

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 8, 2003**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2003/04/08

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

I wonder if the Assembly would agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening I've had the opportunity to speak with a group of young constituents who have assembled in the room upstairs to discuss some topics of interest to them. I'd like to introduce them. I will read their names off, and then afterwards I'll have them rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly. We have with us this evening Darcy Andrews, Ravi Amarnath, Jeanne-Marie Audy, Matthew Bissett, Leslie-Anne Fendeleit, Garnett Genius, Matthew Mohr, Mark Ruhl, Neil Ruhl, Angela Schubert, Trevor Stokke, Chris Young, Beverly Eastham, Jessica McClay, and Steve Buchta. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly one of the most distinguished citizens in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar and a former Detroit Red Wing, Mr. Terry Cavanagh. Mr. Cavanagh has had a very distinguished career in civic politics and has a very keen interest in the economic prosperity and the future of the city of Edmonton. He's in the Speaker's gallery, and I would now ask him to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr. Hutton: I was going to acknowledge Mr. Cavanagh as well, Mr. Speaker, because he was a fine mayor and is a dear friend too.

The Deputy Speaker: I guess you could stand up again. A double welcome.

head: **Government Motions**

Provincial Fiscal Policies

19. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate April 8: Ms Carlson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise tonight to begin debate on the budget for the 2003-2004 fiscal year. One of the main components of the whole discussion and the theme that kind of permeated through the speech from the Finance minister this

afternoon was the idea that this is a budget that's going to start a new phase in Alberta's financial management, financial planning, and the key word seems to be the focus on stability and sustainability. When you look at the process that was put in place through the legislative agenda earlier in the session, Bill 2, that put in place the ability to deal with the stability fund, or sustainability fund, the infrastructure capital fund, and to make some of those adjustments. That really will help in that context.

When you look at the idea of sustainability and the broad context of that term, I have to go back to the question that I placed to the Premier yesterday in question period when I asked him to define sustainability in the context of the government's debate, and he in effect took that opportunity to tie sustainability to government expenditures that were constrained by revenues. That's simplifying an answer that he gave us, but that was the sense of it. I guess when I think about that definition and that use of the term, I would like to think of sustainability in a lot broader context of what is a true use of that word, and to define it so closely tied to budget balancing, budget sustainability, then what we end up with is the kind of approach to planning that really doesn't facilitate the true concept of stability and sustainability, that I discussed at length for the last number of years and, more specifically, the last two years when I've been trying to promote the idea of sustainability, the stability fund, as I called it, the infrastructure fund, the revenue smoothing, all concepts that the government has now incorporated. But the debate that went around my definition of that sustainability had to deal with the progressive and sustainable growth of our province. If we look at it from the point of view of, in effect, the tools that were put in place, those tools by themselves only facilitate an operation, but what they do is they need to make sure that the tools have the appropriate vision behind them.

What I want to talk about a little bit at the start tonight is the vision that I would like to have seen in the budget today and the vision that, in effect, ended up in the budget today. I guess to use some of the budget line items that show up in it, it's a matter of: how do we look at provincial expenditures as a component in both the economic and social systems of our province? If we look at how the government approached the budget this term, yes, they've created a system that will provide for, if I want to call it, the ability not to have shocks in a year. So it's taken out the uncertainty of the budget rather than the sustainability of the budget. You know, I guess that's how I can classify the difference in what I was talking about when I talked about sustainability and stability of our budgeting processes as opposed to what I see in the government's operational plan that they gave us today. In other words, they've got a budget and they're using tools to smooth their budgeting process, not to make a sustainable budget.

When I talk about a sustainable budget, I look at it from the point of view of: are the public expenditures sufficient and appropriately placed to give us the growth in our economy, the support of the infrastructure in our economy, the balance in our social systems, and the safety nets that are there to really provide for a future, a vision, that says, "this is where we want to be 20 years from now; this is where we want to be 30 years from now; this is where we want our children to be when they become adults, become legislators taking our place"? This is the kind of thing that we have to focus on, and I don't see that in this budget in the context of sustainability that I use when I talk about that term.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just kind of go through a little bit and use some of the examples that I want to use to illustrate that in the sense that what we have is a system that didn't put the money in the priority areas, the areas that Albertans were asking for. You know, we keep line item totals in the budget, and I guess the easy one to talk about

is education because that's the one that most people have asked questions about today. We end up with, depending on how you calculate it, somewhere between a 4 and a half percent, 4.7 percent – and some people have even come up with a number of 4.9 percent – increase in the Learning budget. But when you look at what's really there for the frontline delivery of service, even the budget points out that it's only 2 percent for the per student grant, and if that's all we have in the per student grant, that's in effect a signal being sent by the government that that's the amount of money for classroom activity.

8:10

Now, I recognize that there are additional dollars for technology in another line item, but, you know, that's a signal by the government that those dollars should be in technology. There's another line item for special needs. That means that those dollars should be used for children with special learning conditions, special needs, to help them learn, to help them reach their potential. But when you look at it from the point of view of what's there to handle the classroom need, the per student grant only goes up by 2 percent. How do we deal with that in the context of a system that still is trying to catch up on an arbitrated wage settlement, that is trying to catch up with extremely high utility costs for the past year and the foreseeable couple of years?

When we look at a system that's trying to deal with the added costs of new technology adoption and the evergreening of technology, it doesn't give us a sustainable budget when we look at how it's broken out in Learning. You know, we're dealing here most in my discussion with the K to 12 component, not the advanced education or the adult learning component that they define in the line items of the budget. Even there we're giving basically for the classrooms at the advanced education level a 2.2 percent increase, but what we're doing is in effect downloading on to students more of the cost by allowing tuitions to go up, by allowing differential tuition fees. This basically says that students have to finance more of their own education cost.

When we put that into a development component, Mr. Speaker, you have to appreciate, you know, the focus that I've taken on a lot of the work I did before coming to the Legislature in terms of my work with governments, my work with communities in terms of economic development, and one of the things that we talked about all the time was the need for human resource training, human resource quality, but also the fact that economic development really transcends the idea of just having that. We've got to have an ability for those individuals to participate in both the community system and the economic system, and if we're basically saying to a new graduate that "you're going to have a much greater obligation to the financial community through paying off your loans," they're not going to have the money to participate in what we have as a consumer economy in North America. We don't have with them the same ability to go out and buy a home, to buy new cars, to buy, you know, the entertainment, the consumer goods that I had, as an example, when I graduated.

I was very fortunate to have gone through university at a time when, you know, the public saw the value of a public university and the value of citizens trained to participate in the system. So in effect I came out of university with essentially no financial debt. So I had to deal with that in the context of: where do I go by comparing my grandchildren now or even my children, who are coming out of their university programs with significant financial debts? Does that mean I should step in and help pay off their debt for them? Well, I think that's an issue that we have to look at in terms of what a social expectation is. I hear a number of the members across the road

saying that, yes, I should be paying off my children's university debt, but this is the idea of: where does the benefit truly come from that university education? It comes back to all of us as a community. I think the ideal example that we can give on that is the decision that was made by Ireland about 15 years ago to make sure that every student who wanted to had access to an advanced education system, and that system in effect helped them get established, and they had a lot of support through the public school system: no tuition, minimal tuition at the postsecondary education level.

We need to look at the perspective that they now have one of the fastest growing economies in the world. So in effect they were thinking about the long-term potential and long-term sustainability for their communities. They were dealing with this in the context of how to make sure that their communities were viable by having well-trained, well-educated individuals, and they've got rewards coming now from that. You know, that's the thing we should be looking at when we plan our budgets, when we plan our expenditures at a public level, the idea that we end up pushing this to the limit in terms of making sure that these students have a manageable debt but that they do have an obligation to pay off that debt. All we're doing is making sure that the financial communities of our economy are strong, not the true sense of our community, because individuals then start to make decisions about where they can locate to get the most from their employment so that they can pay back those financial obligations. I don't think this budget passes on a message that we want to strongly support people, young Albertans, getting a quality education in our province.

You know, the whole idea that we look through this and say: where are the priorities, where are the issues that this government sees as important? We look at a 2 percent increase per student or classroom grants for education, yet we look at a much bigger increase in the additional dollars going to support horse racing in this province. They get a 10 or 12 percent increase; students get only a 2 percent increase. What signal of priorities does that send to the young people of this province? You know, it's really in my mind the wrong kind of a signal when we're going to increase the expenditures on horse racing by more than we're going to increase the expenditures on public education, more than health care, more than any of the other people service components. It really sends out a wrong signal and a signal that doesn't reflect a lot of the priorities of Albertans.

The other component that we heard talk about here in terms of the stability of where we're trying to go as a province is, you know, this new idea of capital expenditures, and I guess just to kind of touch on one more point to kind of illustrate, the focus that I see in this budget that doesn't sit right with how I would like to see us serve the public through this Legislature is this idea of how we're going to deal with our capital and our infrastructure. You know, it's great. It's really commendable that the government is making a commitment to catch up on some of the infrastructure deficit that we've had created over the last 10 years. You know, the idea that they're going to commit to \$5.5 billion over the next three years is going to in effect make sure that we do have some degree of catch-up and sustainability in our needs for infrastructure.

8:20

But when you look at what they're doing, it's interesting that they're committing to use some of that public money in support of other financial alternatives, as they call them in here. In the background material they start talking about and they reintroduce the concept of the public/private partnerships, and if we're looking at the long-term best interests of Albertans, we have to make sure that we spend the dollars to get the best return over years, not just this year but over a number of years, for Albertans.

It really raises the questions when we have the best credit rating in North America, we have the options to deal with financing our infrastructure, we have the providers of infrastructure – you know, the businesses in our community who in effect can put that in place . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. leader. We have a debate going on, and some people have forgotten their manners this evening and don't realize that we have only one hon. member speaking at a time, and that's you, hon. leader, not this gentleman over here nor the other gentleman over here who seems to be anxious to debate. They will have a chance later on, but right now it's the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Debate Continued

Dr. Nicol: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The point I was getting at is the fact that if we look at the long-term investment in our capital projects, the very best way for us to do it and give Albertans the best value for their dollar is to do it under the public system because we in effect can borrow the money, we have the technology, we have the expertise, and we have the private-sector construction companies that can actually build those things for us in the most cost-effective way. All of the material we've been able to gather over the last four months while this debate's been going on has indicated that in the other jurisdictions where the public/private partnerships have been tried, they've all raised a lot of concern and a lot of problems, all the way from higher costs to higher management to greater bureaucracies being created to deal with the provision of services, and that's not what we want in Alberta. We want to have seamless, cost-effective infrastructure.

All I'm saying here is that if the government moves ahead on this, if they really feel they have to, make sure that the guidelines that they put for this committee that they talk about creating to vet these investments and these partnerships – that that committee be challenged with a long-run vision of how cost-effectively our public dollars are being used and that they have to do it in a public way so that in effect everyone can be brought into agreement about: this is a cost-effective way. We don't want to be in a position where we see problems arise, we see obligations arise that weren't foreseen, and the other issue is, you know, that we have to make sure that the quality standard is the same. In the examples of the P3s that have been tried in Alberta, there were quality differences between the public construction and the private-sector contract construction, and we have to make sure that if we're going to compare costs under a partnership scenario versus the costs under the public system, the quality standards and the use requirements are compatible. You know, that's one of the things that's really important that we do in the context of being open with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I guess there are just a couple of other issues that we talk about in terms of trying to make sure that we deal with the budget in its full focus. If we look at, in a sense, some of the issues that come up with, again, the line item concept of the individual ministries, we are very pleased to see the magnitude of the increase in health care, but when you build in the federal contribution, which in effect is expected to be used for new services in terms of home care and catastrophic drug costs, we have to look at that then. When you take that amount of money out of the health care budget, there's really little or no optimism to be felt in that health care budget because it doesn't really send a signal that there's a lot of room,

especially with the labour negotiations that are coming up this year, how they're going to be handled.

Will there be contingencies built in so that we don't end up with the same kind of requirement for financial transfers from one section to the other to handle the labour costs as opposed to the funding that went into other aspects? It's important, you know, that that kind of issue be dealt with, but, Mr. Speaker, the appropriate place to do that is in Committee of Supply as we deal with those individual budgets. So what I'm trying to do more here is focus on some of the major components of the budget in terms of where we're going.

I guess the other part of it that I want to just address, as well, is the idea that historically we've had some of the disaster services risk management dollars handled at a budgetary level. If I read the budget documents correctly, now almost all of those risk requirements in our budget are being transferred over to the stability fund. So drought, fire, those kinds of components are going to be ending up over there because even in Sustainable Resource Development the line item for forest fires is well below the average amount of money spent in the last three to five years. In effect, we can say that it's not enough to meet what is an average expectation. There is a kind of a signal being sent here that the budget process expects some money to be transferred from the stabilization fund to deal with forest fire fighting.

We look at the agriculture components and look at the drought programs there. I guess I don't share quite the optimism of the Minister of Finance today when she talked about the new Ag programs and how they were going to in effect reduce completely the need for the kinds of ad hoc programs we saw last year. Mr. Speaker, I really hope that that is the case, you know, because the ad hoc programs that we saw last year were really quite open to question about the effectiveness of them. I think I relayed the situation that I was faced with last summer on the acreage payment program where on my farm in southern Alberta I was faced with the highest yields I've had in five years, the best prices I've had in 20 years, the lowest costs because I got rain when I needed it. I didn't have to irrigate. I had all that public infrastructure there to help me risk-manage, yet I got the little form in the mail saying: you can qualify for public money. Now, I didn't apply, but in the end that kind of points out the fact that ad hoc programs don't really direct the money where it needs to go. So I really would like to share the minister's optimism when she spoke this afternoon and said that she hoped that this new program being put in place by the minister of agriculture would eliminate the need for those ad hoc programs, but I also had a chance to chat with the minister of agriculture and pointed out some of the stories that are starting to float around rural Alberta already about ways to abuse the system that are already being found by some of the farmers out there that are signing up for the new programs.

8:30

You know, this is the kind of thing, Mr. Speaker, where any new program has to be tested both for its effectiveness and also for its ability not to be used. Are the fences appropriately defined around it? I hope that the minister works strongly to make sure that as next year comes along, the new programs are built or are modified to close some of the loopholes that appear to be in it right now, but that's something that we can only tell over time in terms of how much of a problem that's going to be. I guess that where I was going on that is that it goes in with this idea that all of the risk management money is now being transferred to the stability fund, and how do we sustain that in the context of long-term planning? It would have been better to have had some kind of an estimate built into the annual budgets, you know, especially in Agriculture. With Ag

Financial Services they have a mechanism to move money across years so that, in effect, you can create a pool that has money in it that is actuarially sound over time based on the expectations of demand for the program. So you end up looking at that and saying: why put so much of the risk onto a fund that was supposed to be there for stability as opposed to that risk management component?

Mr. Speaker, as I kind of come to the end . . . [interjections] Well, maybe I'll use a few more minutes of my time now. Getting all that encouragement, I'll go on a little further. The idea is that, you know, we need to make sure that we go through the explanations of the budget and try and make it so that it's easy for all of us to talk to our constituents about it.

I just wanted to touch on one other aspect before closing, and I guess I throw this out as much to hope that it will precipitate an answer as opposed to throwing it out as any kind of a criticism or anything. It's something that to me seemed just out of context or out of sorts with what's been going on the last year or so, and that is the significant drop in the expenditures for Aboriginal Affairs in the context of how that is going to be brought in line with all of the issues that are coming up right now about the work that we're doing in the First Nations communities and the Métis communities. I noticed that in some of the departments there were new line items where aboriginal initiatives showed up under some of the individual departments, where they were not located in others years.

So I guess the question that I throw out and kind of in closing is: is there kind of a philosophic change in the approach to co-ordinating the affairs that are associated with aboriginal issues under one ministry where they are now being spread out under a number of ministries? This is, I guess, an issue that reflects on co-ordination and making these programs so that they flow together, that they don't overlap, that they don't duplicate, so that they're directed in a way that's needed. That, I think, was one of the strengths of having a lot of the programs co-ordinated under that one ministry, but now they seem to have been dispersed through a number of ministries.

So I guess, as I said at the start, that's a question that I raise. I'm not making it as a criticism. It was more a matter of: is it a philosophic or administrative change in the way the government sees relationships with the First Nations communities? In response it would be nice at some point in time to see an explanation about why that dividing up of those moneys occurred and what the government hoped to achieve from it because it really doesn't seem to lead to the co-ordination and the consistency that we could have if they were all run through one minister, one administrative unit. You know, it affects, I guess, a focus of the government.

Mr. Speaker, in drawing to a close, I just want to say that this is a budget where we have to question whether or not it really reflects the priorities that Albertans have been talking about. When you look at the relative increases in ministries in particular activities, I think Albertans would have liked to have seen a little more money at the classroom level in education. There need to be some ideas put out about: what is the true relationship of the public service?

Just in closing, Mr. Speaker, I was doing one of the interviews on the radio station tonight, and it was a call-in. One of the individuals called in and said that he'd been down in Nebraska, and he was wondering why a state like Nebraska has a budget that's about half the size of the budget of Alberta. He said: you know, if we had a budget that was half the size of our budget right now, as Albertans we'd have a lot more money in our pockets. I raised with him the issue that I had lived in that part of the U.S. for 10 or 12 years and the idea that they don't have health care in their state budgets. The social service system for health care for seniors is all out of the federal budget. They don't have a lot of the other same expenditures at the state level that we do at the provincial level here. Their federal

government provides a lot more money for support for the advanced education institutions whereas here that all funnels through our budget.

You know, it was interesting in the sense of how perspectives of budgets, perspectives of expenditures really create different expectations for people who look at them. That's why I think it's really important that as we go out and talk to Albertans about our budget, we don't put out information like was in one of the news releases where it said, you know, that basically health, education, and infrastructure are 70 percent of our budget. Mr. Speaker, if I've ever heard an irrelevant fact, that has to be one because it doesn't deal with expectations and expenditures. All it deals with is, in effect, something where they want to make it look like something that it isn't, and that's a real concern when we start talking about money.

What we should be talking about is: are the dollars we're putting into education giving us a long-term, sustainable economic and social system? Are the moneys that we're putting into health care giving us timely and accessible service? Are the dollars we're putting into infrastructure enough to give us a sustainable social and economic system? Are the dollars we're putting into human safety nets like SFI and AISH enough? Are they effective? Are they providing people with the support they need? Those are the comparisons we should be making rather than trying to make the comparison I talked about between the Alberta budget and the Nebraska budget or the fact that health, education, and infrastructure make up 70 percent of this year's budget. Infrastructure itself grew in this year's budget, so if you're going to compare it to last year's budget, it's irrelevant. You're comparing apples and oranges. So we shouldn't be putting out that kind of information if we want to be open and truthful with Albertans. We should be talking about the true facts of: are we delivering services in a cost-effective way and at a level that Albertans are asking for?

8:40

Mr. Speaker, that's the kind of criteria that I want to use in judging this budget, that I want to use as we go through each of the departments and look at the line items, the program expenditures, and basically say: are we getting value for the dollar that we're spending on behalf of Albertans? I hope that as we go through that, at the end we can say yes. I know that already on some of the numbers I've looked at, I'll be raising some real questions because I don't think we've got sustainable expenditures that are in the long-run best interests of Albertans, but in other areas I think there is a lot of money being spent where we don't need it. Albertans don't need to have a bigger budget. They just need a budget that's spent in different ways, in ways that meet their priorities and meet their expectations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democratic Party.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that I have 20 minutes. Fifteen? Okay. All right. With a document as vital, as important as the budget document, it's difficult to do it much justice in 15 minutes, but I'll do my best. With the \$20 billion or more planned to be expended here, I think it comes to about a billion and some for each minute that I have at my disposal.

Mr. Speaker, for a government as well endowed fiscally as this provincial government, Budget 2003 is a huge disappointment. For school boards and parents hoping for some relief from crippling deficits and ballooning class sizes, Budget 2003 is a huge disappointment. For postsecondary students who are facing tuition hikes of 6 to 10 percent year after year, Budget 2003 offers absolutely

nothing. Most of the 7 percent hike in health care spending is simply the Tory government taking advantage of increased federal transfers. There's little in this budget for children and less for seniors.

My first surprise with Budget 2003 is that it didn't contain an update on revenues and expenditures for the 2002-2003 fiscal year. The third-quarter update was released February 26, almost six weeks ago. Surely the government has by now a better handle on what the final surplus is going to be for the next budget year. If past experience is any guide, the surplus for last year is likely to be much larger than the government is currently willing to admit. To be blunt, the revenue numbers as reported in the third-quarter update don't add up. For example, oil royalties are projected to be 40 percent lower than in the year 2000-2001 despite the fact that oil prices have only been about 5 percent lower this year compared to two years ago. This represents a difference of about \$700 million, the first instance of lowballing. Natural gas royalties are projected to be about 40 percent lower than in the year 2000-2001 despite the fact that gas prices are only about 20 percent lower this year compared to two years ago. This represents a difference of about \$1 billion.

Therefore, it's quite conceivable that the final budget surplus could be \$1 billion to \$2 billion higher than forecast as recently as the third-quarter update. This fact is kept well hidden in Budget 2003. The government knows that the budget surplus won't be known until June. If the surplus is higher than what is reported in the third-quarter update, it would be too late to do anything other than apply a hundred percent of these extra dollars to debt repayment. Instead of \$2 billion sitting in the bank waiting for debt to mature, the cash set aside could grow to \$3 billion or \$4 billion. With all government awash in cash, having this money sitting in the bank while school boards are facing huge deficits is a case of misplaced priorities, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2003 is the first budget that uses the new fiscal framework passed by the Legislature earlier this session. To be fair, the new fiscal framework properly applied does serve to improve budgetary processes in two ways. The first change is a shift from pay-as-you-go cash accounting for capital investment, where costs and expenditures are expended in the year they're incurred, to accrual accounting for capital investment where the costs are written off over the useful life of the capital asset. This change does not impact on the yearly budget bottom line, but it will cause the province's net assets to go up another \$10 billion thereby making the province's remaining accumulated debt look just that much more insignificant.

The second change resulting from the new fiscal framework is the establishment of a sustainability fund into which nonrenewable resource revenues in excess of \$3.5 billion per year will be paid. This sustainability fund will be allowed to grow to \$2.5 billion, money that can be tapped to pay for unexpected expenses like drought and forest fires. Once this sustainability fund reaches \$2.5 billion, any surplus funds can only be used for debt pay-down or transferred to the capital account.

While the concept of a sustainability fund is a good one, the way it's being applied in Budget 2003 is not. I have to seriously question why the government is putting \$2.2 billion into the sustainability fund in the very first year, Mr. Speaker. Paying such a massive amount into the fund in the very first year is a way of hiding some of the budget surplus. It also lends credence to those who charge that the sustainability fund will be used as a slush fund to pay for rebates at election time. Load up the sustainability fund between elections; use it to pay for goodies at election time. Instead of fast-tracking transfer to the sustainability fund, some of the dollars should instead be spent on priorities like keeping a lid on classroom sizes and reducing wait times in the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said yesterday that Budget 2003

contained no tax increases, only tax cuts. Reading the fine print today, we find that that isn't exactly the case. There is, in fact, a sneaky 5.8 percent increase in school property taxes paid by homeowners and businesses across the province. That is because the government has not adjusted the education mill rate downward to compensate for increases in the assessment rate base. During the last provincial election the Tory government promised to freeze the education property levy at \$1.2 billion. Well, guess what? Two years later Albertans are paying an additional \$127 million in school property taxes. That's sure not what Albertans were expecting when the province took taxing powers away from local school boards.

While Budget 2003 contains no further increases in health care premiums, this comes on the heels of a 30 percent hike last year. If the government wanted to give meaningful tax relief to average families and seniors, they would have reduced this highly regressive health tax.

While Budget 2003 contains tax hikes for every Albertan, the only tax cuts are for corporations. The half point cut in the general corporate tax rate from 13 percent to 12.5 percent means \$95 million in the pockets of corporations, many of whom are enjoying record profits thanks to high oil and gas prices. This is \$95 million that could have gone to classrooms or to improving health care, Mr. Speaker.

The single biggest disappointment of this budget is its failure to pony up for education. The extra money for K to 12 education is barely enough to feed the class hamster, Mr. Speaker. Per pupil grants to school boards will only go up by the same 2 percent announced in last year's budget. That is causing financial crises for school boards across this province. This 2 percent increase does not pay for the government-imposed arbitrated salary settlement with teachers. It doesn't pay for inflation that's running at about 5 percent per year in this province. It doesn't pay for skyrocketing utility bills. To be blunt, this government has the financial means to address the looming financial crisis of school boards but has done virtually nothing. This government has let down Alberta's children.

Don't take my word for it, Mr. Speaker. I want to briefly quote from a news release from a provincewide parents' group called APPEAL in their response to the budget. This news release is entitled Parents Express Shock and Disappointment. The news release goes on to say:

The Alberta government is paying lip service to Alberta's children in their budget rhetoric but has abandoned them in the funding. There is nothing in the 2003 budget to address classroom conditions. In fact, the 2% general grant increase will result in larger class sizes throughout the province . . . Parents had hoped for at least a status quo budget but we have received a brutal wake-up call that the province is unwilling to put their money where their mouth is. Alberta's children take a backseat in this budget.

8:50

In postsecondary education base operating grants are only increasing by 2 percent in 2003-2004, less than half the rate of rising costs. No wonder most postsecondary institutions are hiking tuition fees from 6 to 10 percent year after year with no end in sight. The universities are also bringing in differential tuition for certain faculties. This government's response? Well, they're generously allowing postsecondary students to slide further into debt by raising the limits on student loans. In my view, allowing students to go further into debt is the wrong solution. Meaningful action to address skyrocketing tuition fees is the better solution, Mr. Speaker. Not a sign of that in Budget 2003-2004.

Thanks to the federal government health has done little better than education in Budget 2003. Over one-half of the increase in health spending in this budget is due to increased federal transfers.

Alberta's health regions are receiving increases that should just about allow them to keep up with rising costs. However, it must be remembered that the health minister allowed most of the health regions to run deficits and deplete financial reserves last year which they'll have to start repaying this year. So will the new federal dollars be enough? Only time will tell, Mr. Speaker. Rural health regions face a much more serious problem in the face of the new budget and the new commitment made by this government, however.

With \$910 million of last year's surplus already set aside and more dollars also flowing in, Infrastructure is clearly the big winner in this year's budget. Having said this, however, the province does have a significant Infrastructure deficit that has built up over the last decade. The problem with Infrastructure is not the amount of money being spent but rather the way the government wants to spend it. Starting next year, the government wants to spend about 30 percent of its Infrastructure money on so-called public/private partnerships. It also wants to force local authorities like school boards, health regions, and municipalities to use P3s whether they make financial sense or not.

This Tory government is refusing to look at the evidence that clearly shows that P3s don't work. Whether we are talking hospitals in the U.K. or schools in Nova Scotia, P3s have cost more and delivered less than publicly financed infrastructure. Worst of all, P3s reduce the accountability Legislatures have for the expenditure of public funds. The New Democrats will work hard over the next year to convince Albertans that P3s are a bad deal for Albertans and that our schools, hospitals, and roads should continue to be publicly owned and operated.

Budget 2003 provides social assistance recipients not deemed employable with a \$20 increase in their monthly benefit on June 1. This is the first increase in the 10 years since the government cut rates and does not even restore them to what they were back in 1993. Meanwhile, inflation has gone up by over 30 percent and rents have gone up by 50 percent. This tiny increase of 66 cents a day won't even buy you a cup of coffee, Mr. Speaker.

Meanwhile, monthly benefits for disabled AISH recipients were last increased four years ago, the only increase in the last 10 years. There are no increases for severely disabled Albertans in this budget, Mr. Speaker. This is a terribly shabby way to treat the province's most vulnerable citizens.

If there's little or nothing in this budget for children, Mr. Speaker, there's even less in this budget for the province's seniors. Despite a rising seniors' population, expenditure for seniors is going up at a rate less than inflation. I guess seniors should be thankful that this budget doesn't hammer them to the same extent as last year's budget. This year the government is only hiking their school property taxes and fails to help them deal with skyrocketing utility bills. Last year the government also hiked seniors' health care premiums and took away their dental and eye care benefits.

On environmental protection spending, \$10 million on climate change initiatives and \$5 million on water conservation is likely to do little more than fatten the pocketbooks of government consultants.

The budget also continues to waste money on pet projects. It has \$4 million more in subsidies for horse racing for a total of \$37 million. There's 26 million more dollars for the money-losing Swan Hills toxic waste plant.

To wrap up, Budget 2003 is a stand pat, do-nothing budget. It fails to address the growing financial crisis in our schools. It doesn't address skyrocketing utility bills. The budget lacks vision and does not address the real priorities of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've just come under 15 minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On questions and comments. I listened attentively to the comments of my colleague, the leader of the New Democrats, and I was interested when he prefaced his comments by saying that he was spending something like, I think it was, \$1.5 billion a minute. Is that a suggestion then on the part of the leader of the New Democrats that he does not intend to participate in any of the budget debate, the estimates which will be coming forward over the course of the next month? Surely, the leader of the New Democrats is planning on participating in that debate and will have ample opportunity to further discuss the budget and is not limited to this 15-minute interval.

One other comment, and that had to do with the toxic waste and the funds going to the Swan Hills plant. Is it the member's contention that we should not be eliminating or getting rid of toxic wastes?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member who made these comments. When I said that I have 15 minutes, I meant 15 minutes this evening. So I'm aware of the fact that he and I will have ample opportunity to look at the budget estimates in detail department by department.

On the second part of his observation, how we should deal with waste disposal in this province, the Swan Hills fiasco is not the way to deal with it. That plant has cost Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars over the years, close to half a billion dollars at least, if not more, and it continues to lose money. I think it would be irresponsible for us to continue to close our eyes to that disaster and say that nothing can be done about it. Spending another \$26 million on it this year is not the way to deal with that disaster and say there are better ways of dealing with disposal of those harmful wastes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on questions and answers?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona: does the hon. member consider this government mean when he learned today that there was no increase for AISH recipients in this province after energy deregulation has driven up the cost of inflation and their benefit rates certainly are not reflected? [interjections]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is extremely timely and appropriate. To laugh off the significance of this good question is to trivialize the whole issue of what our obligations are as a community to the most vulnerable members of our community, and Albertans on AISH, Albertans who receive social benefits under SFI and others are the most vulnerable among us. These are people who are unable to find jobs and do employable work. These are Albertans who are either disabled or suffer from chronic illnesses which don't allow them to work. To say that they should not receive increases on a regular basis which are at least commensurate with the rate of inflation so that the real value of what they've been getting over the years can be maintained is to neglect our responsibility in a way which I think is not a responsible act on our part.

9:00

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, having listened very attentively to the member's diatribe, I must respond to some of his comments. The hon. member tried very hard to discredit very worthwhile organizations like Good Sam, like Bethany Care, like the Caritas group.

When he went on and talked about how terrible P3s are . . . [Mr. Lund's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. members are reminded that under Standing Order 29(2) we're allowed only five minutes for the question and answer portion. As interesting as it might be, those are the rules.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

13. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, entitled the Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday, February 19, 2003.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my obligation as Minister of Justice responsible for the Electoral Divisions Act and for the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to move Government Motion 13.

Mr. Speaker, I say obligation rather than using any other descriptive because like many if not most members of this Assembly I don't particularly like the report. In particular, I'm extremely unhappy with the report in that the commission saw fit to reduce the number of electoral districts in Edmonton to 18 from 19.

As a member of this Assembly I, like most of you, am very much in tune with my community, am very much interested in the outcome of boundary redistribution. In fact, I directly and through my constituency association made direct submissions to the boundaries commission with respect to boundaries to the city of Edmonton. In fact, I'd like to say that by my count more Edmonton Conservative MLAs and constituency associations made submissions to the boundaries commission than Edmonton Liberal MLAs and constituency associations. By my count. There is no group, whether Liberal or Conservative, closer to the subject or more knowledgeable about how our communities interact or better able to draw the lines than the members in the House. However, there is also no group of individuals with a greater personal stake in the outcome, and it is precisely for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that we do not engage ourselves in rewriting the boundaries but, rather, establish a commission to do the job within the parameters set out in the legislation for that purpose.

This House in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act sets the number of constituencies in this province, and it's set at 83. Then the commission has the job to draw those boundaries within the limits of that number and within the parameters as set out in the act. I have as a member of a political party been involved in a number of redistributions over the years and seen a number of iterations of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and I must say that the act under which we operate in this province is one of the fairest and most reasonable acts in the country in that it sets almost no parameters for the Electoral Boundaries Commission. It says 83 seats, and it leaves it to the commission to then draw those seats based on the

latest census results and taking into account a list of factors that are set out in the act, taking those factors into account, not mandating them.

I've argued before a number of electoral boundaries commissions, at least three, over the years that one of the factors that they should take into account in drawing boundaries is growth since the census. I can report to the Legislature that I'm not very effective in making that representation to the boundaries commissions because it has not once been accepted by a boundaries commission. One of the reasons that it hasn't been accepted by a boundaries commission is that the census provides basic verifiable data with respect to population numbers, and there is not a basis in verifiable data, at least that's been presented to the commission, to show the growth since then. In fact, in talking with the chairman of the commission about boundaries and the redistribution in this circumstance, he made the point to me that while most representatives of communities who appeared before the commission spoke about the growth in their community, none of them provided verifiable data, and all of them indicated that there had been huge growth since the last census and that that should be taken into account. So the commission had a very difficult job to do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea why anybody would ever take on the invitation to join an Electoral Boundaries Commission. It has got to be the worst job that anybody could ever accept.

Dr. Taylor: Speak for yourself, Dave. I'd like to be on it.

Mr. Hancock: Well, resign from the House and we'll give it to you.

Mr. Speaker, I really don't know why the hon. member would want it because no one is ever satisfied with an electoral boundaries' report. You could never draw the report the way we as the experts in the business, as the members of this House who know our communities, who know where the lines should go, who know which communities ought to go together – no one could draw those boundaries better than each one of us. The problem is that each one of us would come up with a different map.

So we give the job to an Electoral Boundaries Commission, in this case chaired by the province's Ethics Commissioner. The act sets out that the chairman of an Electoral Boundaries Commission has to be a judge or an Ethics Commissioner or someone in that type of capacity. We had the benefit of an Ethics Commissioner who was also a past member of this House and therefore had a good understanding of the problems and the possibilities with respect to the electoral boundaries and had the benefit of being someone who was respected for his independence, impartiality, and respected in his role as Ethics Commissioner. Then, of course, the act allows for the nomination by the government and by the Official Opposition in consultation with the third party of the other members for that commission.

We give the job to the commission, and then we ask them to meet the public. The act specifically sets out that there should be commission hearings across the province, an interim report, additional hearings across the province, and a final report. The commission is mandated to follow that course and did follow that course so that public across the province could have input at the commission and discuss what their interests were and what their expectations were of a boundaries commission. The commission had those hearings and made its deliberations based on the information which it had.

The interim report surprised many of us when they came to the conclusion that Edmonton, for example, should lose a seat. It was a surprise to us. The previous numbers that I had prior to the census from the Chief Electoral Officer wouldn't have suggested that, but

the census numbers as they came out last spring indicated to the boundaries commission in their judgment that they needed to set numbers which would result in two seats being lost in rural Alberta – one in northern Alberta, one in central Alberta – and one seat being lost in Edmonton, and three seats going into Calgary and region. Those were the numbers based on the census numbers and based on their view of how you balance the interests of representation. Calgary's seats have a number approximately a thousand or more higher than Edmonton seats under the proposed redistribution by the boundaries commission, and rural seats have about a thousand less.

Those of us who have argued for years about the need for a triple E Senate in this country so we could balance the regions against the population find it very difficult to argue with the logic of a boundaries commission when they come up with a result which says that the regions have to be balanced against the population. So when you look at the logic of the commission's report, whether you like the result of the report or not, you find it very hard to challenge the logic of the report. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I encourage members of this Assembly to accept the report with all of its warts, as each of us perceives it, to thank the commission members for doing a thankless job, and for recognizing that if we rejected the report, if we did not accept the report, what we would be doing is we would be sending it back to a new boundaries commission – this commission has done its job and is finished – to work with the same data and the same problems and probably to come up possibly with lines in different places but with some other variation of the same result.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that it's prudent or logical of us or reasonable for us to reject a report unless we could suggest that there's something grievously wrong, that they've made some egregious error, that there is something that they have done wrong based on the mandate that they were given. As much as I don't like the result of the report, I can't say that they did anything wrong. In fact, I have to look at the report and say that the five members of the committee, the two appointed by the Liberals and the two appointed by the government and the one, the Ethics Commissioner, appointed as chairman, did a good job on the mandate that they had. I just don't happen to like the results, and it's not for me to substitute my view of what the results ought to be for the review of a boundaries commission which is charged with drawing boundaries based on all the input that they have and all the evidence before them and coming to the conclusions that they have to. In fact, we separate ourselves logically and realistically from redrawing boundaries and give it to a commission because in the history of parliamentary democracy there have been accusations of gerrymandering when governments or Legislatures or individual members of Legislatures attempted to draw their own boundary lines for themselves.

It's prudent, it's reasonable, it's rational for us not to delve into the job of redrafting the boundaries but to give it to a commission. We've done that. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act sets out the parameters, sets out the criteria. It's a fair act, it's a fair process, it's a fair mandate, and they did their job fairly, as much as I don't like the results. For those reasons I would ask that this House approve the motion and allow us to get on with the job of bringing forward an electoral boundaries act as needs to be in the second process.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed further in the debate on this motion, I wonder if we might have agreement from the Assembly to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not every day that a member has the privilege of rising and through you introducing to all members of the House a number of former members of this Legislature and virtually all of the city council of the city of Edmonton. We delayed a bit because we were waiting for the mayor to arrive, and I can't see him. I don't think he's there, but if he does come in, we'll ask if we can introduce him. Obviously, Edmonton city council is here to listen to this debate and I'm sure will be impressed by the oratorical skill that they're about to hear. Terry Cavanagh has already been introduced, but we'll ask each member to stand as they're mentioned: Terry Cavanagh, Stephen Mandel, Ron Hayter, Janice Melnychuk – Karen, are you behind there somewhere? – Karen Leibovici, Michael Phair, and Ed Gibbons.

An Hon. Member: Jane.

Mr. McClelland: Oh, sorry, Jane. Didn't see you. And Jane Batty. Accompanying them is their minder and the person that keeps them together, Dennis Thomson. Welcome.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I too want to welcome the councillors from the city of Edmonton in our midst, but in addition I would like to introduce two of our caucus staff who are sitting in the public gallery: Laura Nichols and Marilyn Hooper. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Now Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and get an opportunity to speak to Government Motion 13 regarding the Electoral Boundaries Commission, but before that I, too, would like to welcome our distinguished visitors in both the Speaker's gallery and the public gallery this evening.

This is a very important debate not only for the current history of the city, but it has implications for the future history of this city. I cannot support this motion, because it is my view that the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission should not have reduced the city of Edmonton's representation in this Assembly by one MLA. Next year we will be recognizing the first 100 years of the city of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, the centennial year of the city. Edmonton is in the middle of another period of solid economic and population growth, and Edmonton should not as a result of this report have lost one constituency before the next provincial election. Now, what a birthday gift from the province to this dynamic capital city. Happy birthday, Edmonton. Good-bye, Edmonton-Norwood. That is wrong. If the city is to continue to have a positive influence in this Legislature, why are we going to water down the voices in this Assembly from 19 to 18? Again, this report has failed to address the chronic, constant issue of underrepresentation of Alberta's cities in this Assembly.

Now, Edmonton-Norwood, to be specific, has had a long, distinguished history. The constituency of Edmonton-Norwood goes back to 1959. It has been represented in this Assembly by represen-

tatives of four different political parties. This is a rich and varied history, and to just take the eraser to the neighbourhoods that are currently represented by Edmonton-Norwood's member and add them to the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands is in my view very disrespectful of the citizens of Edmonton-Norwood.

Edmonton-Norwood as we know it is one of the most disadvantaged ridings in the city. It needs its own voice in this Assembly. There are people there that are very angry about losing their voice, and one of them, certainly, is a resident of Edmonton-Norwood by the name of John Patrick Day, Mr. Speaker. I would like to quote from one of Mr. Day's submissions to this commission.

Edmontonians are slightly less worthy of legislative representation, and will be so forever and ever.

I do not believe that this was intended by anybody. Indeed I am sure it was not. But it is the message given and received.

That reflects on all of us.

Edmonton-Norwood is an inner-city riding with a population of over 28,000. Twenty-four percent of its population is made up of new Canadians. There is a large Italian and a large Asian community. Seventeen percent of the population has less than a grade 9 education. Thirty percent do not have a secondary school certificate. All in all, over 47 percent do not have a full high school education. The unemployment rate for the riding is over 14 percent, more than double the provincial average, and it is interesting to note that more than 56 percent of the households in the riding make under \$30,000 per year. Should those citizens lose a voice in this Assembly? I say no; they certainly should not.

9:20

Now, I view this report as being anti-Edmonton, and it advantages the Progressive Conservative strongholds in rural Alberta and in Calgary. Sure, the first report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission suggested that Edmonton lose a seat and we lose two rural seats, but the loss of population in rural Alberta is a result of this government's economic policies, and the city of Edmonton should not suffer because of that. You have a highway 2 mentality. You're interested in economic development 50 kilometres east of highway 2 and 50 kilometres west of highway 2, but you're forgetting about the rest of the province. [interjections] The city of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, should not suffer as a result of that.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, how quickly you seem to forget. We have a convention in this Legislature that only one member is talking at a time. So, hon. ministers and hon. members on this side of the House, when your turn comes, we'll gladly listen to you, but right now we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, so let us hear Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's population has grown substantially even since the 2001 census and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. In eight years, when the next Electoral Boundaries Commission sits, unless we can convince this House to put them back to work and do this all over again, there will need to be radical changes because of the growth in this city. According to Economic Development Edmonton the population grew in 2001 again – and this is exceeding Conference Board of Canada forecasts – by 4 and a half percent, and this is in addition to the 8.7 percent growth reflected by the 2001 census. As a result, large parts of Edmonton may have to be redrawn to reflect a large disparity between the number of voters and seats which represent them.

Now, the minority report that was submitted in the final report of the Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta was submitted by Bauni Mackay, certainly appointed by the Official Opposition and the Official Opposition leader. There were some outstanding arguments presented in that minority report, and we need to consider those. There was certainly the conduct of the commission. There were several problems addressed, but let's look at three of them: the concept of representation by population, the concern over the concept of effective representation, and thirdly, issues of increasing urbanization not being reflected in this report, Mr. Speaker.

Representation by population means one person, one vote. The minority report by Bauni Mackay points out that because of the redistribution of seats between Edmonton, rural Alberta, and Calgary representation by population is compromised. Even if you look only at the 2001 census, it indicates that Edmonton should have 19 seats, and I argued before the commission that we shouldn't have 19; we should have 20 seats. Edmonton should actually, yes, be gaining an additional seat. However, we are losing one, which means that Edmonton's democratic right to representation is unfortunately compromised.

Now, again according to the minority report the definition of effective representation as used by the committee is vague and in some ways obsolete. The measure of effective representation was based on access of the MLA to constituents and vice versa. The commission did not take into account advances in technology such as e-mail, fax, as well as air travel and an extensive highway system when discussing effective representation. They took into account such issues as geographic distance and low population density. They also took into account the distance of a riding to the Legislature.

It's interesting to note that this afternoon when the budget was announced there was a line item in there with a total expenditure for the Supernet, which is going to be handed \$300 million, and that is another way for MLAs to interact with their constituents. It was suggested that perhaps in the public libraries and the public schools in rural Alberta there could be one dedicated line, the same as we have a RITE line so that constituents would have another way of contacting their representative if they were unavailable because of a sitting of the Legislative Assembly and they were present in the capital city Mondays through Thursdays.

Now, Mr. Speaker, such measures are obsolete when discussing effective representation according to the minority report as written by Bauni Mackay. The minority report did argue that what was missing from the measures were distances such as cultural distances and social distances. These distances cannot be closed by technology and are a barrier to effective representation. As a result, the situation arises again that those who are culturally and socially distant, people who are attracted to cities as opposed to rural areas, are being misrepresented.

The minority report also stresses the increasing role of urbanization in that economies in a world of global contact and community are becoming the basis of economies in the modern world, and if I can make one suggestion all over again to the members of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, it would be this: I would encourage them to read Jane Jacobs before they were to start their report and their study and their analysis. Jane Jacobs would remind each and every one of us of the importance of cities and the importance that cities have in the economic development of the region surrounding them. Whenever you penalize cities, you penalize the entire region. Miss Jacobs is a well-respected, world-known economist and urban planner.

Now, the minority report also points out several scholars' opinions that all Albertans gain from an urban strategy and that rural econo-

mies are losing their position in a global economy. While Calgary may gain from adding two seats, it helps no one – it helps no one – that Edmonton loses a seat. The minority report makes an argument that by removing a constituency from Edmonton, the commission is not taking into account the city's role as a hub of activity for a large part of the province and not only this province but also the territory to the north of us. Economic growth in the city and the importance of that growth to central and northern Alberta were not thought of, and that is why I have to agree with the minority report and I cannot accept the recommendations of this report as it's presented in this Assembly now.

When we consider the city and the fact that we have a centennial year coming up and we are going to face the prospect of losing a voice in this Assembly, I think that is a slap in the face to the citizens of this city. I'm sorry; Edmonton should keep their current representation. They probably should have at least one more seat. We have to look at this. We have to have a good look at this in this Assembly at this time and recognize that a mistake is being made. We have time to correct the mistake. It's just going to take political bravery. This government in the past has changed course, has changed direction, and regardless of the composition of this committee we in this Assembly have the authority to change direction. If we were to have another commission, have another look at this issue, well, so be it. But it's a small price to pay for democracy.

Mr. Rathgeber: What if you don't like the other one any better?

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder said: what if I don't like it any better? That is essentially democracy, and I would encourage the hon. member to participate in the debate in this Assembly on this issue. Certainly, the constituents of Edmonton-Calder I think would have a direct interest in the fact that we are losing representation in this Assembly. Certainly, the constituents of Edmonton-Calder would be most anxious to know how their representative feels about Edmonton losing one of its 19 seats.

Now, certainly, in conclusion, it will take a lot of political thought and courage by this government to recognize that a mistake has been made, but we in this Assembly have an opportunity here with this motion to correct that political mistake and not penalize Edmonton now or in the future by reducing its representation in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

9:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. Gordon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin tonight, I would like to also say hello to some old friends of mine: Ed Gibbons, Karen Leibovici, Michael Phair, Ron Hayter, and my good friend Terry Cavanagh. Hello, buddy. It's good that they're here tonight. I wish my municipalities could be here.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably going to be the toughest speech I've ever had to give. I'm not very proud to stand here tonight and have to condone Motion 13, to say that it's a motion I go along with, to say that it's a motion that my people respect. My people, the people of Lacombe-Stettler, are very, very concerned about the Electoral Boundaries Commission report. They were so concerned that they turned out for the second go-round in force: my municipal councils, my school boards, the people in my community that speak for other people. They said: "Listen; we're not happy with this. We are going to lose an MLA along the highway 2 corridor." The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just talked a few minutes ago about how this

doesn't affect rural Alberta. It does affect rural Alberta. It affects rural Alberta in a big way.

Since 1990-91 we've had differences in Pincher Creek, Crowsnest, Cardston, Drumheller, Athabasca, Wabasca, and now we're going to look at Lacombe-Stettler and Ponoka-Rimbey. I'm not a gambling person. I have nothing to do with gaming and I'm not the least bit interested, but I should have been, because I could have made a lot of money. If someone had said to me, "Listen; they're going to disrupt your constituency," I would have said no. We have the numbers. We have the people. We have the location. We have the growth. We're two or three kilometres off highway 2. We had 330 housing starts in Lacombe last year. We're growing. We're going to continue to grow. We will not be affected. What do they do? They take one MLA away from rural Alberta along the highway 2 corridor, one of the highest growth areas in the entire province. Now, I would have lost money if I'd bet on that.

So I'm standing here tonight saying to you: indeed, this will be the toughest speech I've ever given. My councils passed unanimously at all of their meetings, on behalf of all the people they represent, that they didn't want this to happen. They don't understand why it happened. They don't see the need for it happening. The Lacombe side of my constituency, as it now stands, is going to continue to grow and grow and grow because of the location. They're close to Edmonton. They're close to Calgary. They're close to Red Deer. People want to live there. I grew up in Calgary. I lived in Calgary for 21 years. I love Calgary. If I'd lived in Edmonton, I probably would have loved Edmonton, but I grew up in Calgary. I went to high school in Calgary. I figure I've got the best of all worlds. I'm rural with an urban twist. I happened to fall in love with a rural guy, and I'm really glad I did, because for 35 years he and I have lived in, supported, and been part of a community, a rural community of which I am very, very proud.

You, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and some of you are very proud of Edmonton, and I love Edmonton and have a great affiliation since I've spent so much time here. A beautiful city, a beautiful river valley, but I love rural Alberta. Now, should I have to apologize for living, working, breathing, raising children, being part of a community because I'm a rural Albertan? I should not have to, and I will not. I should not have to give up my rightful place as the MLA representing that area. We have the growth. We have the numbers. Farther east they didn't have the growth and they didn't have the numbers, and that's what the commission took a look at. They gerrymandered themselves, hon. Minister of Justice. They took my area and decided to fix it to make sure that the eastern part was looked after. Well, people don't like it, and I don't like it. I'm not happy with it, and I will not accept it. I earned my place in this Assembly. My people sent me here to tell you, to tell Albertans what they want me to say, do, vote on, and be part of. They don't like this report, they don't like this motion, and they will not accept it. We don't have to accept this report. We don't have to like one iota of it.

As far as I'm concerned, these figures were fed into a computer. The computer spit them out and said, "Listen, everybody; this will be constituency A, B, C, D, E, F, and so forth and so on," until we had 83. It didn't take into consideration community. It didn't take into consideration relationships. The people in my constituency on the Lacombe side have a wonderful relationship with each other. They get along with the county. The towns work together. Not only is this to lose an MLA from either Lacombe or Ponoka – and I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimbey. I don't want to go up against him in an election, nor does he, I'm sure, want to go up against me. He had his numbers; I had my numbers. I thought we were fine.

But I'll tell you what this has done. This has split my community.

My municipal leaders are shaking their heads. I have one community that now is to be part and parcel of Red Deer-North. I think the world of the MLA for Red Deer-North. She is one of the best MLAs here. She talks about the Red Deer Rebels, the Red Deer Rebels, the Red Deer Rebels, a great hockey team. But, unfortunately, my town of Blackfalds does not want to be part of Red Deer-North, nor should they be. They're a community of 3,800 people. They're rural. They get along well with the town of Lacombe, with the Wolf Creek school division, with Lacombe county. They have rural issues, and they want to remain part of a rural constituency, and as their MLA I have to agree. That is the best fit. The hon. MLA for Red Deer-North and I have talked. She only wants what's best for the people of Blackfalds.

Now, Blackfalds is an interesting community because per capita in Alberta they have the highest growth rate and the most number of babies born in the entire province. Does that sound to you like a community that's not growing? I don't think so. And you know something? The bottom line is that if you asked one of those members of that commission why they did this, they'd say: well, 90 percent of Blackfalds work in Red Deer. Well, I got news for you. Ninety-five percent of the people that live in Lacombe work in Red Deer, my husband included, but we don't want to live in Red Deer. We like to shop in Red Deer. We like to go to hockey games in Red Deer. We like to eat out in Red Deer. But, by gosh, we don't want to live in Red Deer. We don't want to vote in Red Deer. We don't want to elect our town councils from Red Deer. We want to be rural, and the reason why we're rural in Lacombe is because we're close to Edmonton, we're close to Calgary, and we're very close to Red Deer. But we're rural, and we like it, and that's the way we want to be.

I feel very, very badly that this commission didn't hear the first go-round, didn't hear what my people had to say the second go-round, and now I have to stand before you tonight and tell you that as the representative for Lacombe-Stettler I cannot support this motion. I cannot support the work that the commission has done. My political career could well be on the line, but my people, my town of Lacombe council, my town of Blackfalds council, my Lacombe county council, and my Wolf Creek school division, plus all of the people I see in the drugstore, the grocery store, at the coffee shop, and the people that sit on my executive as part of the political process that I must go through want me to say: this is ridiculous. So this is what I'm saying.

9:40

The hon. member that I've know long before I was ever here, the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, said it best when he said to the commission: "You didn't have to use these figures. You didn't have to do it this way. You could have reduced it, and everyone in the province would have been looked after and satisfied." But, instead, no. I personally have a great deal of respect for many members that were on that commission, but I will say it publicly because I've said it to each and every one of them: I don't think they did their job. I don't think they did their job properly. I think they fed the information into a computer; the numbers came out.

Part of the rationale behind all of this is to take a look at community, to take a look at what fits, to take a look at natural boundaries. My town of Blackfalds has a natural boundary. It's a river. It's been there since the beginning of time. Lo and behold, Lacombe county made it their county boundary. So we have the river that was the boundary between what was part of Lacombe-Stettler and part of Red Deer-North, and Lacombe county had it as their boundary. Lo and behold, they just forgot about this river. It wasn't part and

parcel of it. They didn't look at community. They didn't look at relationships. They didn't look at needs. What did they look at? Other members of this Assembly, colleagues on my side, colleagues on that side, have said that there are problems here. Well, if there are problems, folks, let's change it. Let's put a new commission in place. Let's put in new guidelines, new criteria. Let's see what fits. Let's make it work.

I would really be remiss tonight if I didn't stand up here and say that what I'm telling you tonight is from me. It's from the heart. I have no notes. But it's also from all those councils, all those people in my community that have said: "No, Judy. Don't let this happen. This can't happen. Why is it happening to us? Why are you and the hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimbey going to have to fight it out?" Folks, I've been through a nomination before. In fact, I've been through two nominations. I've been here 10 years, and in 10 years I've never had a community get off their duff and speak out and speak up and say: no, we are not going to accept this.

Do it if you want, hon. members. Do it if you must, but I'll tell you that our Premier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, talks always about respect for each other in this Assembly. I respect what the hon. member here has said about Edmonton. I respect the councils here, and I wish my councils could be. I praise you people for spending the amount of money that you have on this issue, because it's a serious issue. My people tell me that democracy is questionable if this happens. The people from Blackfalds tell me that their democratic right is lost. There's no way that they will be able to run and be an MLA being part of Red Deer-North.

I am saying to all of you in this Assembly: if it isn't you this year, it might be you eight years from now or 16 years from now. I'm asking you for consideration for what I'm saying on behalf of the people I represent. I've represented 35,000 people that have been very, very happy with their lot in life, with their representation. They feel that that's threatened, I feel that it's threatened, and I'm asking you to say no to Motion 13. Thirteen has never been my lucky number, and this particular motion was tabled on February 19, which is my birthday, and when you're my age, birthdays aren't a happy thing either.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Two things before I recognize the next speaker. One is that we now are under Standing Order 29(2), questions and comments.

Before I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, did you have a question or comment that you wished to . . . Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, questions and comments.

Mr. Hutton: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the hon. member if she could tell us what she really thinks.

Mrs. Gordon: If the hon. member has another hour or two. I could take him for coffee later, Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments or questions?

Okay. Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona – I will eventually. I'm sorry that it's a Solomonic exercise that I have. Instead of having two mothers with one baby, I have a whole bunch of people who want to speak. [interjection] That's Solomon. It's a passage from one of the books. I have so many people who want to speak. I'm sorry; we just have to take one at a time. So it will be a government member and then an opposition member.

This is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After listening to the passionate speech from my hon. colleague from Lacombe-Stettler, I don't think I need any more persuasion that this report needs fixing before we pass it. We can't let this report go through. Our colleagues from the city council are sitting up there watching us tonight debate this motion. I want to congratulate the Edmonton city council for taking a very strong position in trying to convince this House, this Legislature, that this report is flawed and it shouldn't be passed in its present form.

I also want to congratulate the Electoral Boundaries Commission on a job reasonably well done. There's no doubt that the commission had to balance many variables, including the principles of effective representation – I think we have to be respectful of the commission's work to some degree – and representation by population, the requirements of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and the needs of heterogeneous communities, including the major cities and the neighbourhoods within them, smaller cities, urbanized areas, and rural Alberta. It can't be easy to find the balance between these sometimes competing aspects, and they have worked hard to reconcile them.

However, I would be failing my constituents, my fellow Edmontonians, and the voters of Alberta if I didn't also raise some concerns with this report. I'd like to quote Gary Hanson, general manager and chief operating officer of West Edmonton Mall. He says, and I quote, that representation by population is fundamental to democratic society. Voter parity should be one of the first considerations in determining electoral boundaries. Although Edmonton did not have the growth that Calgary did prior to the 2001 census, it did have a substantial growth rate of 8.7 percent and has continued to grow. The commission's recommendations do not take this into consideration nor the major role the city of Edmonton plays in the economic success and social growth of the province. End of quote.

The fundamental principle of our democracy is the notion of one person, one vote. Without this principle we can't guarantee that every Alberta voter has equal say to determine the path that our province will take. At the last election a vote in some parts of rural Alberta was equal to two votes in Edmonton and three in Calgary-Shaw. The final report of the EBC has improved greatly on the situation, but still there is a range from 32 percent below the provincial average to 16 percent above, Mr. Speaker. Allowing variances of close to 25 percent in a significant number of ridings suggests that the problems remain.

In spite of the best efforts of this commission there appears to be built into their report a systematic bias or tilt which shifts voting power towards some citizens at the expense of others. Relative equality of voting power is a principle that has been upheld by the courts in a number of provinces, including our own. It is possible to have significantly lower variations in population and thus better reflect the principles of representation by population. The New Democrat opposition recommended to the commission that constituency populations be kept to within 10 percent of the average, as has been achieved in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. According to the principle of equality of voting power, Edmonton's population in 2001 warranted more than 18.5 ridings, Mr. Speaker.

9:50

To quote the minority report:

Edmonton has grown dramatically since the 2001 Census was completed. According to Economic Development Edmonton, in 2001 the population of Edmonton grew by 4.5%, exceeding the

Conference Board of Canada's forecast that it would be the fastest growing city in Canada with a growth rate of 4.1%. The Conference Board of Canada forecasts Edmonton's growth at 2.4% for 2002 and 4.5% for 2003 [the current year].

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in the first six months of 2002, single family housing starts in Edmonton increased by 50% compared to the same period last year. In May of 2002 there was a 95% jump in single and multiple housing starts compared to May, 2001, and in June the increase over last year's figures was 91%.

In other words, Edmonton's rapid growth has been occurring since the 2001 Census and is forecast to continue.

Therefore, by reducing the number of seats in Edmonton, the commission would cause Edmonton to be underrepresented until after the census of 2011 and through at least two provincial elections.

Again to quote the minority report of the commission:

The challenge is to find ways to get as close as possible to voter parity without violating anyone's right to effective representation. Inevitably, this requires additional human and financial resources to provide the physical means to ensure effective representation for all Albertans, including more rural constituency offices and staff, increased air travel, more assistance with ground travel, and high quality communications technology. The capacity to do this rests in the will of the Legislative Assembly, not in taking a division [away] from Edmonton.

The definition of effective representation is vague. It would seem that the ease with which the MLA and constituents are able to have access to each other is the measurement of effective representation. However, ensuring adequate access and addressing access issues is the responsibility of Member Services, not of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

At one time access required face to face contact. Distance, area, and population density were critical factors in determining the effectiveness of representation. However, in the 21st century, access means communicating efficiently and expeditiously.

The difficulties of representing a rural riding are well known. As a counterpoint, there are additional difficulties internal in some urban constituencies. Many are able to affect the ability of an MLA to represent their constituents, particularly those in inner-city areas. These include many socioeconomic concerns such as high levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and linguistic diversity. None of these variables were included in the calculations of the matrix despite the fact that Alberta Finance collects detailed demographic data on provincial ridings that include this information.

A final quote from the minority report, Mr. Speaker, with your permission:

Although linear distance, geographic area, and low population density are viewed as potential barriers to effective representation and are therefore measured and compared, cultural distance as defined by linguistic, ethnic, religious, cultural and racial diversity is not. Neither is the social distance that is created by the fact that large cities are magnets for the physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually unwell. Similarly, vertical distance and high population density can be daunting because any kind of access to residents of apartment blocks and high rises is often impossible. The anonymity and social isolation of city dwellers provides another invisible distance.

The minority report continues.

These distances, unlike linear distance, cannot be bridged by technology because there must be social learning, which can come only from interpersonal contact. Although these distances make effective representation in some Edmonton constituencies extremely difficult, they were not taken into consideration in the distribution of electoral divisions.

Section 14 of the act specifically says that the commission is allowed to take other considerations into account and is not re-

stricted to only those listed in the act. If sparse population and the distance of some rural constituencies pose challenges for effective representation, so do the high levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and linguistic diversity of some urban constituencies.

Currently Edmonton's inner city is divided between three ridings: Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Norwood, and Edmonton-Highlands. The interim report proposes that Edmonton-Gold Bar cross the river and take in the central communities of Riverdale, Boyle Street, and McCauley. In addition, Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Highlands, Edmonton-Norwood, and Edmonton-Calder would represent parts of the inner city. I'd like to quote from a letter from Ewen Nelson, vice-president of the Boyle Street Community League. Mr. Nelson says:

We have grave concerns about the proposed changes. Edmonton's inner city communities are a complex mixture of people of widely varying needs, and the residents of those communities often have great difficulties getting those needs met. One source of assistance has always been the Member of the Legislative Assembly for the area. By reducing the number of Edmonton ridings, the MLAs for those ridings will be less able to assist citizens in need.

We also have great reservations about losing our connection to Edmonton-Highlands. In the Highlands riding, Boyle Street has much in common with other communities. Issues facing Boyle Street are similar to those facing McCauley, Cromdale, and other nearby communities. We have little in common with the communities in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and fear that Boyle Street issues could get lost or overlooked.

Central neighbourhoods share a community of interests. These include ethnically diverse populations and a high percentage of residents who live in rental accommodation. By eliminating one inner city riding and diluting the inner city by further dividing it between more ridings with higher population, the Commission's recommendations will reduce the ability of inner city residents to voice their concerns.

Specifically, residents of Edmonton's inner city would be better represented if the riding of Edmonton-Norwood is retained, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-one percent of Edmonton-Norwood residents do not speak English at home. This presents communication barriers for MLAs, making more difficult effective representation of their constituents. As well, family incomes in that riding are 38 percent below the provincial average. Therefore, residents of Edmonton-Norwood may rely more on government services and thus depend on the assistance and advocacy provided by their MLA.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands. It's a motion which is very simple. It adds the following to the motion. Before I formally move it, I'd just like to read it into the minutes. The amendment would be as follows, that it will add to the end of the motion: "with the exception of the report's recommendation to remove one electoral division from the city of Edmonton."

I now would like to have this amendment distributed, and with your instructions I will read it into the record of the House and wait until it is distributed until I conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, this will be amendment A1, and you may commence. You've moved it.

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move amendment A1 to Motion 13 on behalf of my colleague, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

10:00

Mr. Speaker, if this amendment is voted on by the House and accepted, in effect it will restore the 19th seat to Edmonton. By restoring that seat to Edmonton, we can prevent many of the

problems that have arisen in the commission's final report including the underrepresentation of Edmonton for at least the next two elections, the division of community interests in central Edmonton, and the dilution of inner-city concerns within more and larger ridings.

I will finish my remarks with a final quote, this one from Edmonton city councillor Stephen Mandel. Councillor Mandel states:

Any decision to reduce Edmonton's representation in the Alberta legislature is unreasonable. Edmonton's population is growing at a substantial pace that makes the recent census out of touch with reality. That is by far not the primary reason. One only has to read the arguments put forward by the minority report of the committee to understand that a reduction is shortsighted and extremely punitive. I encourage all of our Legislators to support the rights of Edmontonians to be properly represented with the maintenance of our current 19 seats.

The Deputy Speaker: You have one more minute, hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just about to conclude.

I urge all members, therefore, to support this amendment, and I certainly would like the House to pay attention to what my hon. colleague from Lacombe-Stettler has to say. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Point of Order Admissibility of Amendment

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order with respect to this particular notice of amendment. I would refer you to Standing Order 23(1), which deals with introducing "any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." Referring to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, page 176, paragraph 578(2) deals with "an amendment which would produce the same result as if the original motion were simply negated is out of order."

The motion put forward basically says that there will be an addition of the words "with the exception of the report's recommendation to remove one electoral division from the city of Edmonton." This particular report provides that there will be 83 specific constituencies, and one of those specific constituencies recommended in the report is not the electoral division that was eliminated, namely Edmonton-Norwood. Therefore, the effect of this particular motion, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be 84 constituencies. That is what it means. The fact is that under the legislation pursuant to which the report was done, there must be 83 constituencies. Therefore, on the face of it, Mr. Speaker, this particular notice of amendment is out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A comment on the point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to suggest respectfully that there's no substance to the point of order raised here because the *Beauchesne* quotation that was made here is, "An amendment approving part of a motion and disapproving the remainder is out of order," and my amendment does not in any way disapprove the remainder of the motion before the House. It simply adds on to that which is already before the House. So there is no attempt here to disapprove anything. The intent of the amendment is simply to add on to the existing motion before the House. So, in my judgment, I hope you will rule that the point of order is out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Further discussion on this?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, while I certainly understand the rationale for bringing forward this type of an amendment, I have to support the argument by the Deputy Government House Leader that it's out of order because in fact the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act provides for 83 seats and the effect of this motion would be to create 84 seats because it would approve the report of the Boundaries Commission with the exception of Edmonton. By doing that, it increases the number of seats, and that is contrary to an act of the Legislature, so it offends the Standing Order. As much as I would like to concur in the amendment because of what the member is trying to do, it's not possible under the rules of the House to have a motion of the House violate an act of the House.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, it's a common practice in this House when amendments are brought forward that they need the approval of Parliamentary Counsel before they can be put in order on the floor of this Assembly, so before we go further in this debate, I believe we should have an explanation from Parliamentary Counsel giving us the basis on which this particular amendment was approved.

The Deputy Speaker: On that particular thought, the Parliamentary Counsel and Clerks at the table are here to advise the Speaker, and the Speaker is the one who can't pass the buck but gets advice from hon. members who are lawyers and Parliamentary Counsel who are lawyers. Having only the background of teaching, it's a challenge. If there is any further assistance – I think we've already had one from you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but if there are no others . . . You have something cogent to add to this dilemma?

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, with your permission if I may quote from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* the purpose of amendments. It's *Beauchesne* 567. It says that

the object of an amendment may be either to modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original question.

I submit to you and to the House, Mr. Speaker, that the intent of the amendment that I've made is simply to increase the acceptability of Motion 13 that is before the House. So I would request you to rule the point of order as being out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, thank you for all your assistance in dealing with this matter. The hon. Minister of Gaming is quite right in referring us to 579. I think that's the reference you had, hon. member. At least that was the page you were talking about, and the reference was there, which is:

An amendment may not raise a new question which can only be considered as a distinct motion after proper notice.

Is that what you were . . .

Mr. Stevens: The reference, Mr. Speaker, so that there's clarity on the point, is at page 176, paragraph 578(2), which reads:

An amendment which would produce the same result as if the original motion were simply negated is out of order.

That's the 6th edition.

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: I don't have the benefit of prolonged years studying the law, but it would seem to me that, first of all, the reference that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona came up with, that is to say *Beauchesne* 567, would perhaps apply here.

The object of an amendment may be either to modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original . . .

So that would occur to me as being relevant. The amendment would

appear to be in order. It is an acceptable form as was observed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and it modifies the main question to increase its acceptability which is, of course, what 567 directs. It's not a direct negative of the main motion. When all else is to be considered, the remedy lies with the House, and that is that they can simply defeat this amendment, and we can move on with hearing others who wish to speak to the motion. So I would rule that the amendment is in order. Now I am standing here, and hon. Government House Leader, you wish to challenge that?

Mr. Hancock: I'd love to, Mr. Speaker, but I respect you too much, so I'll just speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry then.

Before we go forward, I have another request to make. I wonder if the Assembly would agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this evening council was introduced, but our mayor wasn't in attendance at that time. He has since joined us for what will be probably the last 45 minutes of debate this evening, and we certainly appreciate his presence here and his strong support of Edmonton along with all of the council in terms of ensuring that we retain at least the number of seats we had before. I see that he's risen. Please welcome him to this Assembly.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: This is a debatable motion, so the hon. Government House Leader on amendment A1.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to speak against the motion. I do believe that your ruling was incorrect in that, but we will have to deal with it in the House and deal with it in the House by defeating the amendment. As much as I would love to concur with what the member is trying to accomplish by passing the motion, we would be violating an act of the House, that act of the House, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which says that we have 83 seats. The effect of passing this amendment would create 84 seats, and the House cannot pass a resolution, with all due respect, which violates an act of the House. If we wanted to do that, we ought to have amended the act and added an extra seat.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to engage in this debate. I think the spirit of this amendment is the right spirit. I think it's motivated for all the right reasons, reasons that I know that we in the Liberal caucus share strongly, that Edmonton should not be losing a seat. The census data shows Edmonton should not be losing a seat even if there was no accounting made to the growth that's occurred since the census, so clearly what motivates this amendment is to be admired and respected and supported.

I find myself, however, agreeing with the members from the government side that this is, in this case, not a workable amendment.

It's not workable for a couple of reasons. There's no way, as the Government House Leader and I think deputy House Leader pointed out, that we can leave Edmonton where it is and leave the rest of the province where it is. We're going to end up with 84 seats, and as they pointed out, that's clearly against the law, against the act that this is working from. If we are to leave the city of Edmonton with the number of seats that it has, we have to make an adjustment somewhere else. That means we have to open up the rest of the report, which is not allowed under this particular amendment.

I would also join in the spirit of the Member for Lacombe-Stettler that this amendment is not fair to other parts of the province either. So if we are, as I believe we should, going to open things up to respect the needs of Edmonton, then surely as Albertans, as citizens of this entire province we have to respect the needs of every other community as well.

So while I have no doubt of the sincerity and goodwill and rightness of the spirit behind this amendment, I for one find it unworkable and unfair and on that basis cannot support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the minister.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my experience when dealing with amendments, one should not try to bring in through the back door that which cannot be brought in through the front door, which this clearly tries to do. Therefore, the amendment in my opinion is clearly out of order. However, since we do have a question on it, may I call the question?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I think that if you wish to debate that the ruling was improper or wrong, there's another venue for it.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To follow some of my learned colleagues on what is being intended here, I guess I would ask the Speaker, based on perhaps new information in front of him, that in fact he take a few moments to consider the ruling that he's made. I understand that there's some new information for the Speaker to consider prior to what I believe to be not even necessary to be had on this particular motion because, as the hon. member across the way has mentioned relative to it, it is not in my view in order. I understand that the Speaker has some new information, and I'd only ask that the Speaker consider the new information prior to considering another ruling based on the new information he has.

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has some new information, and that confirms the earlier decision. If you really object further to it, you have the remedy at hand. You just need to vote against the amendment. I think that's enough on these rulings. Thank you, hon. member.

Are you ready for the question?

Dr. Pannu: May I conclude the debate?

The Deputy Speaker: No, that for sure you can't do. When you make an amendment, you don't have a conclusion right.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on the motion itself.

Mr. Jonson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. First I'd like to make a few comments with respect to an issue which seems to be arising and I hope will not dominate this particular debate. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that seemed to be referring to there being a viewpoint that rural areas were there to serve the cities, sort of a hinterland. We certainly in the rural areas do not look upon it that way at all. We have our contribution to make to the future and to the health of the province, and we know that the cities do as well, and we can't do without each other. We need to work in a direction of continued co-operation for the betterment of all the people in all areas of the province.

To address the whole matter of the electoral boundaries report, Mr. Speaker, I would first like to recognize that the task assigned to one of these committees is certainly a challenging one, particularly in a province that has a growing population and is changing somewhat in terms of its overall distribution as a population. I'd like to acknowledge that the committee did not have the luxury of being able to solve problems by adding seats. That is something that, as I recall, was a possibility in previous examinations of electoral boundaries. So they did have a set number of seats to deal with, and the addition of three or four seats was not an alternative that would get you out of some of the challenges that the commission faced.

10:20

I would also like to acknowledge that the commission did make its rounds of the province after its interim report, and as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler indicated, they did their job of coming to various parts of the province and hearing submissions, that came in considerable numbers from our area and the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's area. There was representation there from individuals, from local governments, and there was certainly concern expressed at that particular time.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to indicate, before commenting further specifically on the report, that I've had the fortune or bad fortune to have been involved in looking at electoral boundaries reports for some 40 years. You might wonder how I get to that number. My job before being in politics was that of being a schoolteacher, a teacher of social studies, and I can remember this being part of the political process that I endeavoured to explain to my students on a number of occasions. I must admit that I was successful, I think, as a school teacher and probably as a politician in being able to rationalize and to explain and to convince my constituents once I became an MLA that when these electoral boundaries reviews came around, yes, there were changes. Some we did not particularly like, but they had a rationale for them, and they were made within certain rules and certain guidelines which Electoral Boundaries Commissions had established over several decades.

Now, this brings up what I think to me are the major concerns that I have with this particular report. The documents that are available for anyone to peruse outline the issues that should concern an Electoral Boundaries Commission. One of them, of course, is the issue of sparsity and density of population, and as these rules have evolved, there has been a latitude allowed in the instructions that have been given to the Electoral Boundaries Commission for a variance of plus or minus 25 percent of the average voting population of constituencies. Now, it would appear, Mr. Speaker, that in the case of Ponoka-Rimbey – and I have to mention, of course, Lacombe-Stettler – that particular latitude was not utilized or considered. Both constituencies are well within the range of the plus or minus 25 percent as far as population is concerned. That does not seem to have been a particular consideration. We are both quite viable in terms of existing numbers and also conform to the current rules or policies that an Electoral Boundaries Commission is to look

at and to consider.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker – and this is another very grave concern, and I'm sure it is for perhaps some other members of the Assembly and certainly would be the case with the Member for Lacombe-Stettler – is that wherever possible boundaries should follow municipal boundaries because there has to be a co-ordination with respect to the services that are provided, the issues that have to be dealt with, and that in the case of Ponoka-Rimbey seems to have been very much ignored.

Also, there is supposed to be recognition of community of interests. Now, certainly Ponoka-Rimbey functions quite well. It is mainly a farming or agricultural area, but it does have its oil and natural gas, it does have its urban businesses, and it is a very, very cohesive group. The local governments get along with each other. There's no particular issue there.

The other issue that I'd like to bring up, too, is that also to be considered is the trend in terms of population growth and the development of the area. Now, Mr. Speaker, as has already been mentioned, the corridor along highway 2 is an area of fairly rapid growth and steady growth, and all projections are that a constituency such as Ponoka-Rimbey will be growing in terms of population. It is not as if it is flat-lining or it is dormant in some way, and it's certainly not declining in terms of its population. So it is not likely, in any way of looking at the future, to be a constituency that is going to drop below that minus 25 percent. So that's another item to be considered as well.

Then the one that really is most glaring, I think, is, as I said, that there should be some respect for community of interests, the cohesiveness of certain areas of the population in the constituency, and there should be some respect shown to the role that local government has to play and the importance and the common sense that's involved in the electoral boundaries coinciding as much as possible with the municipal boundaries in the constituency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to be too critical of the drafters of the report, but I recall back in American political history that a term called gerrymandering was developed. I must admit that the gerrymandering concept was developed by politicians, not by electoral boundaries commissions. Nevertheless, the maps that have come out – and I'll speak particularly of my own constituency – start to get that aura of a salamander. That is, they go round and round and round and round with no seeming connection to the boundaries of local government or natural geographic features or particular community interests. While I do very much appreciate the amendment that was made between the interim report and the final report of the commission whereby there was a sliver of land added to Ponoka-Rimbey which went around the town of Rimbey and brought it back into the constituency, the fact of the matter is that the two or three townships on each side of that particular highway, highway 53, are in two different constituencies. So it is a troubling development there as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that despite the fact that I very much appreciate that this is a very difficult task that the Electoral Boundaries Commission had – and in this particular case I have to go as an individual with my overall experience over the years with representing this particular area of the province and the history of boundaries commissions – I do find that we have a rather unique situation here where the various electoral commissions table of contents, chapter E-3 of a document that I have before me, which is the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, refers very, very distinctly to there having to be consideration of municipal and other important boundaries. There has to be consideration of what I would call service areas, and there should be consideration of the fact, by the very legislation that I have before me and that we have before us in

this Assembly, that there can be a variation of plus or minus 25 percent from an average constituency population number. Really, I do not see the rationale in anything that is happening within the two constituencies in question that should indicate that we need to amalgamate the two constituencies, that we should amalgamate them in such a way that natural corridors as far as transportation and trade and other association will be split in various directions in a very dysfunctional way.

10:30

Further, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that I have concern over, although I must acknowledge that I do not have the latest documentation on this particular matter, is that in the case of Ponoka-Rimbey as it currently exists, we have a very large First Nations population. Their numbers have been chronically underestimated as far as the voting population is concerned, and that is something that does not seem to have been acknowledged and accounted for with respect to the deliberations of the commission.

So, overall, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have a situation here where the constituencies in question – but I will speak specifically for Ponoka-Rimbey. Ponoka-Rimbey I think has had effective representation over many, many years, not just since I've been there, but we do our best, and I'm sure that the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler does as well. We are a growth area. We currently come within the parameters that are required to have two distinct constituencies in that particular part of the province. We have numerous municipal governments to be served. We have a varied business base.

I do take issue with the contents of the boundaries report. As I've said, it's the first time that I have done so in a number of roles. I've not argued formally against a boundaries report before, but I do think that in this particular case for the reasons that I've outlined, I will not be able to support and to represent to my constituencies that I agree with this report.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join in this discussion, but I have to say immediately and right off the top that I do not concur with the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I do not support Government Motion 13 to accept and concur in these recommendations.

I just have a wee little quote that I found here that sort of sums up how I'm feeling about all of what's gone on here. This is from Donald and Elenore Laird from *The Art of Getting Things Done*:

Next to being right, the best of all things is to be clearly and definitely wrong, because you will come out somewhere. If you go buzzing about between right and wrong, vibrating and fluctuating, you come out nowhere; but if you are absolutely and thoroughly wrong, you have the good fortune of knocking against the facts that set you straight again.

And I think – I hope – that is the situation that we find ourselves in with this report. It is thoroughly wrong. A number of other members have spoken eloquently about what has been missed in the report or the criteria that was set up that doesn't work for them. We must not accept the recommendations of this Electoral Boundaries Commission. It is irrevocably wrong, wrong, wrong, and we should not support it.

I think overwhelmingly it's wrong, from my point of view, for three reasons. One, it is wrong because Edmonton loses a seat. I appreciate very much the passionate words that have been spoken by the members for Lacombe-Stettler and Ponoka-Rimbey, and good on

them for speaking so eloquently on behalf of their constituencies. I am an MLA from Edmonton, and I am concerned about Edmonton losing a seat, and that's how I am approaching this debate. I think that it's important throughout this debate that we not fall to the Conservative ideology that tends to say: if you're going to give something somewhere, then you have to take something away. I don't think that that has to be put into play here, and I'm certainly not approaching it that way, that in order to get what I want for Edmonton, I would therefore turn around and take it away from somebody else. I'm not approaching that debate this way. I just think that what's been put forward by this Electoral Boundaries Commission is wrong, wrong, wrong.

The other two reasons why I will not concur with the recommendations here. Number one was Edmonton is losing a seat. Number two, I find that what's being proposed in one of the changes, particularly to the community of Boyle-McCauley, is cruel and unfair. I'll come back to that later. Thirdly, I find that the process or more specifically the criteria that's used in the matrix is old and tired and is not taking into consideration a number of things that are very important in my community and I think in Edmonton.

I appeared before the Electoral Boundaries Commission three times. I was invited to appear before the commissioners to talk about what it was like representing an inner-city urban community. I appeared along with my colleague for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who talked about representing sort of a suburban riding in a metropolitan area, that being the riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I also appeared in person at the very first hearing that was held in June in Edmonton, and I appeared again at the second hearing. So I have taken every opportunity available to me to appear before this commission to plead my case on behalf of Edmonton and on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Centre and even, casting the net wider, on behalf of those who live in Boyle-McCauley.

The first time I appeared, I was asking the committee to please make sure that it respected the natural community boundaries, and that's one of the reasons that I am so unhappy with the report that we find in front of us. It did not respect those natural community boundaries, and I thought that that was just happening in the city. Having listened to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, obviously there's a natural boundary there that's also not being respected, and I think it works very much against the work we're trying to do as legislators when we allow communities to be carved up or broken apart artificially.

So when I first appeared, I was trying to talk about upholding those communities and their natural boundaries. I was also trying to capture three apartment buildings that were ending up being orphaned. They were just outside of my riding but on the very far edge of Edmonton-Highlands, and quite often just being where they were situated, sort of right in the middle of downtown, they tended to get orphaned, and I wanted to make sure that they were going to be captured.

I talked about what it was like representing an urban riding and the different pressures that were on us and made a plea for constituency budgets and the pressures that are on constituency budgets. I don't know what happens in rural areas, but I was speaking about the pressures that were on my constituency budgets, in particular things like the cost of translation. I have multi, multi languages and many different ethnic backgrounds that are represented in my community, and if I really want to speak to those communities, then I'm going to have to translate, and if I'm really going to speak to them, I'd have to translate into between six and 10 languages, which is a cost factor. So by way of example, that's what I was talking about.

10:40

The second time I appeared at the hearing, I was specifically

addressing what had been proposed in the draft report – I actually have my notes with me from that – and I was talking again about the need to maintain 19 seats in Edmonton, recognizing a number of the points that have already been raised here: that Edmonton continues to grow, that the growth rate since the census has been particularly noteworthy, that I did not want to see the kind of imbalance created in Edmonton that we created through the last electoral boundary change which resulted in such pressures in Calgary. I felt that we needed to challenge the commission to work more with technology and innovation that was available. I believed very strongly in one person, one vote, and I did not want to see the votes of the constituents in Edmonton-Centre being worth less, and the commission was not able to give me and I think other Edmontonians the arguments to convince that long-held format of one person, one vote. I think that my constituent's vote is just as valuable and should have equal weight as one from any other riding, even compared to rural ridings, and I felt that that was not happening.

I think that what's important here is that we use the golden rule, that we use respect, and I think we need to reject this motion. We need to use whatever is available to us as legislators – if that means changing the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, so be it – so that we can create a new Electoral Boundaries Commission that will approach this again. Fine. We have the power to do it. Let's be grown up. Let's do it. I think that with that it's important to set before that Electoral Boundaries Commission, if we do get a new one, that respect is key. This should not be something that's based on my way or the highway or might makes right or if I'm right, you're wrong or if somebody gets something, someone else loses something. It's just not a constructive way to approach all of this, and there are a number of other factors that should be weighed in.

Now, specifically I want to look at what is currently under the matrix that's being used, and I felt that there were a number of biases here and also a number of things that were not taken into consideration. For example, the matrix takes into consideration the number of elected bodies – and their definition of that is pretty narrow – that a member may have to deal with as part of the criteria for the matrix. So those who have to deal with a number of city councils or a number of town councils, for example, are going to weigh higher on the matrix. It does not take into consideration the situation that I think many of us in the urban ridings now find ourselves in where we are also dealing with elected bodies who are not recognized by this matrix structure; for example, business revitalization zones.

I have four, I think, in Edmonton-Centre, and I know that a number of my colleagues in this city also deal with them. These are areas where people are elected to represent the business interests in a given area. They talk about revitalization; they talk about taxation; they talk about streetscapes. They talk about how they are going to work together as a community and how they interact with the other communities and constituencies that are surrounding them. You know, if we're going to be talking about how difficult it is for an MLA to represent, how many nights you work, how many weekends you work, certainly the meetings with those groups, in my mind, are just as vital and just as key to the health of a community as a meeting with a town council. It's another night, if that's how we're breaking it down and judging it. So the matrix is not taking into consideration things like that.

It's not taking into consideration the range of socioeconomic households that one can be dealing with. I don't have proof, but I've been told a number of times by those that do have proof that Edmonton-Centre is one of the widest ranging constituencies, going from the very, very well-to-do – Wayne Gretzky used to live in a very high-end condominium on Victoria Park Road in my riding – right down to the people that are living underneath the bridge behind

my office and everything in between. So we have a much wider range of what kind of resources people have to approach, and that also creates its own set of challenges in representing people. That's not taken into consideration.

Distance, how far people have to travel, is very important when we look at the matrix. The further you have to travel, the more difficult it is in being considered a factor in how you represent people. Yes, I can certainly see how that would be an issue for some, but again I think that there are other issues and factors, like language barriers, like the fact that the cities tend to attract those who are seeking resources, that are not taken into consideration that do play very much for us representing urban ridings.

For example, in Edmonton-Centre I have a number of people with mental health issues. I have a number of group homes. I have a number of apartment buildings actually that cater to people with mental health issues. I have the CNIB. I've got a number of organizations that are catering to people that need help, and thus I get the people who need help. They're going to cluster around those services. In many cases, unfortunately, the services for one or two people who are in need of CNIB are not available in the rural areas, and they're going to move to the city. That's okay. That's where the services are for them. But it also needs to be considered as a factor in how you represent people and how you access your MLA and how difficult that is.

I'm just finding that the matrix that this Electoral Boundaries Commission looked at is old and tired and cranky, and it is not taking into consideration what it's really like in 2003 to try and represent vibrant communities. That's not to say that my community, my constituency is any better than anyone else's. I think it is, but I'm willing to say that all 83 constituencies in Alberta are equally important, and we value them all. It's just different. I don't think that we should be saying that it's terribly easy to represent one, and therefore they don't get the resources.

Overall I think that this Electoral Boundaries Commission did not do a good job. Now, whether it was because what it was charged with hampered them in some way, whether they fed numbers into a computer, and that was the result, and they were willing to abide by it – I don't know what went wrong, and at this point I don't really care except to learn a lesson so that we don't repeat it. What has been proposed under this Electoral Boundaries report is not acceptable. It is particularly not acceptable to me as an Edmonton MLA that we would lose a seat. Obviously, there are other issues that have been brought up in this House, argued equally fervently and perhaps even better than I have been able to make my own case.

So I urge all members to vote against the acceptance of this report. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Question or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Rathgeber: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre what she would do. It is all fine and well to bemoan the loss of a seat in Edmonton, and I certainly don't criticize her for taking that position. But would she increase the number of seats from its current number, or would she pull another one out from rural Alberta? How would she justify that after listening to the passionate speech from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler?

Ms Blakeman: I think the point is that no one individual in this Assembly is going to be on the next Electoral Boundaries Commission. The point is that we have the ability to reject the report that's put in front of us as being unacceptable and to send it back. Now,

we know that the Electoral Boundaries Commission was dissolved as soon as it signed off on the report; therefore, we would have to look at adjusting the existing legislation to create another Electoral Boundaries Commission and send it back to them. I don't think I'm going to have the honour or perhaps the travail of being appointed to that commission. Nonetheless, it's our job in this Assembly to set the criteria for them, and I think that as a group we're more than capable of doing that.

10:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you. I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Centre would, then, advise the House how she would envision the mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission to be changed for this hypothetical new commission.

Ms Blakeman: I think that if the member was listening – I spoke at length. In particular, one of my major concerns is the matrix, that I felt needed to be updated and expanded. Certainly, that is I think one of the important components that would need to be changed and set before another Electoral Boundaries Commission.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, would the Member for Edmonton-Centre advocate increasing the number of seats as a method by which the matrix could be expanded?

Ms Blakeman: No, I wouldn't.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How, then, would the Member for Edmonton-Centre square the circle?

Ms Blakeman: Well, the member is giving me a great deal of credit in that somehow he seems to believe that I'm going to be the new Electoral Boundaries Commission all by myself, and I don't think that's appropriate. I think we have the mechanism before us to create a new Electoral Boundaries Commission and to set forth the criteria we want. I've already said that I think we need to update the matrix. Frankly, it's not my job. As much as the member is trying to put it on me, it is not my job to determine all of these.

An Hon. Member: You're critical of the last job.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely. It is well within my rights to reject the report that's in front of me. Do I have to personally rewrite the new one? No.

The Deputy Speaker: No further questions or comments?

Mr. Marz: Just one question, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the member would come up with a suggestion on who she would think would make a good chairman for this new Boundaries Commission since King Solomon is no longer available.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre seemed to be just focusing on the matrix. However, as the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler indicated, I

made a presentation to the commission. Quite frankly, we wouldn't have needed to do much of this if we had followed one simple thing, and that is to go to plus or minus 20 percent instead of 15 percent. I wonder if the hon. member would agree with that.

Ms Blakeman: I certainly think that's something that should be included in whatever we look at next because it does address a number of the factors. It seems to me that it particularly addresses some of the factors that are of concern to the people that are representing rural ridings if I'm hearing that correctly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister, in the 12 seconds remaining.

Mr. Lund: The fact is that if we went to plus or minus 20, Edmonton wouldn't lose a seat, we wouldn't lose a rural seat, and Calgary has enough seats so that they could work within what they've already got.

The Deputy Speaker: We're now out of time.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to speak.

Mr. Hutton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to welcome His Worship the mayor, the councillors, and staff who are choosing to come down and watch this titillating debate. This is a very emotional issue as you heard earlier from my wonderful colleague from Lacombe-Stettler.

As the representative for the citizens of Edmonton-Glenora it is important for me to stand and outline my position regarding Motion 13. Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that I am very proud to serve the people of Edmonton-Glenora and will continue to do so the best I can for the remainder of this mandate, even the ones that may not be part of my constituency due to this redistribution.

I've been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party for three decades and served in government for two. This will be the third boundary report I have been party to, no pun intended. The arguments and the displeasure have not changed over the decades. As the hon. Justice minister, our Government House Leader, stated, this was an arm's-length commission that was given parameters and principles and criteria that were very objective and solid. The population has moved, migrated, and increased. I cite my hon. colleague from Calgary-Shaw. When she was elected, she had 73,000 people living in her riding. That was a mere two years ago. Today she has 90,000. That is three times the size of my constituency.

I would like to stand before you this evening and say that I am satisfied with the commission's findings, but I can't. I don't want to lose any of my constituents. I don't want to lose a seat in Edmonton. I would like to keep things the way they were, but that would be selfish, self-serving, and subjective, Mr. Speaker.

So what do we do? Well, Mr. Speaker, we could reject the report and take it upon ourselves in this Legislative Assembly to draw suitable lines for the next general election. With an Assembly with a 74-seat majority I'm certain that it would be a very interesting map indeed. The word "gerrymandering" comes to my forebrain when I think of that majority, and I also think that the courts may have some concern and reject any map that we as Legislature members would put forward.

Our second choice, Mr. Speaker, would be to reject the report and have another one struck, and I have to agree again with the Government House Leader in saying that the outcome would probably be marginally changed or minor at best. The third choice is to say that we accept this report, this objective, arm's-length commission's

report.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to figuratively pull out my sabre for my constituents in Edmonton-Glenora and for the city of Edmonton in this august House that is steeped in British and Canadian history. I then will put it back in again and accept the principles of this objective, arm's-length report rather than my subjective, personal views. I believe that the citizens of this great province will be well served by the boundary change as it will be hopefully approved in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments, questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a sad event that we're engaged in this evening. I, too, would like to speak against Government Motion 13. For my caucus this is the culmination of a great deal of work. We've been at the process of trying to make sure that Edmonton was treated fairly for a great deal of time. It started when two of our members were asked by the boundaries commission to make a presentation to them before they started their hearings around the province, and it continued with consultations with our caucus before the interim report was made, and presentations were given by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

During the second round of consultations, after the interim report, we had the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar make presentations, and we agreed at that time that we would work through our constituencies so that we could get as wide a number of voices on this subject as we could so that our presentations would truly reflect what Edmontonians considered to be important. So a number of the Edmonton constituencies did make presentations, very good presentations, to the commission. We had a petition urging that one seat not be taken away from the city as this report recommends. We had a Standing Order 30 in the fall of 2002 to try to ward off the recommendation that appears before us now, and we had some discussions with members of Edmonton city council in terms of what we might do as a city to avoid the motion that appears before us this evening. Unfortunately, those efforts have not resulted in what we wanted, and we have Motion 13 before us.

11:00

I think that if there's anything good that came out of the boundaries report, it was that the appointment of Bauni Mackay as one of our representatives was a very, very good thing. I think that if you read through the boundaries report, her minority report makes the case for our city eloquently and succinctly. She has done in three pages what many of us won't be able to do in the 15 minutes we're allotted this evening. She has served the city well, and unfortunately her voice was a minority voice on the commission.

As westerners, Mr. Speaker, and as Albertans we're quick to complain about the unfairness of voting systems, particularly when it comes to federal politics and federal institutions. For instance, with respect to the Senate Prince Edward Island has four Senators, and each of those Senators represents 25,000 voters, while in ridings here a Senator represents 105,000 voters. That disparity, that difference in voting power really bothers western Canadians. We also are upset with the number of voters to MPs: one person, one vote in Alberta, one person, two votes in New Brunswick, and one person, four votes in Prince Edward Island. Those discrepancies, those deviations from the norm of one person, one vote really do upset us as Albertans and as westerners, and as I said, we have

devised a number of schemes over the years to try to alleviate those differences to no avail. However, when it comes to provincial electoral boundaries, we seem to put away those concerns, and we seem to be very willing to embrace and excuse in fact inequalities in the system. I think that that's why we find ourselves in the position we are this evening and why we ended up with the electoral boundaries report that we did.

What we have this evening, of course, is not new. There have been precedents in years past. In England, as society became more industrialized, the landed gentry there tried to hang onto their political power, and they did that by denying the newly industrial areas representation. So you had what have become known as the rotten boroughs, where you would have a borough represented by two Members of Parliament. Thomas Paine wrote about this at the time, and I'm quoting from his *Rights of Man*. In 1791 he said:

The county of Yorkshire, which contains near a million souls, sends two county members; and so does the county of Rutland which contains not a hundredth part of that number. The town of Old Sarum, which contains not three houses, sends two members; and the town of Manchester, which contains upwards of sixty thousand souls, is not admitted to send any. Is there any principle in these things?

So as far back as 1791 the notion of one person, one vote and the inequalities in the system were causing difficulties. As I said, it ended up being historically significant and has introduced the notion of rotten boroughs, because that's what they were. They had constituencies with very few people who had exactly the same representation as constituencies that had thousands. I'm not suggesting that the parallel exists in Alberta at this time – it's not yet quite that bad, Mr. Speaker – but there is a parallel.

The increasing urbanization of this province continues unabated. If you look over the changes in the provincial population over the last number of years, the shift from rural to urban is a fact of life, and that shift puts some major stresses on urban areas, as it does on rural areas. There's a quote from the minority report that I think is pertinent here.

While there is no question that the changing face of the province presents a major concern that must be dealt with, the urban/rural distinction serves no useful purpose in grappling with the economic, political and social changes facing Albertans. The solution lies in public policy and not in removing a division from Edmonton. Diluting Edmonton's voice in the Legislative Assembly is not the solution to maintaining a strong rural population. In fact there is a growing body of evidence to show how regressive and counter productive [that] is.

I think that that's relevant as we consider the motion before us this evening, Mr. Speaker.

It's public policy that has to be addressed if rural Alberta is to be strengthened. It's public policy in the area of health care. It's public policy in the area of education. We know how devastating, for instance, it is when small rural schools are closed. In many cases when that happens, it closes the community. Yet we have public policy that works to make that happen. In terms of education policy, in terms of investment policy, in terms of immigration policy, those are the areas that I believe the minority report was talking about and indicating that they had to be addressed if the concerns of rural Alberta were to be recognized and dealt with.

I think there's a lot that will be said and there's a lot that appeared in the report, but I think that for me the most telling remarks were the ones, again, in the minority report. It said:

Not one presenter at the Commission hearings in Edmonton suggested that Edmonton should lose a division. Even in the rest of the province, there were very few presenters who singled out Edmonton to lose a division. However, what we did hear many

times in rural Alberta is that the electoral boundaries process should be about people and not about numbers.

I think that that's an important conclusion from the report. I guess that the numbers, of course, that we are suffering from are the numbers that were used by the commission and ones that have been challenged and certainly are ones that are going to within a few years make Edmonton at least two seats short if the present population trends continue. So in part for us it is a numbers problem.

When our constituency association prepared our presentation – and we spent a good deal of time considering the whole question – we didn't even consider addressing the notion that the city might lose a seat. It wasn't even on our radar, and we didn't address it in the report that we prepared. We fully believed that given the population and given the projections for the city the 19 seats that we had in the city were a given. Little did we know, Mr. Speaker. We made recommendations about our own constituency and if there were changes, where those changes might be. We made some recommendations about the matrix and how the matrix might be enhanced, but we didn't make representation to the commission, and as the minority report indicates, it was only on the minds of a few Albertans and certainly not on the minds of Edmontonians, who again, I think, were surprised at what has appeared as a recommendation.

I think that one of the things we can blame ourselves for, Mr. Speaker, is that we allowed the commission to go forward with the givens that we did, that we were happy with the 83 seats. In fact, there have been some recommendations before this Assembly that the number of seats in the province be reduced to 65, and I don't agree with those. I think that the number of seats should reflect the interests and the needs of Albertans, and you don't start off with a preset number and then make things fit. So I believe that we were wrong when we set the commission off on its work to make that as a given. I know that it's popular to indicate that you're going to either keep the number of seats the same or you're going to reduce the number of seats. Politically it's the thing to say, but in terms of the wisdom of serving Albertans, I think it was a mistake. I, too, can hope that somehow or other the report, the recommendation before us will be rejected and that we'll put our minds to finding a way that the very, very serious objections that have been raised and will be raised to the report can be accommodated.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

11:10

The Deputy Speaker: Comments? Questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods how he reconciles his statement that the boundaries commission should not have any preset notions with respect to numbers; however, he has in his view a preset notion that Edmonton should have 19 seats.

Dr. Massey: Yeah. It's a good question. I think one of the things that we might have done is some preliminary work in trying to determine the appropriate number of seats instead of just accepting the 83 because that's the way they were. Maybe there had to be some preliminary homework done looking at the problems to see if 83 was going to be the number that would actually serve us.

The Deputy Speaker: No further questions?

Would the Assembly be willing to give agreement to the brief reversion to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Mr. Masyk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce three friends: Werner, Zoria, and David. I'd like them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly. David was my campaign chair, Werner is president of the association, and Zoria is a member.

Thank you.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood is next to speak.

Mr. Masyk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find myself in an interesting position: standing on the front line of a battle field of a constituency that's being eliminated. I took an oath, and that oath meant that I have to do my best, do my due diligence for the constituency. Is this part of it? After 700 days of being broken in, so to speak, to come and face this and exactly explain to the Members of the Assembly that Motion 13 is wrong and to come up with reasons why is interesting.

Lacombe-Stettler had some reasons, passionate reasons. Mine are more geared toward the city of Edmonton and council and His Worship Bill Smith. They took it on themselves to dig deep, Mr. Speaker, and spent \$50,000 of taxpayers' money across the board to involve the city of Edmonton and its residents and the voting population, and by doing that, they represented all of Edmonton. So all of Edmonton wants to have 19 seats, and that's measured against the \$50,000 that they did spend. Otherwise, they wouldn't have spent it. So those two correspond, and if they correspond with reality, then it must be the truth. So I'm not bringing forward speculation or a system of philosophy. What I want to do is bring forward anti theories, and anti theories there again correspond to reality, the truth.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Boundaries Commission made a mistake. Why they made a mistake is because when I discussed some sentiments in my office with the chairman – and had it not been a Conservative riding, the likelihood of it not being taken away was great. Now, I didn't tape record it. It was said as my word against his. However, if there are transcripts from the Ramada Inn, we could easily get the admission from Mr. Clark where he admitted to saying these things. Now, does that make it right? Or does that lead us into an area of a legal challenge, which so often accompanies mistakes?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to be as nice as I can and as fair as I can and at the same time achieve an objective, which is to keep the 19 seats and at the same time save face by the oath I did take to represent Edmonton-Norwood. To me, which is it? We could do one of two things. We can either accept the report, or we make a law that there are more electoral boundaries, or we can reject it. It's quite simple. Anything other than that, for the last three or four hours all we did was spin our wheels.

So what are we going to do? Well, naturally, I'm going to vote against this motion. Had it not been Edmonton-Norwood, had I not been in the front, well, would I be hypocritical to say, well, I would sit back and join in the spinning of the wheels? Well, who knows?

I would probably encourage everybody to say that I wouldn't, but that's hindsight. Anybody can do that. But as long as I went up for it, as long as I knocked on those doors, as long as I told the people that I would represent them continually, I will continue to do so until the last breath that I take. At that point, I will probably lean over and trip the trip wire. What does that mean? Well, we'll see.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you dig deep into the trenches, you have to take the field back. So how do we do that? Simple. Convince all my colleagues to vote against this Electoral Boundaries Commission. Are they going to do that? They spent, you know, half a million dollars doing it. Is the next one coming up going to be any different? There are all various kinds of questions. Who has the answer? I don't think anybody has the real right answer.

Edmonton-Norwood, Mr. Speaker. I've probably got 10S pages of notes listening to debate back and forth. I wore myself fairly thin trying to be direct and blunt and to the point and at the same time be convincing. Now, am I achieving that? There's no table thumping; there's no nodding of heads.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora figuratively took a sword out. Well, I'd like to literally take one out – now, it's imaginary, but it's there – and I'd like to chop that report. Here's one here, and if I had the strength, I would probably tear it in half and table it. That's how I'd like to fix it. [interjection] It's too thick. That's why it's imaginary.

Where does that leave a person like me? Where does it leave an MLA who's representing a riding that's being eliminated? Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Assembly it leaves me only one thing: that's to plead to the other members to do the right thing and vote against it. It'd be embarrassing to get on my knees and beg them.

You know, when I grew up, my dad ran a lot of things by me. It's, you know: you don't work; you don't eat. Well, I brought that philosophy, and I still carry it. I think that's probably why I fit into this government. That's what builds the country. You have to get out and do your share of work. If you work for 10 hours, charge for 10 hours. That was drilled into me. Before you complain about your shoes, look at somebody with no feet. That was drilled into me.

I brought that into my constituency. In the parts that were in the inner city, I had to basically educate a lot of constituents when they came to the door. Believe it or not, they didn't leave all that happy, but I honestly didn't know. I come from a northern community, from a farm, with this background, this philosophy: "You don't work; you don't eat. The harder you work; the luckier you'll get." Every day I had that. Then somebody would come in. They would tell me this; they'd tell me that. Well, work; all you have to do is work. "Well, we can't make it." It's not what you make, it's what you save. I was told that. Didn't your parents tell you that? "Well, we had no parents." Oh. Well, what did you learn in school? "We never went to school." Oh.

So I was faced with a whole pile of things, and one thing representing Edmonton-Norwood did do is it educated me to a whole new world, one that didn't exist in the oilfield, where I worked, one that didn't exist on the farm, where my Success by Six was picking roots. These guys didn't know that.

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So little by little as I would go into the community leagues, little by little as I would go to different functions and I would sit down and I would talk to people, I was literally shocked at what an inner city is all about. So I for sure am grateful that I'm a new person out

of it, and for 700 days I'll tell you: I have a lot of education. It's not a social outlook. What I do bring is a good conservative-type outlook and bring those sentiments across to people that are in my constituency to make them a better person. I even went so far as bringing Bill 210, and that's a reflection of what needs to be done in the inner city. That's a reflection of what needs to be done in all of Alberta for people who are less than fortunate.

Now, does that mean anything to our government? Well, that's to be debated yet in second reading. I'm not trying to lobby for that bill right now; however, the occasion does present itself. You know, it would go a long way if people would just look at an inner-city constituency, and if it's being held by a government member, anchor into it and root into it. I think, Mr. Speaker, that if we really considerably looked at 19 seats and rounded it up properly, other than Jethro Clampett's new math, where you round down, I think we would probably have a lot more foresight into seeing how things should be accomplished. Calgary is growing. It's a fact. Where's the place to address it? Right here and right now. Calgary is growing. Count the numbers. What can we do to change it? Amend the act to be 84 seats. Are we going to do that? Well, that's another hill to climb.

The one facing us now? Motion 13. Are we going to pass it? I don't want to, and I'm not going to, and I have my reasons. I explained them, and mayor, council, you know, I probably feel that I lost that riding. I honestly feel that. If it was one of the other parties, they wouldn't have taken it. There are only, you know, nine of you guys, and there are a whole bunch of us. So it wouldn't look good; would it? Well, let's be honest. Would it look good if they

took one of your ridings? What's left for me? You know, I have full confidence that I could have knocked off any one of you guys in an election. Just dig in. So is it about politics? Of course not. I can walk – maybe in Strathcona I couldn't, but the rest is . . . I'm not worried about it. I covered my constituency three times because that's the work ethic that I had.

The point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, and to the city council who came in, is that if this riding loses, I probably will have to assume full responsibility for winning it in the first place. So if that happens, I apologize to you for losing it to Edmonton, but for any consultation while I am here, maybe we can shorten up some distance on Anthony Henday Drive. Maybe I can lobby harder in the remaining time that I do have here, and hopefully that'll go somewhere, and hopefully we can justify that \$50,000 of taxpayer money that was spent. But it's not over till it's over.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'd like to encourage the members to reject this Electoral Boundaries Commission report on the basis that I brought forward, and on that note I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]