

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 22, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/03/22

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

This evening we are going to divide immediately into two subcommittees, one in 512, that's subcommittee B, Justice and Attorney General. So all those people who are in subcommittee B, please adjourn to room 512, and the chair, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 8:02 p.m. to 10:08 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of Supply to order.  
The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the department of Treasury, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to table copies of the documents tabled during the subcommittee of supply meeting this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.  
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Justice and Attorney General, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**10:10**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the department of Treasury and the Department of Justice and Attorney General, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of the documents tabled during Committee of Supply 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

[The members indicated below moved that the following Bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| 2 Dairy Industry Act                                 | Renner<br>(for Klapstein) |
| 3 Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 1999 | Severtson                 |
| 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 1999                 | Hancock<br>(for Stelmach) |
| 5 Surveys Amendment Act, 1999                        | Renner<br>(for Yankowsky) |

### Bill 6

#### Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1999

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1999.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some final comments with respect to this bill, first of all to indicate some disappointment that the department was not able to bring forward some amendments to address the issues that have been raised by the opposition within the committee stage, those issues related to an inequitable fee structure, the application of the amendments not being retroactive.

I would also just like to read into the record -- I did receive a copy of a letter from a citizen in the province. This letter was addressed to Mr. Severtson as the sponsor of the bill.

MR. DICKSON: You can't refer to him by name.

MRS. SLOAN: Oh, I'm sorry. To the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, my apology.

The writer states:

I have been listening with interest to the debate on Bill 6, and there seems to be a good deal of comment about the \$350 fee for searching for either one's parents or child. I am going through this process in the province of Quebec, and I enclose a copy of the form used there to request a search. As you will see, if one is eligible for a reduced rate, one has to submit a copy of the previous year's income tax declaration in order to prove eligibility. Also, as you will see on the reverse side of the form, there is a schedule for repaying the applicant at various stages if the search is not able to be completed. Perhaps this could be used as the basis for an amendment to Bill 6 when it comes to Committee of the Whole.

I, unfortunately, did not receive this letter until after the bill had passed that stage, but I'd like to acknowledge Cheryl Toshack's thoughts and comments with respect to the bill. It is perhaps something that the government may choose to bring forward at a

further time. It was certainly something that I highlighted as an issue that I had personal experience with in terms of attempting to advocate for someone who could not afford the minimum \$350 fee that is currently in effect under this act.

So in those respects, Mr. Speaker, and with those thoughts, I conclude my comments on the bill. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan to close debate.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to mention to the Legislature and to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that there is the other aspect in an adoption. What we have is the post registry where the various parties involved with adoptions can register at no cost so that they can match up, but both sides have to apply to match up. The cost is with the search agencies. Usually they go through the post registry first, and if they're not successful, then they'll hire a search agency. But in many cases I feel that when they go that way, there could be such a thing as a veto already placed on the record. So even by going through the agency, they can't do anything if a veto has been placed.

I, too, got the letter, and it was past the stage -- you mentioned the one letter about Quebec -- of making amendments. But I did read that letter, and I have to correspond back.

With that, I close debate on Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

### Bill 19

#### Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1999

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 19, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1999.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could we have the attention of the table officers here. I've just lost track. I thought the Clerk was going to make an announcement as to what the next bill was going to be, and I didn't hear that.

We have, then, before us in third reading Bill 19, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1999. We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who's expressed an interest to speak to this.

10:20

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've spent some considerable time on Bill 19, and every minute of it was important because Bill 19 of course is the legislation that will appropriate over \$3 billion. Our concerns have been put on the record several times. My intent at third reading is not to repeat all of that. However, I am still very curious as to the government's rationale for presenting the legislation in the form that it's before us. The \$3.575 billion represents about 25 percent of the provincial budget, but if you actually go through department by department, what you find is that there is wide variance.

If the rationale for the bill is simply that the government needs this supply because the budget debate won't conclude before the end of the fiscal year, then we could accept that, but we would also expect that the request would be limited to just those funds needed to operate government departments until the budget does become approved sometime in early May. Instead, what we see are departments such as Executive Council that are only requesting 17 percent

of their budget in this interim period and other departments -- I think the winner in this regard is Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. I think they get the silver star for optimistic spending projections, given that that department is requesting 61 percent of its budget.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through the analysis, you'll see that there are very few actual requests that mirror the 25 percent. Most of them are above that. So I have to just wonder out loud why the government can't do a little bit better, take a little bit more care and effort, and do a little bit better job of planning their disbursements around the budget cycle. Also, I still question, of course, why the late introduction of the budget, because if it had come to us in a more timely way, we would have been able to have gone through the statutory requirements on budget debate and possibly passed it without having to have an interim supply vote whatsoever. You can only think that that would be the goal of this government that likes to paint itself as being such good stewards of the province's finances.

So Bill 19 is a bill that will ultimately get the support, I believe, of most members of the Assembly because we don't wish to see government operations grind to a halt or go through what happened south of the border a couple of years ago. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, we can't let it go unremarked that this government's record is getting worse instead of better in terms of coming to the Assembly with interim supply requests. As they continue to do that, I believe that it erodes public confidence in the ability of this government to manage the money that they're entrusted with.

Just before returning to the Assembly this evening, I was attending the annual general meeting of the community league in my constituency, and they asked me what I was rushing back to the Assembly to do. When I told them that I was going back to participate in a debate that would see 25 percent of the provincial budget allocated ahead of all of the other estimates, they were somewhat in disbelief. They said: "How could that be? How could it be that you're being asked to approve 25 percent of all of the expenditure without having the benefit of all of the debate and of having all of your questions answered on all of the detailed program estimates?"

The observation made by the treasurer of that community league to me -- I believe it was the treasurer -- was: "Well, that sort of lays waste to the claim that there's a lot of integrity in that process. If you're going to be asked to spend up to 25 percent of all of the money before you can have the detailed questions answered, then why do you even go through the exercise of the business plans and all those other things? Doesn't it make it look like a little bit of a charade?" I thought that was a very good point made by my constituent.

So we've got the best of times and the worst of times here. We've got a situation where we know the appropriation will go ahead, but we're very concerned about the lack of accountability.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the wonderful progress that we've made today, I would move that we do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 10:26 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]