

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Wednesday, August 21, 1996 **8:00 p.m.**

Date: 96/08/21

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

**Bill 49**  
**Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 1996**

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. Question.

MR. MAGNUS: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you'd like the motion first, and I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 49, the Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 1996.

MR. GERMAIN: This particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, clears the way for the oil industry and its customers to make their own private deal in the hopes that it will aid in consumer protection and lower prices for all and save some cost in the regulatory hearing. By supporting this Bill this evening, we take a giant leap of faith that those people who are playing in that particular playpen will continue to ensure that their motives are driven by consumer protection and that their intentions will continue to protect the consumers of this province.

That in essence is the substance of this particular piece of legislation, and I think it is appropriate that the Legislative Assembly basically send warning to the industry, a shot across the bow as it were, that the Legislature will be watching closely the industry and how it performs in this new deregulated environment.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Might we have consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.  
Edmonton-Glenora.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests who are in the Legislature tonight just to make sure that somebody is doing an honest day's work. Mr. Earl Evaniew is still amongst us even though he's said many times that he is leaving and not coming back. That notwithstanding, his wife, Sandy, and daughter Jenny are in the gallery, and I would ask them to please stand and enjoy the welcome from the Assembly.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce two constituents of mine who are not quite of voting age yet, but I'm sure that as they get a little bit older, having lived with the right kind of politics for all their lives, they

would definitely vote Liberal. They're here tonight to see their Dad in action. They are Haley and Jeremy Sapers. If they'd please rise and receive the warm welcome.

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

**Bill 48**  
**Appropriation (Supplementary**  
**Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2)**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer, it's with pleasure that I move second reading of Bill 48, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2).

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking, then, to second reading of the appropriation Act, I guess there are three basic points I want to make this evening. The first is that I think now it must be at least six times that we on this side of the House have asked for the Provincial Treasurer to try and get it right, to try and link the appropriation Bills to outcome measures. A number of American states do that. They say: "This is the amount of money we are going to spend. This is what we expect to get for that money. This is the contract between the Legislature and the voter. We're spending this amount of money. This is the outcome we're going to get."

When we look at this supplementary appropriation Bill, we don't see any such specific link, any such contract that says: this is the performance; this is the outcome we're going to get for these dollars that are being expended. The very least the Provincial Treasurer ought to do on a Bill such as this is provide those types of outcomes.

Let me be more specific about the individual items in this appropriation Bill, Mr. Speaker. We see in the Bill a request for an additional \$6 million in operating expense for seniors' programs in Community Development. It's clear that there are problems in seniors' programs. You only have to listen to what seniors are saying about their inability to make ends meet, how the rules of the game change. And now the government is doing something about it. Now they're trying to make good, partially, for cutting too deep too fast. Yet in the justification for this additional expenditure was there any mention made of indicators that suggested need, of the type of data which led them to do this? We know that seniors' group after seniors' group after seniors' group made representations to the various ministers of Community Development.

Well, it seems to be, then, that pressure on the minister is one criterion that leads to additional funds, but the bottom line ought to be that government money ought to be expended where it is needed, and there should be justification for how and why and how much. How do we know that \$6 million is enough? There was no empirical justification. We're told that it's enough, that with these additional funds it should meet the needs of seniors. How do we know? Well, the minister tells us that it is so. On what factual basis? Well, there is none provided. Do we get any information on how this is going to change, for example, the

income, the threshold facing various seniors? No. Do we see what's going to happen in terms of the overall impact on median income of seniors as a result of this? No.

We get no factual information, Mr. Speaker, by which to judge whether this is too much, too little, or just right. We have the word of the minister. But a little less than four or five months ago we had the word of the minister that the amount less \$6 million was the right amount for expenditures on seniors. What's changed in that five-and-a-half, six-month period? Well, it's been the outcry of seniors that this has not been enough money.

I think the very least that can be done, Mr. Speaker, is that a government that talks about business plans, talks about outcome measures, talks about performance measures ought to in fact try integrating it into the budget process so we can see why this amount of money is just right when it wasn't just right six months ago.

Second point. In Health in particular this is an allocation that is specific to the Capital regional authority. As an MLA representing the Edmonton area I am glad this is happening, because call upon call at my constituency suggested that there were serious problems. But is this too much, too little, or just right? Again, I don't know. Are the problems that are experienced by the Capital regional health authority generic problems that are going to creep up in the other 16 regional health authorities? Well, I don't know. I certainly don't know that, Mr. Speaker, on the basis of the justification given us by the Minister of Health. I have his word for it that this is enough money.

Well, I don't think that is good enough. I'd like to see numbers. I'd like to see outcomes. I'd like to see what is going to be achieved for this money. I'd like to know whether this is a generic problem or a specific problem to the regional health authority. If it's a specific problem to the regional health authority, why? Why does it exist? Were the cuts too deep, too fast there? Was it because the initial allocation of funds was arbitrary? Was it because the cuts were arbitrary? I don't know. I'd like to know, but I do not have the factual basis on which to base any decision as to whether this is right, too high, too low. I'm certainly going to vote for this, because the regional health authority needs it, but I'd like to know that we're treating the problem, not the symptom.

I'd like to know exactly, then, what is going to happen as a consequence of this additional money. Again, in terms of justification for the additional funds, we did not hear it. We just were basically told: it's the amount that's required. Well, great. Prove it. I'd like to know how the hon. minister can say that. I'd like to see how these types of supplementary estimates fit into the business plan, again a point I made in Committee of Supply, Mr. Speaker. When the government comes into this House and asks for supplementary appropriations, it's an admission that their initial allocation wasn't enough. It's a reflection that the budgeting process didn't work.

### 8:10

This is the very time, then, that the government should trot forward various measures and say: "This is why it doesn't work. This is the problem that we're trying to solve. These indicators, these performance outcomes say that this is the problem and this is the amount of money that's required to address this problem." Well, we didn't get that, and that is the point I made in Committee of Supply. This is a government that's got a two-track policy. They have a business plan; they've got the budget. But there's no real intersection. In the supplementary estimates you'd expect to see that intersection where need is justified on the basis of

outcome and performance, and we don't see that, Mr. Speaker.

You can look at Transportation and Utilities. Again a point I made. I'd like to know which roads. Why? Why the reallocation, on what basis? Was it because the initial allocation wasn't enough? Was it because they'd underestimated the various requirements for these resource roads? It's not the reallocation that bothers me. It's just the justification, the link to the business plan and how it really works. Supplementary estimates are the very point where you ought to see a justification that you're getting value for money.

One reason, Mr. Speaker, that citizens, taxpayers are still very skeptical of government is that they do not know if they are getting value for money. How do you know you're getting value for money? It's when you explicitly say: this is the outcome we're getting for the moneys that are expended. Various American states do it. This government is attempting to do it. It's got part of the infrastructure in place. Well, they should go the whole way. They should in fact in terms of asking for allocations justify in those types of terms.

It's clear that we're going to support this appropriation Bill because it's clear that there is the need, but we'd like a more factual basis on which to vote yes. We're going to vote yes. We're going to take the word of the ministers. We certainly have heard from our constituents that there are problems. But there's still a way to go in the budgeting process and the business plan process. Again I'll make the appeal to the Provincial Treasurer: start making a contract with taxpayers whereby you explicitly link outcomes to appropriation. That way people will say, "This is the amount; this is what we're getting for the dollars that are expended." Once governments start doing that, it'll be far easier for people to, in a sense, believe in value for money.

Accompanying this link, then, on the budgeting side, where you link appropriations to performance, is also the audit function. I think the Auditor General does a superb job there of saying that in retrospect these dollars were spent legally, but the Auditor General now is starting to look at in fact value-for-money audits, that they were spent wisely. There's quite a difference between spending money legally, in a sense meeting the criteria in the legislation, and spending it wisely.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments on the appropriation Bill I'll take my seat.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak also on Bill 48, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2). I rise in support of this appropriation Bill. The reason I will be supporting this Bill is that since the budget came down earlier this spring, I've received many calls from constituents, in particular on seniors' issues and health issues. I think personally that it would be negligent for me to rise and to vote against this Bill. It is from the basis of what I've heard in my constituency, that there are severe problems in both the seniors' areas and the health care areas, that I think we have to financially address it.

I regret personally that I can't get responses to some of the questions I raised at second reading. When the minister stood up to speak in defence of this Bill, in defence of the supplementary estimates, he spoke of success rates; he spoke of surveys that had been undertaken in health care and the high responses that the government had received through those surveys. The questions and the concerns I raised at that time were: what was the govern-

ment surveying; what was the survey specific to? The conclusion I came to was that the survey in fact reflected upon our health professionals and not government policy or, for that matter, the restructuring of the health care system. There's a clear differentiation between those two. I do believe that Albertans still have a great deal of confidence in health care professionals. Therefore, any survey you do that's specific to those areas or the services they deliver will reflect well. In fact, your survey delivered a 96 percent in favour, in support of the health professionals.

Mr. Speaker, that survey . . .

### Speaker's Ruling Electronic Devices in the Chamber

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've had a number of notes drawing to my attention the fact that computers are being used in the Chamber, which of course is by our agreement that we would do so. In the evenings, whether in Assembly or in committee, the computers may be used. In the afternoon, computers may be used only in committee stage, but whenever they're used, the little sounding devices must be removed or deactivated or whatever. Hopefully all hon. members . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: It's a cell phone.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's okay. Someone is indicating to me it's a cell phone. That's even more serious. I was about, though, to respond to the number of notes I've been receiving on the idea of computers.

Sorry to interrupt you, hon. member, but anyone with a cell phone could please remove it.

### Debate Continued

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nowadays whenever I hear a telephone ring, I assume it's yet another constituent calling with concerns about the state of our health care system. How appropriate the phone rang during the time when I was going to address that specific concern that the surveys the government has done to date, the performance measures that have been made public to Albertans don't in fact indicate what's happening to the structure, to the health care system. They only indicate what's happening to the health care professionals and perhaps the confidence that Albertans have in our health professionals.

When I looked at this Bill, I was wondering – well, the Premier and many of the government members call these Bills, at this point, reinvestment Bills. Mr. Speaker, I don't think so. I think these are more like financial apologies hidden within the word "reinvestment," because it's not really reinvestment. If you dismantle something and you didn't know how it worked and you're trying to put it back together, you may have to do some things like this government is now finding itself in the middle of.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the government to put these moneys as quickly as possible directly into these areas. However, I would encourage the government more so to start those surveys on the health care system, on what restructuring is doing. It's important to survey some of our health care professionals to see how the system has affected them and, through them, their patients. I'm not convinced that has been done to date.

Mr. Speaker, those were the comments that I did want to make this evening. I will be supporting the Bill because I think the moneys are urgently required. I only wish that I had the performance and outcome measurement, the ability to do those measures

that the government has the ability to do. I personally don't, so I have to rely on the calls that I receive from constituents. To me that's one measure of performance. Unfortunately, it's not a very high level of performance in terms of the health care system. I hope that these moneys will go partway to addressing some of those performance issues. I do fear that there aren't enough moneys.

In particular, the area that I would like to see some moneys addressed to – we heard that there is over \$100 million going to Calgary for capital projects, yet in northeast Edmonton . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I hear members that seldom stand but wish to speak, and I hope that they rise shortly, after I take my place back in my seat, and offer their comments.

On behalf of those 180,000 Albertans that reside in northeast Edmonton who for 15 years have been surveying and working very closely with their community to determine and demonstrate health care needs – they have in fact done that, and very clearly, yet they're not going to have any government co-operation on the capital project which they wish to undertake to deliver the health care services required for that population. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that just prior to building the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat's \$200 million dam, we look at that \$7 million project in northeast Edmonton which will affect 180,000 people, many of whom are seniors who require those health care services in their community.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Bill 48.

8:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Having found the nights on this debate at the estimate stage crowded with speakers, I did not speak to this matter during the estimates, and I'm privileged and honoured to be able to speak to Bill 48.

I first want to address principles in this Legislative Assembly, if I might, for a moment, Mr. Speaker. The Provincial Treasurer brings forward annually with much fanfare a budget. He then leaves this Assembly and goes into the foyer, and against the bright lights of all of the provincial press and TVs, he talks about the wisdom and the greatness and the wondrous things that the minister of course is doing with the support that he extends to his department. Therefore, it is always I think important that this Legislative Assembly scrutinize very closely when we are coming forward six months later – in this case only three months later – with admissions of incomplete budgeting, with admissions of miscalculation, and with admissions that for the Provincial Treasurer the universe is not unfolding exactly the way he intended.

Now, sometimes during these appropriation Bills the debate gets aggressive. Sometimes it encourages enthusiasm amongst all of the members in terms of their response to the aggressive debate, but the bottom line, the underlining principle, Mr. Speaker, is that a supplemental estimate and a supplemental appropriation Bill denote in most cases a failure to plan. Therefore, it is extremely illegitimate. When my hon. colleague the professor of economics, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning, himself extremely well read in matters of finance and economics and social policy and a man who has no difficulty expressing his expertise in a colourful and vocal way – they are right when they say that the Provincial Treasurer must

come under detailed and intense scrutiny on Bills such as this, particularly at second reading of these Bills, where we talk about the policy of these particular expenditures and the policy of these particular items.

Now, other Members of this Legislative Assembly from both sides of the Assembly should put their oars in the water and row the water and the boat a little bit on that debate as well. But there seems to be an attitude within the private members who support the government of this Legislative Assembly, few and far between as they may be despite their position in the chairs in this room, that they do not want to stand up and criticize the government for having to come forward with these supplemental estimates.

We will remember, Mr. Speaker, that this is an unusual summer session. This is an unusual summer session called for by the Premier of this province, called for after the scheduling of the First Ministers' Conference in Jasper, a very peculiar summer-called session. We do not yet know the reason for that. We do not know why this unusual summer session was called, but what we do know by inference is that the Provincial Treasurer could not even wait until his usual midterm report card to receive his failing grade. Normally he waits until the October session that starts October 15, about six months after his prognostications concerning his accuracy, standing down there in front of the bright television lights to take his credit for another perfect budget that is on track and absolutely perfect and devoid of criticism. Anybody who criticizes the budget, then, in February must be one of those classic minority groups that the government prefers to refer to as whiners or malcontents or troublemakers or self-interest groups.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about millions and billions of dollars, and I for one, on behalf of the good folks that live up in Fort McMurray, am always curious about the government expenditure of money. So again tonight I'm curious about the government expenditure of money. I know that some hon. members chuckle and laugh about that because, you see, they don't have that same curiosity. I would love to have been knocking on their doors as a kid at Halloween time, because they would have opened their pockets and given me everything. They're not curious about how the government spends its money.

You know, talking about government spending its money, the government's flying an empty plane back and forth from Calgary now to avoid criticism. Do any of the members stand up and say, "This is absurd"? No, they don't. They sit timidly on their hands because they have no curiosity about the government and its expenditures. So permit me tonight, Mr. Speaker, to express the curiosity that all Members of this Legislative Assembly should express when I ask some of these questions to the government.

Yesterday in debate I described the characteristics of a politician: skin as thick as a water buffalo and a brain the size of a peanut. I described those characteristics, and some hon. members chastised me and made allegations that the brain in that equation must at least be the size of a pear. They felt that I was being unduly harsh when I referred to the botanical plant the peanut.

Let me ask this. Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that when the government is planning all of their other budget items, they are on an accrual basis, the normal accounting principle, a financial accrual basis, but when they are spending disaster relief up in Slave Lake, they are suddenly on a cash basis? They're going to spend \$10 million, and only as a small footnote do they recognize the federal government's contribution of 70 percent or more of that particular claim. Now, why is it that we're appropriating \$10 million when the number is really only \$3 million?

When the Treasurer brings his budget forward, he shows the gas taxes. You remember that the government likes to say there's no sales tax in the province of Alberta. When the government came forward with its budget in February, Mr. Speaker, you'll recall that they put in there the hotel tax. They put in there the tire tax. They put in there the gas tax, the tobacco tax, the liquor tax. All those taxes they put in there on an accrual basis. Lo and behold, when it comes to disaster relief services, they ask us to appropriate \$10 million for that function and ignore completely the fact that 70 percent or more of that is coming from the federal government.

You know, I'm just a small-town lawyer. I'm not a wise economist, like my hon. friend from Edmonton-Whitemud. I'm not a man of the insight and astuteness of the Provincial Treasurer of this province. I'm just a small . . . [interjections] Small is the right word. We have to ask . . . [interjections] Oh yeah. Yeah. Now they want to talk about my small garden at Lac La Biche, Mr. Speaker, on land that I cleared with my family, with my own hands and a modest chain saw. That's big in the eyes of this government. That's big in the eyes of this government, this committee-grabbing government.

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. members, I wonder if we could allow the hon. Member for Fort Macleod – pardon me; Fort McMurray. I'm sure the people will be sorry that I've moved you. I wonder if the hon. Member for Fort McMurray could be allowed to continue his observations on this Bill without all of the additional help that he's receiving.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, sir. You do me great honour by identifying me in the same breath with those fine citizens in Fort Macleod. However, it is reputed that they are well served by a wonderful MLA.

### **8:30 Debate Continued**

MR. GERMAIN: I want to go on, Mr. Speaker, and talk now about the concerns from Fort McMurray's perspective, another area of the province, another proud area of historic tradition in the province of Alberta. We have the disaster services, and we have to wonder why the Provincial Treasurer drops the accrual system and goes to a cash system, which is contrary to the general principles of financial administration and management, why he does that.

Now, some members of this Assembly, jaded and suspicious of mind, say that he does that for no other reason than political expediency, that it makes him look good. He can go up to those poor folks in Slave Lake and say: "We're spending \$10 million to bail you out of your flood disaster. Vote for me. Vote for me and vote for my candidate." I'm sure that's just a jaded and sinister approach and that the minister will soon come in and apologize for that switch to the cash system.

While we're on flood relief, there were other flood disasters in the province of Alberta this summer, including one in the Sherwood Park and Spruce Grove areas, Stony Plain. I'm wondering where in this particular supplemental budget is found the flood disaster relief for those good folks. Where is that found? If we're talking about supplemental budgets for disaster relief, where is the allocation for those good folks in that part of the province who have suffered from floods?

I want to also continue talking about the transportation aspect

of this particular budget, because it is not only the disaster relief that raises my curiosity. Mr. Speaker, we have had from time to time MLAs stand in this Legislative Assembly and talk about the faltering and failing and eroding road infrastructure in their particular areas and even of areas that are not in their ridings that they are concerned with because of the synergistic connection or because of the closeness of the riding and because indeed maybe constituents from those other ridings contact them.

Now, earlier this year we heard much in the newspaper from the good residents of Zama Lake, a community in northern Alberta. They were complaining about the fact that they had to cough up the money or get industry to cough up the money to pay for their secondary road so that utilities and energy revenue could be generated for the province. It seemed to me that they made some very interesting points.

The minister of transportation in bringing forward his portion of this appropriation budget says that there's going to be some road infrastructure to support rural and small urban communities. Well, I know a couple of small urban communities that are interested in that. One is the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, Mr. Speaker, which the riding of Fort McMurray is plump dab in the middle of.

Now, last year we had a ferocious forest fire that consumed the timber across our main and only road artery to that community, Highway 63. This in fact provided substance to the allegations of the citizens up there that they were in a dangerous predicament with only one road and that road of dubious and marginal construction, width and grade and the like. They have been suggesting for many years, as have the individuals who live along the communities of Chard, Janvier, and others along secondary road 881, that it is time to get secondary road 881 moving.

In due fairness to the government where fairness is due, they did take strides this year to work on some sections of rural highway 881. But the good citizens who live in Lac La Biche are concerned that the road is being destroyed and pounded to death by increased traffic, and they do not get any extra money for that. So they see that their road system has become a tap line into the public coffers of the province of Alberta, but in the meantime those individuals who would be attracted there to spend money in their communities, tourists and the like, are turned off because of the road infrastructure.

I wonder why the minister of transportation does not follow in the steps of his predecessor and stand up and table a list of the projects around the province of Alberta that are going to benefit by this road construction, this mid budget correction, mid budget slush fund. I think that is right and proper.

I want to say that when the hon. minister of economic development was the minister of transportation, I want to give him a lot of credit for standing up and putting to bed once and for all the debate on where the road money was going. You know, it has been a cruel and tragic political joke in this province: if it moves, give it a grant, and if it doesn't move, pave it. That's been a cruel and tragic testimony to the legacy of this government in this province. I thought the hon. minister last time had taken some strides to make the road construction process and the grant awarding open and transparent. I challenge this minister of transportation this time to do the same thing before we vote on this mid budget appropriation correction for road transportation. Surely, that same information that's known today must have been known four scant months ago in February.

So I urge all Members of this Legislative Assembly to do your duty for your constituents. What an amazing thought. Do your

duty for your constituents by voting against this road transportation component until you know where it's going and until it passes the needs test. After all, we did this; we talked about road construction less than four months ago in this particular province.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to the health department, and I want to begin with an analogy. The analogy is one that you will know well, and that is the coal miner analogy and how the coal miners used to put a little canary bird in their helmet to take the canary bird down with them to act as an early warning device. If something was wrong in the mine, the canary would stop chirping. It works opposite in politics. In the mine the canary would stop chirping, and the smart miners would in fact know that something was amiss.

Now, what is amiss in the supplemental budget of Health that I think that every Member of this Legislative Assembly should examine carefully and criticize with great concern is this, Mr. Speaker: we have to appropriate additional money for health in addition to the crisis that my learned colleague the economics professor for Edmonton-Whitemud raised, the crisis in health care. In addition to that crisis in health care, what does it tell us when \$13,500,000 has not been collected in health care premiums. Have we had any explanation that meets the test on that particular item? At about \$800 per adult that represents approximately 16,800 people that have what? Left the province? Have become now so impecunious as a result of the Alberta advantage that they now are subsidized in their health care premiums? Are they simply refusing to pay? If so, are there any collection steps being taken?

Why is it that between February - it wasn't even February 15, Mr. Speaker. You could correct me. I don't think we chewed through that last budget till way into March, and here it is August, five months later, and we're chewing away again. Why? Because the Alberta health care premium estimates are out of whack. I mean, what is that? What has happened here? What have I missed in sitting here that we need to discuss this particular change in the health issues?

It is my concluding comment in this particular debate that when the government comes forward and the Provincial Treasurer comes forward with supplemental estimates asking for a midterm correction in budget and planning, a midterm correction in this case all in the expense end, Mr. Speaker, I think the Legislative Assembly has the right to say as a matter of first principles that there is then a heavy onus on the departments and the ministers who are making this claim to come forward and say not only a brief narrative description, as contained in the supplemental books, on what the claim is, which is useful information, but they must come forward and just like a review board self-criticize and self-analyze why it was that that item could not be predicted. Does it have something to do with the changing, shuffling chairs of the government cabinet and new brooms sweeping cleaner or less clean, whatever aspect of that analogy you want to use?

The government has a high onus, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, I say to you and I say to all Members of the Legislative Assembly that when all they do is file their document and stand up and give lip service as to why they're doing that - they should come forward with an explanation. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Education says that he's discharging his duty, but of course I say to him that there's no change in his budget expressed here. So when is he going to discharge his duty by increasing the desperately needed funds for the Fort McMurray school district, since all the other ministers seem to have no lack of ability to discharge their duty by increasing spending.

8:40

In furtherance of that discharging of his duty I say to the Minister of Education, who, you will recall, you heard say, Mr. Speaker, in answer to my comments, that they were discharging their duty – I want to ask them when it was between last March and today that their duty has shifted so that these additional expenditures are necessary, not yesterday, not last week, but right now. Why not on October 15, when we come back here, as we all expect to do in October? That's when we normally come back for a fall session, and I'm assuming that this is just a little summer stroll and not the fall session. But that's a debate for another time. Why today are these issues so important, and why today are we not getting the information that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud correctly and rightly points out is appropriate information?

With that, Mr. Speaker, because I know that there are numerous other individuals waiting to speak to this very important issue and speak to the additional expenditure of some millions of dollars of provincial money, I will take my place and listen with great interest to the rest of the debate on this important Bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 48, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2). First of all, we look at what's being appropriated. Six million dollars being asked for to spend for seniors. Just a little review. We had changes made to the seniors' benefit plan without any input, without any consultation with them.

MR. SEKULIC: Didn't ask the seniors.

MR. BRACKO: Didn't ask the seniors, the ones who count.

They said: oh, no problems. They set up a special phone line that was supposed to last two weeks. In the two weeks they got – what? – 30,000 phone calls. Thirty thousand. They said: it's going to end within six weeks. Eight months later it was still going full blast with the same number of people, and they have had over 250,000 calls, 20,000 more than the number of seniors in this province. They said that nothing was wrong with it. The minister who earlier was in charge was chirping up never answered that question.

A commitment was made to seniors who are on a fixed income by the Member for Olds-Didsbury when he was seniors minister, commitments that they would be looked after, that certain funds would be there for them. He was here; he was in the House. I wasn't. He as well as the other members who were here since 1986, '89, and the other elections made that commitment to them. A commitment was made to the seniors, and the seniors believed the government, you know. Then what happens? The seniors said: well, maybe a 5 percent cut would be appropriate for some. But it went up to 30 percent. You can see that because of some of this, more money was needed. Inappropriately cut back without any surveys, without anything done to prove that it was needed or that they could afford it.

In seniors' housing they did some old survey that they said they got from the federal government to say that seniors were capable of paying \$1,200, \$1,300 a month rent. When we did the survey, we found that most seniors only earn \$700 a month. So they're going to pay \$600 more than they have. Made a lot of sense. No research done. This is not just in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, but across the province as I traveled into different constituencies.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

The other sin that this government has committed – I withdraw the word “sin.” The other mistake made by this government and a tremendous abuse of seniors I believe: seniors that were 85, 90 years old who were in a seniors' lodge in their community were moved two, three, or four hours away to a long-term care. At that age when there's no support system where they're moving, it means slow suicide for them, but that wasn't considered. That wasn't even looked at. That's not in my riding but in ridings from rural Alberta here. I can give you examples. I can give you names. They wouldn't ask for it. They wouldn't want to know. They don't see their minister or their member walk in to see what's happening to the seniors. Here we are, fighting for seniors, the ones who built this province, the ones who made the sacrifices, the ones who went without. You know, they left this province, when they retired, debt free. In a matter of nine short years, we're not debt free. We're owing a tremendous amount of money.

MS LEIBOVICI: What kind of government did that? Was that a Tory government?

MR. BRACKO: Well, a government charged with incompetence and . . . What were the other two? Competence, deceit, and – was it fraud? That's the type of government. [interjections] That's what the courts said. I'm just regurgitating what the courts said, stating again and again to bring to the attention of these members the tremendously poor job they've done, the commitment that they haven't kept to seniors.

We look at health care. Again, we look at what's happened. The tremendous cuts, quick cuts without thinking. It's going to work; it's going to make it work. We look at physiotherapy. They're going to make it; it's going to work miracles overnight. Strike 1; it doesn't work. So they try again. Strike 2; it doesn't work. Now they're on the third pitch, and they're hoping, praying it's going to work. We know that we're just waiting. It's going to fix everything in 90 days. We know that that didn't happen; we're at day 340-some now and still waiting.

Look at labs. I was talking to doctors the other day. They said: “You know, we used to have a lab around the corner. A senior would come in, and we'd take a blood test, send it to the lab. Twenty minutes later we could tell them what was wrong, and we could treat them. Now they may come in in pain, and because there's no lab next to them, they have to send the senior away to one of the bigger hospitals by ambulance.” This is what's happening. Instead of getting the results immediately, it's three, four, five days later. That sick senior has to stay in the hospital at \$1,200 to \$1,500 a day, and they say this is tremendous cost saving. You can see the tremendous expense. They said that it cost tremendously more, if you look at the total picture, and it's important that we do this.

I challenge this government and I'll keep challenging them to have outcomes. Maybe it will save us more by doing what they did, but show us. But also show us the additional cost because of the removal of labs that we used to have.

MR. SEKULIC: Those are future costs.

MR. BRACKO: Costs that are happening now, over the last year: give us that information. Do that research. Show Albertans where we're saving money. We'd support this type of thing. But

it's going to cost more in the long run, and they say: "Aren't we good? We're saving Albertans money." They're endangering people's lives. They used to get the lab report back and they could treat them right away. Now it's three, four, five, six days later. A person can get ill or infected or whatever in that time. Prevention is very important. Something that could have been prevented now is going to cost taxpayers a lot more money because it wasn't thought through. I know it was done elsewhere, but does that mean it costs less? The cost is sent on to the taxpayer to pay for it.

We look at this. We know the money is needed for seniors. We keep fighting for the seniors. We keep fighting for health care, health care that Albertans deserve and pay for and want their tax dollar efficiently used.

It's interesting how, you know, near an election: pump more money in. How great. They pat themselves on the back with both hands and say: "Look what we're doing for you. Aren't we wonderful? Tell us we're wonderful. Tell us what a good job we're doing. Vote for us." Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not going to be fooled again by this type of propaganda or this type of treatment, especially the seniors. As I travel this province, they're upset. They're saying, "The government thinks we're stupid, that they can pull the wool over our eyes." Well, that's not going to happen again. They're up to it, and they're saying that this isn't going to happen. Why? Because they've sacrificed, but the government hasn't. They're the ones that created the problem, and now the seniors are carrying the load of what's happened over the last number of years.

#### 8:50

So with that I'm going to conclude. I'll be supporting the Bill, but again, as mentioned by my colleagues the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Member for Fort McMurray, we want to look at the outcomes. Show us the outcomes; show Albertans the outcomes. We just don't want money given like so often in the past: repeat, repeat, repeat, without looking at what's happening. If a teacher did that with students, they would be out of there quickly. You take the students where they are, and you've got to bring them up to a certain level before they go on to the next grade, or their achievement at least has to be there. But not the government. There's no accountability on this. "Trust us," they say. "What we say is true and right." They don't even know how to look at and be challenged by their own figures, how to make it better, to see the best use of taxpayers' dollars. They're so used to wasting it that they're not capable. We'll give them a hand. I'll sit down with them anytime, show them. They would have saved taxpayers millions of dollars in the past and would continue to. Use the expertise of the members for Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Manning and the other members here that are involved and know what's happening. Use it. Work together for all Albertans and don't come through with this type of thing time and time again. Albertans need to have their tax dollars used wisely.

With that, I conclude.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I'm sure you will recall, when we were at the last stage of this Bill, I was speaking about why I was going to be supporting the appropriation Bill, and I was talking particularly about the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital. I want to continue to explain to the Assembly why I'll

be supporting this Bill, and I want to draw on some of the experiences of patients at the Glenrose hospital to help explain that support. I also want to talk a little bit about seniors and the concerns that have been brought to my attention from some of the elders in our province. I also just want to mention briefly right off the top my particular concern that the appropriation pass quickly in regard to ambulance, the \$6 million that's been set aside for both ground and air ambulance.

When I was going through my own notes and looking at the various reports on the utilization of ambulance and some of the problems in both air and ground ambulance, I was also reviewing *Hansard*, and I came across a comment from the now Minister of Economic Development and Tourism when faced with a question about ambulance utilization and the growing burden on individual Albertans, who once upon a time could expect to receive a certain standard of medical care in their home community but are now being forced to be transported to a community sometimes far away. The minister was being asked about a constituent who was quite seriously injured but had to drive himself to the hospital because the hospital refused to admit him, so the ambulance cost wouldn't be picked up there. He didn't have any kind of private insurance for ambulance coverage and was really told that he would have to get to the hospital himself, even though he was in some considerable discomfort and in some medical jeopardy. When confronted with that, the minister said: "What's wrong with that? We're not a taxi service."

I'm glad to see that the government has had a change of heart. I'm glad to see that the government has changed its mind about the necessity to properly fund ambulance service in this province. This \$6 million will be a help. It won't solve the problem because it still won't address the rather structural issues that have developed around the provision of ambulances and emergency transportation for all Albertans.

When I was talking about the Glenrose hospital, I think I was retelling the circumstances surrounding a typical day at lunch at the Glenrose hospital when the patients are brought out of their rooms into the dining area. I think I ran out of my allotted time at the point where I was explaining that the seniors are often left sitting, while they might be side by side, still in some relative isolation because they don't know whether the patient next to them has the ability to speak. They may be suffering the effects of a stroke. They certainly haven't been introduced. I'm told that the staff cutbacks at the Glenrose are so severe that they no longer have the staff who have the time to make sure that co-residents, those residents that are living on the same floor, in the same unit, side by side sometimes for very long periods of time – they no longer have the staff who can make sure that those people are introduced to one another, that they're involved in some kind of social interaction. Of course, we all know the importance of social interaction when it comes to healing and quality of life. So here the seniors sit.

The staff then go on their lunch break before the patients eat. Then in sort of a mad rush the carts come up with the food on them, and then all the staff who have finished their lunch break come back, and they distribute the food in a rather hurried manner. They're hurried because they're overworked. They have a number of wards and a number of patients that they have to get to in a very short course of time. One of the things that struck me about that was the sort of lack of just basic decency and dignity that went into that whole process. I certainly hope that some of this money which will be going to the Capital health authority will be used to deal with that concern.

There are some other issues at the Glenrose hospital which I think are very worthwhile mentioning at this point, so I can express my hope to the administrators at the Capital health authority through this forum in the Legislature for how some of this additional funding will be spent. Mr. Speaker, you, because of some of your other roles as a member of this Assembly, may be interested to know that the number of DNRs – and I know you know what a DNR is: a do not resuscitate order – that are on patient files at the Glenrose has risen quite dramatically. Why is that? Is that because patients are sicker at the Glenrose? Perhaps. Is it because there is less ability to revive gravely ill and chronically ill people? I don't think so. As far as I understand it, the medical advances are actually able to save lives more and more every day. But there's a lot of pressure on family members. I've been told that they're being counseled, that they're being encouraged actually – and those are the words that family members have used to describe these circumstances to me – to put a DNR instruction on the chart for some of their sick and elderly loved ones. They feel this is very unbecoming, and they've posed the question to me, "Why is this?" They reach some very frightening conclusions for themselves about the kind of financial pressures that must be on a system where they feel they're being actively pursued to have a DNR order put on a patient's chart.

Something else that I think the Assembly might be interested to know: the Glenrose hospital is one of the major hospitals in western Canada. It's one of the major hospitals in Alberta, and it's one of the three referral hospitals in the Capital health authority network. Do you know what happens if somebody has a coronary incident at the Glenrose hospital, Mr. Speaker? The staff don't push a code button and get a crash cart up to the ward. You know what they do? They dial 911. They're forced to rely on 911. The paramedics come from outside of the hospital, take that patient outside of one of the major hospitals in western Canada and transport them to yet another hospital. Fortunately, if they're lucky, if there's not a code red going on at the Royal Alex, they'll only have to move across the road. Nonetheless, isn't it striking that that's what our health care system has come to, that one of the major referral hospitals in this region, for that matter in this part of the country, is forced to rely on paramedics and using 911 when a patient has a coronary.

Mr. Speaker, another area that could use a little bit of extra funding at the Glenrose hospital has to do with the role of the case co-ordinator. One of the things that has been done very well at the Glenrose hospital is that they've instituted the practice of having a case co-ordinator whose job it is to walk through all the treatment that the patient receives, be with the patient throughout their stay at the hospital, be their advocate, help them get into programs, help them understand the procedures and the red tape and the bureaucracy. It's actually a really, really fine initiative. The managers at the Glenrose are to be commended for implementing it. But you know, they've been thwarted by the lack of funding. Staffing is so thin at the Glenrose hospital that when a case co-ordinator is off sick or away on much-needed and much-earned vacation time – when those case co-ordinators are off on annual leave, do you know that there's nobody, no process in place for that case co-ordinator to be replaced?

So imagine, if you will, Mr. Speaker, an 80-year-old woman in the hospital suffering from a stroke, needing speech pathology, physiotherapy, perhaps some other kinds of therapies, who may not have a lot of family support here in Edmonton, being left alone in the Glenrose hospital, being introduced to her case co-ordinator, let's say, on a Friday afternoon only to find the

following Monday, when she expects to find out about when she is going to get her physio, when the speech pathologist is coming, that that case co-ordinator is taking her first vacation in three years and will be away for the next three weeks, and then to find out that there's nobody on staff to take over her responsibilities. It's not the way a health care system should be run, and it undermines the integrity of that program, which, as I said, was a very good initiative at the Glenrose hospital. I'm hoping some additional funds will be spent there.

**9:00**

I'd like to move away from the geriatric and seniors' programs, stroke programs, and take a look at some of the pediatric programs. One in particular, developmental pediatrics at the Glenrose hospital, makes a huge contribution to the overall health of Alberta and Alberta's children. The problem is, again because of budget cuts, Mr. Speaker, the unit clerks have been largely eliminated out of that program area. What you're left with is the physicians who do the assessments, the physicians who actually do the hands-on work with the children in terms of diagnosing any kind of developmental problems, neurological problems, physiological problems, problems that lead to learning disability and problems that, if left undiagnosed and untreated, end up resulting in all kinds of consequences for these children and their families.

These doctors – there are very few of them; it's highly specialized work, very emotional work, and very time-consuming work – are left without the administrative support they need to be efficient. So instead of the prescreening being done as it was by the unit clerks in filling out the forms, asking the questions, doing the family histories with the parents of the children, the doctors themselves are doing that job.

Now, I'm not saying that the work is beneath the doctors. It's not. Perhaps in an absolutely perfect world with perfect funding there would be enough developmental pediatricians on site that they would be the ones that would be able to do all of that for case continuity and for the integrity of the program. The fact is that those doctors are a rare commodity. They're not quite as rare a commodity as unit clerks. The job was being done by unit clerks, but in a rather costly, cost-saving measure those administrative positions have been eliminated. Now the administrative and clerical duties are falling to the doctors themselves. This is backing up their ability to do their work as physicians, so we see the waiting list growing from 150 to 270 to over 430 kids waiting in northern Alberta to be seen by a developmental pediatrician. This does not bode well because early intervention, Mr. Speaker, is so critically important when it comes to the kinds of problems that these children have. I would hope that the Capital health authority will be able to make good use of this money in those areas and so many others that we could talk about and that some of my colleagues have already spoken of.

I'd like to move to the supplementary estimates now for community health for a minute and talk about the seniors' programs. The Minister of Community Development has come to the Assembly and said that we need to spend more money on seniors, and I guess that's fair enough. I know that I've heard from hundreds of seniors in my constituency, and when I say hundreds, I mean literally hundreds, Mr. Speaker. I helped distribute well over 700 applications for the special needs assistance program, and I guess that that really was an eye-opener for me, because I didn't believe that there were over 700 seniors who were suffering as a result of the government's policies.

If you remember, the first thing we learned about the special needs assistance program is that it was developed to assist those



seniors who have had a very harsh impact on their finances as a result of the government's policies. So in my constituency I was surprised to find, when I began to ask, that there were hundreds and hundreds of seniors who felt that they had been unduly affected by the government's policies. What was even more disheartening than that realization, Mr. Speaker, was that less than a handful actually received the special-needs grant that they applied for. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of seniors went through their shoe boxes full of receipts and went through the laborious task of filling out the form and getting it submitted and making sure that they had all the paperwork done, and only a handful actually received the grant. Of those, many of the ones that were turned down came to me and said, "How come I didn't get it?" You know, I couldn't explain it to them, so I encouraged them to appeal the decision and to see whether or not the decision-makers could explain it to them.

You know, some of those seniors went ahead and appealed the decision. Some of those seniors actually won their appeal; they got some of the grant money on the basis of their appeal. But others didn't. When I began to look at those cases and I began to try to evaluate them and compare them side by side, Mr. Speaker, it was very difficult to determine on what basis they were originally rejected and why some were then eventually granted and others were still denied. Similar circumstances, similar dire straits, similar consequences as a result of the government's policies, but some seniors managed to get lucky and other seniors didn't. Not the way to run a program and certainly not a program that we can be proud of.

I'm pleased that the Minister of Community Development has decided that the maximum grant will be increased for seniors and, more importantly, that the eligibility criteria will both be made more explicit and will be expanded so that all seniors can be confident that they'll know why they qualified if they did, why they didn't qualify if they were rejected. More and more seniors who have been hurt by this government's policy will be able to take advantage of this pool of money. Now, it's a short-term pool of money, and I guess it's at the whim of the government. They can put a little bit more money into the pot when it politically suits the government. They can take a little bit of money out of the pot when it politically suits the government. But at least for the time being, some seniors who are reeling from the cumulative impact of this government over the last three years will be able to get some relief. I would encourage those seniors to take advantage of that opportunity just as quickly as they can.

I am concerned about one aspect of the supplementary request for Community Development as it will be applied to seniors. I note that the changes made to the program were actually made July 1. Here it is August 21, and the legislative authority still isn't in place. We're still debating it. You know, there must have been something very desperate going on. There must have been a real sense of urgency, whether it be political or whether it be programmatic. This government must have really felt that they had shortchanged seniors in this province, because what they did, of course, is they rushed in with a program, changed the funding, changed the budget, changed the eligibility criteria, and then after the fact have come to the Assembly and asked permission to do all those things they've already done.

Now, that's not the way to make social policy. It's not governance; it's not leadership. It's making things up as you go along, and it's not good enough. I would hope that this government never, ever has to do that again, that they have not so badly mismanaged a program that they are forced without authority to

do what they can to shore it up and then come cap in hand to the Assembly begging forgiveness and hoping that they'll eventually get the legislative authority that they need to do what it is that they already have done. I would hope that we don't repeat that particular embarrassment on behalf of the government.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said at an earlier stage of this Bill, I am supportive of this Bill. I'll be encouraging my colleagues to vote for it. I just wish that we didn't have to deal with supplementary estimates, and I certainly would rather that we didn't have to deal with them at a crisis level.

Thank you.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight we're speaking to the supplementary estimates. What we're here tonight to talk about is this and also a reinvestment Bill, which will probably be up next on the Order Paper.

It's funny how the Tory-speak these days is to try and cover up some of the inadequacies that this government has partaken in over the past number of years. Right now this government is saying that they're going to be reinvesting in what's been taken out. In reality, had the government not gutted the health care system, had this government not gone after the seniors with the vengeance that they did, there would be no need for the supplementary estimates tonight. This is a government that has put us into the position that we're in right now. It put us into a deficit position over a number of years and is now coming to us with the myth that people have to suffer for the things that they ask for.

I remember once hearing on a radio station the Treasurer saying that it's people that asked that the current deficit and debt be brought into this province. I had trouble with that. I particularly have trouble with that when you look at – let's just take since the year 1989. There have been a number of Tory deficits since then. What's interesting is that of those individuals who are in the Assembly at this point in time, 23 of the 54 Tories sitting here right now actually approved the deficit budgets. Of the 19 current cabinet ministers – and we keep rising in the number of cabinet ministers – 17 in actual fact approved the deficit budgets.

9:10

I thought that it might be interesting to go through who some of those ministers were. What we are looking at is the current minister of advanced education, the current Minister of Energy, the minister responsible for children's services, the minister of social services, the Treasurer, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, the Minister of Health, the Premier, the minister of environment, the Minister of Community Development, the minister of science and research, the minister of agriculture, the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the minister of economic . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I trust that you will get on with the Bill that we're currently discussing and soon.

MS LEBOVICI: Sure. All these ministers have approved deficit budgets.

Now, the hon. Speaker is indicating to me to get on with the Bill at hand. Well, the reality is that since 1989 we've had deficit budgets. Now we're in a position where we're looking at surplus budgets of incredible numbers. The reality is that these born-

again fiscal Conservatives just can't seem to get it right.

In the supplementary estimates that we have in front of us right now, it's obvious that the government and the Treasurer just can't get it right. How else could you explain that not more than four months after the budget, the much-touted budget that the Treasurer put forward, we're now looking at funds required in Health, in Community Development, in Transportation and Utilities. These are the exact areas, with the exception of the Transportation and Utilities program, that the hon. opposition has been pointing out as problem areas. We have been saying over and over and over again that the health care system, by the cuts that have been put forward by this government, has been gutted. What is exceptionally sinful on the part of this government is the reality that the government keeps perpetuating a myth that health care costs are out of control when in reality since 1990 the health care costs in this province have consistently been going downwards. We are now at the point where we have the lowest health care costs per capita in Canada.

What we are seeing is an attitude of lack of caring and compassion, an attitude of lack of listening and understanding, and an attitude that, well, we can get away with it because we have a majority in this Legislative Assembly and we can do whatever we please, that we have been given *carte blanche* by the people of Alberta to do whatever we please.

Now, some of the hon. members before me had indicated that the seniors as one group are saying that they've had enough, that in actual fact they are not going to be hoodwinked by the government anymore, that the peanuts that have been thrown their way with regard to the supplementary estimates are not sufficient. In actual fact, the shame and anxiety that this government has perpetuated on the seniors of this province are what they're going to remember when they approach that ballot box in the next few months.

Now, the Treasurer says that in fact this was something that the citizens of Alberta knew about, that in fact the citizens of Alberta wished this kind of a budget and, by extrapolation, the supplementary estimates that we see tonight. I don't think this Treasurer or the Premier ever told people that it would be a fact of life that people were dying, that the Premier of this province ever said that he wouldn't blink and wouldn't listen to what people said, and the Premier of this province never told people that his agenda is to actually privatize health care and it's okay if you fall through the cracks.

What we are seeing tonight is the fact that the Capital health authority is receiving \$14 million. We know that's at least \$7 million short of what the Capital health authority requires to just maintain an even keel, if that, and that that's not enough. We know that we have a health care system now where the Premier is talking about urgent care facilities in Calgary to replace emergency care facilities, and it's hard to quite understand what that is. In the Edmonton area we're still trying to figure out what community health centres are. If someone is really sick, it is hard to know where in fact to go. Even when you do get there, what ends up happening is that you get shuffled from one hospital to the next hospital to the next hospital.

The question arises: is that \$20 million really enough? Have there been the studies required to ascertain that that's enough? Have the outcomes, the performance measures, all the things that are required when one looks at a budget, actually been looked at? I think from what we've seen, the answer is no.

That answer also holds when you look at the changes to the Alberta seniors' benefit. I've heard the Minister of Community

Development say that this is good for the seniors and that they're really looking forward to this. It's true; extra money is good for the seniors. The reality is that the program when it was first initiated and the program as it now sits does not meet the needs of seniors and in fact is a sinful program and, as such, should never have been implemented by this government.

Now, one of the things that we see over and over again is this ability of the Treasurer to play with the figures, and we are potentially looking at in 1997 a \$1.5 billion surplus. The Treasurer is saying: oh, well, that's not really money that needs to be considered; that's not really money that I can forecast. Some of that is reality – that is difficult to forecast – but the other reality is that at this point in time the Treasurer is underestimating. That is as sinful as the overestimations that his predecessor did that led to our deficits: in 1989, a \$2 billion deficit; in 1990, a \$2.3 billion deficit; in 1991, a \$1.8 billion deficit; in 1992, a \$2.6 billion deficit. And 1993 was a particular banner year: a \$3.8 billion deficit. The total amount of \$14.2 billion is deficits that were put forward by this Tory government. They were put forward by this Tory government.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's really \$32 billion.

MS LEIBOVICI: It's \$32 billion total over a number of years.

So what we're seeing right now is again a budgeting process that is a sham, is a budgeting process that can't quite do it, is a budgeting process that throws dollars at certain areas, that has to throw dollars at areas because the budgeting process was wrong to begin with. The budgeting process underestimated what the regional health authorities required, underestimated what the benefits were that seniors required. I would like to know from the Minister of Community Development if the minister can tell us the number of recipients that will benefit from the dollars that she's put forward and the number of recipients that she will have to refuse because there are not enough dollars available.

9:20

I would like to have the Minister of Health tell us who will get services from the Capital health authority and who will be refused services because the Capital health authority is \$7 million short? Which life will be shortened as a result of that \$7 million? Which person may not have the kind of care required and have their hospital stay prolonged? Which person will be the person that will have the infection that will bring them back into the hospital system? In today's paper the neonatal unit has now come up with figures that show we are above the norm for infections in neonatal infants. So which child will not make it? Which child will not make it to their first year because the Capital health authority is \$7 million short?

Now, the reality is that the Capital health authority is one example. There other regional health authorities that do not have sufficient funds. Some regional health authorities and at least one that we know of, the one that the Premier is currently in, having ridden the unity train to Jasper, is in a deficit position of \$1.5 million. I thought the regional health authorities were not allowed to run deficit positions, but in this particular case it's okay. So is the budgeting process real, or is the budgeting process a sham? Is the budgeting process one that looks at what the needs are, or do we have pretty words on a piece of paper and many documents that say that this is what the performance measures are, this is where we're heading for, and these are the dollars that are there to be allocated? I would like to submit, Mr. Speaker, that that is not the case, that in fact we have a lot of words, we have many

books, and we have a budgeting process that is just as sinful as the last budgeting processes were. It is wrong to run a deficit position. It is wrong to want to be able to say that we have a surplus just so that it looks good.

This government has a moral obligation to provide service to Albertans. It has a moral obligation to ensure that Albertans attain the service they require when they enter a health care system. The supplementary estimates are not enough. I will vote for them because at least they are some dollars, but they are not enough. I would submit that the Treasurer and the Minister of Health need to look at what the needs are in the regional health authorities and ensure that they are properly funded.

I would also submit to the Minister of Community Development that she needs to look at what seniors require, what benefits seniors require, to look at how many seniors still are out there without the benefits they need in order to be able to live in a fashion that rewards them for the sacrifices they have made over a long period of time, and to allocate the dollars that are required to permit the seniors to live in dignity.

Thank you.

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

**MR. BRUSEKER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to make a few comments on Bill 48, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2). I read that out like that because I think that's where I want to begin my comments. Here we are, slightly more than a third of the way through the current fiscal year, the 1996-97 fiscal year, and we are already on the second supplementary supply Act before this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, back in my first go-round in this Legislative Assembly in the 22nd Legislature, we had What's a Million Dick as the Treasurer, and now it looks like we have What's \$36 Million Jim as a Provincial Treasurer, because this seems to mark his second attempt at coming forward with a budget correction to, I guess, deal with errors and omissions in his first budget.

To be fair, some of these proposed expenses deal with disaster services. Disaster recovery is the actual title, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that those are contingencies for which one really cannot plan. But when one reviews the background behind the different estimates, when we look at the Community Development operating expenditure of \$6 million being proposed here in attempting to meet the needs of the Alberta seniors' benefit and see that the description of \$2.2 million of the \$6 million being proposed is

to expand eligibility criteria so that assistance is no longer limited to applicants whose need is based on unexpected or increased expenses directly related to changes in government programs,

it seems to me that when one reads that sentence from the supplementary supply estimates which says that there are unexpected or increased expenses as a result of government programs, it suggests to me that changes were implemented in those programs before the ramifications of those changes were given due consideration. That can be found on the last line of page 10 of the supplementary estimates book.

So I look at that, and I've had a number of seniors in my constituency office expressing concern about the seniors' benefits and the various cutoff levels that are in place as a result of varying seniors' income, whether it's a two-income senior couple or a one senior, one nonsenior couple or a single senior living on his or her own. All of these different categories of seniors, if you will, Mr. Speaker, have different cutoff levels for seniors'

benefits. So when one sees that the government is saying, "Well, gee; there are some unexpected expenses there," one may say, "Well, 2 and a quarter million dollars is perhaps not a whole lot of money in terms of total error." I think it's still an admission, when we're looking at a second, a No. 2 supplementary supply Act and we're barely a third of the way through the year – it says to me that there are some problems involved with the special-needs and seniors' benefit programs.

Mr. Speaker, the other area where I did want to make a few comments was under the section of Health where the operating expenditure that is being proposed is in the neighbourhood of \$20 million. That is being divided up into two areas, one of which, the \$6 million, is being appropriated for improvements to ambulance services, both air and ground ambulance services. I think that improving air ambulance services, particularly for those Albertans who live in rural Alberta, is a move in the right direction. Quite frankly, with the massive restructuring that is occurring in our health care system across this province, north to south and east to west, I think it is incumbent upon the government to ensure that all Albertans have equal access in one form or another to adequate health care services.

Now, in many of the rural parts of this province we are seeing hospitals being closed or downsized or their functions being changed, depending upon the area in which you're located. Unfortunately, of course, there are Albertans in those areas who will become ill, who will have injuries, who will have accidents and will need to be transported quickly, expeditiously, and safely to adequate health care facilities. From that standpoint I support increased utilization of air ambulance services. I guess, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to see is a bit more of a plan for that utilization.

I have the good fortune of having a couple of individuals who live in my constituency who are pilots for the STARS air ambulance helicopter. I'm sure, being a Calgarian yourself, Mr. Speaker, you've probably seen that red helicopter flying across Calgary, attending to the injured. They tell me that that piece of equipment, if I can refer to the STARS air ambulance that way, is an extremely valuable tool and an extremely wide-ranging tool in being able to cover a very large portion of southern Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're aware that the STARS air ambulance serves not only the residents of the city of Calgary, but indeed they talk about that one golden hour in which time they can get out to where the patient is located, collect the patient, put them in the ambulance, and get them back to the city of Calgary.

**9:30**

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that facility, that piece of equipment, the STARS air ambulance, that we are fortunate enough to have in Calgary, that covers so much of southern Alberta, should probably be replicated in various locations around the province. When I look at the \$6 million that is being allocated out of the total \$20 million of health care expenditures towards improved air ambulance, I have to ask the question: how much of that money is going to be allocated to replicate that STARS air ambulance service? As I said, having had the opportunity to speak to a couple of the pilots, I think it's a great service.

**MRS. BLACK:** It's a great service.

**MR. BRUSEKER:** The Member for Calgary-Foothills agrees with me.

Not only have I had the opportunity to speak to some of the

pilots but also to some of the medical personnel, and it should be repeated around the province. So from that standpoint, Mr. Speaker, I support the improvement in air ambulance services around the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I did want to raise was the relative conundrum we see here which seems to be a bit of a contradiction. Out of the \$20 million that is being allocated for health care services, \$14 million of that is being allocated towards the Capital health authority. The Capital health authority has made representation that they need half again as much or \$21 million to address what they perceive as a shortfall. On one hand we have the Minister of Health who says that the responsibility for the delivery of health care is being turned over to the regional health authorities, whether that's the Capital health authority or the Calgary regional health authority or any one of the 15 other health authorities around the province of Alberta.

So the minister says: we're going to give you the responsibility; we're going to give you the mandate to look after the delivery of health care in your region in terms of opening or closing hospitals. Yet when the health authority says, "Okay, you've given us the mandate; now give us the money," the response from the government is: well, we're not going to give you the \$21 million; we're going to give you \$14 million and the other \$7 million – well, good luck, you're on your own; see what you come up with. It seems rather inconsistent for the minister and the government on one hand to be saying to these regional health authorities: "You're responsible. You look after it. It's your problem, not ours any longer because we've created these regional health authorities," yet on the other hand not to provide those resources.

Mr. Speaker, that's somewhat akin to asking a carpenter to build you a home but you're not going to give him a hammer to drive the nails in to do the job. You can provide everything else. He may have the lumber and he may have the nails and he may have the site, but if he doesn't have the hammer, it's just not going to come together. Well, I would say that this may be a similar kind of analogy. I find those kinds of analogies sometimes useful in maybe clarifying the situation a bit.

MRS. BLACK: You can bring your own hammer.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, maybe they have to bring their own hammer, but it's a \$7 million hammer, hon. member, that they're being asked to bring, and that may be a little beyond their ability to provide that kind of a funding.

Yes, on one hand, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a step in the right direction. We're giving under this Bill – proposing to give, I guess we should say – \$20 million more to Health and in particular \$14 million to the Capital health authority, but that's not all that they've requested. That's not all that they have said they need. So the minister, looking for guidance and direction from those individuals, has received that guidance and direction, and in my reading of the Bill and the supplementary estimates book which was provided to us earlier this week, does not seem to be responding in a fashion that really supports his regional health authorities that he has appointed.

Mr. Speaker, I support the Bill. I think it's a step in the right direction to alleviate those areas which I think have been highlighted by different individuals as problem areas within the province of Alberta. But I guess I would have to say, in a sense, I hope that when we have our fall sitting, which the Member for Fort McMurray referred to, perhaps in October in this Legislative Assembly – because I'm sure we're all keen to be back here in

October once again – perhaps then we'll be seeing supplementary supply Bill 3. Perhaps the Provincial Treasurer will be trying to get it right yet once again, and we can debate another supplementary supply estimate at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to the supplementary estimates and in support of them. In fact, it would have been very difficult to speak in favour of supplementary estimates in times gone by, when there wasn't the good, solid financial planning that reflected a surplus in budget. I'd continue to recommend that all colleagues support this and at this point ask for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a second time]

#### **Bill 47 Reinvestment Act**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 47, the Reinvestment Act.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, please.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised that it's the Provincial Treasurer who's bringing forward this Bill. I would have thought it would have been the minister of the environment because so much of the June 24 reinvestment scenario was recycled material from the budget. What I find amazing is that if you look at page 40 of the budget, there it is. It set it out pretty clearly. They were going to be spending \$303 million. Lo and behold on June 24 the Premier gets up and announces it like it's brand new, and the press bought it. That's the other amazing thing. It was there. This was simply recycled good news. Something that was in the budget was repackaged and sold again for political gain.

MR. BRUSEKER: Used oats.

DR. PERCY: Yeah, used oats. I have to say, again, that it was there and we heard about it twice. It was kind of like a meal that comes back and comes back and comes back. So there we are. We see the announcement about the reinvestment. Now, the actual expenditures that the hon. Premier spoke of on June 24 are not specifically in this Bill, but they're part of the package and I think are appropriately dealt with, because it was the Premier himself who spoke of it in terms of reinvestment.

Now, I'm going to focus on one or two areas, because I know my colleagues want to speak to this and speak to this extensively. I want to start at what I think is actually the most interesting and relevant part of this Bill, and in fact it's probably one that most people will skip over as footnote material. The interesting and perhaps most profoundly required element of this Bill and the one thing that will lead me to support this Bill is in fact the way that the cushions are going to be recalculated.

Presently the cushions are calculated on an individual basis:

separately for natural resource revenues, separately now for corporate tax revenues. It's a very mechanical way that these cushions are calculated, so mechanical that they're in a sense driven by history. You could easily have the perverse outcome where in order to make the cushions you'd have to in fact reduce program expenditures from one period to the next, notwithstanding the fact that you'd think you'd be running a significant surplus.

What this amendment does is in fact allow the cushions to be calculated as a sum of the two items, renewable and resource revenues and corporate tax revenues. That makes a very significant difference, because the whole purpose of cushions, Mr. Speaker, is their contingencies. Really what you want is to make sure that the volatile elements of your revenue base, that you take into account that volatility, and you want the collective volatility. You don't want to calculate it on an individual basis. So this amendment, then, that leads to recalculation of the cushions makes absolute economic sense and is in the best interests of in fact the budgeting process in this province, as well as the interests of all Albertans. So there's an element in there that does make sense.

9:40

Now, when you look at other elements, though, of the legislation, there is a serious problem, and in fact this is a profoundly serious problem. We're on record for this, and I know there will be many of my colleagues here after the election who will in fact deal with this problem. It's simply this: if you look at the numbers, Mr. Speaker, the fiscal swings in this province are enormous. If you look at fiscal year 1994-95, the Provincial Treasurer in the budget said that we're going to be running a deficit of approximately a billion dollars. Well, the public accounts showed for the '94-95 fiscal year a billion and a half dollar surplus. So there was this fiscal swing of 2 and a half billion dollars. The cushions that were there were small. In fact, the fiscal swing was 13 times the size of the cushions.

Now, when the swings are on our side, and we're on the positive side of the resource price cycle, that's great news. On the other hand, we know there is a resource price cycle, we know that this is a highly volatile economy, and we know that right now we're lucky. What happens, though, when the good times end and they go through the normal cyclical volatility of this economy and we have fiscal swings of a billion or a billion and a half on the other side of the ledger, in fact under the existing legislation the government must cut. They must cut in that fiscal year, not the next fiscal year but in that fiscal year. The government has in hand, then, the quarterly financial updates, so they know pretty clearly, Mr. Speaker, the revenue flows and whether or not they have to take action in the first quarter or the second quarter in order to balance the budget on the expenditure side.

Now, all that stands between us then and a large negative fiscal swing are the cushions. Are they big enough? The answer is no. In fact, the Treasurer – and I must say this report, the Revenue Forecasting Review, says that the department does a very good job. It says that they do as good a job as you can, given the uncertainty with those variables. Where the report – chastises is too strong a word. Where the report suggests improvements is in fact how the government deals with the consequences of that volatility. They use code in the sense that they talk about other ways of flexibility. Perhaps they didn't want to say the words "stabilization fund." I mean, those seem to be words that kind of stuck in their craw. But you read that, and they talk about the size of the swings, and it's clear they're talking about alternate means of dealing with these swings.

Again I think the Treasurer got value for money with this. This is very thorough, very good, and I think is a good basis for evaluating what the department does do. But it highlighted this problem: the legislation is asymmetrical. While we save the surpluses, the only mechanisms we have for dealing with unanticipated deficits are cuts in program expenditures or larger cushions or increasing taxes. Large unplanned cuts in expenditures would be stabilizing. Large unplanned increases in taxes would be destabilizing. So they suggest some other sets of mechanisms. They talk about alternate ways of flexibly dealing with this, which is some form of stabilization fund. I would have liked to have seen that issue addressed in the Reinvestment Act because it is a preventable accident.

A stabilization fund can be set up in such a way that it's not in fact a trough that will be driven by political need. It won't be a fund that will be used to subsidize interest shielding, as was done in previous years. What can easily be done, Mr. Speaker, is that you can put fences around it. What you do is ensure that you can't use the fund in successive years. You can't use the fund to finance expenditure overruns, only revenue shortfalls. You can try and have that there. You can invest it in the short end of the market, with six-months' term to maturity in these, so the funds are there.

You've got the heritage savings trust fund to deal with long-term structural problems. What happens when the oil and gas run out? You have the heritage savings trust fund. What happens when we have this volatility associated with energy prices and agricultural prices and forestry prices? Well, we have the stabilization fund. That provides a planning horizon. It provides a buffer so that you don't have to impose unplanned cuts or unplanned tax increases in the year. You read the legislation; it's very clear. If it looked like we were going to be running a billion dollar deficit, the legislation requires in that fiscal year the Provincial Treasurer to cut transfers to local governments, to hospitals, to universities, to school boards, to balance the budget.

Now, the Provincial Treasurer will leap up and say, "But we'll cut in low-needs areas, and we'll keep high priorities." Well, two-thirds or three-quarters of our expenditures are in those high core areas in health care, education, and social services. Just as when you had to ratchet down expenditures, it had to fall on the big three, similarly, Mr. Speaker, it will have to fall on these. It may be unbalanced, maybe only 10 percent in health care and 20 percent in education, but we're still talking large numbers, unplanned cuts in the midst of the fiscal year.

So when we talk, then, about a Reinvestment Act and we look at the revenue forecasting, it makes absolute, eminent economic sense to change the calculation of the cushion. I mean, the way the cushion initially was calculated, it was incremental. First, it was just energy. Then corporate tax revenue crept in, and each was just calculated on a separate basis. It makes just plain good old horse sense to calculate it as the sum.

That was recommended in here, and it has also been suggested by this side of the House. We also have to look, then, at the consequences of that volatility. We can recalculate the cushion; we can have it there as a contingency fund. But the cushions are not big enough. That's what this report says. That's what the evidence demonstrates. So this is a problem that this economy in this province is going to face, not this year, maybe two to three years from now. It's something that we can deal with now. To the extent that there are going to be windfalls – and I think again that the Provincial Treasurer was lowballing it when he said that the high end was going to be \$879 million; I think we're going to

be looking at \$1.2 billion – there will be money there that can be put in some type of stabilization fund that can be used, then, in the context of a current fiscal year, to buffer Albertans from unplanned and deep cuts.

I really regret that we don't see this in the Reinvestment Act, because it's something I think we could deal with. Other provinces may not have it, but other provinces are unlike Alberta. One thing that Shaefer Mansell and Feicke clearly demonstrate is that this province is unlike many others in terms of the high degree of revenue volatility. This province is unique. Research study after research study, one of which I was involved in, clearly show that in the North American context Alberta stands out in terms of the degree of economic instability and revenue volatility. So we should do something about it, and we should address the issue rather than keeping our fingers crossed.

What this Bill does essentially is keep the fingers crossed and hope that oil prices stay up and that we only have good news. Well, you plan for the worst and hope for the best. So I'd like to see some changes made there. Again, his independent panel said: look at these alternatives. So part of what they've recommended is included in the Reinvestment Act, but not all of what they recommended. I think it would and it should receive very strong support from all members of the House were it to be included.

Now, what are the other issues, again, in discussing the principles involved in the Reinvestment Act? Well, we can go into the debate about the pay-down of the debt. It's kind of like somebody who's six foot three going into the pole vault and he sets the pole at about two foot one. I mean, it's easy to leap over. In fact I could do it with a blindfold, and in a sense that's what they've done with their calculation of the net debt, Mr. Speaker. They took a figure, the figure that they gave the Securities and Exchange Commission, and they said: "Oh, let's knock off unfunded pension liabilities. After all, that's only a debt to other Albertans. We don't want to pay that up front." So you keep knocking it down, and you get to a figure of about six two.

The Premier talks about, "We're going to pay off the mortgage on the house." Well, if you pay off two rooms in a five-room house, Mr. Speaker, you don't get title. That's how it works. You've got to pay everything off. So two-fifths of the mortgage being paid off doesn't make a lot of sense. I mean, it's just a simple suggestion. If you tell the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington that the net debt is one figure, why don't you use the same figure for Albertans? I mean, why not be consistent? Why not treat the unfunded pension liability as a true liability? After all, you accrued it.

9:50

So there we see it. Back to the debate, then, and what is the size of the net debt? Again, in terms of being consistent, just as the Provincial Treasurer will lowball the surplus, so too will he lowball the net debt.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we have sort of the ultimate kind of irony. I've listened here a number of times to the Government House Leader, now the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services, say: what the opposition's doing is a waste of time. Well, he comes in with legislation that's clearly redundant. You don't need this legislation requiring you to pay down the debt faster. You just have to read the existing legislation. It was pretty clear you could pay it down fast if you chose to. There was no penalty. There was no slap on the wrist if you paid down more. I mean, this is political window dressing for a potential fall election. That's what this is. This is sort of a slogan.

When we look at this legislation, we have political puffery dressed up as an amendment, which is the faster pay-down of the debt. We could have kept the existing legislation. It was easy. The hon. minister, I am sure, will leap to his feet and say, "Well, we're putting fences around it." Well, if the hon. Provincial Treasurer had a spine, he wouldn't have to do that. He would just say, "No, we're not going to spend the additional money, and we're paying it down faster." Why do you have to legislate common sense? I don't know.

So, Mr. Speaker, the net debt lowballed, legislation that's redundant, a surplus, which obviously isn't part of this, which is lowballed – and he asks: in spite of all this, why will I probably support this Bill? Two reasons. The first is the cushions. The second is the employment tax credit. I think that is a first step, not a great first step, because why would you exclude single parents, for example? Why would you exclude individuals? Single parents are included in this. Why isn't the issue low-income individuals? What is the cost of doing that? Why isn't the issue equity for individuals, for the working poor? I mean, that's the issue with this. You're trying to get money to those people who are on the margins, who are just earning a wage at or above the poverty level. It's individuals that count. You want to keep people in the labour market. It's great to get that money to families, because nobody wants to see even greater child poverty in this province. The real issue in terms of equity is if you're poor, whether you have a child or not, you're still poor. If the intent is to get money to the working poor, make the Bill do that.

So I don't think it goes far enough in that regard, Mr. Speaker, but at least it's a good first step. It should go a lot further and deal with all of the working poor, with working poor individuals. I think the intent is laudable: get money to those who need it. I think the breadth of its coverage could be greater, and I would be curious, when the hon. Provincial Treasurer leaps up to defend his Bill, if he gives us the numbers. What would it have cost, then, to deal with all individuals, not just those with children? What would have been the incremental cost, and why did the government choose not to do that? Certainly on grounds of equity and fairness it makes sense to do that.

I support the employment tax credit, and I'm glad to see the move in that direction. As I say, I think the calculations of the cushions make sense, and certainly, given the way the calculations were done historically, there was the potential for significant aberrations to arise. I don't think the legislation goes far enough in terms of dealing with all of the issues raised in the revenue forecasting report, particularly with regards to stabilization.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

I noted comments by the Provincial Treasurer that they in fact were going to look at hedging, which is something that was suggested by Mansell, et al, as well as by myself on other occasions as well as by various groups in the department of finance at the University of Alberta. That makes eminent sense. Hedging doesn't protect you from revenue shortfalls. What it does is make the lower income stream more predictable. The one thing you do want in life is some degree of predictability with regards to your revenue streams. So anything you can do to make your revenue stream more predictable makes sense. There's not a free lunch. There is some cost always to hedging, but it provides that certainty that's required in budgeting.

The other issue, I guess, that I regret not seeing discussed or raised was the move to oil-based bonds. The province of Alberta

I think is in a unique position in North America. I mean, it has a very good credit rating. It has a stable political environment. It's a net oil exporter. One of the things that oil-based bonds do is allow you to synchronize your debt servicing costs with oil revenues. [Dr. Percy's speaking time expired] So on that note, in Committee of the Whole I'll talk about oil-based bonds, because I think they should have been in here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I was sorry I wasn't here to move second reading of the Bill; I was absent from the House. But I want to thank my colleague the Attorney General for moving second reading on my behalf. I rise in support of this Bill.

Hearing the hon. member briefly from my office, as I had an opportunity to do so, I then rushed to the Assembly to hear the completion of his lengthy speech. I thought for sure that I was listening to the Conservative Provincial Treasurer of Alberta. Here was a man who was actually for the most part, for a Liberal, making a heck of a lot of good sense.

I want to thank the hon. member for his contributions to the debate. Clearly he's outlined a number of the principles of the Bill, the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act, and is making sure that the fire is to the feet of this Legislative Assembly and this government to ensure that the net debt, as agreed to in previous legislation, as agreed to by all hon. members – they voted for the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act and the Deficit Elimination Act in the past and agreed with that definition of net debt. Although he did decry it in debate, he was still there to put his hand up on voting day. He supported it to make sure that our net debt is paid down in 13 years rather than 25 years. That's an important step that Albertans told us. They wanted to see that debt reduced and the net debt in fact eliminated. That's what this Bill does. It does it in half the time.

As well, the hon. member talked about the calculation of the cushions and gave a very good explanation of how we were taking the appropriate approach in ensuring that those cushions are there to protect us from the downside of a volatile economy and, more importantly, to assure that that \$450 million annual average payment is made.

He also talked about the family employment tax credit, and I did appreciate his laudatory comments in support of the Alberta family employment tax credit. He's absolutely right. Raising families is an important responsibility in this province, and it's a very costly endeavour, Mr. Speaker. So given our ability to enable those Albertans from \$6,500 of working income to \$50,000 of working income to keep more of that money rather than send it to the Provincial Treasurer, I appreciate the hon. member's support for that initiative.

Finally, the Fuel Tax Act. He didn't make mention of that, I don't believe.

DR. PERCY: I didn't get a chance.

MR. DINNING: And he would have, had he had the chance. He's absolutely right.

He would have said further laudatory comments about it, seeing our aviation tax reduced by one-half in January of 1997 and our railroad fuel tax reduced from 9 cents per litre to 6 cents January 1, 1998, and to 3 cents by January 1, 1999. Again, the focus is on a targeted tax reduction to improve the competitive advantage of those important industries in the province who use aviation,

who use the airline industry, use the railway to ship their product. It gives them that extra leg up in that our taxation is that much more competitive.

10:00

So, Mr. Speaker, he has spoken appropriately about the principles of this Bill. I simply wanted to supplement what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has said. Some would call him the wanna-be Provincial Treasurer of the Liberal Party. God knows, Mr. Speaker, we've always welcomed that kind of intelligent, intellectual debate in our caucus, and I would continue to welcome the hon. member anytime he wanted to make that contribution. Perhaps I might be able to respond in debate form, Mr. Speaker, as you know I am wont to do from time to time, when I am able to speak on this Bill the next time.

Allow me now, sir, to adjourn debate on this Bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer has moved adjournment on Bill 47. All those in support of this motion please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

#### Bill 46 Electoral Divisions Act

[Adjourned debate August 20: Mr. Henry]

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to speak to the Electoral Divisions Act, which will create new boundaries based on recommendations made by the Electoral Boundaries Commission's report, whereby there will be two rural ridings eliminated and Edmonton and Calgary will get one new riding each. Originally, the background, the history of how we got to where we are right now, has led us to a situation where we are looking at a report that in effect purports to deal with the decision of a Court of Appeal but which, due to the constraints that have been put on it by this government, is not able to fully deal with the rulings from the Court of Appeal.

Now, if I may just go through a little bit of background as to how we got to where we are right now – and I think it's important to know this in looking at the reasons that we're here. It's important to understand the reasons that we are here in order to be able to make the decision as to whether this Bill should be supported or not. For those members – and there were at least 20 – no, more than that. There were at least 23 members of the current Conservative government present in November of 1990 when this fiasco around electoral boundaries began. In fact, I believe that one of the members who was instrumental in drawing up the boundaries of 1993 is now the Minister of Energy.

In effect, what happened was that there was a Bill passed in November of 1990, Bill 57, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which appointed an Electoral Boundaries Commission. In 1991 the members of the commission were chosen by the Conservative government and the New Democrats, and the

commission was roundly criticized for consisting of political appointees.

Now, in May of 1992 the commission released a final report with no main recommendations, but there were five minority reports. [interjection] No, no; the final committee with five minority reports. In fact, they were unable to agree as to how the boundaries were to be drawn. So in July of 1992 the government announced that a special select committee of MLAs – and it's this particular committee that the Minister of Energy was on – would draw up the new boundaries for the province. Both the Liberals and the New Democrats refused to participate in the process because they saw that the process was skewed if politicians were involved in drawing their own boundaries. I believe there was another member – I think his name was Mr. Bogle – who was also involved at that point in time. When we talk about a boondoggle or Bogle boundaries, that's what came out as a result of this particular committee.

There was a committee report that came out in November of 1992. Of course, there were allegations of gerrymandering. There were specific boundary recommendations that came about, but there were no justifications or explanations offered for the boundaries that were drawn. [interjection] It's just been brought to my attention that that was called Bogle-mandering. The government by order in council referred the matter of the question of the boundaries, and as to whether they infringed on the Charter of Rights, to the Court of Appeal. Subsequent to that the election was held on those particular boundaries even though the matter was still before the Court of Appeal.

Now, you need to remember that in February of 1994, the Liberals introduced Bill 201, which would have reduced the number of MLAs to 65, would also have had the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench draw up the boundaries with advice from the Chief Electoral Officer. Then, of course, in October of '94 came the ruling from the Court of Appeal that indicated that there should be changes prior to the next census and preferably prior to the next election. The reason for that was the fact that there was a bias in favour of rural ridings in that they consistently had below-average population levels while urban ridings had higher levels of population and that there was no proper justification for this discrepancy and that, in the words of the court, "If Alberta wishes to call itself a democracy," the change had to occur.

Now, that brings us to why we're here right now, in the middle of August, which is an unusual time for the Legislative Assembly to be sitting. The government has tried to do the window dressing to give us a reason to be here other than the electoral boundaries, so they've put into effect the Reinvestment Act, and they've put in front of us supplementary estimates, when in effect those things could be done without this particular session, and we have in front of us the electoral boundaries as they now sit. So we're looking at Bill 46, Electoral Divisions Act.

With regards to my riding, there is not much of an effect. I do lose a community that is particularly dear to myself in that there is a large seniors' residence within that community. There is the Grey Nuns, as they're called, within my community, within Glenwood, and a very active community league, that I have had the pleasure of working with on a number of initiatives.

One of the problems that we see within the report is that the census that the commission had to deal with was the 1991 census. In effect, there could have been another census that the commission could have worked with in order to be able to better project what the variances would be and what the population would be in

Edmonton-Meadowlark as it now stands. If I may, when I look at the 1993 projections that were obtained from the city of Edmonton planning department for my riding as it now stands, we would see that the variance would become 21.3 percent. In actual fact, in 1995 that variance becomes 27.2 percent. That population census which had Edmonton-Meadowlark at 34,812 increases to 39,143, which would put Edmonton-Meadowlark 27.2 percent above the provincial average. In reality, Edmonton-Meadowlark is one of the areas where construction is still ongoing in the Terra Losa area and the Lewis Estates area, where I have the pleasure of having the former Premier of this province residing.

#### 10:10

Now, some interesting projections for both Terra Losa and Lewis Estates are that by the year 2020, which is down the road – when one is looking at boundaries, one would hope that they are not done on a yearly basis, because that costs dollars. As I indicated before, the born-again fiscal Conservatives seem to have dollars on their minds. You would think that this is not something that they would want to have done on an annual basis, as it were. The projections for both Terra Losa and Lewis Estates total 36,579. This is within a very small area. This is a very concentrated area. When we look at that projection plus the Edmonton-Meadowlark projection, assuming static growth, we're looking at the possibility of Edmonton-Meadowlark a few years down the road having 75,721 people within its area to be represented by one MLA. That is definitely above the provincial average that we see at this point in time.

Now, the Bill has tried to address some of the questions regarding whether urban voters will get enough clout under the new formula, and in effect there are some groups such as the Alberta Civil Liberties Association that indicate that in fact the population disparity between the rural and urban areas will not be sufficiently addressed by the current recommendations, that in effect Calgary should have gotten two more seats and Edmonton should have gotten two more seats. That was, in effect, I believe, a submission that the Alberta Liberal Party had put forward to the commission, as well, recognizing the difficulties that that might produce in some areas of the province. However, the reality is that individuals across this province need to be represented and they need to be adequately represented.

The commissioners have given their best and have tried to deal with the parameters that were put forward by the government; in other words, the 1991 census and the fact that there were to be 83 seats. Unfortunately, the commission was not given the ability to look at other issues. If this province and if the Treasurer really cared about electoral representation, they would have allowed the commission to look at things like proportional representation. They would have allowed the commission to look at things like the ability to have plebiscites and referendums. There are numerous ways to ensure that voters in both the urban and the rural areas have the ability to be properly represented by their members in the Legislative Assembly. This particular government . . . [interjection] It's the Treasurer that keeps chirping, so I guess he will get up pretty quick and say something of interest as opposed to just being insulting.

What the members opposite need to understand is that there are other ways to be effective in representing and in providing representation to individuals. As I indicated, there are ways, such as looking at proportional representation. There are other electoral systems that could have been looked at by the commission, and they were not allowed to look at those. There are issues to deal with different methods. The first past the post is not



necessarily the best method of ensuring that representation of either regional views or of rural views are provided. In actual fact, if we had a proportional representation system within the government right now, the Liberals who had 40 percent of the vote in the last general election would have 40 percent of the seats; the Conservatives who had 44 percent of the vote would have 44 percent of the seats.

That in actual fact probably would have helped, especially with regards to the arrogance that we sometimes see from the Conservative side of the House. Perhaps that would have provided for a more caring and listening attitude. Perhaps with a 44-40 percent split in the Legislative Assembly we would not have a Premier who says that there are people who fall through the cracks in the health care system, we would not have a Premier who says that death is a fact of life, we would not have a Premier who says that cracks are okay and that he won't blink, and in fact this would provide for better all-round government.

The fact of the matter is, however, that we have this particular Bill in front of us. As I indicated, the commission, which was an independent commission this time around, did attempt to do the best they could given the constraints and I think have put together a report that does reflect the decision of the Court of Appeal and does reflect the majority of the submissions that were presented to the particular commission. It would be impossible to satisfy everyone, though I'm sure the commission did whatever they could to ensure that the participation in the democratic process would be as equalized as possible across the province. That probably was not possible given the constraints. I think that in effect the commission has done a commendable job in attempting to come to the conclusions they did.

The thought that I would like to leave with the government is that unless they are, of course, rushing to a general election within the next few months, they may wish to, then, in our next session put forward a different model of voting, look at things such as referendums, look at things such as plebiscites, look at the issue of proportional representation. There are many other kinds of systems of either voting or ensuring citizen participation. In fact, I had put a motion forward on one of the last Order Papers urging the government to set up just such a task force that would look at how to better ensure participation of Albertans in the democratic process. That particular issue died on the Order Paper. It appears that this government only likes those motions and Bills that they themselves put forward.

So I would challenge the government. If they truly believe that there need to be changes to this system, don't deal with what's here in terms of the current Electoral Divisions Act, but try to be forward thinking, try to look at what our democracy could look like 20 years from now, try to see what the kinds of challenges are going to be 20 years from now, and try to set up a system that can deal with those particular challenges. This government does not seem to have at this point in time either the political will or courage to do that, partially because there's no incentive. When one is in power, one doesn't like to lose one's power.

To change the current system to really redress the imbalances in the current system could mean a loss of power base for the government. That is something, of course, that is quite understandable, though not very commendable. That in fact is probably the bottom line as to why we're seeing this Act in this form with the current constraints that are around it and why it is in place at this particular point in time, why we are here in the middle of August to discuss an Electoral Divisions Act. It is simply so that the government can maintain its power base and can maintain its status.

10:20

Quite frankly, I think that Albertans are wise to that particular kind of action. They know why we're here. When a snap election was called in 1989, it cost the Premier at the time, who's now a constituent of mine, his job. He in fact had to try and find election elsewhere. So though the Treasurer may whine and though the Treasurer may make all kinds of noises, the realities are still there. Albertans are not to be fooled. They know exactly what's going on here, and they know exactly why it's going on here.

I would urge this government to look at trying to make the democratic process function as effectively as possible.

Thank you.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Electronic Devices in the Chamber**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members will remember that not so long ago the Chair did speak about turning off the noises from the telephones, which shouldn't be in here, or computers. There seems to be a noise emanating from over this way that may be related to a computer. If so, I wonder if they could turn the noise off.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. At this time on a Wednesday night it's probably time to make a few comments about this whole business of the electoral redistribution. I would like to begin by reading into the record a quotation that comes out of the Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, the final report that was given to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in June 1996. I want to quote from page 61 of the report.

We have decided not to alter the boundaries of Barrhead-Westlock. The current boundaries for Barrhead-Westlock reflect the history of the area and the traditional senses of community. They also generally reflect the municipal boundary configurations and we are satisfied that the social and transportation infrastructure is respected by the current boundaries. Moreover, changing the boundaries of Barrhead-Westlock will alter the presently acceptable configurations in neighbouring electoral divisions. This region of Alberta would not be well served if Barrhead-Westlock's configuration were changed, given this result.

And that's the end of that quotation.

Mr. Speaker, as well, I want to congratulate and thank those constituents of mine who took the time to make presentations both during the first round and the second round and, at the same time, those others who did not attend either of the two rounds but wrote and sent submissions to this particular commission, in particular Shirley Morie, the mayor of the town of Westlock; some citizens from the Citizens Action Committee, Albert Cairns and Alice Lee; Mayor Sid Gurevitch of the town of Barrhead, Councillor Albert Van Etten of the town of Barrhead; Mayor Gary Pollock of the town of Swan Hills, Mayor Lorne Olsvik of the village of Onoway, the reeve of the MD of Westlock, Don Currie; the secretary treasurer of the MD of Westlock, Wyatt Glebe; the administrator of the town of Westlock, Garth Bancroft; Bob Jackson, who is the chairman of the Aspen health region; George Visser, the reeve of the county of Barrhead; Les Zylinsky, the deputy reeve of the county of Barrhead, and Doug Tymchyshyn, the manager of the county of Barrhead.

Mr. Speaker, the conclusion the Electoral Boundaries Commis-

sion reached, as far as I can understand with respect to Barrhead-Westlock, came about as the result of the widespread interest and involvement of various constituents of mine who did take the time to attend meetings of this particular commission that were held in Edmonton on November 6, 1995, and in Westlock on November 16, 1995, and during those two time frames to in fact provide written information with respect to it.

This is the third opportunity that I've had to be involved in this whole question of electoral reviews, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of being elected for the first time in 1979, and the constituency that I then had the privilege of running in had a certain type of configuration. Shortly thereafter, in the election of 1982 and moving towards the election of 1986, a second configuration was put in place, and it was a rather dramatic change in terms of the basic type of constituency that I had the privilege of being involved in the first time as opposed to the second time.

Then, following the election of 1989, another electoral boundaries redistribution commission did take place and a new instrument was put in place. The election of 1993, the fifth one, also gave me an opportunity to contest an election in a third type of constituency. The third type of constituency was very much dramatically different from the second one, as the second one was very much dramatically different from the first one. In fact, the variance in population in the third one saw a shift of almost 20,000 electors. Some 10,000 left the constituency that I had the privilege of representing, and some 10,000 were added to the new constituency that I had the privilege of representing.

The experience from those three events and five elections: citizens basically feel generally most uncomfortable with change, very dramatically, and this report is not much different in terms of the experiences from the past.

Mr. Speaker, when I read the first report that came out in January of 1996 in terms of electoral divisions, my assumption and my assessment in reading the first report said that there would probably be about a dozen changes in varying degrees from minor to major in terms of what was happening in the various 83 constituencies in Alberta. When we arrived in June of 1996, the number of changes had increased very dramatically, so much so that my reading of it seems to suggest some 56 constituencies are impacted by the report that we're looking at and the Bill that we're looking at as well. The case of major changes has been outlined by the commission very significantly, almost some 43 constituencies impacted by that and some 13 with so-called minor changes. Of course, they have a definition in the report as to what a major change is and what a minor change is.

I go back to the comment that I made a few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, that generally when these things happen, citizens feel very uncomfortable about what has happened, and they feel uncomfortable about a whole series of things. Even though there has been no change and no impact on the constituency that I have the privilege of representing during this term of office, it is surprising to me how many of my constituents and how many people I have met and how many people I know in the province of Alberta have expressed to me that they are uncomfortable with this report and that they are uncomfortable with the changes that have been suggested and the changes that have been recommended.

I find that quite surprising, because again, here we are in an environment where my constituents went, made presentations to the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and in fact came back and basically said that they seemed to have been respected and that,

in terms of what had happened in the review, they seemed to have been heard. In terms of the report that's come back, they seemed to have listened and written in terms of what they should do and what was expected of them. Yet at the same time they say to me: "But we have a whole series of questions? Can you help us?"

So I want to raise some of these questions tonight, because in listening to the comments of my colleagues in the House in the last several days and reading their comments in *Hansard* – and *Hansard* is a very valuable tool, not only for the present, Mr. Speaker, but it's a very valuable tool for the future, because it contains some rather interesting comments and rather interesting statements. Time permitting, I'll have a chance to go through some of those as well. But the questions, the questions have come to me, and again I'll focus primarily on those questions that have come from my constituents.

They say to me: "How is it that in 1996 we would accept a report that would see a loss of two rural seats? How is it that in 1996 we would accept a report that would basically say that Edmonton should have one more seat and Calgary should have one more seat? Now, isn't that interesting," they say, because they've never heard anything from anybody in Edmonton and Calgary who says that they want more MLAs. Yet they've never heard anything from anybody in rural Alberta that said, "We want fewer MLAs." It's a rather interesting question, Mr. Speaker.

So I give them a copy of the Electoral Boundaries Commission report, and I ask them to go and read it. After they've read it, they come back to me with even more questions. They say, "Well, that's really kind of interesting, because now we really don't quite understand, and we perhaps are feeling a little more left out than we were before we even had a chance to look at the report and to hear any of the talk about it."

### 10:30

They're fundamentally unsure, Mr. Speaker. They're fundamentally unsure of what the future will bring and where we will be going with this particular process. Is this a process that in essence will see some more changes coming about in the next number of months or the next year or two or three, or is this process now going to follow through in terms of what it basically says in our election statutes legislation that basically would suggest, in terms of what some members have already said in their speeches, that the next time we will be looking at this matter again will come after the next two elections into the future, so that in essence we will be looking in the early years of the next millennium, when in fact there will be another reorganization of constituencies in the province of Alberta?

The fundamental question of "What is next?" along with "Why is this happening now?" and the unsureness about the future all seem to come together in terms of the discussion. There is great concern, Mr. Speaker. There is great interest as well as the concern, and the two of them go hand in hand.

Mr. Speaker, for the love of me, I could not explain to any of my constituents this matrix review that is contained in this report. I did graduate from high school, and I'm very proud of that. I've done a little bit more studying along the way too. I've read this report. I've taken the time to read it again. I've taken the time to read it a third time. Quite frankly, I don't quite understand the scientific methodology that someone is attempting to invent to fit a task that they were asked to do in 1995 and 1996.

I daresay that if you take this matrix and if even the best communicator in this Assembly were to go out in any town hall anywhere in Alberta and if you were to stand up in front of a crowd and if you were given 10 minutes or two hours – I don't

care if it's downtown Edmonton or downtown Fort Macleod, and I don't care if there are 10 people or a thousand people; take any of those options that you want – and if you were to stand up in front of those people and explain the matrix and what it means scientifically, I daresay you would be brilliant if you could do that. I simply do not have the ability to do that, and I don't know if I found anybody who has the ability. I'm sure that if I keep searching I will find someone who will do that. Whether or not it will come across is really the most interesting of all questions that I have.

In terms of dealing with one of the most fundamental questions in a democracy, fairness in representation in terms of a democracy, they'd ask me then, "How is it that you had these conclusions put forward by a committee?" Then they'd say to me: "Why weren't there any experienced former politicians involved as there have been in the past?" People who in fact understand the process, have had experience with the process, can understand what community means, can understand what community interest means, can listen to people, can hear people, and attempt to respond to them in the language they have learned to understand.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there are no experienced former politicians involved in this process. We also know that in the current world that we live in, there are some people who advocate suspicion for anyone who has the title "politician," and we also know that there are some who advocate suspicion of anybody who might be a former politician. But my premise in all of this is that, you know, life in Alberta is actually pretty good and pretty fair and pretty interesting in 1996. Those people who came before us must have done something right sometimes, maybe once, along the way so that we could have evolved to where we're actually living in 1996.

Then a further question, "Who are these people who were involved?" So I explained to them: some very nice, competent people, a Court of Queen's Bench judge, Judge Wachowich, a great guy. I had a great conversation with him. We had a wonderful exchange of views in Westlock, Alberta, and I really was quite pleasantly surprised to know the great interest that he took in my part of Alberta. He inquired about the roads and the conditions and that sort of thing. That was very, very good, as did the other people. But when you take five people and put them together, you have to have a dynamic that goes. They asked me, "Well, what do they know about us?" I said that I think most of them do have some inkling of what it is to be in this part of Alberta, that part of Alberta. So in fairness I have no criticism about the individuals who were involved, Mr. Speaker, other than the fact that there isn't anyone there who'd ever had that title "experienced former politician" or in fact "experienced current politician" who might have been involved because I do believe there are some things that you should have a multitude of viewpoints provided to.

To be involved in this system of governance in terms of the democratic system of governance is a high honour and a high privilege, Mr. Speaker. It's not something that is only abandoned to people who are derelicts of society, and I use the word "derelicts" of society in quotation marks because that is not meant to be a slur on any member of this particular Assembly. What it is to point out that there are some people who actually believe that the honourable men and women in this Assembly are not much higher than that on the totem pole. That's certainly not my view and never, ever has been.

The next question they asked me: "Well, did these individuals who we don't know have a hidden agenda? What was their game

plan? What was their reason for doing this? Did they go out with a view in mind that they were going to change this constituency or that constituency?" I said: "Well, no. I don't believe anybody had a hidden agenda, because I believe the direction that they were given at the outset, the direction that I believe the Assembly gave them at the outset, was to go forth, look at all the boundaries of the 83 constituencies in Alberta, and come back with the rationality as to why those 83 constituencies are there."

Now, they did it in the case of Barrhead-Westlock. They even wrote a whole paragraph in the report saying: this is fine; it meets all the municipal tests, all the municipal configurations. That was one of the mandated objectives of the electoral boundaries review that was done a number of years ago: to try and become as coterminous as much as possible with existing municipal boundaries in the province, make them coterminous with provincial electoral boundaries so that in essence people can understand what a boundary means. When you get in the rocket ship and you go a couple of hundred feet above the surface of the Earth, the interesting thing about it is, you know, Mr. Speaker, the farther you get away from the Earth, the less distinctive are the distinctions on the ground. You don't see lines on the ground. You don't see a line that says that this is the boundary between the MD of Westlock and the MD of Morinville or the county of Thorhild. You don't see a line that says that this is Saskatchewan and this is Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, in much the same way we wanted it simplified before, so in essence one of the principles you would think would have been extended through to 1996 would have been a simplification and in fact have as much coterminous boundary as you could possibly have.

So basically to answer the question, "Did they have a hidden agenda?" no, I don't think they did have a hidden agenda. Then they asked the most difficult question of all: why was this review even needed? Well, we've had a debate in this Assembly about that. The Assembly has agreed that the review was to take place, so that litany of discussion and debate has been given, Mr. Speaker. The review is under way. Hopefully, that review in fact to some will be conclusive.

When I look at the document, the Bill that basically set out what it was that was supposed to happen and I look at the Bill itself, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and if I look at section 16 of it, it said basically that the commission was to take into consideration the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

We all know there's great debate in terms of what effective representation means. Numerous colleagues before have talked about it, but it's interesting in the report itself. The commission itself seemed to have concluded what the conditions of effective representation are. Basically, it says that Madam Justice McLachlin said that the first is relative parity of voting power and basically says that that essentially is what that means in terms of the definition of those who wrote the report.

The commission was also to take a look at sparsity and density of population. It was to take a look at common community interests and community organizations, including those of Indian reserves and Métis settlements, and whenever possible the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. For those in this Assembly who twirled their eyes and couldn't quite understand what it was when I was talking about existing boundaries and saying, you know, when you got above the Earth

and you looked down, you did really see boundaries, I find it kind of interesting that the fourth item in terms of what the commission was supposed to have done was to actually look at community boundaries in our two urban centres and, again, wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries, the number of municipalities and the local authorities, geographical features including existing road systems and the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries. Then section 17 of that Act said:

The population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above nor more than 25% below the average population.

That's pretty clear, Mr. Speaker, what the commission was to do.

Well, when I read the report again, again, and again – I've read it four times now, Mr. Speaker – I wonder why, then, the mean seems to be not 25 percent but seems to have been closer to 15 percent. It seems to have been a targeted figure. I don't understand that, Mr. Speaker, because when a Legislative Assembly passes a law, the law becomes the dominant theme or direction provided to those who are to enforce it. Here's a situation where very clearly it says in the Act that this is what the standard is. Yet we have a report that moves away from what the standard is and what we're supposed to be dealing with.

#### 10:40

These are tough questions, Mr. Speaker, to explain to people when you're not sure how anybody got away with that. It's not the easiest thing in the world to do, and I think we have a responsibility to explain not to one another here in this Assembly as much as we have to explain from where we've come and to those who sent us here. They're very, very interesting questions in terms of factors and variances and the like.

Mr. Speaker, I read with interest the comments of colleagues in this Assembly. They made them in *Hansard* in the last number of days with respect to this particular Bill. I don't mean to provide précis comments, but perhaps some of these are telling in terms of where I want to conclude this evening with my comments on electoral boundaries.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West in *Hansard* says on page 2183:

I would encourage members to direct the commission to plan for the future in a little stronger fashion and come up with a Bill that is more accurate and reflective of the province of Alberta than Bill 46 is today.

I'm not sure what the position is of the Member for Calgary-North West, but I presume he's going to vote against the Bill, Mr. Speaker.

The very distinguished Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development made some comments. Basically he says, "I have a great deal of difficulty when somebody makes some rules and then doesn't even abide by them themselves." He does explain what all this means, Mr. Speaker. So there's some confusion in another hon. member in terms of what this report is all about.

Mr. Speaker, another member, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, says on page 2185: "I think there are too many MLAs in principle." I'm not sure what that really means, whether there are too many MLAs that are elected, whether he wants to reduce the number of MLAs, or what the position is there. I gather that at least one member believes that there are too many MLAs.

Then the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud says, "I think, as I say, that this Bill isn't as cut and dried as it looks."

The Member for Little Bow gave an impassioned plea on behalf of his constituents, as I hope I have done on behalf of my constituents, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. [some applause]

MR. CHADI: Jeez, thank you, you guys. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I have some comments to make on second reading of this Bill, Bill 46, the Electoral Divisions Act. With respect to changes that were proposed in this Bill pertaining to my riding of Edmonton-Roper, I think they're reasonably good changes, changes that everyone in Edmonton-Roper accepts. I think the most interesting and reasonable change is the change in name, because Edmonton-Roper really is meaningless to those folks that live in the northwest part of Edmonton, being the Castle Downs area.

For a long time it was to the point where when you mentioned you were representing Edmonton-Roper, it meant really nothing to a great deal of people that lived there, let alone to the people of Edmonton or the people of Alberta: "Well, where is Edmonton-Roper?" I think changing the name to reflect the area of the city that you represent is a good move, and I of course accept that change.

Another change that will take place in Edmonton-Roper besides the name is that we are growing to a point where we've now adopted in this Bill two areas that should have been part of the riding in the first place if the 1992 changes were to be considered reasonable. Those are the areas of Oxford and Skyview. Now, these border the riding of Edmonton-Roper. They have everything in common with Edmonton-Roper and absolutely nothing in common with Edmonton-Mayfield. As a matter of fact, you've got to cross a couple of freeways, you've got to cross the railroad tracks, and you've got to go probably five or six miles of urban setting before you get to the heart of Edmonton-Mayfield. Yet you can throw a stone across Oxford and Skyview from Roper. It makes an awful lot of sense that these two subdivisions are now part of Edmonton-Roper, and the natural boundary is the St. Albert Trail to the west. Those are some of the things that we lobbied for and got, and I'm grateful for that. I'm sure the Member for Edmonton-Mayfield is probably pretty much upset because those are great Liberal subdivisions.

Anyway, I do have some concerns with respect to the Bill itself and the principle of the Bill. Prior to the 1993 election I recall my old hometown of Lac La Biche launching a court challenge on the boundaries that were proposed at the time. I'm certain they had some legitimate concerns at that point in time, so much so that there were other intervenors that were involved, and they actually got the government to initiate the review that subsequently brought about this Bill.

Now, the member that represents Lac La Biche-St. Paul spoke already on second reading of this Bill. I look at *Hansard*, and I see the comments made by that hon. member. It's amazing, Mr. Speaker, that the member representing the one community that was so vocal and so instrumental in bringing about this court action, that brought about this Bill and this debate that we are embarking on in this Legislature tonight, never said a word about it, as a matter of fact never said a word about his entire riding. That member spoke about a totally different riding on behalf of the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod. I would have thought that if anybody spoke to this Bill, it would have been the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul about the riding that was affected so much so that it brought about these changes that are before us today.

MR. DUNFORD: It shows the great sacrifice he made.

MR. CHADI: It was a great sacrifice. I'm sure there will be a great sacrifice. I'm sure the good citizens of Lac La Biche are going to look at that sacrifice with great interest. In any event, I would hope that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul comes forward in committee on this Bill and addresses those concerns of the community, my old hometown and the community he represents.

Why I find myself in a difficult position to support this Bill totally in principle is because I firmly believe that the mandate that was given initially to the committee – under the circumstances it probably needed to be, but in my opinion it is wrong. The outcome of bringing back 83 ridings is in my opinion too much. I don't have a problem with the urban/rural split or the 15 percent variance or whatever the case may be. I just think that when we have 26 Members of Parliament representing Alberta, we should probably have no more than double that representing the constituents of this province, and that would make it 52 MLAs. The reason I say that is the number that was passed around for the longest time – let's reduce it by 20 percent. That brings it down to 65 MLAs. Well, why 65? Why not 69 or 79? Why 20 percent? We have 83. Why 83? It makes no sense at all. I mean, it's almost like why is 12 a dozen? Nothing fits. It just doesn't make sense sometimes; it's not something that is realistic.

**10:50**

When you look at the boundaries in this province and you ask people about the municipal boundaries or the provincial boundaries or the federal boundaries, they're at a loss because there are too many. There's too much. People don't really realize who their Members of Parliament are or where they represent, because they don't know the boundaries. Why don't we become consistent, if at all possible, as much as possible, so that people, particularly Albertans who are not too involved in the process – we are involved. We understand our boundaries. We've driven them. We've door-knocked them. We've been to all parts of those, probably every single road, whether it was rural or urban. We've covered them all. But there are many, many, many individuals that aren't involved in the process, as we are, and they find those boundaries too confusing.

I would think that if you took the 26 federal boundaries and said, "Well, why don't we just cut them in half or get two people to represent each one," that would give you 52. In the city of Edmonton or the city of Calgary rural representatives are suggesting, you know, that we've got too many. Well, perhaps we do. For that argument I'm saying – here is an urban MLA suggesting it be cut down, not to have 18 or an increase to 19. I'm saying drop it, bring it down to 12. We've got six in Edmonton. I think we've got six in Calgary. That would give you 12 in each city. Fifty-two to me makes a lot of sense. Splitting those boundaries in half gives us fixed boundaries already, something that can be consistent with the federal elections.

Perhaps maybe when the federal government changes those boundaries – because they're going to do it undoubtedly – they can be done in conjunction with the province of Alberta. Maybe what we can do as well is work with municipalities in the same fashion. I believe that in the city of Edmonton there are six wards. I stand to be corrected. From those six wards two aldermen are elected for each ward. Now, that's what I'm saying about the federal boundaries and the six MPs. Two would be elected for each one of those. That would give 12, the same number of aldermen that are elected to represent the city. That would be the same number that we would elect in terms of MLAs

to represent the city. It makes a lot of sense to me, and I would hope to think that we could start somewhere. It's too bad that we didn't do it and give the mandate to the commission to do something along those lines back then.

I know it sounds dramatic, bringing it from 83 down to 52. It does sound dramatic and perhaps maybe too much to accept all at once. It's radical change. Maybe we need the minister – who is he? – of economic development now to take on such a task. He's pretty good at doing those cuts. I would think it makes an awful lot of sense, and I would hope that future politicians and legislators in this province take those comments to heart and initiate those kinds of changes.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'm going to take my seat. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to rise and speak on Bill 46, the Electoral Divisions Act. I want to begin by voicing my profound disappointment in the proposed loss in Calgary-Egmont of the communities of Ogden, Millican, and Lynnwood. Those communities were added to Calgary-Egmont in the previous boundary review, so they haven't been with us very long, but now they are proposed to move to the constituency of Calgary-East. Now, Ogden, Millican, and Lynnwood are great communities, and it's an honour to represent them in this Legislature. Many of those families are third and fourth generation Calgarians, and not one poll in that area voted for the policies perhaps politely described as leftist. So Calgary-East may be receiving a solid core of great Calgarians who know what they want as a government.

In the event that Bill 46 does pass, I'll be very pleased to welcome back to Calgary-Egmont the residents of Kingsland, another great Calgary community, who incidentally were part of Calgary-Egmont prior to the previous boundary review. So here we are; it seems that we've come full circle with this current review. But I will welcome them back to Calgary-Egmont and will work hard to fill the shoes of their previous MLA, the hon. Premier of this province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's electoral boundaries law has seen much scrutiny in recent years. It has a lot of history. It has been considered by numerous bodies: in 1989 a select special committee of this Legislature, in 1991 the Alberta Court of Appeal, in 1991-92 the Electoral Boundaries Commission, in 1992 another select special committee of the Legislature, in 1994 the Alberta Court of Appeal, and now in 1996 the current review. In all these reviews the electoral boundaries have been found to comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and with the rulings that have been set out by the Supreme Court, but we are not closer today to a system that defines and supports the concept of effective representation than we were back in 1989, and at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now, with six reviews by various bodies in less than a decade, we're no closer to that.

What did the commission have to consider with respect to setting boundaries? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock enumerated those. They must look at the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and as I've already said, none of the previous reviews said that we were in violation of that in the first place. They have to look at sparsity and density of population, common community interests and community organizations, existing community and municipal boundaries, the number of municipalities, geographic features – roads, rivers, et cetera – and the desirability of clear

and understandable boundaries that make sense to the residents and that are wanted by the residents. Clearly, from the debate we have heard so far, the commission seems not to have followed its own terms of reference. Many members in this House have described in detail the breaches with respect to the terms of reference that should have been paramount in the commission's deliberations and decisions. It seems that the principle of effective representation and the variance formulas that have been adjudicated by the Supreme Court of Canada are not good enough for Alberta, and this commission saw fit to vary the law of this land.

In 1989 the Supreme Court of B.C. did a thorough review of the right to vote and agreed that this right is really the right to effective representation, not equality of voting power. That court suggests that a 25 percent variance would be acceptable. In 1991 the Supreme Court of Canada reviewed Saskatchewan boundaries, which incidentally are quite similar in structure and nature to Alberta's, and approved the rule which permits population variance of 25 percent from the average riding. I want to read a short excerpt from that decision. It's very short, but I think it's very instructive.

It may be useful to mention some of the factors other than equality of voting power which figure in the analysis. One of the most important is the fact that it is more difficult to represent rural ridings than urban. The material before us suggests that not only are rural ridings harder to serve because of difficulty in transport and communications, but that rural voters make greater demands on their elected representatives, whether because of the absence of alternative resources to be found in urban centres or for other reasons. Thus, the goal of effective representation may justify somewhat lower voter populations in rural areas.

Now, that's what the court said.

**11:00**

In the most recent review, the commission in its wisdom decided to change the law that had been tested by the Supreme Court of this land. It changed the law from 25 percent variance to something that appears to be like 15 percent. Why, Mr. Speaker, did the commission feel that in Alberta we needed to

vary and change this variance that had been approved and reviewed so many times before? Are we to believe that this commission was above the law? Now, in 1991 the Alberta Court of Appeal agreed that equality of voting power was not required by the Charter. It also noted that courts should generally not interfere with the judgment of the Legislature when it comes to selecting electoral boundaries. The court approved the population variance of plus or minus 25 percent of the provincial average, and as well it also approved a different variance of 50 percent plus or minus for special consideration divisions.

So what we've had is an inordinate number of reviews by various bodies at great expense, and we're no closer to an appropriate definition or appropriate boundaries. What we have now is an unanimous report that does little more than tinker with boundaries without reference to the terms of reference that should have been used by the commission in the first place.

I have great difficulty supporting something that I know is wrong and that so obviously does not achieve the will of the people in all of the 83 constituencies of this province. I would remind all members that the Court of Appeal in 1994 did not invalidate the existing boundaries, but what we have now is worse than what we had before. We now have two more urban ridings in the very cities where the people consider there are too many MLAs. You know, if there are going to be reductions, everybody understands that it's not going to come from rural ridings, that it will come from urban ridings.

So what are we to do with this unanimous report? Is it appropriate to allow four citizens chaired by a judge to change the law of this land, or is that the function of this Legislature? Mr. Speaker, in my view, the report should be rejected and a process begun to define once and for all what effective representation means to the people of Alberta and how many MLAs they want to have represent them.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

[At 11:05 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]