our designated supply subcommittees in the estimates, and we've talked about Education for a long time. The important thing to note here, Mr. Speaker, is with the government's change to the whole concept of net budgeting, the figure we have in this Bill of \$1,520,134,000 does not, of course, accurately reflect the total amount of money being expended on Education in the province of Alberta. In fact, when you look back at the budget estimates, you will see that the total figure, the total consolidated expense as shown in the budget book on page 134, is \$2.699 billion; \$2,699,474,000 is the total amount of money, which is a considerable amount of money. There's no question about that. What is important to note is that that figure is down from the year before, which is down from the year before

that, which is down from the year before that. This figure is seeing a reduction in the terms of the total expenditure going towards Education. When we look at the net budgeting figure, which of course is what is reflected in Bill 22, the Appropriation Act, 1996, we see only a figure of \$1.5 billion. In fact, of course, the reason for the difference in that amount of money deals with the whole issue of funds that are going to be appropriated and collected into something called the Alberta school foundation fund, which is the collection of property taxes by this provincial government from the school boards and then doled back out across the province to the school boards.

It is important also to note that within the Alberta school foundation fund expense, if one looks back again at the budget estimates, we have now a surplus being collected in there of some \$19 million. The obvious question again to the government is: why is the government collecting a surplus in the revenues here? Why do we not see that money being spent back on education, going back to the people from whom it's collected to be spent on the children in the province of Alberta, whether it is ECS children, whether it is 1 to 12 children, whether it is postsecondary education students who look to getting that education they need to get through and find themselves a career and build a future for themselves? Why is the government having now \$19.4 million of accumulated net revenue at the end of this year? This year alone, within this fiscal year we're talking about, the 1996-97 fiscal year, they are projecting an accumulated net revenue of \$4.3 million. Mr. Speaker, what the provincial government is doing is collecting property taxes, funneling that back I presume into the general revenue fund, or perhaps it's just going to sit here in the Alberta school foundation fund. Those are dollars that the government is collecting for education. Those are dollars that should be spent on education. Why do we not see that reflected in Bill 22, in the line item dedicated to the Department of Education?

That is one of the problems we have with this Bill, Mr. Speaker. I've used the Department of Education as an example here, but by moving to net budgeting it really does not reflect – it does not reflect – the total amount of money being expended by this government and collected by this government through its variety of school foundation funds and revolving funds in different departments. When one looks at many of the different departments in the budget estimates, you will find that there are a variety of revolving funds where money comes in and money comes out, all of which have an impact, of course, on what that particular ministry, whatever that is, is involved with. In the Department of Economic Development and Tourism we've got a revolving fund, we've got a tourism education fund, and so on and so on.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, one can progress onwards and onwards through this budget, and the questions that we have are virtually endless. Unfortunately, the answers are virtually startless. That is what creates the problem for us. We have questions without end and answers without beginning, and that makes it difficult to support a piece of legislation like Bill 22 that we have before us today.

Mr. Speaker, I did want to make a couple of other comments about a few other areas within the budget. One that I want to raise in particular for my own constituency deals with the issue of environmental protection. When one looks at the issue of forestry offices within my constituency, there is the currently located office for the Bow-Crow forest, which has been very successful, has received accolades from the industry, accolades from people

in the city of Calgary that they are providing the services, that they are doing what needs to be done. They are looking after the educational needs. They're looking after the Junior Forest Wardens program. They are looking after permits for both tree-cutting and firewood-cutting and of course for forestry tree transplants.

What do we see in this budget estimate, Mr. Speaker? We see a reduction of the dollars being allocated to environmental protection in the southeast slopes region under the lands and forests services. What is being proposed is to close that office, one that is very successful, to move it from a central location in the entire region that is being served by that office and move it to a less central situation. Having spoken to the officers who work in that office and have concerns, they are concerned that their region is now going to get so large and the travel distances are going to be so difficult that it will be very difficult to ensure that environmental protection and policing of the forests, particularly in the southern part of the southeast region, is going to be feasible.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

That, Mr. Speaker, I think should raise some concerns with Albertans. It should raise some concerns with Calgarians that the services they have had provided for them are going to be curtailed, that the environmental protection which I think when one speaks to 99.9 percent of very reasonable and responsible Albertans – they are concerned about environmental protection, are concerned that our forests need to be protected, are concerned that the water needs to be protected. If we proceed with this program as outlined in the estimates and reflected, as I've said, in Bill 22 before us today, I would think that many reasonable Albertans would express great concern and grave concern over this proposal. The government should be taking notice of those concerns and reflecting that in their decisions and policies to change locations of offices, which not only impacts, of course, on the services being provided to Albertans and to Calgarians, a city of 750,000 persons, Mr. Speaker, but also on a much smaller scale to the individuals who work in that office and are concerned about the service and the job they will be able to do as professionals to serve the needs of the province of Alberta, to serve the needs of Calgary residents, and to serve the needs even of their families in terms of where it is they're going to be living and working.

So from that standpoint, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against Bill 22 when the vote comes at second reading.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My comments on Bill 22 are going to be directed at certain elements. Firstly, when I look at pages 3, 4, and 5 that break down the schedule of votes, I have comments for the legislative offices of Auditor General, Ombudsman, Chief Electoral Officer, Ethics Commissioner, and Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'm not going to be addressing the Legislative Assembly Office or support to that. I have a number of comments with respect to Community Development, Education, Family and Social Services, Health, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Public Works, Supply and Services.

It strikes me as well, Mr. Speaker, that what you're getting this evening is a little geographic balance we don't normally see in the

House. You've heard from my colleague for Calgary-West and my colleague for Calgary-North West and now from downtown Calgary, and hopefully it'll be evident that you're hearing not just from some Calgarians but a very large number of Calgarians represented by the last two speakers and this one as well. So the concerns we want to raise we think are shared by a great number of people in that city in the south part of the province.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill 22 that we're dealing with is really the culmination. This is the final step in a process, not, in this case, a long process, but clearly a tortured one that brings us here, and of course it started with the presentation of the budget. I wanted to congratulate the Provincial Treasurer at the time for doing something I thought was farsighted and helpful, and that was presenting all of the three-year business plans in an integrated fashion at the same time that the financial material for the budget was presented. That made sense, and it allowed us, this time, to get away from the past hair-splitting exercise where people would say: "You can't ask questions about business plans. We're here to talk about numbers." Well, I think it's clear now that because of the position staked out by the hon. Provincial Treasurer, we had a kind of freedom we haven't always had in the past to explore business plans and where those dollars are going and what they're doing, not just the numbers and how they've been sorted out between particular elements and particular votes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, because Bill 22 represents the culmination of a process, I want to make a couple of observations before I get into dealing with the specific items on pages 3, 4, and 5 of Bill 22, and it is the process that brings us here. I had occasion to write a letter to the Government House Leader on March 4 indicating some concerns. The letter had been tabled, and it's one of the papers of this session that identified some concerns I'd seen. I remember at that time it was after the Municipal Affairs subcommittee was meeting on a Thursday afternoon, and there was another committee meeting upstairs in the room up there. By preorganized arrangement, I guess on the government side, in both cases they moved to shut down questioning in those departments at approximately 4:40 on that Thursday afternoon. That prompted me to write the letter on March 4 expressing my concerns with the process and my disappointment, I think, that although there had been a whole lot of talk when we embarked on this process that this would mean more debate, in fact what we've effectively had is less debate and arguably less effective debate for some reasons that I'll mention in a moment.

I think members will recall there had been the unsuccessful motion for contempt on February 26, the question of privilege raised on February 28, all related to concerns about the process, some concerns that the opposition had, and then we had the letter to the hon. Premier from the Leader of the Opposition on March 11, which listed 10 kinds of problems that members on the opposition side were having with the budget process, including too little time for MLAs to ask questions and receive responses and so on.

You know, one of the things – it came back again the other day. We were back dealing with the Department of Justice for the third occasion . . .

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order. Would you share that with us?

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: Yes. The section in *Beauchesne* on relevance. It's

very clear in looking at Bill 22 that it's talking about very specific sums, nonbudgetary disbursements, lottery fund transfers, capital investment. There is nothing here at all on the item of process, which the member has frantically and pathetically debated time after time in this House and at inappropriate times. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you would rule indeed that his comments are irrelevant to this particular issue.

10:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the matter of relevance, to the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks. It was precisely because I anticipated this kind of objection. I wanted to take some time at the outset to build the case. I had attempted to make the point that the Bill is a culmination of a process that started when the budget was introduced. As much as the Government House Leader has a different view, I ask him to respect mine. We're able to deal with process. There have been comments about process. It seems to me that I indicated quite clearly specific items that I'm going to be talking about on pages 3, 4, and 5 when the member was either not present or not listening, and my intention is to deal with those.

Bill 22 doesn't exist in isolation. Any attempt to say that we can talk about this but we can't talk about that big pile of material that the Provincial Treasurer brought in with a whole lot of hoopla and fanfare when the Speech from the Throne was read would make this a vacuous, empty process, and I'm sure that no member and certainly not you, Mr. Speaker, would want to see this process become that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, thank you, hon. members. Relevance is not unlike beauty: it's in the eye of the beholder. *Beauchesne* lets speakers off the hook by saying, "In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt." I wonder if there isn't something about repetition.

Anyway, we have had at some length this discussion on the process that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo objects to. Bills that deal with estimates are by nature open to allow members to call the government to account. As you know, it was only 781 years ago that the barons called King John to account, from which some people say we take our places here today. So the Chair has some difficulty in calling on this kind of a thing, the issue of relevance on the member. However, since we have heard the debate on a number of occasions, one wonders whether or not you would now tie it into the particular Bill that we have before us. If that could be accomplished, then perhaps we'd all be the better for it.

Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much for the advice and the ruling, Mr. Speaker. When I got up and walked over this morning, I actually thought that it looked a little bit like Runnymede outside.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, just moving on, then, I'm anxious to make the linkage. The Government House Leader as usual anticipates and beats me to the punch, so I'll try and get to the point of linkage.

Before I do, I just wanted to make the observation that as I've watched this budget process, I'm aware of the frustration that government members feel. More questions come from the

opposition side. There's frustration that there were lots of questions about process and about three-year plans and so on. I suspect, Mr. Speaker, part of that is because the government members have already been through that. You see, the committee structure has been organized to mirror the standing policy committees made up of government MLAs only, and they have an opportunity that we in opposition don't. They have the opportunity to have ministers come in front of their committee, answer questions, be able to talk at length about planning and three-year plans and so on. The only opportunity that members on this side have is in the context of this kind of a debate, so it shouldn't be surprising to anyone that there are lots of questions and that there's a lot of information sought. I wouldn't say we're handicapped to that extent, but that's part of our reality. I remind members to be cognizant of that and recognize that we haven't all had the opportunity of the same kind of base information.

Now, I wanted to focus firstly, Mr. Speaker, on page 3. I guess my comment is in terms of the legislative officers: the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Ethics Commissioner and Information and Privacy Commissioner. There's typically a little debate about those. I'm fortunate because I'm a member of the committee that supervises those offices, so I have a chance to be able to get a lot of information that I wouldn't have got otherwise and that doesn't normally come through the House.

When I turn to the other departments and look, for example, at Community Development, \$200,000, and the nature of the questions that were asked and the responses received, I find that we're here at this state: we haven't seen full responses to the questions asked. In terms of Family and Social Services there was a committee that met just a week ago. This was a designated committee. Four hours of questions were put to the Minister of Family and Social Services, who was certainly there and was helpful, but there were many questions that were never answered. Yet we're here, and the government asks us to vote on, you know, over \$1 billion that's going to go to that department without having had the responses received.

In the area of Justice, which I wanted to focus on, we're looking there, I suppose, at a relatively modest amount relative to the balance of the schedule: \$333 million. I daresay one couldn't preface it by saying "only" \$333 million. You know, we simply haven't got the questions answered. The Minister of Justice has certainly attempted to be helpful. We had consideration of estimates for Justice on March 5, March 14, and March 21. The last time was March 21, and the Minister of Justice presented, just moments before we embarked on the third round, a 56-page package of written responses to questions that had been asked, questions asked in good faith. It's not a very satisfactory process because that was our last chance to ask questions with respect to this minister and this department. Nobody had a chance to read through all the material here. So we still have an unsatisfactory process. There were a lot more questions put to the Minister of Justice that I don't have a response for tonight. Here we're ready to vote. I still haven't got the response from the minister. It seems to me that the system falls short in that respect.

Let me give you an example. On page 39 the minister was asked: "Why do you not track an assessment of court delays on the civil side?" Now, this is one of the things that a response was received to. What we got back was:

The Department does have some information on how long it takes to get a civil trial date in the Court of Queen's Bench in both Calgary and Edmonton. This information has been gathered manually in the past but requires further review to determine its accuracy.

Well, how can we reasonably be expected to vote on \$333 million tonight when the Minister of Justice isn't able to tell us how long it takes to get a case from the point a statement of claim is issued, or an original notice of motion in the minority of cases, until trial? That's what people want to know. That's the kind of information that my constituents raise with me when they complain about court delays. We don't have that information. That was but one example. We can find other questions similar to that where for a variety of reasons – the department is over-worked, the minister is too busy, or the government doesn't track this information – we don't have it, yet we're expected now to come and vote on these things.

#### 10:10

I mentioned March 21 before. It was interesting to me that in the response and in deciding how I should vote on the requested appropriation of \$333 million, on page 6 the Minister of Justice had told us that he wanted to create an improved public understanding of the various roles of the Justice system. That was part of the strategy of the Justice department's three-year plan. That was one of the things that was going to dictate how the \$333 million referred to at page 4 was to be spent. He wanted, he said, to improve public awareness and do some other things. That was part of his three-year plan.

Well, while he wants to create improved public understanding, what we have is the Government House Leader making comments on March 21 which go in exactly the opposite direction. March 21 was the last go-around of the Department of Justice estimates. At that time, while we were talking about how the \$333 million was going to be spent, the Government House Leader waited until the end of the debate on estimates and then jumped up, knowing that he was going to adjourn debate immediately and there'd be no chance for a response, and he refused to take a question at the same time. It was interesting because what he said was that he acknowledged public confusion over division of responsibilities in the Constitution. He recognized that that was a problem, but then he proceeded to compound that very public confusion in two major ways. Firstly, he wanted to go on and say what a very dangerous thing it was for judges "to presume to take upon themselves powers of policymakers and legislators." That appears on page 750 of *Hansard*.

He then also went on to talk about the rights of victims. Now, what I found curious at the time, Mr. Speaker, was that this is the very same individual who had voted to reduce services to victims in 1995, when the Legislative Assembly was dealing with the government's amendments to the freedom of information Act. In fact, he took away a right that victims had before that was a significant right. When he talked about "technical handcuffs" and technicalities that allowed accused people to get off, what was so curious was that he didn't tell us what he thought was a technical right. Was it the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty? Was it the right to be informed promptly upon your arrest of what the reason was? Was it the right to be secured against unreasonable search or seizure? What were the technical handcuffs that he was talking about?

It seemed like the Government House Leader had been watching too much American television. You remember he wanted, when you were in the Chair, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the Jeffrey Dahmer case. This is at the very time that we're spending some of this \$333 million to try and give Albertans more accurate information about their legal system and their legal remedies. So we've got lots of problems with those sorts of things.

The Government House Leader talked about a perception that

justice has gone awry, so the perception needs to be corrected. Granted, but why, then, would he proceed to speak in an ill-informed manner on all kinds of things that his own colleague the Minister of Justice could quickly have disabused him of? I mean, I think everybody in this Chamber has a responsibility to try and understand what they're talking about and not to perpetuate public confusion and not to inflate and propagate myths and stereotypes, but that's exactly what we heard when the Government House Leader was finishing his debate on the Justice estimates.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that in Municipal Affairs I had some frustration because I never did get an opportunity to ask a number of the questions that I had wanted to. That had been one of the committees that didn't get brought back.

Public Works, Supply and Services. I'm still waiting for information from the minister responsible on some pretty basic information on costs in terms of how the new freedom of information Act is working. He gave us a couple of statistics, but that was it. So how can we be expected to reasonably vote \$437 million when we've got a minister who says: well, we haven't got that information yet; wait for the annual report; wait until a year after the Act has been in place. I don't think that's reasonable. I don't think that's the sort of thing that my constituents expect me to accept as a response.

At some point we've got to find a way, Mr. Speaker, of being able to ensure that we have a genuine scrutiny of what's in front of us. That would mean an opportunity to have input at an earlier stage, the opportunity not to have to be scrambling and running back and forth between two different rooms, the opportunity to be able to get responses to questions asked before we get to the stage of a vote. I've raised this concern in past years. We still haven't remedied that. Until we do, many members will be left in the position of being uncomfortable voting very large sums, vast sums, of tax dollars, particularly those of us that aren't part of these Conservative caucus standing policy committees, where they may be able to get responses; we can't. We haven't been able to do it in this process, and the much-touted promise of more debate time simply hasn't materialized. In fact, what it is is that there's been a degradation.

I don't like going in to debate something when I don't have the *Hansard* from the last go-around. I'm also concerned that for people on the outside – this was a concern I've raised before – for Albertans who don't have the privilege of being in this Chamber and want to find out what's going on and want to see what questions are asked, it's exceedingly difficult. You know, there are even some people in Lethbridge. In fact, Lethbridge is perhaps one of these places in the province that has one of the best-informed groups of electors I've encountered anywhere in this province. People ask intelligent questions. They have an insatiable thirst for information. I'm confident there are people in Lethbridge who may want to see what the Minister of Health said when she was asked questions in one of the smaller committees. It's extremely difficult to access that *Hansard*. It's not part of the running *Hansard* that's available in the usual fashion. It's very difficult to find. I think that's something we're going to have to address before the next time around.

If you have the resources that perhaps a minister may well have . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: No. Your critic has it.

MR. DICKSON: The Minister of Health is so engaging, Mr. Speaker. When she raised her concern, I wanted to respond immediately to it.

Thank you very much for your patience.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After I listened to the comments of the previous speaker – he talked about running between a couple of committees, not having chances to express points of view – I would just like to remind the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and yourself, Mr. Speaker, that during the designated supply subcommittee on Economic Development and Tourism, which I chaired, the meeting started at 8 o'clock in the morning on a Monday. It was held here in Edmonton, where the majority of the opposition MLAs reside. There were members who had to come in the day before to be here for an 8 o'clock meeting. At 8 o'clock in the morning, when the rest of the committee were in their places ready to meet, there was not one Liberal opposition member designated to that committee on time. There were three that showed up during the course of the morning. I counted on my watch, and for no more than five minutes were more than three of the members in attendance at the designated supply subcommittee. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie made a comment, something to the effect that she had the privilege of being able to speak to the minister by herself because nobody else was there. After she was bolstered by an amazing two more of her MLAs, then she decided to leave.

So, Mr. Speaker, for anyone to say that they had to rush between committees, that they didn't have the opportunity to debate or to ask the minister questions is really stretching the truth, because we were there from 8 until 12, and at no time – I say no time – were there more than three. Only for a period of approximately five minutes were there ever three members of the Official Opposition, and at most there were two.

Thank you.

10:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this evening and firstly correct some of the things the Member for Little Bow said with regard to those earlier estimates. It's certainly true that it only takes one member of the opposition to fill two hours of questioning, which was all that was allotted to us by the minister and his department. It certainly does not take the flurry of Conservative MLAs who had nothing better to do that morning than to sit there and watch us ask what I thought were very good and very relevant questions. The rest of us were out doing our constituency duties, which are compounded by the way this government is spending its money irresponsibly and not putting people first.

MR. BRUSEKER: Then you guys wanted to adjourn early.

MS CARLSON: And then you wanted to adjourn early because when your turn came, the 15 of you couldn't come up with even five minutes' worth of questions, never mind two hours'. I look forward to having an uninterrupted two hours again next year in this very, very flawed process.

MS CALAHASEN: If you get back.

MS CARLSON: Don't worry; we'll be there. Don't worry.

Speaking to these appropriation Bills, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I have to speak against having the vote here this evening. It is absolutely impossible to do it, because we have



such a lack of information. We're spending so much money here. Tonight we're talking about \$11 billion. Now, that's more than \$25,000 for every single person who lives in this province: every baby, every young person, every youth, every adult, every senior. It's \$25,000 per person we're spending just tonight. How are we doing it? In a complete absence of information. Very few of the questions that any people on either side of the House have asked have been answered in this debate process. Perhaps that has happened because the debate has been squashed into too few days. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's going to be a long evening. Let's not make it long and trying. We would like you to try, however, to listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that we do not have enough information here to really make an informed decision about these billions of dollars that we're spending. Part of that process is probably due to the shortened time span that we've had to debate estimates in this session. With having concurrent meetings, even ministers who have tried to act in a responsible manner and get the questions answered for us have been unable to do so. I would quote the Minister for Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, who on March 19 in *Hansard* said that he thought he would have all the answers prepared for us that evening when we were once again in debate on it, and he committed at that time to have the information to us by the end of the week. In fact, he said he would have "delivered to each of the members who asked the particular questions" all of the answers.

Mr. Speaker, I have yet to receive that package of information. There were many questions that I asked, in excess of a hundred on this department, and I haven't got a single answer back. Now, that's in the very smallest department in this government. That minister has not had time because of the shortened budgetary debate process that we have entered into, has not been able to get us back the information. Now, how do you expect me to report back to my constituents and say, yes, I made an informed decision when I voted on this budget, that I know what the government was doing, that I have the answers to the questions I asked and that you asked me to ask on your behalf, that we can say with some degree of security that the dollars being spent in the coming year are going to be spent in a responsible manner, that there's been adequate debate about them, that all of the questions have been answered, that all of their business plans are going to be able to achieve their goals, that in fact the goals are the right goals, that the strategies they've talked about are the right strategies and will bring us to where we want to be, and that in fact this government has a plan and that in fact they can carry it out?

Well, we can't say that to anybody. We can't say that to a single person in this province, because we don't have the answers. We don't have the answers for any of those dollars. I will not go back to my constituents and say that I approved \$25,000 for each and every person in your house to be spent in the coming year, that I feel any degree of comfort with the way this money is going to be spent or that we have in fact got the answers. In fact, there hasn't been enough time, Mr. Speaker, for me to ask many, many, many of the questions that I have in these various areas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How many? How many, Debby?

MS CARLSON: Very many. Hundreds of thousands of questions are yet to be asked by all members on this side of the House, and

many of them are on my behalf. Constituents have been coming to me with questions about the direction of this government, and we just can't get the answers. We can't even, in fact, get the time to put all of the questions.

So for all of those reasons, I'll be voting very definitely against this Bill when it comes up for the vote tonight, not just because I think the process has been flawed but because we simply can't get the answers. It would be irresponsible, absolutely irresponsible for me to do that when I'm supposed to be representing the best interests of my constituents in this regard.

Now I would like to go to some of the questions I had that were unanswered because I did not have the time to ask them. I know that I'll end up running out of time before I ask them, so it's a hard choice to decide where to start. I've decided that since I have a rural component to my constituency, I will ask firstly some questions on agricultural user fees. The facts are that this government has implemented 480 new or increased user fees, licences, and premiums since this government was put in place. The past four budgets that we've seen here have in fact had 91 direct user fees, licences, and premiums, and another 289 have been implemented through government regulation. That's of serious concern to all of the people in this province.

I would like to just review those increased user fees in the area of agriculture. What we're talking about now is areas that had no user fees at all, zero, in the year just prior to this government coming into office. Against our best wishes and against all of the debate in this House, this government has put in place user fees in the following areas. Livestock stockyard fees are \$20 now; there were none before. Agents, \$30; none before. Dealer's licence fees, \$50; there were none before. Grazing fees: there were none before. Now these range - in the 1992-93 year, right in here, the fees were not applicable and were not recorded, not recorded in any of your records here. Brand inspection fees: the same thing; there were none in 1992-93. [interjections]

The government is telling me, Mr. Speaker, that this isn't true, but in fact there were no recorded fees during that time period and none for livestock brand inspections; right? Zero. Zero was recorded in these records in this department.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're reading from a Liberal press release.

MS CARLSON: No. This is from your information.

Central milk testing: what were they? Before, \$5; now they're \$10. Financial advisory services to help these small businesses and all home-based businesses in the agriculture industry were zero before and are now \$100. Agri-news for nonmedia subscribers, \$30 to \$50 now; they were nothing before. We see technical consulting and engineering services to help them improve the ability in their areas to market: none per day before; now they're \$200. In fact, I have a dairy farm in my constituency that was quite surprised at this, because about five or six years ago they required some advice in a technical area and went to the government for help and were very happy and satisfied with the results they got. When they went back about a year and a half ago, they were absolutely appalled at the kinds of charges that were implemented there.

10:30

In the department of agriculture, for nutritional labeling there used to be no fees. Now there's a fee of \$25. Postprocess cleaning: before this government came into power, the fees were \$10. Monthly equipment leasing has gone up by 4 to 5 percent

too. Interim processing for these same areas before were nothing; now they're between \$330 and a thousand dollars. Sensory evaluation: nothing before, \$120 now. Product laboratory development costs per day are a hundred dollars now. With previous governments they were nothing. So we have to wonder when we take a look at all 480 of them, Mr. Speaker, which generate a revenue of \$271 million, what this government is up to and how these hidden taxes – and in fact user fees are taxes – are being explained to the people in this province. They're not. They're absolutely not. They're listed in your documentation. Over the past 10 years, where there were no fees, where there were increases – the majority of the increases over the years came when this government came into power.

With that I'd like to move on to the Community Development estimates. I have to speak for a moment to the advisory council. In this budgeted year that we are talking about here today, there were budgeted dollars to let the women's advisory council fulfill its mandate, which was supposed to go until the end of the year. Yet, lo and behold, what happens? Last Thursday, at the end of the day when nobody could follow up on the situation, the advisory council was brought to a close, was shut down early. I'm wondering what the minister expects to do with those dollars that were budgeted there and how it is we can vote on this tonight when we don't have any answer on why he closed it down or what he is going to do with the money that was budgeted there. It will be closed at the end of March, Mr. Speaker. It was not supposed to be closed until the end of this year. We have to remember the kind of work that the advisory council has done.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is rising on a point of order? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

**Point of Order  
Tabling a Cited Document**

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 37(3), I believe. When a member reads from a document, which this member has quite extensively done, that document will in fact be tabled at the end of her presentation.

MS CARLSON: I have no problem with that at all, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to table it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member; I didn't hear you.

MS CARLSON: I'd be happy to table it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh, okay. Thank you.

**Debate Continued**

MS CARLSON: Continuing on with the advisory council, this has been . . .

MR. SAPERS: It's the budget, Stan.

MS CARLSON: That's exactly right. It's not too tough to table the budget.

On the topic of the advisory council, which was a very important council in this province, they did some outstanding work, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they were in the process of doing additional outstanding work when without warning the rug was just taken from underneath their feet, and everything that they

were doing was stopped, and they could not finish their task. Their task at that point was something which the minister had asked them to do, and that was to involve themselves in a consultation process with the women in this province with regard to what should replace or take the place of or what needs still needed to be met, in terms of women's issues in this province, that the advisory council previously did an excellent job of representing. In the middle of this consultation process, absolutely in the middle of it, they just stopped the funding and told them they have until the end of March to finish their project.

What that means is that this government pretends to listen, but they don't, Mr. Speaker. They budgeted the money for it. When they did a responsible consultation process, the government just cut off the funding and said, "That's the end of it." So, Mr. Speaker, before I can vote on this Bill this evening, I want to know where that money's going and why they didn't let that advisory council finish their consultation process.

Over the years that I've been in this Legislature and certainly for many years before that they did a job that was not done by anyone else and was very needed and necessary. Over the years they made many, many, many recommendations to this government, very few of which were ever implemented, in fact less than 10 percent of the recommendations that council came forward with. Those recommendations were based on extensive consultation in the province, based on the kinds of emergent needs that were there for women in the province, and the government didn't implement them. They had all of these wonderful policies that they could have moved forward on, and they moved forward on less than 10 percent of them. Mr. Speaker, that's not a responsible way to act, and it's not the kind of thing that this government should be doing, particularly when the way that they've been spending the dollars and making the changes in this province has a direct impact on women.

Women predominantly have been the big losers in this reorganization of the government. Women predominantly are employed in health care and education sectors. Women predominantly are employed in low-income areas, and when jobs are cut and turn from full-time to part-time, who's hurt most by that? It's women. Who are the predominant workers – nurses, aides, clerical staff, and lab techs – in the health care system? Those are the people that are hurt in the health care system when we make the cutbacks, and those are women who are hurt in the education system. It's the teachers in the classroom. It's the aides in the classroom. It's the kind of support people that come in and assist. Who are those people predominantly? They are predominantly women in this province, and they are hurt to a greater extent than anybody else.

The council spoke up on behalf of those women, represented them in many areas, and made recommendations on how to improve the condition and bring some fairness to a system that is definitely at this point in time very unfair. They did extensive and necessary work in this province. The fact is that they've been discontinued eight months ahead of their mandate, and who's going to speak on behalf of all of those people who are disadvantaged now? So I really would like the answer to that before I can vote on this Bill this evening.

Another area that I have been unable to make any comments on at this point in time is Family and Social Services, Mr. Speaker. In the business plans under the core businesses and goals the minister puts in here "keep children safe," yet we have found time after time that those children that are in the care of this minister have not been kept safe. While he can talk the rhetoric

here in terms of the strategies and the welfare reform and the help for individuals for independence and developing and implementing an integrated community-based system, the facts are that it isn't working for everyone. In fact, there are a lot of children who are falling through the cracks in this system, and we're not talking about people who are going to be missing a meal. We're talking about children losing their lives, losing access to education, losing social opportunities, not having enough food on a long-term basis, not having adequate clothing, not being able to join in activities, which will help with their social upbringing in this province, because they don't have the money. They don't have access to the money. There's no one there to speak or work or lobby on their behalf, and that's wrong. It's incorrect for that to be happening.

We saw again today that the minister was unable to answer the questions adequately and in fact does not know what's occurring in this ministry when it comes to the individual. He only has broad, broad overviews, which do not help the small children who are now suffering. [interjections] There are people on the government side who are groaning and yawning at this, Mr. Speaker. They think this topic is boring. We do not think the topic of child safety and the education of children and their long-term viability as contributing members of society in this province is a boring topic. We think it is the primary topic in this province, and we put children first. This minister and this government are not prepared to do that. They think it's a yawn. It's not a yawn. It's a very, very important topic, and it deserves far, far, far more consideration than any of these members are prepared to give, as we can see by the idle chitchat that they're prepared to offer across the floor here this evening.

They do not have a focus on individuals, and it's individuals who make the whole, and it's these young individuals who make the future of this province. We get to choose now what we want the future of this province to be like, and we choose a bright future by making sure that all children in this province have access to adequate food, to proper nutrition, to clothing, to adequate education, to adequate social integration within the systems, to adequate day care, to adequate after school programs. We don't see that happening with this budget or how these dollars are being spent, and the minister clearly cannot answer our questions when we ask them. So how are we expected to vote on a Bill spending all of this money when none of these answers are forthcoming?

**10:40**

I have to speak to many more issues here in Family and Social Services that the minister is simply not addressing. He talks of all these percentages meeting critical government standards. It's not percentages that we should be focusing on here; it's people we should be focusing on. When we talk about a proportion of employment initiatives, graduates not receiving welfare benefits 12 months after graduation or placement, well, each and every member in this House has had numerous people come through their constituency offices who have been on social services, who have been absolutely threatened with a disallowance of their benefits if they do not take out a student loan and take the training offered by the government, training that is in fact inadequate for their needs, training that in fact does not result in jobs, training that in fact does not give them some of the necessary training required, which is life skills training. If you've been in a position in your life where you've never had to get three children up and out the door and properly dressed and lunches made and off to school and then to a job at 8:30 or 9 o'clock in the morning – you

don't learn to do that overnight. It takes a very long time, and it takes proper training, and this government is not prepared to do it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise and make a few comments on Bill 22, the Appropriation Act. I am certainly going to support this Bill for a number of reasons, mainly to carry on the business of this province in a very fiscally responsible way, which I think has been demonstrated over the last two years, going into another successful debate.

There's been much said across the way about the process. I am sorry that all members did not have a good experience in their Committee of Supply or designated committees. As Minister of Health, which was a designated committee, I can say that the questions were very good from both sides of the House, and I believe they were answered. In fact, I would suggest that the opposition members perhaps didn't have any further questions, because when we had a further discussion in the House, the same questions were raised in the House as had been raised in committee. So I would imagine that would signify that they had run out of questions, but they were good questions.

MS CARLSON: You didn't answer them. That's the problem.

MRS. McCLELLAN: There was an answer to every question, and the hon. member across the way who is talking about them not being answered wasn't in the committee, so I suspect that is a little bit like some of the comments that were made in her earlier comments. For Edmonton-Ellerslie, who talks about representing a rural constituency, to say that farmers did not pay grazing fees before this budget – I think the farmers in Alberta will be very interested to hear that. I don't know how long that member has been there, but I would expect three years. I know certainly in my area they will be and I expect in the rest of the province. To say that farmers did not pay livestock brand inspections before this year – I think ranchers in this province are going to be excited to hear that. Because as far as I know – and I think I come from a slightly more informed position, being a farmer in this province. I can assure the hon. member that she's wrong again.

This is not uncommon. This is the same opposition that said that Alberta's health premiums were the highest in Canada. Well, in fact, there are two provinces in Canada that have premiums, and the other provinces' are 6 percent higher than Alberta's. Wrong again. Mr. Speaker, I could go on with a list of wrong, wrong, wrong.

The one thing I will concede to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is that she probably does need considerable more time to be informed, but I'm not sure that this debate is going to assist. I would suggest in representing a rural constituency that one gets out and talks out to the rural people in that constituency. That's certainly what I do to hear from them and to provide input into debate in my caucus and in the House and, I hope, come somewhat better informed to debate in estimates.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that in the designated supply subcommittee that I sat in, the questions were good. They were answered when there was more detail necessary. I made the commitment to the hon. members that I would respond in detail in writing, as I have in past years. I believe that they would acknowledge that indeed that has always happened. Now, there is a difference between getting the answer to the question you ask or getting the answer that you want. I give the answers to the

questions that I'm asked to a factual basis when they are specific questions. Certainly I believe the chairman allowed a fair amount of latitude to discuss policy, and I think that was useful for both the minister and the members who were present.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this appropriation Bill is sound. I believe debate had the opportunity to occur, and again I can only speak to the committee that I took part in. In fact, as my observation, it was well chaired. It was well attended by all members of the House. The questions were short, to the point, and I believe responded to by the minister. In fact, if they were not, if they required detail that wasn't at hand, it was assured that that information would be forthcoming, and it certainly will. *Hansard* is available from those committees. I will admit it's not quite as speedy as the *Hansard* that we enjoy here on an overnight or few hours basis, but I believe that it's handled quite well.

Mr. Speaker, I believe every member in this House has some responsibility to do some research before going into committee estimates and to ensure they really represent their constituency's views, to talk with their constituents about the appropriation, about the changes. I am sure members do that. It brings better informed questions to that debate.

Mr. Speaker, I have always found that ministers are accessible in this Legislature and that the debate and the discussion don't begin and end with appropriations, although that's a very important part of it. I hope that all members will continue to involve themselves throughout the year of implementation of an important budget for the citizens of this province and ensure that the programs we have in place for them are working well. I can tell you that I look forward to that input from members on both sides of the House throughout the upcoming budget year.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think every member has a responsibility to do good research. I think as legislators we have a responsibility to be as accurate and as factual as we can. I'm sure we all do make that attempt, but sometimes pressures of time cause us to maybe be less informed than we might like to be, but I encourage members to be involved in the debate, to ask questions – I can assure hon. members I will do my utmost to respond to those questions – and to take opportunities other than in that debate to make themselves further informed of the activities of the particular department they're interested in.

Mr. Speaker, as I go through this Bill, I can only say that I cannot understand why hon. members would not want to see the budget for the office of the Ombudsman for the province of Alberta proceed or the office of the Chief Electoral Officer of the province, not want to see the budget of the office of the Ethics Commissioner proceed, particularly not want the budget of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to proceed. These are just some of the offices we are speaking to in this appropriation as well as all of the numerous departments whose very important budgets and work continue.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there is the matter of the public service in this province, who certainly I think expect to have an ongoing payment for their valuable services that they perform for us. I was disappointed when interim supply was debated here, and it was questioned as to whether it should proceed. I think at that time we were told that we could be assured that there would be no problem in moving forward with appropriations, and why would we want supply? Well, I want to ensure that the business of this government proceeds. I want to ensure that the public service in

this province continues to be paid. I want to ensure that these very important offices have their budgets, so I will be supporting Bill 22.

10:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Ah, thank you, my favourite Speaker. I'll try again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] That's better. We're learning.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the appropriation Bill. I've listened to the debate this evening with respect to process, with respect to fees, with respect to taxation. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie spoke, in my opinion, rather well about the process. The members previous to her, who spoke with respect to process, I think speak well to how I feel about the process. After being elected to this Legislature in 1993, I think it was shortly after that – perhaps it was the fall sitting – that we had a debate with respect to a budget, and it was the first time that I was introduced to such a procedure, and then again in the spring in the following year, so it would be the spring of '94. Not knowing the procedures of how the Legislature functioned, it really gave me a tremendous amount of insight, being able to participate in every single government department estimate.

I'm going to plead with respect to process that the events that took place in debating the budget estimates this time around were just not effective at all in my opinion, the opinion of an MLA who was elected to serve approximately 35,000 residents in an area in northwest Edmonton. I certainly didn't get what I really would have liked to have gotten out of the estimate debates, because in 1993 and that early part of 1994, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, taking it even a year after that, last year's budget estimates were even far more appropriate in terms of process than this time round.

In attempting to deal with the estimates on a departmental basis in the Assembly and in the evenings as we are tonight, I think was a most appropriate way to go. I'm pleading with the Assembly that we do away with this system that we went with this year and maybe the next year we go back to what we originally had. Even if we had to cut the days down to bring them to where we're at now, we can still effectively do that, but to have every single government department – maybe even one night instead of two nights, whatever the process is, as long as each MLA has an opportunity to come in. I wasn't allowed in, or perhaps was allowed in certain subcommittees and certain committees that debated the different government departments, but a lot of them overlapped. It was very difficult to be able to go from one to the other so that you could follow debate once the debate was going on in one. In order for continuity you had to stick around and stay to hear what questions were being asked, and as well, Mr. Speaker, you wanted to hear the answers.

That's the most important part. I remember the Minister of Health after the Health estimates. I recall the Alberta Liberal critic coming out of that committee and saying it was probably one of the best sessions of questions and answers that he had ever been in. I commend the Minister of Health for that. Madam Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, I wish I would have been there, because I think I would have learned a great deal at that point, being able just to have that opportunity to have been there would have meant so much more to me. I wasn't on that committee, and I was unable to attend as a result. So the process . . .

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes, hon. Government House Leader.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 459 is quite clear on relevance and repetition. The matter has already been raised once tonight, and the Speaker has already suggested that more care needs to be shown as far as repetition. The member opposite is talking about the process of estimates in subcommittee, which is not addressed in any way, shape, or form in Bill 22. It is not even hinted at.

The member is also suggesting that he wasn't able to get to certain committees when in fact the record clearly shows that in many of those subcommittees there were only five or six Liberals present. Some of the people who protested loudest – the Member for Calgary-Buffalo as the Justice critic didn't even show up for one of the nights for consideration of Justice estimates. Didn't even show up.

So I think it's interesting that the Member for Edmonton-Roper, who has been speaking, who is usually succinct in his comments, has strayed. It could be the lateness of the hour, which does affect the minds and brains of some people at this particular hour. But in fact there's been a considerable straying.

As a matter of fact, I have been on the edge of my seat, Mr. Speaker – I see you asking me to wind it up. I'm trying to do that. I have been on the edge of my seat waiting for him to actually address Bill 22, as the Minister of Health addressed Bill 22 very effectively only moments ago, zeroing right in on the actual numbers and talking about actual expenditures. I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, though I obviously will always defer to your wisdom, which is known far and wide across the land, to weigh into consideration the fact that we desperately want to look at these actual appropriation estimates. In fact, the discussion on the process, which has been a resounding success – members on both sides of the House have told me that they found it a much-improved process. I would ask that you would really zero in on *Beauchesne* 459, related to relevance and repetition.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, I'm just going to allow one.

Okay, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, far be it for me to challenge your international reputation, but I wanted to simply say this. The first point raised was repetition. There have been numerous rulings in the past by the Speaker of this Assembly that repetition means repetition within a speech, not if you have a series of different members making a similar point. That's not what 459 provides in *Beauchesne*. We've heard that before, and the point is this: within the context of the speech I think you'll find that this particular member has always been inventive and creative and makes a number of points but doesn't belabour a single point. *Beauchesne* 459 clearly does not apply to a member simply embellishing, reinforcing a point made by another.

In terms of relevance, we've already had, I think, an expansive ruling by the Chair that when we're dealing with the question that drives everything that happens in the Legislative Assembly, there's considerable scope, and given the fact that this is the very last opportunity dealing with this Bill to be able to address budget and budget-related matters, there should be wide latitude afforded the Member for Edmonton-Roper.

Thanks very much, sir.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, on the point of order, the Government House Leader has absolutely a point of order. I'm not too sure whether his quotations are right. However, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper went on at length, and I was just about to stop him because I had . . .

MR. CHADI: You wouldn't.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would. The fact is that I hadn't heard any words to do with the actual Bill itself. It was all on the process. We went through this the other day with the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: You owe me one.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No, I don't owe you one.

The fact is that I stopped him. I even took his turn away because of the process. I know the hon. member will in fact discuss Bill 22, because he has not said anything except the process that went on, and that is not up for discussion this evening.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

11:00

**Debate Continued**

MR. CHADI: Thank you. With respect to Bill 22 and for the sake of nonrepetition here, I won't go back and talk about process. Personally I believe that it has everything to do with Bill 22, because what we're debating here is the principle, my dear Mr. Speaker, with respect to every single government department. They are all listed here, everything from agriculture, Advanced Education and Career Development, right down through to the Treasury Department and every single department along that front bench on the government side. So it does have everything to do with it. If I didn't have an opportunity to speak in Health estimates, for argument's sake – I wish I would have been there – that's what this is all about. This Bill clearly . . .

**Speaker's Ruling  
Relevance**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper, you are again speaking of the process. We've gone through that. I understand there are members of this House that did not agree with the process. That is not up for discussion this evening. We are here to look at Bill 22, on which we can be very general, but we are not going to continue with the process of all the estimates that have taken place. I wouldn't allow it the other night, and I have no intention – the next time you'll lose your turn.

**Debate Continued**

MR. CHADI: Well, I appreciate the opportunity to continue. Thank you. Let me start off, then, with respect to page 3, where we talk about the Legislative Assembly and where we're talking about the Auditor General's department and operating expenses of \$9 million, almost \$10 million, Mr. Speaker. There's a capital investment of \$608,000 in this appropriation Bill, and clearly I recall that at the time there was a public outcry over that expenditure. Once again, we see it here. I'm wondering and I continue to wonder: with all of the different capital expenditures that are taking place within the appropriations, why is it that we don't have an inventory of equipment, an inventory of furniture? That's what this \$608,000 is all about.

Goodness, with all the downsizing that's taking place, one would think it would be rather understandable that we would have a great deal of surplus furniture around. It wasn't so long ago that in the Annex there was a trucker that unloaded a couple of chairs, and I asked him where they were going. He said that they were going up to the ninth floor. I said, "So somebody wanted to blow the budget for 1996." He said, "Well, if you think that's something, we had two huge truckloads of furniture that went over to the Provincial Treasurer's department." I can't recall for sure, Mr. Speaker, two or three truckloads. Of course, in questioning that, I was told, well, that furniture was rather old, and it was time we changed it. Well, we see \$608,000 in here once again and then again in the Provincial Treasurer's department, if we expended those funds with those two truckloads in the previous budget. But here within this budget we've got a million and eight, almost \$2 million in capital being expended this time around in the Provincial Treasurer's department.

I suspect that probably close to a million three is going towards that new computer system with respect to calculating the taxation or the collection of corporate income taxes and other taxation within this province. That would leave somewhere in the range of about \$500,000 left over for something else. Now I question: how much of that is going towards more office furniture, more new equipment? How much of that could have been saved if we would only consider having some kind of an inventory from all across the government front benches and all the different departments that says, "Well, I've got this, and I have this," and pull it all together and start to save us some money? We're talking probably \$500,000 in that department, \$600,000 in the office of the Auditor General. That's a million plus dollars right there, and it goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the operating expense within Treasury, this is an area that has caused me some grave, grave concern. Make no mistake about it, whether it's members on this side of the House or on that side of the House: I'm all for a balanced budget. I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to vote for the appropriation Bill. You hear me? I'm going to vote for it. I'm not one that'll hold back and suggest for a second that I don't want to see more expenditures. I'm satisfied with the amount of expenditures that are being expended within this term, within this year.

When we look at the operating expense within Treasury, it's 32 and a half million dollars on the corporate income tax side alone. That side bothers me to a great degree, and I spoke with the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs about this, the collection of corporate income taxes. All of us must get on the case of the Provincial Treasurer. I would think that we could shave that down considerably, because we're expending somewhere to the tune of \$15 million a year on the collection of taxes. Now, the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs talks about there being some cost to having the federal government collect it. The Provincial Treasurer counters that by saying: no, there is no cost. When you pressure the Provincial Treasurer and you ask the Provincial Treasurer with respect to the actual costs the federal government will charge, he'll tell you it's zero, that there is no cost. There's no cost, Mr. Speaker, yet we steadfastly refuse to continue to negotiate with the federal government to take this process over. I know it will save an awful lot of money.

The Provincial Treasurer argues about the fact that it isn't only corporate taxes that are collected within this subdepartment or this subprogram, if you will, that there are other taxes that the computer is needed for, therefore justifying the capital expense of a million three in this year. I say that a great portion of that,

particularly with respect to audit procedures and the collection department – the fact that we monitor the tax returns that come in, making different businesses, corporations throughout the province file returns in two spots, one for the federal government and one for the provincial government – is an expense that we can do away with.

The argument that the Provincial Treasurer also came back with was: when we talked to the counterparts in Ottawa, the decision would be that here in Alberta we don't charge on the taxation on a monthly basis. So any corporation that has federal taxes to pay pays them monthly, Mr. Speaker. Every month we have to submit a certain sum of money based on what we anticipate our net profits will be, and we break it up into 12 monthly payments and submit them. That's what you have to do with the federal government. But in Alberta the corporate income tax is slightly different. That anticipated Alberta corporate income tax portion does not have to be submitted on a monthly basis. In fact, what we do is we submit it on an annual basis. Once we prepare the federal tax, then at that point you submit your return plus your cheque for the Alberta corporate income taxes.

Now, the argument is: why should we subject Alberta corporations to paying that portion, the Alberta corporate portion, on a monthly basis? I don't think that's a reasonable argument. It isn't really a great sum of money. Regardless of whether we pay it on a monthly basis or on an annual basis, they all have to get paid. I know that for our employees, for argument's sake, we submit on a monthly basis. Each one of us in this Legislature would know – the Member for Medicine Hat would know and I would know and every other person in this Assembly would know – that every time you receive your cheque, there's a portion of it that goes, and that's on a monthly basis, unless some of you get it every two weeks. I get it monthly. They take that portion off every month, and it's submitted to the federal government. Now, a portion of that comes back to the Alberta government. So if it's done personally that way, what's the difference if we allow it to be done corporately that way? I think it's sad to see such a huge expenditure on an annual basis with the sole argument being: well, we don't want our corporations subjected to having them collect it monthly. It's not a good enough argument. We should all get behind that. We could save a great deal of money.

#### *11:10*

Mr. Speaker, another area of concern of mine is in Economic Development and Tourism. We have an operating expense this year of \$66 million. Get a load of this: we've got a capital investment in there of \$315 million. Guess where that's going. I suspect to more equipment, more furniture, more furniture that we probably already have. But you never know. I mean, we've got to keep the furniture stores going. Too bad we don't have a furniture manufacturing company in Alberta that we can just deal with. I suspect that we're probably dealing with corporations outside of this province, and that would be sad.

With respect to the \$66 million that is being expended within the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, you know, I bring your attention to one thing, and that is the Alberta Opportunity Company and the financial assistance that is provided to the Alberta Opportunity Company. Now, I think that the Alberta Opportunity Company in its day was a good idea. I think it was a corporation that was put together that assisted a great number of small businesses not only financially but in ways that allowed individuals to be able to deal with banks, deal with not only the lenders but with competitors, deal with employees, every facet of development of a small business.

Why, I recall that years ago we had a group come that was from the Alberta Opportunity Company. They were small business consultants from within the Alberta Opportunity Company that traveled to small communities throughout the province. What they did was offer advice to different businesses. You know, Mr. Speaker, there was one business that I can recall – and this was the type of expertise that was provided; it was very simple but very much required and needed in this province. This business asked for assistance as to how they could better their corporation and how they could increase their revenues and their sales. I recall this one individual consultant spending a day with this fellow, and after that said to him: the one way you can at least begin to increase your business and perhaps maybe make people aware that you even exist in business is to put up a sign. You know, the individual never even had a sign. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's hard to see the trees when you live in the forest. The guy thought all along that he was doing well, but he never even had a sign on his business. It took somebody to point that out to him. That is why it was so needed in those days.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I think people have gotten far more advanced and that corporations are far more advanced. We have today the Alberta Opportunity Company competing with a federal counterpart. Now, the federal counterpart is the Federal Business Development Bank. My argument is and will continue to be: why is it that we as one taxpayer – you and I, Mr. Speaker, and every member of this Assembly and every single individual in this province, everyone that contributes, every one of us – continue to do that? We also own the Federal Business Development Bank.

Now, we've got these two rival companies, owned by ourselves, competing within and among ourselves, and we continue to do that. Why? Why do we do it? Why do we have offices throughout this province doing exactly the same things? One is competing for the same business as the other. I mean, it's ridiculous. It's like having a car dealership on Jasper Avenue that goes and opens one across the street because he thinks that he's missing out on some business. It's wrong. I believe that what we need to do is we need to consider amalgamating these two so that we can have the one taxpayer with one business and promote Alberta corporations in the best way possible. I would think that what we need to do is get rid of spending this \$7.4 million this year. That is the amount of money that is going towards an operating grant for the Alberta Opportunity Company from the general revenue fund. Every one of you guys that are laughing over there, remember that. We're spending \$7.4 million this year to the Alberta Opportunity Company so it can buck horns with the FBDB. That's a shame. You look at the income statement of the Alberta Opportunity Company.

MS CALAHASEN: Did you ever get anything from AOC?

MR. CHADI: A long time ago, and I can tell you one thing: it was a good company and it still remains a good company.

All I'm saying is this: why should we have two different companies owned by us competing with one another and we spending money doing it?

AN HON. MEMBER: Why should we even have one?

MR. CHADI: The member from southern Alberta here – what's

the riding? – says, “Why should we even have one?” He's probably right.

You know, Mr. Speaker, last year we spent \$27 million, and that was one payment by the government of Alberta. Twenty-seven million dollars went to AOC. Then there were other revenues that went to the tune of \$9.8 million. The point I'm going to make now – and listen to this – is that \$9.8 million went out in '95-96; the estimate this year is \$8 million, but from the general revenue fund, of that \$8 million is \$7.4 million, which would lead me to believe that last year we not only spent \$27 million in the operating grant but we also put \$9.8 million into it.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I hardly think my 20 minutes are up, but I will now take my seat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine-Hat.

MR. RENNER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't planning on speaking to this Bill this evening, but as I sit here and approach the 16th hour of spending time in this lovely room today, starting out with Private Bills at 8:30 this morning, as I know did a number of other members, I really have to take some time to talk about the process that we're going through here tonight. I will be talking about the Bill, but I really need to talk about what we as a group go through to approve the budget and the process of approving the budget and the culmination in the appropriation Bill.

Now, we've had some discussion this evening about the appropriation Bill. In fact, the first speaker that started out speaking from the other side . . .

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper is rising on a point of order. You will share that.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne 459*, relevance. The Member for Medicine Hat is talking about process and he's talking about process tonight. He's not talking about the overall process, which would be in my opinion very appropriate. The process of how the debate is taking place here tonight is clearly inappropriate and irrelevant.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, I just began my introductory comments. I believe I do have 20 minutes to speak. I think it's appropriate that I should be able to have a slight preamble until I get into the meat of the matter.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question of relevance has already been dealt with earlier when the objection was made to one of the members referring to the process at some length. The Chair at that time ruled that when you are bringing the estimates before the Assembly, the Assembly has a greater leeway to call the government into account. However, I'm not sure that that's what the hon. member is tending towards. Nevertheless, Medicine Hat has just begun his remarks, so I think we'll have to give him a moment or two before we can determine whether or not what he says is relevant to Bill 22 or the process that we're in.

Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might add, a very wise ruling.

11:20

**Debate Continued**

MR. RENNER: I certainly do intend to get into the specifics on Bill 22, but I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the Appropriation Act and exactly what it is that we are doing here tonight in approving this Appropriation Act. Much of the debate tonight has centred upon the Act itself not having any information in it. I find that very hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, because we have spent the last two, three weeks day after day talking about the information that the members opposite seek. In fact, I really couldn't understand what the members were talking about. I couldn't believe my ears, so I checked in my desk, and I found that I have a document here in my desk that is chock-full of information. This is the actual budget itself. Then I have another document that I believe all members were given. This is Agenda '96, that contains the business plans and background and support information. We have another document that has the background information for the Legislative Assembly estimates. I did a little bit of checking, and I compared the figures that are in this document, Bill 22, to the figures that are in these documents, and you know what? Lo and behold, they're identical.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is rising on a point of order. Would you share that with us?

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

MR. DICKSON: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the member would entertain a question under *Beauchesne* 333.

MR. RENNER: I'd be pleased to entertain a question.

MR. DAY: Yeah. You guys never do; we do.

MR. DICKSON: I've never refused a question, Mr. Speaker.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: My question would simply be this to the Member for Medicine Hat. While he's itemizing the documents he's received, I want to ask him specifically: has he received written responses from the Minister of Justice to the questions that were asked on March 21, 1996? Has he received written responses to the questions asked in this Assembly to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, with respect to the operation of the freedom of information Act? I'd like to know if he has those materials, because we don't have them, sir.

MR. RENNER: Well, a direct response to the question: no, I haven't received written responses to the questions I asked because, frankly, I didn't ask any questions of that minister. I asked questions of other ministers, and I didn't receive written responses from them because I received immediate verbal responses to the questions that I asked.

Mr. Speaker, I'm satisfied that I am in a position where I feel very confident in discussing Bill 22 tonight. Any questions that I've asked – and quite frankly, if I don't have an opportunity to ask a question of a minister in a formal committee setting, I don't hesitate to pick up the phone and ask him myself, and I would encourage other members to do so. I don't think it's any more

difficult for them than it is for me.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about something else. We've also heard comments made tonight that the information we have is confusing and is woefully inadequate, yet I seem to remember in my mind a quote that was widely used in the media from the Liberal critic when the original documents that I referred to earlier were tabled. I remember the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud commenting at that time that he had to admit these were probably the most extensive, best reporting of any government in Canada. So I don't understand how the members opposite can be claiming that they don't have the information at hand when their own finance critic has repeatedly said that he feels the records that we have are the most comprehensive records of any government of Canada. I'm sorry; I can't comprehend what the members opposite could be talking about.

Let's talk about what the appropriation Bill itself is here for. As we have been debating and discussing all night long, there has been an ongoing process to discuss the budget itself, and that process culminates in Bill 22. Bill 22 is simply a summarization of the foregoing process of approving estimates through the committee process. As I mentioned, the figures that are in Bill 22 equate exactly to the dollar to the figures that are in the budget documents.

So let's talk a little bit about what some of the figures are that are in this document. I look to the first line, and we see an Advanced Education and Career Development operating expense of just a little over a billion dollars. I will give the Member for Edmonton-Roper credit. He has indicated tonight before this House that he intends to support this Bill, and I congratulate him for that. But, Mr. Speaker, can you believe it? There are other members on that side of the House who this evening have indicated that they do not intend to vote for this Bill. They're going to vote against this Bill. Do you know what they are going to vote against? Advanced education: a billion dollars a year. Those members over there are going to vote against educating adults in this province. They don't care about our adult students, about our universities, and about our colleges. Quite frankly, I will be supporting this Bill because I support the Medicine Hat College. I support the University of Calgary. I'm an alumnus there. I even support them financially. I give them donations every year. I will be supporting this Bill for that reason. [interjections] If the lowly income of an MLA was a little higher, I would even support them to a greater extent than what I do.

I want to talk about – and I'm not going to go through each of these department by department. No, I really don't think it's necessary. But I do want to spend some time talking about education, because some of the debate this evening has been devoted to education. We heard members opposite claiming that the Department of Education was only going to be spending \$1.5 billion and then they said, well, it's actually not \$1.5 billion but it's \$2.5 billion. Again, I'm not exactly sure where they're getting their numbers from. The \$1.5 billion that's in this document are the dollars that are going to be coming out of the general revenue fund, which is what these documents are all about, which is what Bill 22 is about. We all know very well that there is the education foundation that supports the balance of education, so don't let anyone let you think that the total budget for education is \$1.5 billion when in fact it's not.

We've just spent, as I said, three weeks discussing the overall spending for education. I think it's interesting to note that when we entered this process of balancing the budget and balancing the budget by reducing the spending of government, not by increasing



taxation, which would have been the easy way of doing it – incidentally, if I remember correctly, the Liberal candidate in the last election at the forums I attended was saying the same thing, although you'd never know it from the members opposite since we got started on the real process. What we did was reduce overall government spending by the amount that is required to balance the budget, and that was approximately 20 percent overall. [interjection]

Mr. Speaker, how much do you think education spending was reduced in the past three years? Four point three percent. Four point three percent. We have heard repeatedly about the terrible things that this government has done. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members for Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-Meadowlark, you'll have your opportunity as soon as the hon. Member for Medicine Hat concludes his contributions to this evening's debate.

Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to their comments.

I understand that . . .

MR. DAY: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On your own member?

MR. DAY: Yes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, the Government House Leader has a point of order.

**Point of Order  
Questioning a Member**

MR. DAY: I was just wondering if the member would entertain a brief question.

MR. RENNER: I'd be very pleased to entertain a question.

**11:30 Debate Continued**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member just indicated that overall reductions to the Education budget – I think he said 4.3 percent. I was wondering if he was aware that the leader of the Liberal opposition at the chamber of commerce meeting in this city last week told assembled members that the cuts to education were 20 percent. I wonder if he was aware of that.

MR. RENNER: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't aware of that. I'm really pleased that the Government House Leader made me aware of that, because it's certainly something we on this side of the House are very aware of. Obviously we've been spending more time reading these documents than some of the members opposite, or they would have known exactly what the figures are.

Mr. Speaker, this appropriation Bill is what is required for the Provincial Treasurer to pay on behalf of the government, on behalf of the taxpayers of the province of Alberta, the sums of money that are approved in this document, the details of which are in this document. I think it is most irresponsible for members of this House to spend the last three weeks discussing the details of this budget, never bring forward any amendments to the Bill, never bring forward any suggestions for changes to the Bill, to criticize ad nauseam but never have any positive suggestions and

then have the audacity to vote against the Bill when it actually comes down to the evening where tonight is the night we have to discuss and approve the Provincial Treasurer paying the expenses of operating government.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk a little bit about the process of consolidated reporting. Consolidated reporting is reflected in this Bill. With the accounting background I have, quite frankly, this is the first time since I've been here – and I've been here for three years – that I've truly understood exactly what is presented in these documents. Because you don't have to search from page to page. You don't have to go seeking information because all of the information is there.

You know, I will give the opposition credit in small doses because I think from time to time they do deserve it. I can remember last year when we were here discussing and debating the estimates, we did run into a problem when we had just started in the process of consolidated reporting where some departments actually had more revenue than they had expenditure, and so we were approving estimates that were negative amounts. I will admit, it was a little confusing at the time. This year the reporting process is much improved. I would like to congratulate the Treasurer for making the information so much clearer so that members in this Assembly, when they're asked to debate the estimates and vote on the appropriation Bill, know exactly what they are approving.

Mr. Speaker, I for one do know what it is that we are here to approve this evening. The important thing is that we all keep in mind the value of generating information such as this and then reflecting it further into the appropriation Bill.

I come from a small business background. Certainly when we started to put together budgets in our business we didn't have quite as many zeros as are reflected here, but the process was really very much the same. We have now gone through the last few weeks – in fact, for members in the Assembly, it's been the last few weeks. For members in our caucus, we've been involved in formulating these budgets for months. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I've been very pleased to participate in that process, because the process is very much reversed from where it used to be. Before I was a member of this Legislature, I can remember hearing stories of government departments going out on spending binges and spending sprees during the month of March because they didn't want to leave part of their budget in place in case it wasn't there again the next year. We all heard those horror stories, and we all witnessed it.

MR. FISCHER: That was the federal government.

MR. RENNER: The minister of public works points out that it probably still happens in the federal government.

What we have done in developing our budgets is we have not based budgets on last year and then automatically put a little increase or a little decrease on it and said: well, that's going to be your budget for next year. We have gone through line by line, department by department and said to everyone that has responsibility for spending Her Majesty's dollars: what is it that you do, is it necessary that you do it, how well do you do it, and how much is it going to cost you to do it? When you develop budgets in that way, you have meaningful budgets. You have budgets where everyone in this Assembly can sit back and spend some time discussing those questions. Those are the questions that are asked during the estimates. Those are the questions that should be and, for the most part, are asked, certainly by our members,

of the ministers during the estimate process. Those are the types of questions that have been dealt with by all members of this House.

I certainly don't want to denigrate the responsibility of the opposition, although they do tend to get a little carried away at times with talking philosophy rather than rooting out the real issues of: what is it that the department does, how do they do it, how well do they do it, and how much should it cost to do it? That is the question. That is why when you go through the process that we've been through over the past few years of reducing government spending, you can't just go with the process of saying: "This is how much you spent last year. We're going to knock off 10 percent, 15 percent, and this is how much you're going to spend next year." It doesn't work that way, it can't work that way, and it won't work that way. We have to again analyze: what are these dollars for? What is the reason we're spending these dollars?

Now, I've been through the process over the last little while, and I must say that there are departments that have done an outstanding job – an outstanding job – of identifying exactly what it is that they're supposed to be doing. I use the example of the ALCB. We see the ALCB reflected in the Transportation and Utilities section of the budget. ALCB looked at its operation and said: what is it that we do, what is it that we should be doing, and how much is it going to cost? And do you know what? They came up with a whole process of basically coming to the realization that ALCB is really nothing more than a tax collector. So what is this tax collector doing in the retail business? I've been in the retail business myself for a number of years, and I know that as a retailer I'm not a very good tax collector, but I'm a pretty good retailer. I know that when I get involved in the whole realm of selling to my customers and to the businesses in the surrounding area, my role there is not as a tax collector but as a retailer. If I tried to do both things at the same time, I can well appreciate that there would be some problems.

So when I establish what my budget is going to be, I establish that budget clearly on the basis of: what is the process, and what is the ultimate aim and ultimate goal of where we're going to be in the end result? If I wanted to be a tax collector, I would set the budget in a certain way. If I wanted to be a retailer, I'd do it in other ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

11:40

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 22, the Appropriation Act, 1996. I really did enjoy listening to the previous speaker and his experience in the business world. I just hope that now that he's out of the business world, he can relate more to the matters of public interest.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to follow on the heels of some comments that I have to agree on with the Member for Medicine Hat. In particular, he said – and I'm sure it's close to a quote, if not direct – this is the first time in three years that he knows what's going on with respect to the expenditures of this government. You know what? That member voted in each of the first two years for all of the expenditures of the government.

Now, that's the problem with the expenditures that have been approved in this Assembly and that's where I have the problem. Without understanding not only the amounts that are expended, the impacts that are expended, budgets are being approved in this

Assembly, and I'd say irresponsibly. Now, to get up and say that the Liberals or the opposition when they vote against this Bill are voting against education is stretching the truth so thin that it's transparent. If there is a Liberal that votes against this budget, the reason is because that money, that expenditure, could in fact be a waste of money because we don't know how it's been utilized in the previous year. Are we giving the area too much? Are we not giving the area enough? Those questions aren't being answered. So it's quite irresponsible to make the statement that a vote against this Bill is a vote against education or a vote against health care for Albertans. Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. It's about accountability.

Let's talk about accountability. You know, the office of the Auditor General produced a wonderful document, and many of us had the benefit of receiving it. The opening line in this document is: "Accountability is an obligation to answer for the execution of one's assigned responsibilities." The document goes on to say: "The basic characteristics of accountability information are understandability, relevance, reliability, and comparability." Comparability is a good one, because when you take a look at this budget and compare it to previous years, you may have some difficulty. You in fact and all Albertans will have difficulty because when you take a look at something like health care premiums, well, there may be a line for 1996, but you may not be able to find it in 1995. So comparability, a critical ingredient to accountability, doesn't exist. Yet we're going to vote in favour of this budget. Why? Because supposedly it's going to provide education and health care. Supposedly.

What are the other ingredients? "Also, the cost of providing accountability information should not exceed the expected benefit." I agree very much with that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SEKULIC: I believe I have yet a minute before the beep there, Mr. Speaker.

- Accountability processes within a Provincial organization should be consistent with, and support, accountability to the Minister and the Legislative Assembly.

This isn't something where if you don't get the answers inside the Assembly, well, give the minister a call. What is that? Legislature by telephone? What kind of nonsense is that? We're not here to – if the minister can take a call or not, Albertans may get an answer.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, I had so much to say.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I apparently hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but under Standing Order 61(3) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation Bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

On Bill 22, Appropriation Act, 1996, all those in favour of second reading, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

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

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

## For the motion:

Ady	Fischer	Nicol
Amery	Friedel	Oberg
Brassard	Fritz	Paszkowski
Burgener	Haley	Pham
Calahasen	Hierath	Renner
Chadi	Hlady	Rostad
Clegg	Jacques	Severtson
Day	Kowalski	Shariff
Doerksen	Langevin	Thurber
Dunford	McClellan	Woloshyn
Evans	McFarland	Yankowsky

## Against the motion:

Carlson	Sapers	Van Binsbergen
Dickson	Sekulic	Vasseur
Leibovici		

Totals:                      For – 33                      Against – 7

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

[At 11:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

