

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, August 26, 1996 8:00 p.m.
Date: 96/08/26
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole
 [Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Bill 46 Electoral Divisions Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have an amendment by the Member for Fort McMurray. In the first amendment that he moved there is a spelling error. Will the House agree that we just put a "y" in there in the spelling of Fort Chipewyan? All agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We all agreed.
The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank all Members of the Legislative Assembly for agreeing to correct the typographical error so that we could deal with this issue on a substantive basis. I will acknowledge to all Members of the Legislative Assembly that this is a late development, because it had not been made clear to me that we would be creating tripartite names, although I recognize there is one tripartite name: Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

So with that comment, this amendment would change the name Athabasca-Wabasca in schedule 1 of Bill 46 to read Athabasca-Wabasca-Fort Chipewyan. There are no territorial, no boundary changes, no other changes here. All this amendment does is pay proper respect and due deference to Alberta's oldest settlement. Alberta's oldest settlement of Fort Chipewyan will be recognized now publicly and audibly and orally every time the hon. member from that riding stands up to speak in this Assembly.

I would move this amendment.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Chairman, just briefly on the amendment. A name change, of course, I guess to some areas is important, but in this particular case – like I've said earlier this afternoon, I sat on the last boundaries review, and at the time, if I remember rightly, there was no recommendation to include in fact specifically Fort Chipewyan in the name of that particular riding. The biggest concern the constituents had of course – and I would hope the Member for Fort McMurray would recognize that – is the quality of services that the individuals would receive. What they recommended at the time was to have a constituency across northern Alberta represented by their own MLA. I think that's what we should concentrate on as soon as possible, possibly the next review of the boundaries.

In relation to the name itself there are other things to consider, Mr. Chairman. The changes in the signage and all other changes on correspondence could cost into the thousands of dollars at this time, which I don't think are really necessary. The other thing of course is that when you talk about forts – I won't expand on the issue of forts and why they were built. You people can figure that out. It may not be the most popular thing to the native people.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I feel compelled this evening to speak to the amendment as presented by the Member for Fort McMurray. I think it's a great amendment. I listened to the debate from the Member for Fort McMurray, as did the sitting Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, and I feel that this amendment is in keeping with what's been happening lately with respect to the three names in the constituencies.

I think paying tribute to Fort Chipewyan and naming Fort Chipewyan in the constituency name is one of the greatest things we could do in this Legislative Assembly. It is the oldest community in Alberta. It continues to thrive as a wonderful, thriving community.

MR. MAGNUS: Have you been there, Sine?

MR. CHADI: Many times. I've been there many, many times. I can assure the hon. member who asked me if I've been there that I've spent much time in Fort Chipewyan.

There are no roads into Fort Chip, Mr. Chairman, and there are no roads out of Fort Chip with the exception of the winter road. The highways that lead into Fort Chipewyan have led there for probably thousands and thousands of years, and they're the waterways that travel through there. So during the summertime you can either travel by boat or by air.

Fort Chipewyan is deep-rooted in history in this province, somewhat like the community I grew up in, Mr. Chairman, and that is Lac La Biche. They have an awful lot in common. I'm grateful for the fact that Lac La Biche is named in a constituency now. I think it would make eminent sense to name Fort Chipewyan in the constituency as well.

I heard the argument by the sitting Member for Athabasca-Wabasca saying that it would cost a lot of money to change the name now. I don't believe that. I don't hear an argument as to where that money would be spent if it were to be changed. Here's a perfect opportunity right now to pay tribute and give credence to that community up in northern Alberta that for many years was known – as Gretzky is to Alberta or to Canada or to Edmonton or West Edmonton Mall is, Fort Chipewyan was to Alberta.

I can tell you an example. [interjection] This is honest-to-goodness fact. The Minister of Energy is making some comments now, and I can't hear what's she's saying, but it doesn't matter because I want to say what I have to say here. Years ago when I was in New York City dealing with muskrats purchased here in Alberta and sold at the fur auctions in New York, Mr. Chairman, I recall somebody coming up and saying, "Well, these are New York rats." They were selling muskrats, and they called them New York rats. I said to them, "Well, I have a muskrat from Alberta that's better than your New York rat." Then they said, "Well, what is it?" I said, "It's a Fort Chip rat."

To this day the muskrats of the Fort Chipewyan delta are labeled Fort Chip muskrats. The Fort Chip muskrats are renowned throughout the world. When the Fort Chip muskrat goes up for auction, I can assure the members of this Assembly that people around the world know where Fort Chipewyan is.

I believe it would be paying respect to that community. With those words, I'll take my seat, and I'll hear more debate.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I support the amendment of changing the name Athabasca-Wabasca to

Athabasca-Wabasca-Fort Chipewyan. This summer and for the last five years I talked to First Nations peoples from up in Fort Chipewyan. They feel isolated and left out in Alberta. They feel left out because in the summer there are no roads up there. You have to fly in, or I think you can take the river up. They want to know that they're on the map, as the Member for Edmonton-Roper has said. They have been put on the map by this MLA from Edmonton-Roper, and they want to continue.

There is a great tourism trade up there that can be developed. They want it to be known around the world. This wants to be continued. It would be an important point. They can hear it over and over again. Other Albertans could go up there and engage in tourism, fishing in the summer, hunting in the fall and so on. There's higher unemployment up there amongst the First Nations people. This could really increase the employment if they used it right and worked with it. That's important. [interjection] Yes. Describes it.

When you have the whole north – and you can tell almost half of Alberta's in the north. So it's very important that we do this. Here we have with Athabasca-Wabasca close, whereas you have Fort Chipewyan way in the north on one of the greatest lakes in Alberta up there where there's a lot of fishing and a lot of tourism. Yes, this is the type of thing we have to recognize, like I have said. [interjection] It does. It describes what it's like up there: a fort, still sparsely settled, and where they still are engaged in one of the earliest trades we had, the fur trade. This is a very important industry to them. Also, they want to move forward. This would also assist the electronic highway that is up there now, with computers and that. It would allow the students to say with pride, "I'm from the constituency of Athabasca-Wabasca-Fort Chipewyan."

With that, I strongly support this motion.

AN HON. MEMBER: You can't even say. Say that again. I'll bet you can't say it twice in a row. [interjections]

8:10

MR. BRACKO: I was ready to conclude, but I think I'd better add a few more words to it now. They're encouraging me to speak more.

I'm disappointed that the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca is not supporting this motion, not supporting the First Nations people up there, to recognize them and to assist in this very important change that would take place.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude and urge every Member of this Legislative Assembly who is here tonight to think about it carefully and move forward and vote for the new name as in the amendment made by the Member for Fort-McMurray.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The next amendment that I want to address the Legislative Assembly on should in my respectful estimation pass with relative ease. I see that the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is laughing, but he should wait till he hears the comments. Perhaps it was to award him a million dollars for his outstanding abilities and service here. Alas, I stretch the truth.

DR. TAYLOR: What's new? You always stretch the truth. [interjections]

MR. GERMAIN: I never stretch the truth.

The hon. members say, "What's new?" Well, what's new, Mr. Chairman, is this very important amendment concerning the description of the riding boundary of Fort McMurray. Now, what the difficulty is, if all members will look at part 54 of the schedule of this particular Bill . . .

MR. DINNING: Where?

MR. GERMAIN: Part 54. It's on page 33. The hon. Provincial Treasurer asks for further guidance as to the page, which tells me that I have his unequivocal attention on this important issue.

MR. DINNING: I'm not very good with numbers.

MR. GERMAIN: He isn't very good at numbers. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, he says – and *Hansard* will record and dutifully preserve for time immemorial or until the pages burn, whichever first occurs – that he's not very good with numbers. This is indeed the case. A humorous anecdote is said of the Provincial Treasurer. When he was Minister of Education, he was addressing a group of 6,000 teachers, and he said that to get students' marks up, we would just have to get all students above the provincial average. The Provincial Treasurer realized that that could never be. The Provincial Treasurer realized much too late and significantly long after his comment that he had forgotten that an average is of course a moving target, and it would be impossible to get everybody over the average. But his heart was definitely in the right place as he pounded and punted through that portfolio, at least leaving it with kindergarten intact.

I'm tempted by hecklers to digress, so I return now to Fort McMurray. In the description of Fort McMurray on this particular page 33 it describes Fort McMurray. It says basically that the riding of Fort McMurray will follow the boundaries of Fort McMurray. The difficulty with that, Mr. Chairman, is that you will recall – in fact I sent you personally a memorial keepsake souvenir of the new amalgamation of the municipality of Wood Buffalo, which occurred on March 31, 1995, at which time the municipal boundaries of Fort McMurray, theoretically at least, disappeared as it became subsumed in the new larger riding of Wood Buffalo.

Now, there is virtually no precedent about this, because we have rarely in Canadian politics had such an event take place. My concern is that it would be embarrassing collectively to this Legislative Assembly, embarrassing to the Chief Electoral Officer, and certainly embarrassing to the MLA and the candidates that run in the riding of Fort McMurray if in fact Fort McMurray's description for the purpose of boundaries was a nullity.

It may be arguable and may be soundly arguable, Mr. Chairman, that in fact the existing wording would be sufficient to describe the boundary, but out of an abundance of caution it is our proposal to move an amendment which basically restates in its entirety the cornerstones of the riding but indicates that we are talking about the Fort McMurray city boundary as it existed on March 31, 1995. That, in fact, should clear up any possible ambiguity. Of course, there would be no reason for any Member of the Legislative Assembly to vote against this particular amendment, because it is not a politically driven amendment. It is simply a practical amendment.

It may be that other Members in this Legislative Assembly – the hon. minister of intergovernmental affairs may be able to convince and argue that the existing definition covers. If that's the case, then that's fine. It may be that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs will be able to point to some wording in the amalgamation order that makes it clear that the boundaries of Fort McMurray are preserved, at least notionally, for things such as this. Out of an abundance of caution, it seems to me that we could clear that up by restating completely the boundary description but putting in a qualifying phrase that basically says that it will be based on the directions of the Fort McMurray city boundary as it existed on March 31, 1995.

With that explanation, Mr. Chairman, I move amendment A3, standing in my name, which has been distributed to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. For the record, this amendment will read as follows.

The member to move that the schedule be amended by striking out the description of Fort McMurray and substituting the following:

Starting at the northeast corner of section 34, township 89, range 10, west of the 4th meridian; then in a general easterly, southerly, westerly and northerly direction along the Fort McMurray city boundary, as it existed on March 31, 1995, to the starting point.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my place and hear the arguments, if any, that possibly could be raised against this particular amendment.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're here tonight speaking again to the Electoral Divisions Bill that's in front of us. We're now talking to the Bill in the Committee of the Whole stage, which looks at the Bill on a clause-by-clause basis. The Bill appears to be pretty straightforward. It lists the electoral divisions and the schedule and then gives a description of the various locations around each constituency, where the boundaries are for the constituency associations that then will make up the 83 constituencies in the province.

Of course, this Act comes into force on proclamation. My guess is that this will be one of the speediest Bills to be proclaimed in the history of the Legislative Assembly in that, as I'd mentioned earlier, a lot of the Conservative constituency associations are looking at having their founding meetings starting the first week in September and, my guess is, trying to beat the deadline put to the constituency associations by the Premier to have those founding meetings done prior to the policy convention that the Conservatives are having in September. Then, of course, we see the ads in the paper that look at the nominations beginning in the constituency associations, and again we're looking at an early election. So my guess is that once we look at the particulars within the Bill and the particular clauses within this Bill, we will see the proclamation of the Act, which comes into force on proclamation, being very speedy.

8:20

As a matter of fact, if I might digress just a little bit, the Premier this afternoon in question period was yelling across to myself that the election will be soon, soon, soon. As opposed to the Premier being chastised, for some reason I was the one that was chastised by the Speaker, because the Speaker was standing,

for engaging in conversation with the Premier of this province on an important issue like when an election was going to be held. I was so busy talking with the Premier that I did not see the Speaker stand, and unfortunately I was chastised. I think a share of the blame should be on both sides of the Legislative Assembly. The Premier should have taken some onus and said, "Well, I too was talking, Mr. Speaker, while you were standing."

But that is a small digression, and what we're looking at, really, is the essence of this particular Bill that's before us. When I look at 35 – I guess my constituency has become number 35, Edmonton-Meadowlark – as I indicated earlier, the changes have been minimal to the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. I have lost a community called Glenwood, which borders Stony Plain and approximately 156th Street to about 170th Street and 95th Avenue. When you look at the description here of Edmonton-Meadowlark, you see in fact that those particular areas, that rectangle as it were, are taken out of the constituency and fall within the drastically changed constituency of Edmonton-Glenora.

I'm sure the Member for Edmonton-Glenora will have lots to say about what has happened with his particular constituency, which is 30, Edmonton-Glenora, and the new constituency that will be formed in Edmonton, which is 39, Edmonton-Riverview. There are distinct problems, especially with the Edmonton-Riverview constituency. It is appropriately named because it is crossing the river, but in effect what it doesn't do is follow the natural lines that the people in Edmonton have come to understand would be constituency lines for the provincial elections; in other words, that there would be constituencies that would be north of the river and there would be constituencies that would be south of the river, as opposed to this amalgam of the territory. Because there is no Member for Edmonton-Riverview at this point of time, I am sure that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who is most impacted by the changes with Edmonton-Riverview, will be addressing those particular changes.

There are other issues that we see. As we had talked about earlier with the amendment that was passed the afternoon, Airdrie, number 43 in here, has now become a different riding, and I think that will provide for some confusion with regards to this particular section here. As well, we see that there are a couple of areas in Calgary whose names have changed, and we have talked about that one as well.

I find it interesting when we look at Calgary-Nose Creek, which is the constituency the Minister of Education now is the representative of, that this is the riding that will on September 3, I believe it is, have their founding constituency association meeting. The minister seems to have been in a big rush to ensure that the meeting would be as quick as possible. Perhaps he's concerned that there are some contenders who would like to take his place in the Legislative Assembly. By having such a quick founding meeting and, I would imagine, a quick nomination meeting thereafter, he is hoping to avoid any contenders to be the candidate for that particular area.

With the rush that we're seeing with Calgary-Nose Creek – and I believe Calgary-Fish Creek as well is hot on the heels of Calgary-Nose Creek. Calgary-Fish Creek is number 10 in this particular Bill. The nomination meeting for Calgary-Fish Creek is, I believe, September 7, and that is right on the heels of the nomination meeting for Calgary-Nose Creek. Again, perhaps that particular member is concerned that there will be contenders for her spot, and perhaps the changes to Calgary-Fish Creek and the changes, as I elucidated, in this particular Bill for Calgary-Nose Creek are changes that would make it easier, perhaps, for

someone else to contest and possibly win the nomination meeting. So these are definitely concerns of the individuals in the Legislative Assembly with regards to the changes in the particular constituencies we see in front of us.

One of the issues that comes up over and over again is consultation. Although there was consultation up front in the process – and I would like to commend the commission on the work they have done; it is not easy to sit down and redraw the map into 83 little portions and try to meet everyone's needs – perhaps this is one of the things that the Legislative Assembly needs to look at, given the impact this will have on voting patterns and potential outcomes of an election. This may be something that should go back to the commission perhaps, given some of the comments in the Legislative Assembly and outside of the Legislative Assembly, and perhaps also go back to Albertans for further feedback. Now, if the Legislative Assembly does not consider that to be required, then of course I will abide, as will my colleagues, by the decisions of the Legislative Assembly.

The reality is that there seems to be a real rush to pass this particular Bill. When there's a rush to pass a Bill, there are problems that tend to occur, as with some of the government Bills we've seen before us in the past. For instance, if I look at what was then entitled, I believe, Bill 19 – and there were two Bills in one of our first sessions within the Legislative Assembly that looked at totally revamping health care and education within this province. When we actually looked at the clauses, looked at them clause by clause as we are tonight with this particular Bill, to see whether there were some problems with the Bill, there was such a rush to restructure, there was such a rush to change the way health care and education were delivered in this province that in fact what we had happen was the government at one point in time bringing in 19 pages, I believe, of amendments on Bill 20, which was the Regional Health Authorities Act, and in a sense totally reworking that particular Act. Again, there was no consultation on that. That was not sent forward, and perhaps had we been as wise as we are now in the procedures of the Legislative Assembly, we could have asked the Chair at that point to leave the Chair and that Bill could have been reintroduced in the next session after much sober thought.

Similarly, when we look at the Electoral Divisions Act and we look at some of the changes that are made here – in fact, not less than three or four days after this particular Bill has been introduced in the Legislative Assembly, we're hit with an amendment that's put forward by the government side. We then have two excellent amendments that were put forward by the Member for Fort McMurray, the very honourable Member for Fort McMurray, who has only the best interests of not only his constituents at heart but also the constituents of Fort Chipewyan, who are struggling for recognition and unfortunately were not seen to be worthy by this Legislative Assembly of having that recognition.

Now, when we see this – and we're only into day four, I believe, of the debate on this particular Bill – we know that there are probably other areas that could be looked at, other amendments that could be brought forward with regards to the Bill, for instance Calgary-Elbow. I'm just pulling it out of a hat. Perhaps those boundaries are not quite right. I turn to another page: Edmonton-Glenora. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has some things to say about those particular boundaries. Grande Prairie-Wapiti: are the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti a hundred percent satisfied?

8:30

When I look at some of the members that spoke so eloquently in second reading on the government side, there appear to be

some very grave concerns with the boundaries as they're outlined. Yet surprisingly, even though there were all these grave concerns expressed by the Member for Barrhead-Westlock and, I believe, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and the Member for Cardston-Chief Mountain on the clauses within this Bill, either in the Legislative Assembly or out of the Legislative Assembly, even though we've had all this representation, when there was the voice vote in second reading, in fact there was not one government member that said no.

In fact, every government member that was present – and as we all know, there are at least 30 present each evening and each afternoon in order to ensure that they can outvote the Liberals if need be – there was not one murmur from the government side. Hopefully when we do the vote, we can go through each section. We could go through, one, Athabasca-Wabasca and ask for a vote on that. We can ask for a vote on Lesser Slave Lake. We could ask for the vote on Calgary-Bow, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-Cross, Calgary-Currie. We could go through 83 of the constituencies. Chinook is one that I would be interested in to see how the members would definitely vote on that particular one.

If we were to go through each and every one and then juxtapose that versus what those individuals have said in the Legislative Assembly, I think we would be surprised. I think that though on record those individuals may well have said, "Oh, this is terrible; this is not what we thought the Act would be; this is not what we thought the divisions would be," in fact what we would find is that there will be not one murmur of dissent from the government side. In fact, what we would find, as we found in second reading and as we're finding right now in the Committee of the Whole stage, there's not one government member that's willing to get up and say publicly, "This is a problem." I believe that's because of the rush.

Though I did digress, it was very pertinent to this Act and to the individual clauses within this Act, because as the Premier sat there, he very clearly said that the election will be soon. In order for the election to be soon, there need to be new electoral boundaries. In order for the election to be soon, there needs to be a redistribution of the vote for Alberta to be called a true democracy. In order for the election to be soon, I would imagine the government members have been told – and unless we see otherwise, I guess that is the case – very clearly: "You can get up and say whatever you want, but when it comes to the vote, you will not vote against this Bill. When it comes to the vote, you can leave the room if it's a standing vote, but you will not vote against this Bill." It would be interesting to see half of the government members leave the room. That is, I'm sure, what has been happening behind the scenes. If that is not the case, then there is no real rush to pass this Bill. There is no real rush not to be able to deal with each one of these constituencies as they are outlined in this particular Bill, to look at them in detail, to make sure that there are no more amendments that anyone has as they look through and read everything that's in here. This is a very, very long Bill. It is 68 pages long and requires a fair amount of in-depth analysis.

DR. TAYLOR: Keep on the filibuster.

MS LEBOVICI: Now, I heard something about a filibuster in the background here, and one of the interesting things with Bill 20 was that even though the government members cried "filibuster," even though the government members said, "Oh, the Liberals are delaying," the reality was that you needed the time. You needed

the time to bring in 19 pages of amendments. You needed the time to deal with some of the considerations that we had brought forward. Quite honestly, you don't have the ability to do it all, much as you would like to think you do. The government does not have the ability to look at every single angle. That's why you have a government and you have an opposition: so that the opposition can bring forward suggestions, can bring forward good ideas, so that the opposition can bring forward the opinions of those that are not represented by the government members. There is a real need for the give-and-take that the Legislative Assembly provides. When there is a rush – and we have seen this over and over again. We've had closure how many times in this Legislative Assembly? Can anyone remember? We've had closure so many times that it's quite frankly shameful. We outdo the federal government, we outdo every single other government with regards to closure.

DR. TAYLOR: And we're proud of it.

MS LEIBOVICI: Though the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is proud of closure and is proud of curtailing debate in the Legislative Assembly and, I'm sure, would prefer not to have the give-and-take that a democracy provides, would prefer to have the ability to dictate to the people of Alberta what the policies and directions will be, this unfortunately is not the case. In fact, there are legitimate concerns. In fact, there are legitimate suggestions that the opposition does provide. Again I can point to the example of the Member for Fort McMurray.

As we point out the different areas in this particular Bill, there is some government researcher somewhere saying: "Oh, well, that's a point. Maybe we need to bring in another amendment. Maybe we should call Edmonton-Glenora something else. Maybe we should call Edmonton-Meadowlark something else. Maybe we should call Bow Valley, which was part of it, something else. Maybe we should amalgamate . . ." [Ms Leibovici's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 46, a very important Bill to the constituents of Chinook. I listened very patiently to the previous speaker, and I'm going to read *Hansard* to see if there was anything in that discussion that contributed to a better Bill, because I really was quite mystified – "mystified" is a good word – as to where the debate on the actual Bill occurred. However, my time should not be spent in making comments about other members' speeches. It should be spent in representing the people that I was elected to represent in this constituency.

The first thing I want to acknowledge, Mr. Chairman, is that the boundaries commission had a very difficult task. As I read through the *Hansard* for the many, many people who came from my constituency to be present at the boundaries hearings, almost without exception they recognized that. I am proud to represent a very large, very rural, very independent, very self-reliant group of people, and I am very proud of the submissions that they made to that commission, because they made sense, they asked for very little, and they asked it in a way that I think anyone could understand and respect.

8:40

For that reason, Mr. Chairman, I am going to support Bill 46, although it has very significant changes to the riding of Chinook.

As I went through the second round of representations that were made by my constituents at those hearings, they asked that the municipalities remain intact. I must say that the interim report was devastating for that area. It would have split the special areas, which is a very special part of this province. For those of you are not aware of it, it's an area of this province that suffered great drought in the '30s. Many people left, and much of the land went up for taxes. Much of it was taken over, and the special areas were formed as a Crown corporation of the government. I'm proud to say today that the special areas 2, 3, and 4 is governed by a local advisory committee, that it is a proud contributor to the economic well-being of this province, and that the land, although it's fragile, is being well maintained. I'm proud to say that through the drought years less land was blowing in that constituency than in many other parts of Alberta, which I think speaks to the sound management, sound good sense, and sound government of that part of the province.

Many of those people drove miles – I mean over a hundred miles in some instances – to come to those meetings. It wasn't 10 blocks and worry about a place to park; it was miles to make their wishes known. They asked that that municipality remain intact, and I have to say that in this boundaries commission report that in effect has happened. The special areas is the major part. It's some 6 million to 7 million acres of my constituency, and it is intact. Unfortunately, the county of Paintearth, which had indicated they would like to remain in that area, has been changed, but the extension west probably is as good a travel pattern as you can get.

If members would look at the boundaries commission report, look at the map in that, they will see an extremely large constituency. If you look, you'll find larger ones, but the difference is that every part of this constituency is populated, every part of it. The unfortunate part of this map is that it shows primarily Oyen, Acadia Valley, Hanna, Morrin, Drumheller. Going down Highway 9, it leaves out Sibbald, then Oyen, then Cereal, then Chinook, then Youngstown, then the two little hamlets of Stanmore and Scotfield, Richdale, then Hanna, Craigmyle, Delia, Munson, and Michichi. That's only on the number 9. Then you go south of there and you leave out places like Cessford, Pollockville, Sunnynook, Wardlow. If you go north, it leaves out the what I call significant communities of Altario, Compeer, Consort, and Veteran, and it leaves out some little hamlets that are important to me, which is about the area that I live in, such as Esther, New Brigden, Sedalia, and the little place that's somewhat famous for its name, Hemaruka. It leaves out the Spondins of the world. It leaves out the Garden Plain communities.

Mr. Chairman, I don't leave them out. Every one of those areas has people living there. Every one of those people makes a contribution to this province. We do not ask for much in the way of social programs in that area, as I say. There is a low crime rate, I'll agree. There is a low drug usage. There is a low welfare rate. There's an extremely low unemployment rate. The last I looked it was somewhere around 2, 2 and a half percent. That's because most people are self-employed and self-reliant.

I want to just raise a couple of things in my comments, Mr. Chairman, that were made at the commission hearings, and one is a bit of history that might be good for all of us and add a little levity perhaps to the proceedings tonight. One of the constituents who brought a brief forward thought that he would enlighten the commission as to where the word "riding" came from. We call them ridings in this province. Well, initially a constituency was defined by the distance a man on a good horse could ride in one

day, a most appropriate description in my area, I might say. Of course, I am not suggesting that that definition should be used today, but I thought it was kind of an interesting bit of history.

It also, I think, brings us to the question of effective representation, which is where I believe we are going to have to concentrate and where I would like to direct my comments tonight. The courts have said some things, and I'll quote again from *Hansard* from the hearings. They've said that the right to vote under the Charter means a certain number of things:

One, the right to vote; two, the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; three, the right to effective representation; four, the right to have the parity of the votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity.

I think what we're really talking about here is parity of vote and effective representation. Somehow that whole discussion has got to be held.

Justice McLachlin made some comments that were quite interesting in her judgment. She said that perfect parity was impossible. She also said:

Such relative parity as may be possible of achievement may prove undesirable because it has the effect of detracting from the primary goal of effective representation.

The primary goal of effective representation is what I would like to talk about. Factors like geography, community history, community interests, minority representation: all of these things may need to be taken into account to ensure that our Legislative Assemblies do truly represent the diversity of our social mosaic.

I don't believe this is an urban/rural issue. I listened very carefully when the Member for Edmonton-Centre, I believe it was, made some comments about representing an urban riding as opposed to representing a rural riding. Well, I happen to reside in Edmonton-Centre's riding when I'm in Edmonton. I can tell you that some days I'm quite envious of that member's ability to go out of this Legislature and in four minutes be in his office or for any member of his constituency in five minutes to be able to either go to his office or to his office in Edmonton, his ability to slip out at noon and have a meeting with his constituents or over the supper hour when we're in session, the ability to attend a town hall meeting.

I drove up here this morning: four hours. I will drive home again. There are no airports with charter or any other kind of service at New Brigid. I don't regret that, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I feel sorry for all of the members who don't have the opportunity to drive through our beautiful province. I have driven that for nine years, it'll be, in November. I think I've probably missed going home maybe eight times in those many years; I've gone home every weekend. I've never tired of the trip. Mind you, when your constituency is as large as mine, you can vary your routes considerably and hit it almost anywhere. I see a great deal of beauty. I see a great deal of change in our province, a great deal of progress. Actually, the farmyards and little towns that you go along become your friends even though you may not individually know them. You see the changes they've made, the improvements, or you see sometimes with sadness a for sale sign, and you wonder what the circumstances were. I do treasure those hours in my car. Some 150,000 kilometres is probably a good round figure of what I drive in a year. What I do regret is the lack of opportunity for me to spend a lot of time with my constituents because of that. I think that is a concern to the people in my area.

8:50

Face to face is good in Edmonton but doesn't have to happen in Chinook: I don't agree with that. If a telephone will do one place, or a fax – and this has been suggested, that in rural communities we can use faxes, we can use couriers, and we can use telephones – well, then we all do, because we're talking about equality of people in this province. I don't care whether they live in Fort McMurray, High Level, Pincher Creek, or Hanna, Alberta. They have the right to the same opportunity.

I know that I don't have as many issues around transient population. My population is relatively stable, with the exception of the energy industry, which – thank you, Madam Minister – is alive and well and strong in my constituency right now. I don't have a large transient population. I probably don't have a large immigrant population. So I don't have those challenges. I would invite some of you who haven't been down there to come door knocking with me sometime down in the Cessford-Pollockville area. I think it would be quite interesting. Not only that; you would love the people. It is a challenge.

Then I look at the municipal people that I deal with, over a hundred. I look at a Calgary or an Edmonton MLA, who may have 14 members of city council, whether they're aldermen or councillors, and two school boards. I have several school boards even with the realignment. I have three health authorities in my area even with the considerable reduction. It isn't a matter of whether it's a task for me. What is important in this whole issue is: do they have the opportunity to have representation? Remember, we do not have government offices in every one of our towns and villages. My largest town has 3,000 people under the present constituency. So you can imagine they are somewhat minimal.

I believe that while we must go forward, we have got to have in this province a dialogue of what effective representation is, what it means. How does it mix and fit with parity of vote? That's important to people as well. Mind you, we don't question voter turnout or people utilizing their franchise, their right to vote. Again I would say that most rural constituencies take that pretty seriously and do come out pretty strongly.

I've had a lot of interest in this from the media. You know, never have I had from them the question: do you think that under the new boundaries your constituents will be well represented? Will they have effective representation? No. The question is: what does this do to you, Madam MLA for this constituency? How do you feel about having to run against one of your own colleagues? Well, in my constituency that's not a new phenomenon. We've been redistributed about every time that there's been a new commission. So we've run up against this before, and it's not a pleasant thing. But let me tell you in this Legislature: this isn't about me. This isn't about any individual MLA in this room. This is about the right to effective representation of the people of this province wherever they reside, whether it's in Edmonton, whether it's in Calgary, whether it's, as I said, in High Level, Pincher Creek, Manyberries, or any other part of this province. That's what it's about. I think that's the dialogue that I want to see occur when we come back after the next election, whenever it is.

The need to have this discussion now isn't about, you know, that we must get ready for a snap election, although I've heard that mentioned. I think that is a shallow thought. This is about having a commission. We appointed a commission. We asked them to go out with a specific task and a mandate in that task. They went out; they listened. I will say that fortunately for my constituents, although they didn't listen to all of their recommen-

dations, they listened to the primary one, which was to try to keep the municipalities intact. That commission has presented a final report to this Legislature. We gave that commission a task; they've brought that forward. I believe that it's in the best interests of the people of this province that we act with expediency on this report.

Mr. Chairman, for my constituency it's not the best of all worlds. Chinook constituency virtually met all of the tests for being an exceptional riding that would meet the over 25 percent variance, but that was not deemed to be the way that this commission saw redrawing the boundaries. This commission has done their task. The larger question has not been answered by this commission, and I think that before we have another boundaries commission embark on a task that is difficult, we need to talk about that fundamental issue of parity of vote and effective representation.

We in western Canada or at least in Alberta have long promoted a triple E Senate because we recognize that Canada is a very large country and that it does have regional interests. I look at our province in a similar way. We're a very large, large province. We have large population concentrations in some areas, but we must be mindful of the contribution of the rest of the province. I would suggest to you that most of the economic development generated in this province is generated outside of the major urban areas. The energy industry: not a lot of rigs around here that I've seen, but I can tell you there are lots out in the country. Not a lot of forestry projects in town. The rural areas that do have that economic activity certainly support the cities. There is a saying - I wish I could get it straight - that if you burn your farms, your cities will die; if you burn your cities, your farms will cause them to be reborn. Now, that's a many, many, many years old saying, and I think you would bring that up to date a little bit with other activity that has occurred since, like energy, like forestry. The manufacturing that occurs in our cities greatly depends on the raw products that are developed outside of them. This isn't a rural/urban thing. I have a great deal of respect for the people who live in the urban parts of this province. I'm very appreciative and thankful that I have the opportunity to live where I do.

Mr. Chairman, we must come back to the real issue tonight, and that is Bill 46. I suggest that every one of us get on with the business that the electorate in this province set us to do.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The Bill before us, Bill 46, is a Bill that results, as we've heard, from an effort to restore or preserve democracy in this province, because democracy was threatened as a result of the last attempt at drawing boundaries. We've just heard some very eloquent words from the Minister of Community Development. For a change, many of those words I agreed with - and that is a change - but not all of them.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

I was reflecting on the impact of this Bill on my own constituency. I was reflecting on my respect for an independent commission and what that independent commission brought to bear and all the work that they did and all of the many Albertans who made representations to them. I was listening to the minister talk about the pleasures that she has from representing a rural constituency. She hastened to add that this was not an issue of rural versus

urban. I agree with her, but I suspect she overstated her case and made us all think that perhaps it is a little bit of rural versus urban.

9:00

There are many challenges being an MLA, and there are many challenges representing your constituents honestly and fairly, no matter where you are and where they are. Whether people in downtown Edmonton use telephones and fax machines more than people in rural communities outside of Hanna is an academic matter, Mr. Chairman, and I don't think it's particularly relevant. The fact is that if people want to get ahold of their MLA, they will do everything possible to get ahold of their MLA, and if an MLA wants to talk to a constituent, any MLA worth his or her salt will do the same and make the same effort.

As the minister was speaking, I was thinking about the results of the '93 election, and I was thinking about what compelled the court in this province to determine that that election almost threatened the democratic basis of this province. I was thinking about Cardston-Chief Mountain and the fact that that is one of the constituencies going to be redrawn. I was comparing that to the results in the constituency which I have the privilege of representing, Edmonton-Glenora. It occurs to me that if you read the report of the Chief Electoral Officer after the June 1993 election, you'll note that the total number of ballots cast in the electoral division of Cardston-Chief Mountain is less than the margin of victory which I was lucky enough to receive in Edmonton-Glenora. Less people participated in the democratic process in that constituency than were the people who gave me not just the plurality but the majority in Edmonton-Glenora. Then I hear the minister talk about effective representation and one person, one vote and equality of votes, and I think: where's the equality in that? We must do something to address that inequality.

As it is true that every MLA who represents an urban constituency feels that they have certain burdens and that the population density in those urban constituencies creates demands and pressures on them that they can never possibly be fully equal to, I think it's equally true that an MLA who represents a rural constituency must feel that the sheer distance, that the sparsity of population, just the time it takes to move from one point in a constituency to another presents a burden to them that they can barely hope to be equal to. But this shouldn't be seen as competitive. I wish I had an excuse to spend four hours in my car every day traveling through my constituency, dropping in on neighbours and friends and business people in the constituency. What a marvelous way it is to really keep the pulse and keep tabs on what's going on. But, Mr. Chairman, you can't do that when you represent an urban constituency. The sheer volume of calls, the demands, the variety of invitations to respond to prohibit that. So the minister's right. This isn't a matter of rural versus urban, but I think she did protest too much when she was making her case.

Mr. Chairman, when I was listening to the members, the government members particularly, speaking against this Bill at earlier stages in the debate, particularly the Member for Taber-Warner, the Member for Little Bow, and I heard the concerns they raised and I listened to the real angst in their argument and the sense of unfairness that they perceive as it relates to this Bill, I certainly expected that to be backed up with a contrary vote on the Bill. I suppose that still may happen, but I'm surprised that what we've heard from the majority of government members are actually arguments against Bill 46 and criticisms of the commission and its findings. But the Bill is nonetheless relentlessly proceeding in spite of some very reasonable amendments put

forward by my colleague the Member for Fort McMurray. I note that the government has already put forward some amendments of their own, and maybe they'll surprise me and maybe there'll be some more, but I doubt it.

I can't help but again judge the quality of those arguments against my own experience and the privilege I've had in serving the people of Edmonton-Glenora for these last three years. I think about my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, and I think about the various concerns that have been raised by other members. I think about a constituency in Glenora that has several business districts. I think about a constituency that has centres of higher education, has a variety of public and private and separate schools. I think about a constituency that has some of the most desirable housing and residential accommodation in the province and perhaps some of the most marginal as well. I think about the transient parts of my constituency, and I think about the more permanent and stable parts.

Then I compare all of that experience against the recommendations in Bill 46, and I can't help but be struck with a flaw in what the commission and ultimately what the government has proposed to do to the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They've literally taken that constituency, Mr. Chairman, and torn it in half. Not once since the province of Alberta has been a province has a provincial constituency in the city of Edmonton been divided by the river. Now, there are other constituencies in other parts of the province where constituencies straddle both sides of a river. There are certainly constituencies in Calgary that traditionally, historically have been separated by a river, but not once in Edmonton's history has a constituency been cut in half by a river. Yet that is the proposal in Bill 46.

Mr. Chairman, people in Edmonton know that that river valley represents a real break, a real discontinuity in the city. There is south side and there is north side. When I think of Edmonton-Glenora and I think of those communities of Edmonton-Glenora which go down the slope towards the river valley - Parkview, Crestwood, Valleyview, Buena Vista, Laurier Heights - and I think about the community of interest that they share with the people immediately to the north of them in Capitol Hill and in Glenora and in North Glenora and across Stony Plain Road and up 127th Street into Westmount and the people to the west in Glenwood and Canora and I think about the community of interest that they share and the businesses that they operate and that they work with each other in and the schools that their children share and the places of worship that they have in common, I can't help but question why the commission would want to really tear apart some of the most stable communities in Edmonton, why they would want to separate those communities, why they would want to separate the community leagues which form soccer leagues and the community leagues which share hockey teams and hockey tournaments. Why would they want to break those up? Why would they want to, then, imagine that there is some community of interest with the people across the river?

There are wonderful communities on the south side of the river: Whyte Avenue with a very successful 15th annual Fringe festival just completed, Malmo Plains, Windsor Park. But the people in Windsor Park have their own community of interest, and they have their own schools and churches and businesses. They're not in common with the people of Laurier Heights. So why would you want to force those two communities together and why would you want to carve out a new constituency in the middle of Edmonton, where some of the most stable populations are? Why would you not want to move out to the boundaries of Edmonton, where there is tremendous growth and where there is all kinds of

new development? Puzzling questions, questions which were raised by many people at the public hearings between the interim report and the final report, questions, sadly though, not addressed in the final report.

The net effect on the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, Mr. Chairman, is this. The constituency as we know it now, the people that I have been elected to serve and the people that have trusted me for these last few years and who according to the Premier I'll be asking to trust me again very shortly - almost 15,000 of those individuals who have voted almost traditionally in a constituency like Edmonton-Glenora, 15,000 of them will now be put into a new constituency called Edmonton-Riverview. Almost 11,000 constituents who are currently well served by my colleagues in Edmonton-Mayfield and Edmonton-Meadowlark, nearly 11,000, will now be plucked out of those two constituencies and put into Edmonton-Glenora. They'll be sort of added in. If this Bill becomes law, I welcome the people of Britannia and I welcome the people of Youngstown into the community of Edmonton-Glenora, the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I know that they will be well accommodated and that again at least within west Edmonton they share many of those things in common which I've already discussed.

9:10

The net effect, Mr. Chairman, is 15,000 constituents out, 10,000 or 11,000 constituents in, a huge impact on a constituency of what was 36,000 and change, just over 36,000. Now, I note that the old constituency represented almost a 19 percent deviation from what was considered acceptable, and that was unacceptable. So I understand that there was a necessity to change, to trim, to adjust but not to totally remake, not to tear apart. Now, the new constituency has a variation of about 4.3 percent, much more laudable. Certainly it would be much more acceptable if we saw that same variation adhered to cross the province, but that's an argument, I suppose, for another day. The total number of constituents falls to 32,000.

Mr. Chairman, certainly I never complained about the task of representing in excess of 36,000 constituents. I will welcome the opportunity to represent the interests of 32,000 constituents, but I do not believe that the way the boundary lines have been drawn - and there were options, there were alternatives put forward - are in the absolute best interests of my constituents, of the people of Edmonton-Glenora, of the people of Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Mayfield, and for the Edmontonians who live across the river in those marvelous communities in south and southwest Edmonton.

Nonetheless, if the government members who have spoken against the Bill continue to support it when it is voted on, Mr. Chairman, I suppose that this Bill will become law, because this government seems to be hell-bent and determined to bring this Bill to Royal Assent as quickly as possible. We will probably be dealing with these boundaries regardless of what the opposition says in debate. You can tell by the lack of attention being paid to the debate right now just how seriously the government is taking this Bill, even though they protest that the boundaries Bill is of utmost importance to them.

MR. DUNFORD: I've heard it all before, Howie.

MR. SAPERS: I note that the Member for Lethbridge-West is saying that he's heard it all before. I wonder exactly who in my constituency he has been talking to, Mr. Chairman, because if he has heard it all before, then I would expect him to do the right thing and support my position.

Mr. Chairman, the truth is that Bill 46 is not a perfect solution to the problem. It is a tentative step towards admitting that there was a problem, and it is a rather imperfect use of science to justify a set of conclusions. I've been told many times that perhaps it was the best we could have hoped for, that perhaps it is the closest we could have achieved to parity or to equality at this point in time, that the province will continue to evolve, that the differences in representing rural and urban constituencies will somehow magically be ironed out at some future date, and that we will be blessed with finding the perfect formula for satisfying those sometimes competing interests. I'm not sure that will happen quickly, and maybe that in and of itself is reason to support this, because it is a tentative first step.

I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that I think it's the duty of this Legislature to go beyond tentative baby steps towards perfection and honestly try to do the best we can to bring forward the best policy and the best law that we can. Even if it makes us individually uncomfortable, certainly the art of compromise should not be lost within this Chamber. When I hear government members say that they have concerns about the legislation, I guess I would have expected some of them to come forward with their own amendments and vote the way of their convictions, but we haven't seen that.

When I hear ministers such as the Minister of Community Development continue to protest that this is a rural/urban argument but then wax on about the challenges and joys of a rural constituency, all the while the subtext somehow suggesting that urban constituencies aren't quite up to that same test or those same demands, it makes me skeptical that we'll get any closer to perfection. It makes me skeptical of whether or not this government really is interested in anything other than these tiny baby steps and maybe perhaps throwing out some crusts, as it were, to those people who hunger for democracy in this province, not the least of which are our senior courts.

So, Mr. Chairman, what we're left with is a Bill that's flawed. It's far from perfect. It was an independent commission. We have to respect that. It heard from many Albertans, took a lot of time, spent a lot of money, came up with some recommendations which I can wholeheartedly endorse and some other recommendations which I am skeptical of. Finally, as it affects the people of Edmonton-Glenora, it came up with some recommendations which are just downright puzzling.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Minister of Community Development urges all members to focus on the quality of the Bill and to focus on the quality of the debate. In doing so, I had to ask myself what it is that the hon. minister had been doing during all of the time this debate was raging. I had felt that people had genuinely focused on this Bill, and with a couple of what I might call hot flares, generally people focused on the Bill quite aggressively and extremely colourfully.

To remind all members of the House, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West said there was a hidden agenda, and he came back a day later in a public member's statement and corrected himself and said that there wasn't a hidden agenda, that there was an overt agenda. Other members said that they didn't feel that the committee, when it traveled to their community, heard what they had been listening to. That reminds me, Mr. Chairman, that one

of the fundamentals of good arbitration or good negotiation is that if at the end of the day you put forward your proposal and everybody hates it equally, you've hit a home run. You've really succeeded in blending all of the interests very well if you have extensive hatred.

Now, some members of this Assembly have criticized the committee. I do no such thing. I don't criticize the committee at all. I think the committee did a tremendous job as a truly independent commission, the first time in the province of Alberta that we have had a truly independent Electoral Boundaries Commission deal with this very difficult and very tacky subject. Now, why is it a tacky subject, Mr. Chairman? It's tacky because people are effectively speaking for their own self-interest to some extent when they talk about the preservation of their constituencies.

Some members in this Legislature got up and spoke against their own interest. I would like history to record me as being one of those, Mr. Chairman. I urge two things. When the Electoral Boundaries Commission came to Fort McMurray, I was absolutely amazed that virtually everybody who made a submission to the Electoral Boundaries Commission said that the number of MLAs in this province should be reduced in number, that we would have better government if there were less MLAs, that we would save money if there were less MLAs, that we would function more expeditiously if there were less MLAs. Those people who allege that the Legislative Assembly has a certain repetition and sameness about the debate would obviously welcome and embrace less of that repetition and less of that sameness with less MLAs. Well, in this Legislative Assembly every member who stood up and spoke for less MLAs made a declaration against their own personal interest.

I must tell you, Mr. Chairman, that in law there is a very, very good rule of thumb, and that is that if a witness is on the witness stand and they make a statement against their own self-interest, you can go to the bank with the truthfulness of that statement. It's often the self-serving statements that have to be closely scrutinized and closely analyzed.

Now, what we also said up in the riding of Fort McMurray is that we had embarked in that area on an amazing experiment, an experiment of co-operation, an experiment of degovernmentalization, an experiment of reduction of boundaries of government access by getting together a group of individuals and a group of people with different cultural, different business, different attitudinal backgrounds and amalgamating them into one regional municipality, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

9:20

To the extent that the residents of my constituency, the residents of Fort McMurray helped make that possible, I'm proud of each and every one of them. I sat in on many meetings with members of various steering committees, organizational groups, and individual working groups that were trying to make that happen. They were known leaders of the community. They were also known to carry every political stripe recorded in this Assembly and some political stripes not recorded in this Assembly. They put all of those personal biases and personal viewpoints aside, and they worked for the good of the community. I'm so very proud of each and every one of them for doing that work that we thought it would be a wondrous thing if the riding of Fort McMurray would also disappear. I was prepared to put myself out of a job, prepared to put myself out of work, prepared to take my chances on the UIC lines, prepared to take the shoe leather out and pound the street looking for a job.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: People will do that for you, Adam. People will do that for you.

MR. GERMAIN: The minister says, "People will do that for you." You know, my mother, may she rest in peace, used to have an interesting saying about people who wished bad and evil on others.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's not evil. That's just common sense.

MR. GERMAIN: Now the minister of agriculture says, "That's just common sense."

Well, I was prepared to be part of the wondrous experiment up there, where the riding of Fort McMurray disappeared completely and was subsumed in the new riding of Wood Buffalo. You know, it would have been of great assistance to another Member of this Legislative Assembly, the previous minister and hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca, because he has one of the largest territorial ridings of all of the province. I didn't hear that hon. member stand up in this Legislative Assembly and talk about his travel bill or how much time it takes to travel.

The hon. member, now minister without responsibility in charge of children's services, also comes from one of those very large ridings. She comes from the riding of Lesser Slave Lake, a riding so large, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but this is really starting to sound more like second reading than committee. I would ask you to return to the contents of the Bill.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, sir. I was following the pattern and precedent set by the hon. minister in charge of community affairs, who talked about her riding and about other ridings.

I do want to talk about the riding of Lesser Slave Lake. Never once has that member complained in this Legislative Assembly about her travel, even though we could not help but feel sympathy for her one time when she expressed how late at night driving back from the Legislative Assembly after a week of work, I believe, as I recall and recount the story, her vehicle left the road, one of those rough gravel roads in her riding, and was seriously damaged.

I hope that she has done as well as the hon. minister of community affairs. That minister says she travels 150,000 kilometres a year by automobile. That works out to a travel allowance, tax free, of \$37,500 per year. The minister said with some excitement that she's been here at least eight years. That works out to \$315,000 for travel in this province, absolutely tax free, plus gas. I wasn't sure, frankly, Mr. Chairman, whether she was bragging or complaining.

I want to say as well about this particular Electoral Divisions Act that the hon. Minister of Community Development said there are some people who say this is a hurry-up Bill to clear the decks for a speedy election. I took her to be criticizing the Premier of this province in those comments, and I am not sure whether the Premier of this province, when he has a chance to rebut this Bill, will be enthusiastically embracing that criticism of his strategy, which is in fact to have a summer session, to call the MLAs back from their holidays to deal with the boundaries of this particular province.

So in a nutshell, Mr. Chairman, we have had several members of this Assembly that have spoken about an opportunity lost in connection with this particular Bill. The opportunity we have is

that we, first of all, shackled the committee. We said to them that they had to rely on the 1991 census. Then we said to them that they could not entertain the right number of MLAs. When we shackled them, it is hard-pressed for us to criticize their outcome and their result. In short, they did the best they could with what they had to work with.

They were not able to give the municipality of Wood Buffalo its wish to have one larger riding because the community of Fort McMurray already has a variance of plus 12 percent, as documented in the report. Giving the community what it wanted would have driven its plus variance up to about 18 or 19 percent, and that was to the committee members intolerable. Had they had the authority to reduce the number of MLAs, they might have in one bold sweep been able to satisfy the problem of those people who criticize that there are too many MLAs in the major cities of the province of Alberta, more so than councillors. They would also have been able to follow some of the community boundaries in the schedule of this particular legislation.

When we shackled the hands of the committee in those two critical areas, when we were not prepared to have the courage to say that if you wish to reduce the number of MLAs, do so, and when we were not prepared to have the courage to allow them to use such census material as they saw fit, then the result is the inevitable criticism that this Act has been receiving in this particular Legislative Assembly.

I want to urge all Members of the Legislative Assembly to think, when they vote on this particular Bill, of the independence of the committee that selected it. I hope that those members who feel strongly that they have in some way been disenfranchised will reflect that debate again in third reading so that I can be clear as to whether they are voting for or against the Bill. I hope to hear from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West again as to his attitude on this particular Bill. Is he for or against it, or is he simply referring to it as having a hidden agenda? Finally, Mr. Chairman, I hope that all Members of this Legislative Assembly, after this Bill is dealt with, will continue to pursue the goal of fair and proper representation for all of the citizens of this province.

That, Mr. Chairman, concludes my comments on this piece of legislation.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise again to talk to the particulars of the Bill in Committee of the Whole stage. I thought it might be informative for the members to refresh themselves as to some of the speeches that have gone on in second reading. This is in particular with regards to the clauses of the Bill. For instance, when we look at the constituency of Three Hills-Airdrie, whose name has been changed, what we notice is that the current member for Three Hills-Airdrie says:

I don't know if 83 MLAs is the right number, but as a strong rural representative I will never sit back and allow the number of MLAs in rural Alberta to be lowered without a corresponding lowering of the number of MLAs in Edmonton and Calgary.

When we look at the Member for Lethbridge-West, which is constituency number 63 – and in each one of the comments of these members there were particulars with regards to each constituency, indicating what was and what was not correct . . .

Chairman's Ruling Committee of the Whole Debate

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt again. Perhaps I've been a bit too lenient, but all of that debate

took place in second reading, which deals with principles. We're now in committee, and we should be looking at the Bill with respect to the articles that are in the Bill. Therefore I would ask you, please, to take that into account in your debate. I'm trying to make some sense out of what it is that you're trying to debate here. I do have an interest in doing that, and I'm finding that most of the comments since I've taken the Chair – and I wasn't here for some of the debate earlier – have been strangely like second reading, and I think that we need to proceed in committee. Thank you.

9:30

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you for leading me onto the right track. In actuality that's why I have been combining the comments from the members of the particular constituencies with the constituencies as outlined in the Bill. The Bill does not have a large number of clauses, but what the Bill does have is an explanation of each of the constituencies, and I thought what could be better than to indicate, with regards to the constituencies as outlined in the Bill, the comments that the particular members have had on those particular constituencies. For instance, Lethbridge-West, which is 63 in the Bill . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm sorry, but that is all a matter of record. It has all been recorded in *Hansard*. That to me is not debate on what is going on. That's part of the record already. So if there is something new that you would like to add with respect to committee, then I'd be pleased to hear it.

MS LEIBOVICI: Whether it's new or not is perhaps not as pertinent perhaps as to whether the points have been made. I think that when we're looking at the potential amendments to the Bill in Committee of the Whole stage, all we need to do is refer to the Member for Lethbridge-West, who indicated that he did not believe that the constituency of Taber-Warner . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the reason I bring it up is under 23(d): "refers at length to debates of the current session" – this is all part of the current session's record – "or reads unnecessarily from *Hansard*." We could in fact wonder where the comments are coming from. That is just not what we're here to do in committee. That's all been done. So please, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: I feel that what we are doing tonight is looking at the particular constituencies outlined in the Bill. What we have had is considerable debate this evening on the fact that the Bill as put forward does not provide for effective representation. In fact, when one looks at the debate that was put forward in second reading by the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod, by the Member for Olds-Didsbury, by the Member for Little Bow, by the Member for Taber-Warner, the Member for Calgary-Foothills, and the Member for Barrhead-Westlock, what we in fact see is that the Bill as put forward, in accordance with what these government members have said, is flawed, and when one looks at the ridings as put forward in the Bill and the ridings as put forward by the government members representing those constituencies, with the exception of Barrhead-Westlock, who indicated that there was no negative impact to his particular riding, what we see is that there are a number of questions that their constituents have put forward to those particular members. It is quite amazing

tonight that not one of those members has picked up the Bill, has looked at their particular constituency, and again using the example of . . .

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

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Committee of the Whole Debate

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the fact that you, too, have been making some observations about the digression in the apparent attempt to address this Bill. *Beauchesne* 679 is very clear, if members would care to look at it, in talking about the committee stage of the Bill. It goes on to 688, where it talks about the function of a committee on a Bill, saying:

The function of a committee on a bill is to go through the text of the bill clause by clause and, if necessary, word by word, with a view to making such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable.

This Bill comes forward as a unanimous report. The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition said clearly that his party, and from his point of view, endorses this Bill, and members on this side, though difficult, also endorse this Bill. The changes in the Bill impact far more heavily on members on the government side than they do on the Liberal side, yet the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark continues to wander aimlessly, irrespective of being challenged by the Chair. Before she got up this time – it was plainly observed – she turned to the Member for Fort McMurray, took the speech that he had been reading from, complete with the little green tags, and continued to read through there. [interjection] No. The one with the little green tags. She took it from Fort McMurray, following through on all the notes.

Mr. Chairman, I am simply asking that she follow the committee process, put her money where her mouth is and bring forward the amendments, because committee stage on a Bill is to make "such amendments in it as may seem likely to render it more generally acceptable." A Bill that is already acceptable to this House, a Bill that is already acceptable to the Leader of the Opposition – it's been plainly stated and reviewed. She refuses to do the bold thing and bring forward the amendments to expose this filibuster for what it is. I would ask that she do that, that she bring forth amendments or sit down and be finished.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: On the point of order.

MS LEIBOVICI: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure that if the member . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Before you go on, there are too many people standing in the Chamber. If you want to have conversations, you can go and have them outside.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If the hon. minister of social services has ever seen the handwriting of the Member for Fort McMurray, he would know that no one could pick up those notes and read them. What in actual fact I did take from the hon. member was Bill 46, the Electoral Divisions Act. After the research that I've done in the last hour, these green tabs indicate the number of government . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: On the point of order.

MS LEIBOVICI: I am on the point of order, because it is exactly what the minister of social services has put forward. It is clear that there are at least 10 government members that are in these *Hansards* that have said unequivocally that they do not support this report, that though in fact the report . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, order. [interjection] Order. [interjections] Hon. members, I guess what we're going to have to do is ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to do a little work here if we can't get some order, not that he doesn't work but work of a different kind.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I've yet to hear one word on the point of order. I do agree with you, though, that there were many comments during the point of order that perhaps were not related to it, but I would like to hear some word on the point of order before I need to rule.

MS LEIBOVICI: On the purported point of order. What *Beauchesne* does indicate is that you are to look at the Bill clause by clause. That does not necessarily mean that you have to actually put in an amendment clause by clause, but if I so desired and every other Member in this Legislative Assembly so desired, we could in fact take this Bill and read it out word by word. The last thing we discussed, if my memory serves me correctly, was the actual title of the Bill, Electoral Divisions Act. We go through the intent of the Bill, and then we decide on whether we like the title of the Bill. We have not even started to discuss whether Electoral Divisions Act is in fact the appropriate name for this Bill. As a matter of fact, I've had many constituents say to me . . .

9:40

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, order. [interjection] Order. I guess it was sort of the dilemma that I brought up a number of times during this debate, and that is that much of what is being said is part of the record of second reading, and in fact committee is there to render a Bill "more generally acceptable." I do not understand how rehashing *Hansard* and persisting in needless repetition of what's already been said . . . I think that we do have a point of order, and I would ask this hon. member and subsequent speakers to please work on the committee stage, which is trying to make this Bill generally more acceptable, and not persist in needless repetition and refer at length to debates that have already occurred or unnecessarily read from *Hansard*. So govern yourselves accordingly, please.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. DAY: In a moment of calm reflection I had advised the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to take his jacket and stuff it in his mouth. I do retract that. It would be neither a good physical nor spiritual thing to do.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, do I get a chance to graciously accept the retraction and the humility exhibited by the minister of social services?

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: As I was indicating, the whole crux of this Bill is to look at the electoral divisions that have been put forward. Perhaps one of the words that does need to be looked at is whether that word "divisions" is appropriate. Perhaps a better word would have been to put forward the electoral boundaries for the purpose of this Act. I have had individuals indicate to me that "division" seems to be a word that is divisive and that in fact what probably would be better is to talk about electoral boundaries, because in the common parlance of the day, what we do talk about is electoral boundaries. We don't talk about electoral divisions.

When we look at clause 1.2 of the Electoral Divisions Act, in fact what it says is that the boundaries are set out in the schedule. What I was attempting to do was to go through some of the constituencies within that schedule, who have had representation over a period of time, that indicated that in fact there was unhappiness with the boundaries that were put forward and that in some instances it appeared as if these boundaries were in fact – and this is in quotation marks from the Member for Little Bow – short-term solutions and that there were questions that needed to be dealt with. In particular, if one were – and I am not going to refer to *Hansard* – to take the time and refer to the *Hansard* of the afternoon of Thursday, August 15, one would find that the Member for Little Bow specifies exactly what areas in his particular riding, which is 64 in the appendix, which is in the schedule, are affected adversely by the boundaries.

Now, one of the questions that came to my mind reading through the comments from Taber-Warner, reading through the comment from Calgary-Foothills, and even listening to the hon. Minister of Community Development this evening was in fact that the key issue to be addressed is effective representation. When one looks through the five clauses in the Bill, when one looks at clause 1, which talks about electoral divisions, when one looks at clause 2, which talks about boundaries, and clauses 3, 4, and 5, in effect there are no words in here that deal with effective representation. In fact, what the hon. government members have said is that there was no ability for there to be feedback to the committee once the final report was put in. In actual fact, if the Member for Barrhead-Westlock had these grave concerns with the whole tenor of the report, there was no place for the member to put them forward other than through amendments.

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

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: I really don't want to test your patience on this, Mr. Chairman. *Beauchesne* 459 on relevance. You have ruled a number of times and we have frankly agreed with your ruling that the member should not be referring to the extended debates and comments made by other members. It's very clear there is no relevance in what she is saying. We are into a filibuster. What she should be doing is, as she's already been instructed, making amendments that improve the Bill. Failing to do that, I believe she needs to sit down and complete her remarks.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Here we go again. The reality is that when one is in debate and one is looking at different areas within a Bill, it would be extremely difficult not to mention comments that individuals who represent certain areas have made. It would be very difficult not to make those comments, for in fact that would be taking the whole debate out of context. In order to specifically talk about Airdrie, in order to specifically be able to talk about Barrhead-Westlock or Cardston-Taber – I think it would be inappropriate of me to talk about number 48, which is in the schedule on page 25 of the Bill; it says Cardston-Taber. It would be inappropriate to talk about Cardston-Taber without indicating what the member for Cardston-Taber has said. I am not reiterating 20 minutes of a speech. In fact, what I am doing is saying that there were areas that the member felt were not addressed appropriately, that if a member such as Lethbridge-West indicates that he wants to be on record that it's a bad report, that it doesn't represent his constituents' desire . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think I get the gist of what . . . [interjection] Hon. member, order please.

I have to admit that the hon. member did in fact talk to the Bill for a while after the last discussion we had about it but was regrettably going back into again referring at length to debates of the current session. You were making some progress, and I hope that you continue to make progress.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I'm sure that you will, if I do digress – the hour is getting late – keep me on track, because this is a very important issue as evidenced by the debate.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: What is most distressing with regards to the Bill and with regards to the concerns that individuals have expressed on this Bill is the rush that we are seeing with the particular Bill. If in fact the direction that was given to the commission was not sufficient, if in fact the direction that was given to the commission did not address the issue of effective representation so that these 10 members – and there may be others – are able to feel comfortable with the recommendations of the commission, then perhaps what needs to be done is that the Bill needs to be put aside for a period of time and revisited. In fact, there is no rush to do this Bill at this point in time unless there's an election pending. This government has just entered its third year of governance. There are at least two more years that this government could quite easily go to. As the Minister of Community Development indicated, it's an issue of effective representation, and we should get on with our jobs and do that and ensure that this Bill is the best that can be provided.

9:50

As I indicated, there were numerous concerns with regards to the different areas within this Bill. It is a shame that the government is unwilling to listen to the representations that have been made in this Legislative Assembly. As the amendments that were brought forward earlier by the government to change the names of the particular ridings that were enunciated in the government amendment, so too could the government have taken some of the concerns that its own members have put forward and provided amendments. So, too, could the government now say: "Well, we made a mistake. Perhaps we did not give enough scope to the commission. Perhaps given the intense work this commission has

been involved in, it might not be a bad idea to ask the commission to go further and actually look at this issue of effective representation." In every speech that I have heard from the government members, that issue has come up. So what we are hearing from the government is that they're willing to pass a flawed Bill, they are willing to pass a Bill that is flawed, because none of the clauses on pages 1 and 2 of the Bill deal with the issue of effective representation.

Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 46 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the Bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain Bill and reports Bill 46 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Third Reading**
Bill 48
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 1996 (No. 2)

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 48 standing in my name on the Order Paper.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Third reading. We have debated extensively in second reading the principle underlying this Bill. In committee stage we also spoke of the principle and did not bring in any amendments. The issue that I think bears emphasis in third reading is the whole integration, then, of performance measurement, outcome measurement, and budgeting.

A number of members on this side of the House have said: yes, the government has done an adequate job of moving forward in terms of business plans and then trying to link government expenditures to specific outcomes. Our concerns, though, are that there are no specific outcomes linked to this appropriation. Nor in fact in the appropriations Bill in general are there any links between outcomes and the expenditure of money. We've emphasized this point because there still is a cynicism on the part of the public about value for money in terms of government expenditures, and I think that to the extent, then, that we demonstrate what each dollar yields in terms of tangible benefits or outcomes, the closer we are to having Albertans feel that their tax dollars are well spent.

With regards to the specifics of the appropriations, a theme that we had made on a number of occasions was that it's very difficult to say on the basis of the arguments provided in this House whether too little or too much money has been allocated for seniors and Community Development, for the Capital regional health authority, or for Transportation and Utilities. None of the arguments provided were on a factual basis in terms of the specific numbers or the outcomes desired.

It's also interesting when you stand back and look at this Bill and you look at the Reinvestment Act and the June 24 announcements about additional funds being put in the system. Well, those funds come in in '97-98, and the numbers have been plucked from thin air. But is that too much or too little? There is still a real gap between the budgeting process and the arguments used to justify expenditures of money and the appropriations. I think that Albertans at this stage of the game want to know what they are getting for the money spent. Are we directing the money explicitly to where it's required?

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, about the 25th anniversary of the election of the Conservatives and the . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yee haw!

DR. PERCY: When you look at the legacy that Getty has left, for example, I wouldn't be yee hawing too loudly about that: nine successive deficits, \$32 billion in gross debt.

When we ask, "Are we better off in terms of defining the role of government?" do we know on the basis of the supplementary estimates or for that matter, Mr. Speaker, on the February budget what the province of Alberta is going to look like in the year 2000, what the structure is going to look like in the year 2000? We don't. We know that we're going to be spending less, but we don't have a clear idea what the outcomes are. We have no idea what this province will look like because the plan that's going to get us there is not clearly articulated.

So certainly we're going to support this appropriations Bill, but I think there is still work to be done by this government in defining outcomes, linking appropriations specifically to the business plan process and performance-based budgeting.

With those comments, I'll take my seat.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud makes a very good point, and I would just like to reflect on evaluating this Bill against what actions the Minister of Health has recently taken. We've heard the former Minister of Health, the Premier, and the new Minister of Health

talk about this current fiscal year as a year of monitoring. The government is now using the language of recognizing that there are pressure points and hot points as a result of the health care restructuring and budget cuts. We must assume that some of those pressure points have to do with the provision of ambulance service and particularly with the provision of health care services in the Capital health authority, because the supplementary estimates call on new funding to be taken out of general revenue and put into those areas, the other pressure point, of course, being seniors programming, funded out of Community Development.

10:00

At the same time that the government is finally beginning to admit that they have created a huge mess that needs to be cleaned up, have admitted that part of the problem is underfunding and now talk about the dedication to monitoring and evaluation, what we're struck with, Mr. Speaker, is another example of this government saying one thing and doing something entirely different. The Minister of Health just announced the elimination of 700 jobs from the Department of Health – 700 jobs. Many of those jobs were in the area of services that provided information collection, information analysis, data collection. In fact, many of the people who are about to lose their jobs are those very people that would have been charged with the task of doing the monitoring and the evaluation. So one is left to question now whether that monitoring and evaluation can continue and, if it does, on what basis it will continue, given that Alberta Health is to be cut in half. You can't leave that to happen in the various regions nor, I would say, would it be efficient. You wouldn't want to duplicate that kind of monitoring and data collection 17 different times.

So when my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talks about performance measures and indicators and those tests that we all believe are so important, in fact the efficiency and outcome audits which I and my Liberal colleagues campaigned on in '92 and '93, and you see how the government has appropriated that idea and has now built it into its own business plans – however, not the reality of performance audits and value-for-money audits but the rhetoric of them – you can't help but question whether or not the government is sincere that these are things they want to accomplish, that they want to accomplish the monitoring, they want to accomplish the evaluation, and they want to get serious about addressing these so-called pressure points, which I guess is the most polite term the Premier's media advisers told him he could use to talk about the crisis in health care.

So while this Bill is a Bill that we must support because it will provide some short-term relief, as we've said at a previous stage of debate on this Bill, it's a Bill that should not give any of us comfort and shouldn't give any taxpayer comfort. What it represents is a government's short-term, stopgap thinking and short-term, stopgap solution to a huge problem, a problem that has shaken our very confidence in some of our most trusted institutions, including the health care system. This government, contrary to their words when they say you can't just throw money at a problem, seem to be doing exactly that, without any hint of a plan, without any scintilla of a framework for monitoring this money and making sure that it's appropriately spent and making sure that Albertans will receive the best value for those dollars. The silence from the government on this point is absolutely deafening, Mr. Speaker. We haven't heard one whisper about how this money will be monitored and evaluated and whether or not taxpayers will know that they actually had value for money.

Now, based on the information that I have received, have

collected firsthand – the circumstances that Albertans have shared with me regarding their health care, regarding problems with ambulance service, the problems that seniors have had as a result of this government's policies, and the particular problems that the Capital health authority is experiencing – I believe that this money is necessary. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this government will have no way of determining whether it was the right amount or not enough or too much or whether it came too late. I suppose only time ultimately will tell and only time will be the judge of whether this government's actions are appropriate, and that's too bad.

When the Premier was elected back in '93, he made comments like: that was then and this is now; we're under new management; we're out of the business of being in business. Well, obviously that's not the case. They're still flying by the seats of their pants. They're obviously still making this up as they go along. You would think that this far into a government's mandate and this far down the road of health budget cuts, the government would have more certainty, the system would be more stable, and they wouldn't simply still be making it up as they went along.

Thanks.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the third reading of Bill 48. My comments will be brief, but I did want to speak on two specific areas.

Mr. Speaker, in the 1996-1997 supplementary estimates, the general revenue fund document that was part and parcel of Bill 48, on page 16 there is one telling sentence. It's the one that goes just under the heading of Capital Health Authority, and the sentence reads:

This Supplementary Estimate is requested to provide \$14,000,000 to the Capital Health Authority to ensure the continued quality of health services during restructuring.

Well, earlier this spring when we debated the provincial budget and the expenditures required to carry us through the year, that's when we addressed those amounts. That's when we addressed the expenditures required to ensure continued quality of health services for the upcoming year during restructuring. One would have assumed that the government would have had some indicators, and back then I think most opposition members cautioned that there weren't enough indicators. Performance and outcome measures hadn't been done and certainly hadn't been provided to this Assembly so we could make a determination as to what the appropriate amount of funding was. Consequently, what this Bill now does, in effect, through this appropriation of supplementary supply is address the issue of underfunding, or at least it partially addresses the issue. It's an attempt, and it's most unfortunate that even at this point, one-quarter of the way through the fiscal year, we still don't have the kinds of measures that are required to make the decisions here.

As I said earlier, unfortunately, when the government falls short in providing those kinds of measures, those kinds of indicators, we have to rely on the concerns that are being heard widely throughout this province. Those concerns without question, despite the government's attempts to deny them, are the health concerns. Based on those outcomes and performance measures, the ones that really matter – and that's the public of Alberta – they say that health care is at risk, that we stand to lose something we both cherish and value and are willing to fund through a public system.

So when I see in particular the vote on the issue of ambulance services, one has to question right away whether this restructuring, the cuts, affected rural Alberta in such a way that we see a decline in the number of doctors in rural areas, and consequently we now have to transport individuals with air ambulance services. Mr. Speaker, I think that is the case. Nonetheless, the dollars are going there to address this weakness.

Based on the performance and outcome measures that I said earlier, those of Albertans and their concerns, I will be supporting this. I would hope that in the next budget the Provincial Treasurer brings through this Assembly, he will have more substantive information by which we can allocate the expenditure of public dollars. I know he's very interested in doing that for the next round.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the Bill, and I would call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a third time]

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

Bill 47
Reinvestment Act

[Adjourned debate August 21: Mr. Dinning]

Speaker's Ruling
Closing Debate

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Last week, August 21, under Government Bills and Orders, the hon. Minister of Justice moved second reading of Bill 47, the Reinvestment Act, on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer. After the hon. Minister of Justice and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud spoke to the Bill, the Chair recognized the hon. Provincial Treasurer, who spoke to the Bill and then later moved to adjourn debate.

Pursuant to Standing Order 25(1)(b):

A reply is allowed to a member who has moved that a Bill be read for the second or third time, and [in such instance] the Speaker shall . . . inform the Assembly that the reply of the mover will close debate.

The mover of Bill 47 was the hon. Minister of Justice. However, he moved the Bill on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

10:10

According to paragraph 466(2) of *Beauchesne*, "Should a Member propose a motion" – including a motion that a Bill be read a second time – "on behalf of another Member, a later speech by either will close the debate." However, since the Chair did not inform the Assembly that the reply of the hon. Provincial Treasurer was to close debate on second reading of Bill 47, debate on this Bill can continue.

The Chair wishes to inform the Assembly that if either the hon. Provincial Treasurer or the hon. Minister of Justice speaks to the Bill again, the Chair will say "to close debate," and debate will close on second reading.

We have indications from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning that he wishes to speak to Bill 47.

Debate Continued

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do indeed have a desire to speak to the second reading of Bill 47. When I went through the Bill in some detail, I had to raise the question of what is the role of government. If one were to read the Bill or to have

visited Alberta over the course of the last three years, one would be thoroughly convinced that the only purpose the government plays is to pay down debt and, in fact, not only pay down debt but do it in half the time. As admirable as it is, that quality and the desire to pay down the debt and to pay it down even more rapidly – perhaps next year there will be another Bill suggesting that we can do it even quicker – that's honourable, but the flip side of that I would say is equally important.

That is that the government is responsible for the delivery of a variety of programs, some of which they themselves call core programs of government. Those are education, health care, social programs for our seniors, for those who through no fault of their own require assistance from the state. I see that that is a component of the function of government which has somehow been overlooked in the past three years, and in a way it's being overlooked in this Bill. Yet, Mr. Speaker, there is a component within this Bill which does address – and I like what I see. For the first time, it looks to lower income Albertans and realizes that there are difficulties there. Although income support may not be the best way, this tax credit idea, the new family employment tax credit for low-income families, is one I can fully support.

The other issue that came to mind as I was going through this Bill was the news release that was issued on August 19 by the hon. Treasurer. One of the introductory comments that was in there was that the “introduction of the Reinvestment Act 1996 in the Legislature today authorizes government” – now here's the important part – “to implement the reinvestment decisions announced on June 24.” Once again, you know, the decisions seem to have been made in advance as opposed to in the Assembly, debated openly in the Assembly. But we won't harp on that, Mr. Speaker, because for the majority of the Bill I do think that good ideas have come through.

I have to credit the Treasurer with this, that the release that came out on August 19 was a good description of what this Bill is going to do. It did outline some of the areas that would be corrected through this Bill. I can't say I'm as anxious or supportive of paying down the debt even quicker when we haven't determined whether the rate at which we're paying it down now is enabling us to deliver those core programs which the government themselves through their – what's the name of those documents that they issued? – business plans identified as a focus, as a responsibility of the government. So I'm not sure that by increasing the rate at which we pay down the debt, we'll still be enabled to meet the needs that are there and that are emerging at a greater level because of the restructuring and some of the difficulties that Albertans are experiencing in the restructuring.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

The other thing I did want to say, to commend the Treasury Department, is the fact that they did outsource. They sought an opinion from outside the department that was with regards to revenue forecasting. They brought in the Revenue Forecasting Review Committee, chaired by Harry Schaefer of H.G. Schaefer & Associates of Calgary. This committee, then, summarized some of the issues pertaining to revenue forecasting, which I found both insightful and refreshing. I know we've stood in this Assembly many times over the course of the last three years and tried to persuade the Treasurer of much the same information that was presented through the committee.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, perhaps the most positive feature of this Bill 47 is the Alberta family employment tax credit. It identifies

that there are approximately 130,000 low- and middle-income families and close to 200,000 children who will benefit from the Alberta employment tax credit. That's 330,000 Albertans – that's roughly 10 percent of the entire population of this province – with low and middle income that will benefit from such a tax credit. I once again commend the government for this initiative. I think it addresses some of the weaknesses that were created in fact by government. Nonetheless, they are being addressed.

The question that I did have as I was going through this Bill was about this tax credit. This tax credit was based on research and analysis that was done on Alberta families over the course of 1981 to 1993. In that study we see that all economic families of two or more in fact had an income change over that time period of minus 10 percent, that two-parent families with children under 18 saw a decrease of minus 10 percent, that married couples with children 18 or over or other relatives saw a decrease of 12 percent, that lone-parent families with children under 18 saw a decrease of 23 percent. That was covering the period 1981 to 1993. Then we have the 1993 to 1996 period, in which I think we'd probably see even more of an impact on lower and middle-income families in Alberta. I'm wondering whether this measure that's taken, although I appreciate that it's to correct some of the slippage that's taken place over that 10-year period – there's that three-year period where there's even more slippage. The question is whether this tax credit will just be neutral so that families will in fact recover from what happened in that time period 1981 to 1993 and disregard the 1993 to 1996 period.

Those were concerns that I had. I'd like to know – and perhaps the Treasurer will respond to that issue – whether in fact these lower income and middle-income families in Alberta will be further ahead as a result of this, or will it just be a neutral measure to ensure that they don't slip further yet? If it is a measure which will bring them into a positive position, not just a neutral position, then I'm even happier for it, because I think it is something that's required.

The other measure that's being undertaken through this Bill is the aviation and railway fuel tax reduction. I know this is something that when I was canvassing for my own election some three years ago was part of the policy papers – at that point it wasn't the opposition; it was a contender for government – that we were putting across. So I'm glad to see that the government has in fact adopted some of the campaign commitments that the opposition had made. We can see eye to eye, and I think that there will be a positive economic impact as a result of those fuel tax reductions.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, for the most part I see this Bill to be positive. I have to say that I have to reserve my praise with regards to paying down the debt at a faster rate. I think that until performance and outcome measures are in place, until we have clear indicators as to the status of our education, health care, and social systems, we shouldn't be accelerating the rate at which we're paying down debt. We should be attempting to ensure that we get the appropriate level of funding to core programs, not a penny more but not a penny less.

I think that all the hype in the last three or four years in this province and in North America, for that matter, about getting governments to operate more businesslike, although there is some merit to that, the thrust of that desire is, I think, telling governments that they can't overspend. You can't just expect the taxpayer to continue swallowing tax increases, but on the flip side of that argument, you cannot underfund programs. There is a

level, an acceptable level to the taxpayer, and I know that the government is to some extent trying to find that, but in order that we as a full Assembly can debate and then agree upon what that appropriate level is, we need those performance and outcome measures. Until those come to the Assembly, I could never support that third component of this Bill. Those other measures within the Bill, I must say, I will support wholeheartedly. Like I said, Bill 47, the Reinvestment Act, will receive my vote in favour of it when the time comes in second reading and very likely in third.

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

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Bill 47, the Reinvestment Act. The name, of course, is a misnomer, because it is really the opportunity lost Act or the good things that could have been Act or the fair play that could have existed Act. Instead, the Provincial Treasurer, who always reminds me of and personifies that adage of, "Hi, I'm here from the government; I'm here to help," has once again struck terror and fear in the hearts of all Albertans who attempt to read these things.

Just by way of a humorous anecdote, Mr. Speaker, it would be interesting if, just for example, we were to ask the man on the street what this paragraph means:

In Sections 13.3 to 13.8,

- (a) "adjusted earned income", "adjusted income", "base taxation year", "cohabiting spouse", "earned income", "eligible individual", "qualified dependant" and "return of income" have the same meanings as in section 122.6 of the federal Act.

Now, that's a beauty, Mr. Speaker, but lest your eyeballs roll deep into your head when you try to figure out what that means, we move on to where it says that this is a refund. Now, this is the phraseology that all Albertans are going to dance in the street on, because this is evidence of a refund.

Subject to subsections (3) to (6), the amount that an individual is deemed to have overpaid in a month is determined by the formula $1/12(A-B)$

where

A is the smallest amount under clauses (a), (b) and (c):

- (a) the product obtained when \$500 is multiplied by the number of qualified dependants in respect of whom the individual was an eligible individual at the beginning of the month;
- (b) 8% of the amount, if any, by which the individual's adjusted earned income for the base taxation year in relation to the month exceeds \$6500;
- (c) \$1000;

B is 4% of the amount, if any, by which the individual's adjusted income for the base taxation year . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but we will get into clause by clause in third reading.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, I'm talking about the principle of this.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would wish you would. Thank you.

MR. GERMAIN: Yes. Thank you. I'm talking about the principle of the Bill. The principle of the Bill is to try to create a tax advantage for low- and middle-income working individuals in this province. What we have instead is more of that "I'm here

from the government, and I'm here to help" kind of terminology and phraseology.

Any time that the Alberta Income Tax Act is amended, Mr. Speaker, it gives us the opportunity to talk about the principle of income tax legislation in the province of Alberta. What we find here again is a narrow, shallow, and nonresponsive attempt to amend the Alberta Income Tax Act that overlooked so many important and critical devices, including this important and critical device to stimulate economy and to give an absolutely no-cost tax break back to the Alberta corporate sector. Zero cost to the government, Mr. Speaker, and this Provincial Treasurer sits on his hands and refuses to abolish the portion of the Alberta Income Tax Act that obliges corporations to file a separate and distinct income tax return in the province of Alberta. No other province, with the exception of the province of Quebec, that has a different taxation system, obliges their citizens that are operating in corporate form to conduct and handle that filing.

So when you talk about the principle of tax reform in the province of Alberta and when you talk about the Reinvestment Act, the title of this Bill, it is better expressed as, again, the lost opportunity Act, because the government will not take advantage of this free opportunity to cut loose the shackles of business in the province of Alberta and allow them the opportunity to stretch their wings and fly to great heights creating jobs in this particular province.

I looked through this Bill 47, Mr. Speaker, hoping against hope, hoping in the desperation of a desert survivor looking forward to the next oasis, hoping against hope, looking for that section that shows that the Provincial Treasurer truly intends to reinvest in Alberta and that the Premier of the province has heard the citizens of Alberta, and no, we don't find that.

Earlier today we were discussing another Bill, criticizing those people who, it is alleged, didn't hear some members. Here we have a government that sent out some 50,000 or more pamphlets and got I think 2,000 or 3,000 back. Again, they didn't again hear what Albertans asked.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the family employment tax credit a little bit. The family employment tax credit is a very interesting tax credit. First of all, if you have a cohabiting spouse, this legislation obliges that cohabiting spouse to file a tax return. Sometimes a cohabiting spouse may not earn enough money to file a tax return and may not have the necessary underlying foundation to apply for any form of tax credit and therefore might not be filing a tax return. Well, not this government. By golly, to get this benefit, the government wants to make sure you appreciate what side of your bread the butter is on. So we're going to make every spouse file an income tax return unless they can get special dispensation from no less than the federal government of the province of Alberta. That is a very, very odd policy, an odd policy to bring forward in remedial relief legislation when you are attempting to put funds back in the hands of the needy. Not the greedy, the needy. You're going to start by making sure they all file income tax returns.

You know, in paragraph 13.7 the government seeks to protect those refunds. They're going to protect those refunds. They're going to be free from wage seizure. They're going to be free from charging or giving as security. They can't be assigned except as a prescribed enactment. Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because from a philosophy we have allowed tax planners and tax preparers to be paid a certain amount to prepare a tax return. If it's within allowable limits, that's been permitted. Now, is this a type of refund for which that rule will not apply?

In other words, suppose that this is the only refund that somebody can get and to get it they have to file a legitimate tax return, properly prepared. They can no longer go to a tax preparer, because this cannot be assigned. Yet any other refund coming from the government is assigned. This is not government money. This is a refund of taxation that people have already paid by lowering the tax rates through a complicated formula for some people. Why is it that we would prevent them from having a professional do their tax return and pay a slice of that return by prohibiting the assignment or charging of it?

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that that is exempt from writ proceedings as defined in the Civil Enforcement Act? Why is that exempt from distress proceedings? Why can't it be retained by way of deduction or setoff, except as indicated in the legislation? That to me sounds like an odd policy. That to me sounds like a policy where the government wants to make sure that people get the cheque so that they will be eternally grateful to the government for sending them the cheque: the cheque is in the mail syndrome. The federal government did it successfully for many years with the family allowance cheques. Nobody knew what else the government in Ottawa was doing for you, but every month when you opened that \$6 family allowance cheque, you knew that they were doing something for you. Finally wiser brains prevailed, and it was decided that that was a political waste of postage, and the family allowance went the way of many other good ideas, an idea whose time had finally exhausted itself.

10:30

So now we have this government coming forward with the same approach: we're going to make sure the cheque is in the mail, and nobody is going to be able to attach it. Is that going to be legally enforceable? I say to you, Mr. Speaker: suppose somebody goes bankrupt before they get their refund? That refund would then go to their trustee in bankruptcy. Yet in the face of this specific prohibition against that assignment, one has to wonder whether this particular cheque will go through the net of bankruptcy. If that is the case, the Provincial Treasurer, continuing his role of, "Hi, I'm here from the government; I'm here to help," will in fact have created a nullity, because it will be . . . I know that the Provincial Treasurer is dying to get into continuing this debate. He's been galvanized. He wants to debate, to close debate six or seven hours from now, but I want to point out that he probably hasn't thought about that.

Now, what about the guy or the girl who's ducking their maintenance obligations to their other children? What about them? Why can't this thing be attached for unpaid maintenance? Why, Mr. Treasurer? If we really want to help poor people and the working poor, why can't it be attached for maintenance enforcement? The Treasurer shrugs his shoulders, so I presume that we're going to see a government amendment coming in saying that this does not supersede the bankruptcy Act and a government amendment saying that you can attach this for maintenance enforcement.

Now, I want to move on, Mr. Speaker, because I don't dare run out of my 20-minute time on this very important piece of social legislation. I want to draw everybody's attention to the new government style of declaring what the debt is and, by golly, pronouncing it to be law. For the first time ever in the history of legislative drafting since the earlier recorded transcriptions of the proceedings of Westminster and other places and radiating all the

way back to the Magna Carta, when they began to document parliamentary trusts and parliamentary reforms, for the first time we have a government declaring as a substantive law what their debt is. For the first time.

I direct your attention, members, to section 4(1) of this particular Act. Now, normally you would find definitions in the definition section. In fact, there were lots of definitions in the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act. The criticism the Provincial Treasurer got, Mr. Speaker, was that there were so many definitions that everybody intuitively sensed that it was booga-booga accounting, to coin a phrase of one of the hon. members on the front row of Her Majesty's Official Opposition. Booga-booga accounting. The Provincial Treasurer reacted badly to that very viable, constructive criticism. So how did he do that? He created . . . [interjection] Oh, now some member tells me that it was the Provincial Treasurer's term that somebody from our front bench borrowed, and he was in turn criticizing some Conservative Treasurer who preceded him. Booga-booga accounting.

Now we have this, Mr. Speaker. We have gone so far past booga-booga accounting that we now declare what our debt is. Never mind what the debt really is. We'll make a law that says that the debt is \$6.223 billion and no pennies, dollars, cents, or any other denominator or any other digit. We will have that exact debt, rounded off to that exact figure, and we will declare it. We won't create a definition; we won't create a formula. We will actually legislate in the province of Alberta what the debt is. Well, I want the Provincial Treasurer to do that for me. I've got some debt, and I want the Provincial Treasurer to legislate my debt away. He can't do it. It is not possible. It is like legislating that the sun will not come up in the east tomorrow.

What we can't have in my respectful estimation is this new precedent in government Provincial Treasurer draftsmanship where he does not define what the debt is. He does not draw a definition. He does not say that it relates to a formula. He does not say that it is what the annual books at the end of the year say. He says in paragraph 4(1): "The audited Crown debt at March 31, 1996 is \$6 223 000 000." That is an impossibility, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it cannot be that precise and rounded to that many digits. So it's a statement of fact that is fundamentally untrue at the time it was said, and we are wrong to enshrine it in this particular legislation. It is wrong in principle for a Bill to declare what the debt is, but the Treasurer needs that, because against that artificially set number he has now whittled down the number.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that the debt in this province is in fact \$30 billion, plus or minus, if you talk about what the man on the street or the woman in the hair salon talks about when they talk about debt. It's \$30 billion that we owe. Don't go looking and saying, "Well, I built a room on my house last year; therefore, I don't owe \$30 billion." You might say, "I'm hoping that if I have to get thrown out of my house, I'll get a little more out of it," but don't change your debt.

We have \$30 billion plus of debt in the province of Alberta. So what does this Provincial Treasurer do? He sets out a very low jumping bar, and the low jumping bar is that he gives himself a total of now 14 years to get that debt whittled down to zero. He gets that whittled down in 14 years, but you know, in 14 years . . .

MR. CHADI: Good job, Jim.

MR. GERMAIN: It is a good job. Compared to what I saw in

provincial politics in Alberta before I entered politics, it is a good job, but it is still the reality that when my children are themselves almost ready to get elected to political office and take their seats in this Assembly – that's a leap of faith – we will still have a debt of around \$23 billion, more or less, give or take a smirk or two from the Provincial Treasurer. We will still have a debt of that magnitude.

You know, people are going to wonder what it was all about, Mr. Speaker. They're going to say, "What is this?" It's like the guy who lugs home two pails of water up a steep mountain cliff. He gets to the first plateau on the hill, and he can hardly lift his back. His back is seized, and his wife says, "Guess what, honey; we're moving uptown." You know? It's like that. It's not a practical reality or a practical goal.

I want to move on, Mr. Speaker. I want to now talk about the Fuel Tax Act. We have suggested as part of the opposition of this province for some time that these consumption sales taxes are killers of jobs. Recently the distillers of the province of Alberta, obviously rankled by the fact that fuel prices are going to go down, took the unprecedented step of sending MLAs a clear amber substance which I believe to be liquor to make the point that there's nothing in a bottle of liquor except taxes. You know, that was the point they tried to make. Now, if the gasoline manufacturers did the same thing, it would be equally as vivid an example. Almost everything that you pump into your car and pay for at the pumps is taxes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: It's federal tax.

MR. GERMAIN: Is taxes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Federal tax.

MR. GERMAIN: The hon. minister says to me, "It's federal tax." Indeed it is. But I'm still worshipping at the altar that there's only one taxpayer, and I thought that the Provincial Treasurer and the hon. minister did as well. Now they want us to shift the tax around and say: oh, well, tax is okay because someone else is levying it. What we want to do is lower the taxes.

What is missing in this particular Bill is that hotel tax, that killer of jobs and that killer of travelers. That's missing here. The fuel tax is going down nowhere near as much as it should be going down. The tire tax: another tax that kills jobs. The fuel tax is still not competitive with the rest of North America, so let's not be banging ourselves on the back of our shoulder blades with both hands and congratulating ourselves, Mr. Speaker. On the principle of this Bill, if we're going to attack fuel taxes as being a killer of jobs and as something that drives aircraft to the Vancouver International Airport instead of to Calgary and Edmonton, if we are going to attack those, let's get right to the root of the problem and excise the cancer out once and for all, not just nip and snip a little bit at the hairs growing on top. Let's get the cancer knocked right out once and for all.

10:40

Now, let's also look at this particular section of wonderment in the Act. Mr. Speaker, I was commenting earlier on the incomprehensibility of the Act and how it's difficult for members here to present quality debate on something that's incomprehensible, but look at this other mean-spirited and aggressive, gouging paragraph that's found in the Fuel Tax Act. If you happen to buy your fuel at a vehicular dispensing station, even though you use

the fuel in a nontaxable way, you don't get a tax break for that, and you don't get your money back. You know what the Provincial Treasurer says? He says: don't even write me a letter, because I'm not giving you your money back. He doesn't even put in a provision where you could make a claim for a rebate of the tax on the fuel that you could legitimately show you used elsewhere.

The Provincial Treasurer says: well, if you're smart enough to buy your fuel in a way that is not metered for tax, then we're going to let you have the break, but if you have to buy it from a regular pump, as you might in rural Alberta, heaven forbid – speaking up here for rural Alberta – you don't even get a chance to apply for a rebate. The Provincial Treasurer, the guy that's from the government and is here to help, Mr. Speaker, says:

Subject to this section, a consumer shall pay a tax to the Provincial Treasurer at a rate of \$0.065 per litre on liquid petroleum gas if

(a) the liquid petroleum gas is purchased for use as a motive fuel . . .

[Mr. Germain's speaking time expired] Oh boy.

I conclude my comments, Mr. Speaker, and look forward to subsequent stages of this particular legislation where we can talk about this further.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments brief, although I do want to have an opportunity to say on the record both my concerns and my ultimate support for Bill 47.

I think the minister of advanced education said it best when he talked about this government's legislative agenda. He made comment about legislation just being look-good, feel-good legislation, and this is probably the ultimate exercise in look-good, feel-good legislation. In fact, when I read it – and I had anticipated this Bill because I thought this would be a very substantive Bill – it occurred to me that what we really have in Bill 47 is a campaign brochure all dressed up to look like a Bill before this Legislature.

There is very little in this Bill that the government needs to put before the Assembly at this point, so one can only be left to conclude that the reason it's before the Assembly at this point is because the government wants to be able to carry forward into the pending election something called the Reinvestment Act as another one of the arrows in its quiver that they will be fighting the election with.

Now, there are some things in this Bill which are laudable: the family tax credit, this fiscal year's 1 percent reduction in personal income tax, the employment tax credit, certainly the relief, as modest as it will be, for low-income families. I think the point's been made, however, that that relief seems to be somewhat ideologically guided, because it doesn't really help low-income individuals that may be facing the same struggles as low-income families that meet the government's test of family.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud made reference to how the government has adopted some of his notions to do with building in cushions. Mr. Speaker, the ultimate irony here is that you have a Bill called the Reinvestment Act that doesn't really address any of the concerns which are on the minds of Albertans today, the concerns about health care, about lack of access to health care, about fears about two-tiered health care and growing personal costs for health care, which Albertans should have every right to expect to be paid for out of general revenue. It really

reminds me of this government's first discussions about health care. I remember the co-chairman of the health restructuring committee, Dr. Norm Wagner, standing up in front of an audience in Red Deer and showing an overhead. On one side of the overhead were all of those things that were the producers of wealth. On the other side of the chart were all of those things that were consumers of wealth. Of course, health care was up there on the overhead as a consumer of wealth. There was no note at that point and there's still no recognition at this point that quality health care is in fact an investment in this community, an investment in this province.

When you see a Bill called the Reinvestment Act, and when you understand it's coming at a point in time when Albertans have never been more concerned about the quality of their health care system, you would expect at the very least that the government would have done something in this Act to address those concerns. But they didn't. They still believe that health care is not an investment but in fact is an expense and an expense only.

It reinforces once again, Mr. Speaker, that old adage – and this government, I think, lives up to it – that there are people that know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Certainly the Treasurer knows the cost of everything but doesn't seem to know the value of providing dignity to Albertans who are in need. We would have expected to see some of that recognized in this Bill, but of course we don't. So we're left with a dilemma. We're left with a Bill, as I said, that has some elements which would bring some relief, as small as it will be, but a Bill that leaves much wanting.

Mr. Speaker, just one other point that I'd like to make. Members of this opposition have for the last three years been asking the government to please use the full legislative process that's before us, and I'm making reference to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. This Bill, as other Bills,

leaves many, many things to regulation, with no reference to that committee. Those regulations will never, ever be debated in public. The average Albertan who's trying to follow this government's agenda will have tremendous difficulty following that agenda because so many things are being left to these secret, in camera, behind closed doors discussions.

10:50

The one thing that you might expect would have been set by regulation or by a schedule to be published later, that could be appropriately dealt with because it is a bit of a moving target, would have been the calculation or the actual figure for the net debt. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the irony is that even though that's the one thing that you would expect could have been dealt with as a schedule or by regulation, it finds its way entrenched in this Bill.

Again that just, I think, confirms what I believe to be true in my own mind, and that is that the reason why there's a legislated figure and the reason why it's an unbelievably low figure is because this Bill is not about doing the right thing. This Bill is not about reinvesting in Alberta. This Bill is not about ensuring that all Albertans have their basic needs met with dignity. But, Mr. Speaker, this Bill is all about how this government intends to fight an election, and it's with rhetoric and it's with slogans and it's with promises for some future date, as we see here. In the future this government will promise us everything, as they're promising some tax relief in the future, but they're not doing anything to meet the needs that are so evident and so obvious right now.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a second time]

[At 10:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]