

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 7, 2006** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 06/03/07
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, before we start, could we revert immediately to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, obviously the story of the fun we have here at night has gotten out quite quickly. To that effect, my brother Eric is here from Vermilion. I know that you're probably asking: "Will it never quit? Will they quit sending Snelgroves to Edmonton?" It's a great privilege to ask my brother to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very hard-working and dedicated individuals that work in the Solicitor General and Public Security office. Bill Meade and Sandra Klashinsky are here. They travelled the province and did a large amount of work on Bill 16, which we'll be hearing in second reading tonight. I'd like to ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Bill 14
Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce second reading of Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

Health and Wellness is proposing minor amendments to the Health Professions Act. The proposed changes will strengthen the act and respond to issues raised by individual colleges and by the federation of regulated health professions. The Health Professions Act was proclaimed in force in part in December of 1999. There will be 28 regulatory colleges established under the act and governed by regulation when it is fully implemented. There are currently 16 regulations implemented under the act. Twelve are under development and moving forward quickly.

As regulations are developed and professions gain experience operating under the act, required amendments are being identified. These key amendments include clarification respecting complaints, the application of continuing competence programs, adding flexibility for the minister when considering applications from professions to be governed under the act, enabling councils to regulate the title of specialist with respect to their profession, the addition of several protected titles, and an amendment to the practice statement for opticians.

The practice statement for opticians under the Health Professions Act would be amended to ensure that it accurately describes the services currently being provided by opticians, including sight testing, known as refractions, and eye health assessment. Including sight testing in their practice statement will enable the Alberta Opticians Association to ensure that its members adhere to specific standards.

Mr. Speaker, current practices will be maintained and will be performed under the oversight of the college. Performing sight testing and assessing eye health are not restricted activities. Opticians currently perform sight testing under the remote supervision of health professionals authorized to prescribe corrective lenses. The refracting information is provided to the health professional to prescribe the lenses, and that professional is usually in another location.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 108 opticians throughout the province providing sight testing for another health professional. Opticians also currently perform sight testing when dispensing corrective lenses. The regulatory body should be given authority to regulate the health services provided by its members. Providing eye testing and eye health assessments are not restricted activities, so without the proposed change the Alberta Opticians Association will not have the jurisdiction to regulate members that are performing these activities, and they will go unregulated.

An amendment is also proposed for schedule 7.1 of the Government Organization Act with respect to restricted activities. Mr. Speaker, while this schedule has an offence provision, there is no specific time limit stated for prosecution, which means that by default the period is six months as per the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. Amending the schedule by adding an appropriate time limit of two years will avoid this default mechanism.

The ministry's target for full implementation of the Health Professions Act is this year. The department is working with a legislative subcommittee established by the federation of regulated health professions and with individual health professions to address policy issues. As a result, further amendments will be brought forward following full implementation of the act.

I move second reading of Bill 14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading.

There are a number of issues that I would like to bring up as part of second reading. Second reading is essentially a debate on the principle of a bill, and we're always asked whether we support it in second reading. We're answering, then, that we support something in principle or don't support it in principle. I have to admit up front, Mr. Speaker, that I am going to have to withhold my decision because I have some uneasiness about some of the proposals that are being made in this act, and on the other hand I'm very supportive of some of the other sections.

Just a few notations that I'd like to make. The first is under the Government Organization Act, schedule 7.1, that the sponsoring member mentioned. I do note that this is actually increasing the timeline for reporting an offence from six months, which is the default position, to two years. I can also say that a number of people have contacted me – not a large number – with a concern about that two-year cut-off, that two years is often not enough time to be able to come to a realization or to reach the point where you have enough information or decide you want to go forward.

The other side of that, of course, is: how long are you supposed to have a defender of something hang on, waiting to see whether the shoe is going to drop, whether someone is going to try and bring forward a suit against them or some sort of a criminal charge? There has to be some point at which they know that that's not going to proceed. So I just wanted to mention it, that there was some concern raised about that two years. I certainly do not support that in some other cases, particularly around reporting of sexual assaults, for example, but I think that in this particular instance it's probably merited.

The next section, and the one that has been one of the most controversial for me, is the section in the bill which is amending section 25 of the originating act. Essentially what that's doing is changing the way the minister can choose which organization gets to be recognized as representing that particular profession. It used to be that the minister had to abide by the organization that represented the majority of persons that were carrying on that profession in Alberta. That section is being struck down, and now with different wording it's basically saying, you know, that if the minister is satisfied that this is the reasonable group to be chosen, so be it.

There are two sides to this. I've had a number of groups approach me. I'm sure that they're the same groups that have approached the minister and may well have approached the sponsoring member of the bill, all with their arguments about why they should be the one. In balance, I think this is probably an appropriate mechanism for the minister to have at their disposal to deal with these kinds of disputes.

8:10

Let me expand for those in the Assembly that may not have a close association with this. You may have two different organizations that are basically representing people that perform more or less the same function, and each organization is saying: "I'm the one. I'm the one, and the other group is not legitimate or should not be representing." I think politicians are always very reluctant to step in the middle of somebody else's internal dispute and pick because it's just not appropriate. We're not the experts in that area. We're not the ones to say: you're the ones.

An Hon. Member: Speak for yourself.

Ms Blakeman: Well, if the backbencher wants to get in the middle of this and be choosing which profession is more merited, fine. I'm not going to get into that, and I don't think we should be in those kinds of disputes. I think what's been worked out here is probably the most reasonable way to deal with things.

There's a choice, it seems, being made specific to the massage therapists and the group that has a higher qualification or a higher standard. I think they require – now, here we go. There are a number of organizations: the Alberta Registered Massage Therapists Society, the Massage Therapist Association of Alberta, the Alberta Remedial Massage Therapist Association. They are all getting regulated somehow.

The one that's getting left out is the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners. They do not meet the standard that's been set by others, and admittedly this is a very, very high standard. There are 2,200 hours of training required by some of these other massage therapist organizations, and that's very high. I mean, if you look throughout the States and the other provinces, you're dealing more in the range of 250 hours, 500 hours, 800 hours of training required. Twenty-two hundred hours is the standard here, so very very high. This one group, the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners, is going to get left out because they don't come anywhere near that, but they also perform

services that are more related to stress reduction and relaxation massage: maybe that's a good way to put it.

I'm wondering why the minister doesn't consider in this case recognizing a lower level, a less trained level that doesn't presume to have higher aspirations. They will admit that they're trained at a lesser level, but they still want to be regulated and included. The repercussions from this are that if they are not included in this process, they lose the ability to take referrals from physicians, from other health professionals. I think that in some cases they'll lose their ability to literally charge for their services as a professional. So it has a large impact on them.

I would have said that if you regulated a sort of secondary level or a novice level, you're more likely to have those people continue on with their training and try to hit the higher level, as an inspiration to move up and get paid more per hour and all of those things. If we just say that we're not going to regulate them at all, that you're not a profession and we don't recognize you, then those people just leave completely and go onto something entirely different, having basically wasted their hours of training. So I think there's an argument here, that in this particular case a secondary level or different categories could be worked out to be accepted, or the minister could be asking one of the other groups to recognize the group with lesser time, to accept them as a different category. I will admit that this has caused me more meeting times than any other section that was in this proposed bill.

Another section that came out for me is around the complaints. There's an adjustment that's being made here, that essentially someone who makes a complaint to a complaint director regarding a regulated member of a profession has to do so in writing, and they have to sign it. That makes sense to most of us. We're familiar with it from a court of law. You know, if you're going to accuse somebody, then you've got to be willing to stand up in public and put your name to it. Of course, for everybody's reliability and documentation, it should be in a written form, perfectly acceptable.

That clarification is fine, but I find it very odd that it's juxtaposed against the next section, in which the ability to take a complaint orally is now being added. On the one hand, somebody complaining about a regulated member has to do it in writing and sign it. Then in the very next section the complaints director, who has reasonable grounds to believe that the conduct is unprofessional, can receive a referral or be given notice and can be given this information orally and will commence the whole process. I'm finding that very strange, and I'm looking for an explanation of it because I would say that if it's serious enough to start an investigation, as is clearly anticipated by this section, then it should be done in the same manner as all the other ones are, that is in writing and signed so that there's a clear person making a complaint.

Now, you may not want to publicize the complainant's name, but that documentation still needs to be there. It can't be done sort of in an anonymous way and orally. I think it just leaves far too much open for misinterpretation. It doesn't give the person who's been accused much opportunity to come back and say: "How did they write this? Where can I read this and see exactly what they said?" It was an oral statement. I have concerns around that.

There are a couple of sections that the sponsoring member mentioned where the scope of practice is either that they're registering a new scope or they're expanding the scope. We've got the provisional dental assistant, a provisional optician, and then the widening of the scope of the opticians to allow refractions, which are essentially eye tests. We did consult a fairly wide range of stakeholders as we looked at this bill: the Alberta Association of Optometrists, the Alberta College of Pharmacists, the Alberta Opticians Association, the Alberta Podiatry Association, Association of

Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners, College of Alberta Dental Assistants, and – I’m sorry; I didn’t write this one down, and I may not get the title exactly right – the acupuncturists. We’ve talked to all of them, and most of them are okay. I’m bringing up the points where they had some concerns. We were not able to find out what the optometrists didn’t like about the expanded scope. They didn’t respond to us.

The other issue I have and part of what’s causing me some hesitation here is that this bill is specifically mentioned in the Health Policy Framework that was recently released by the minister, known more colloquially as the third way. There is a great deal of uncertainty about this, and as I looked through the document, the framework that was actually handed out, it sounds innocuous enough. But there’s a lack of detail and certainty in a number of areas which starts to make me worry that there’s something in this bill that I’m not recognizing that could have a huge impact on the health professions that are regulated under this act. I don’t want to look back two years from now and go: oh, my goodness; that was the tiny golden key that opened the door that led to private health care that nobody wants. I’m having to be more cautious than I would have been debating this bill a couple of months ago because Bill 14 is specifically mentioned in a couple of places.

When I look at the section 2 in the Health Policy Framework, Promoting Flexibility in Scope of Practice of Health Professionals, I get some interesting phrases and descriptions happening. Under the Policy Intent section, which appears on page 10 of the document, they’re talking about the issue of overlapping roles, responsibilities, and scopes of practice, and that the government wants to look at taking away some of the restrictions that prevent “pharmacists, nurses and other professionals from making clinical care and treatment decisions appropriate to their training and knowledge.” As far as I can tell, none of that’s actually being discussed in Bill 14, but I’m not sure because we don’t get a lot of detail here.

8:20

There’s an attempt to focus on collaborative and team approaches. These are a part of the initiatives that have been very successful, called the primary care initiatives, where you’re bringing in a number of health professionals that work in one location and will have a team approach to working with patients. There’s an acknowledgement here that “physicians would continue to play a key role, but would be able to spend more time on complex cases where their knowledge and skills are essential.” Then it talks about some of these other professionals assuming “a greater role in the delivery of primary, preventive and chronic care.”

Now, this is something that the Liberal opposition has been very keen on, that team approach, but again we get no details about exactly how the minister anticipates this happening. What scope? How are the scopes going to be changed? The only scopes of practice we’re talking about in this bill are the opticians to do eye exams and adding the category of clinical pharmacist, also the new ones of provisional dental assistant and provisional optician. There’s something being anticipated here. There’s clearly some sort of list of jobs or scope of practice or credentials or expectations, but they’re not being spelled out, so very hard to react to.

Again, under the Direction and Implementation section here it talks about Alberta’s new legislation governing the health professions provides greater flexibility in terms of the scope of practice of the various professions as a means of promoting a greater innovation.” Which legislation is being talked about here? Is this some yet untabled legislation, or is it referring back again to Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act?

It’s talking about working with health professionals, taking full

advantage of the opportunities that this legislation has made possible. There’s an anticipation that something’s happening here. It’s clearly talked about in the document. I don’t see it reflected in here. If it’s not in here, where is it? If it is in here, where is it? The other place that this shows up is in the response from the minister to the Liberal health policies. It appears on page 3 of that summary, position 10. The Liberal policy is:

Reshape the way we manage our health care workforce. This includes re-examining the roles of all of our medical professionals, evaluating alternative systems of payment for doctors, and gathering better data to plan for future needs.

We get the minister responding to this, saying: we’re currently doing this; the government is preparing provincial comprehensive health workforce planning. They have worked with a number of different areas. Then, “We are working to bring all health professionals together under the Health Professions Act (Bill 14 – Spring Session 2006).” Again, it’s referred to without any level of detail that allows us to actually understand what the government is intending. We have the government saying: oh, please come and consult with us; give us your ideas. But it’s like trying to talk to a cloud. There’s no substance to it. There’s no list of specificity. There are no details that we can react to. It’s just sort of this amorphous thing. I have concerns that things are not as they appear.

The one other thing that was of note to me in the member’s opening remarks was that he stated that 12 professions are under development to be added to the list. I think it’s a total of 28 that will be the final list. Right now there are 16 of them under there; 12 are under development. My question is: exactly which ones will be ready for April 1? That’s one of the drop-dead deadlines for some of the professions. They have to be in place by then, or they cannot continue to charge for their services. I would like to know how we’re doing. I’ve been in contact with the minister a couple of times over unexplained, inexplicable delays. For some professions they’ve been working away, and all of a sudden the ministry stops talking to them for four or five or six months. They don’t understand why. They are continuing to try and move forward, and then there seems to be this big sort of log-jam or blockage. I’m concerned that there are some groups that need to be through by the 1st of April that won’t be. So I’m looking for that.

Thanks very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 14 in second reading. My first impression of this bill is that, certainly, it seems to be mostly just housekeeping, but there are certain issues in regard to changing titles of professionals that I think deserve our more careful attention and, indeed, some constructive criticism as well.

When speaking with a number of the professionals that are directly affected by this Bill 14, specifically opticians and podiatrists, there is some mixed reaction to some of the specific language that is being employed in Bill 14. I would just like to point out some of our reservations in a general sense, and perhaps when we debate this bill further with my colleagues in the committee, in third reading we can look specifically at where some small changes could take place.

Specifically, if you have the bill in front of you, on the first page, section (2), the Government Organization Act is being amended to include a statute of limitations for prosecution for the illegal performance of a restricted activity, like setting bones and invasive surgical treatments and things like that. You know, I find it a little bit interesting that there is a statute of limitations here of two years.

We were looking at other provinces around the country, and they do in fact tackle this in different ways. Some legislation in different provinces, such as the Manitoba Limitation of Actions Act or the Saskatchewan Limitation Act, both fine NDP provinces, might I add, have the limitation period beginning once the claimant first becomes aware of the offence. This gives us some latitude for people to be able to seek justice if there are cases of fraud or impropriety or things like that. I know everyone has their magic markers out. They can just tab that section, and we'll come back to it perhaps later.

On the third page, section (4), again we're amending the Health Professions Act. You want to repeal the provision that the organization seeking to be a regulated profession must represent "the majority of persons carrying on that profession in Alberta." I think I need further clarification on that section because my initial reading of that is perhaps that in fact it seems to open the door for more ministerial discretion as to who's going to be considered as the profession. Indeed, you know, if we have private health service providers entering the market here with our brave new world that some people are suggesting – God help us. Then we might have an expansion of the recognition of a regulated profession, which I would find problematic, certainly.

8:30

As I had mentioned previously this afternoon in my reaction to the throne speech, when you privatize medical services, you open the door to all manner of quackery and flim-flammery. It's very difficult to regulate these things anyway, but when people are in desperate circumstances and they're looking for some relief and the door is open for privatization, then you just create a whole new set of regulatory problems, some of which, I would suggest, Bill 14 has built into it.

Moving down to page 4, section 10, this amendment proposes to give councils and colleges greater freedom to confer the title of specialist through bylaw rather than going through the amendments to this act. I find this to be definitely a problem because you're raising the concern of this proliferation of new specialities, let's say, without proper consideration. Again, in the sort of retail market of private health care you create these whole new specialities, that you can perhaps charge extra money or what have you. This is a problem because, of course, we're meant to be regulating these things for the best practices and benefits of the public, so if we're not using the term "specialist" in a judicious manner, then I would suggest that we're courting trouble.

Down on page 5, section 11: this amendment seems to want to give colleges and councils the power to enact bylaws respecting the disclosure of information about their members and some groups releasing information about their members. This, I would suggest, provides some problems in regard to privacy, so I would just like to highlight that.

The nut of the issue, I suppose, in regard to Bill 14 is to make these changes on an administrative level, but as I suggest here with these few examples – I'll actually leave some of the others to the other members to point out because, in fact, we do have these problems with it.

Again, I would have to reserve our support of Bill 14 as it stands, but it's young in the session, and we can certainly be convinced of its merits.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and comment on Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes

Amendment Act, 2006. In general the principle of amalgamating the professions under one act makes a lot of sense to me. In the public interest it's clear that we want to have a regime that governs all professions in a similar way, that provides consistency in terms of the practice of those professions and consistency in applying problems with those professions, whether they arise out of complaints or out of recognized problems within the profession itself. In that context the principle of accountability, then, is very much present in the professions act, and it's progress, indeed, to include under a consistent framework all the professions that we believe are serving people and helping them to achieve greater levels of health and healing. So in general I support this.

It obviously identifies some other key areas which have to do with scope of practice, and that needs to be well discussed and debated. I think we on this side have recognized that part of making the health system more efficient is to examine scope of practice and look at the ways in which some practices could be delegated to other professions. Indeed, some things that physicians are doing could be delegated to other practitioners and reduce the load on medical practice. The other issue has to do with standards, a clear ability to measure a standard and to ensure that that minimum standard is always achieved and that an ongoing education program is available for those practitioners to reach that level of competence.

If we are again in this bill trying to acknowledge the primacy of the public interest and the safe provision of services, I would be interested to know what level of consultation these amendments had. It's not clear to me whether or not this had input from all professions commenting on each other's practice as well as the consultation within a particular discipline itself. I think it would be very useful, if it hasn't been done, because clearly the public interest is served when we have measures of effectiveness in that particular profession and we have measures of maintenance of competence.

So given those provisos and those general principles I just have a couple of questions about a couple of sections. There was a repeal in section 4: requiring a majority support. This has been raised by a member opposite in the third party.

Ms Blakeman: And by me.

Dr. Swann: And by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

Why is that? Under what conditions does the minister seek other decision-making advice through the advisory board? That's not clear under section 5.

Again I refer to the principle of continuing competence. That was amended. It's not clear to me why you would amend the requirement for assessment of competence of all members of a particular discipline. This is one criteria for a profession. It is the issue that most of the public are concerned with, that there be a maintenance of competence and an ability to assess that in every case.

The extension of the complaint process to two years is progress. I mean, obviously, half a year is insufficient. I don't know that the two years is sufficient, but it's certainly progress in the principle of justice and fairness.

I was very pleased to see podiatry moved under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. Clearly, podiatry is doing surgical procedures. They should be adjudicated. They should be monitored. They should be evaluated under the College of Physicians and Surgeons, where a lot of the enforcement of standards is legitimately placed, in my view, where they have the highest level of training and competence.

Under sections 7 and 8 there appears to be a contradiction. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to go to 7 and 8 to just refresh my memory. Yes, it has to do with the complaint process. Section 7

says that the complaint must be in writing, and section 8 says that it could be verbal. So it's not clear to me why that would be two separate sections. There may well be a good explanation for it, but it's not clear to me.

I guess the only other recommendation that I see missing here in terms of accountability is the need for every profession to have a separation between their licensing body and their professional interest body. In a number of cases that does not exist, and it would be one thing that I would think I might make an amendment to in the upcoming section on the nature of accountability.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and comments if there are any.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 14, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act. The main object of this bill is that Alberta Health and Wellness is currently working with the health professionals to develop specific regulations and bring them under the jurisdiction of the Health Professions Act: the changes to the application procedure to become a regulated profession, clarification of complaint procedures, changes to the requirements for continuing competence programs, adding new protected titles for some professions, and amending the scope of practice for opticians.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, the amendment to the Health Professions Act, which was passed in 1999, will bring all self-regulated health professions under a single act to ensure that rules that govern professions are consistent. It will oversee 28 regulated colleges, but only 16 are currently under the act. The government has requested that currently unregulated health professions submit applications for regulation. These applications must propose a structure under which the profession could be reregulated.

Each of the 28 professions have been drafting specific regulations under the act. The drafting is taking . . . Mr. Speaker, can you ask everybody to please be silent?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon members, the noise level is increasing. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. The drafting is taking years, with numerous consultations with the members of other professions. Each regulation will list the restricted activities that a profession's members are trained to do.

There are two controversial sections in this act that are explored further in the sectional analysis. The first one is that the Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners opposes the amendment that removed the requirement that an applicant wanting to become a regulated profession must represent a majority of people carrying on that profession. The second one is that the Alberta Association of Optometrists objects to the amendment that includes refractions under the scope of the practice of opticians.

Mr. Speaker, many of the changes are based on recommendations by health professions or are housekeeping changes required to ensure that the language used in drafting regulations for each regulated college is consistent with the Health Professions Act. It may be a necessity to voice concern or caution about the future implications of some of these changes, especially since this bill was identified as part of the government's third-way reforms.

Other potential implications of this amendment for the massage

therapy profession include an immediate spike in fees charged by regulated massage therapists, based on increased demand. Many massage therapists with less training may migrate away from rural areas, reducing access for rural Albertans. Massage therapists may lose income since they would no longer be able to accept referrals from physicians or chiropractors. Does this minister have any plans to regulate massage therapists with varied levels of training?

For the last 22 years the province has required that an application for regulation by health professions "must be made by an organization that represents the majority of persons carrying on that profession." How does the minister justify such a significant policy change? Is the minister satisfied that all relevant organizations and stakeholders were consulted in the development of these changes? That's a big question. How did the minister go about identifying all potential stakeholders? It appears that the decision to regulate is being made in a closed environment. Where is the transparency in this process? How will the minister prevent the views of a minority of professionals being imposed on a majority?

These amendments may cause conflict among professional organizations since there may be strong divergent views on the most desirable form of regulation. What other requirements will the minister be using to determine whether to send an application to the Health Professions Advisory Board? What sort of data or statistical information identifying the number of members belonging to an organization are applicants required to provide?

Mr. Speaker, the long-term implications of this amendment, of these changes need to be carefully examined to ensure that they don't have a negative impact on both consumers and health professionals in the future. There is some uncertainty that the entire range of stakeholders was consulted in the development of revisions to the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act. It is essential that each interested group receive the opportunity to provide input into changes being made that may impact their profession. The Association of Massage Therapists and Wholistic Practitioners was not consulted about changes that have significant impact on their members.

I want to hear more argument and more details about this amendment act before I make up my mind to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, now I would like to adjourn second reading debate on Bill 14. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to stand this evening to move second reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act.

As I stated during the introduction of this legislation, this act will ensure better communication, co-operation, and collaboration between employers of peace officers and police services across the province, which will result in a strengthening of law enforcement services. It will also clarify the role, responsibility, and accountability of peace officers and strengthen provincial standards such as training, use of force, and qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation is the result of Albertans contributing their ideas to improve law enforcement. It has also been developed following a review of best practices on a national and international scale. Bill 16 further enhances the important work peace officers do across Alberta and accurately reflects the wide range of roles they carry out.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments provide for increased

accountability to ensure that both employers and peace officers are complying with the standards. Under this draft legislation the director of law enforcement within Solicitor General and Public Security would receive additional authority to complete inspections and investigations to make sure the rules are being followed.

8:50

The proposed act also establishes a process to manage complaints made against a peace officer. Employers will continue to deal with complaints against the peace officers they hire, but, Mr. Speaker, the director of law enforcement would have the power to review, oversee, or investigate a situation that may be more serious in nature or if the complainant isn't pleased with the outcome of a review at the local level. The director would also have the authority to appoint a third party, such as a police service, to investigate the concern.

These measures will strengthen the integrity of the program and reassure the public that peace officers are doing their job and following the letter of the law. If the peace officer is found not to be abiding by the rules, the current provision allows for the employer's authorization or the peace officer's appointment to be suspended or cancelled. Bill 16 expands these provisions so that it's very clear where a suspension or cancellation of an appointment would be appropriate.

Proposed amendments would also allow for terms and conditions to be imposed on the employer's authorization or a peace officer's designation to ensure that they are complying with the standards. This will help employers and peace officers alike to clearly understand what is expected of them within the program and the ramifications for not following the legislation.

The proposed Peace Officer Act will ensure a more effective delivery of law enforcement services that will help make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond in second reading to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. Of course, policing in Canada involves two levels of government. The Constitution Act of 1867 confers authority on the federal government to legislate on matters of criminal law and to create the country's national police service, the RCMP. Provincial Legislatures are empowered by the same act to make laws in relation to the administration of justice, and policing, of course, is understood to be a part of the criminal justice responsibility of provinces, so provinces can create a police force through legislation or require municipalities to provide adequate policing or negotiate with the federal government for the RCMP to provide policing.

Well, Bill 16 is rather unique, I think, in that it recognizes and authorizes something new, something kind of in-between; namely, special constables or, as they're now going to be called, peace officers. This bill reflects a growing trend in policing today, which is increasingly multidimensional and pluralistic given the tremendous demands that the public wants in terms of peace and security and safety. Since 9/11 there's so much demand for security, so that has meant a proliferation of all kinds of different types of policing, from the traditional role of public police to security guards protecting private property. Bill 16 is legislation which provides a framework for the authorization of special constables as peace officers, an identification that's somewhere between a public police officer and a private security guard.

But this in-between character of peace officers creates a set of problems, and there is the potential for a great deal of public confusion about what we are talking about. At a symbolic level the

police and peace officers and private security guards all wear uniforms and in many cases will carry weapons. For example, a mall security guard engages in surveillance, makes arrests, conducts searches, all traditional functions of the public police, but they are private agents. In some places in Canada municipal police are hired by private business to restrict access, check IDs, remove troublemakers from private property, and they are public agents. So, in fact, there's a great deal of confusion about what is public and what is private. Historically the public police were authorized to protect public places, and private spaces were the responsibility of their owners, who could hire guards.

The problem is that now we have, as one commentator puts it, mass private property. In other words, we have huge shopping centres, and we have hospitals. We have many privately owned spaces to which the public is invited, so questions arise about who should police such spaces. Is that the role of the public police, or is it the role of special constables or peace officers or private guards? There's an obvious overlapping of the responsibility of the public police and special constables and private guards, so there's a great need for Legislatures to bring some clarity to this confusing situation.

The use of private security and special constables is of course increasing across Canada while at the same time the number of police personnel is decreasing. I think this is important to point out. Recent statistics provided by the Centre for Justice Statistics indicate that there are 56,000 police in Canada and 82,000 private security guards and special constables. Given this trend, it would not be surprising that there are different opinions, even conflicts caused by this trend. Of course, at the two extremes, the investigation of serious crimes by police on the one hand and private security guards just protecting property on behalf of the owners on the other hand, there is not much conflict, but in between there are so many functions of special constables and peace officers that carry out traditional police work such as traffic safety. So there's a potential for conflict and confusion. Roles overlap, and distinctions are blurred.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the variety of work performed by special constables in this province, it is quite impressive. There are about 3,000 special constables in Alberta, and they do a tremendous job. I made a comment that was quoted in the paper as being critical of the work of special constables, and I wasn't at all. I was only referring to the special project concerning highway 63.

Special constables have done a really good job and in a variety of ways. There is a tremendous mix of the kind of roles that they perform, from compliance officers who do fraud investigations for many different departments. There are special constables working in hospitals. There are liquor and gaming officers who inspect bars and casinos. There are conservation officers, provincial protection officers who provide courtroom security, campus security, Calgary transit security, and I guess Edmonton is considering the same kind of transit security as Calgary. There is municipal bylaw enforcement. All of these special constables, now peace officers, carry out the duty of enforcing provincial statutes, not the Criminal Code, although here is again a fuzzy area in terms of distinctions which needs to be dealt with.

The feedback from stakeholders, including the public police service, seems to be mixed about this new trend to include so many special constables and peace officers. The trend of an increase in private security and a decrease in traditional policing would of course be of concern for police associations. Some would argue that special constables can free police from routine and mundane tasks, enabling the police to focus on the more complex functions of dealing with serious crimes. I've heard that. In fact, I have a

brother-in-law who's a member of the police force in Ottawa, and he reminds me that that's the case, that many peace officers are able to take a lot of the routine tasks from police officers, and that's a plus for them.

But many are concerned that special constables don't have the same level of accountability and training as the police, and this may cause problems. So my question concerning this bill and the preparation for this bill is: has there been adequate consultation with the police departments, including the RCMP? For example, will the RCMP be involved in the evaluation of the pilot project on highway 63? I'm wondering about that kind of dialogue and debate, whether that has taken place.

There are many questions about this bill, and in second reading I'm not going to look at specifics. I want to concentrate, as I have been, on general issues, not the particular wording of the bill. One of the most important issues is accountability or governance or oversight of peace officers, and there are two different aspects here. There's accountability in the field and accountability in terms of appointment and standards of training and the complaint process. The bill doesn't deal with the first point, accountability in the field, but surely that question is huge. I mean, who is in charge?

9:00

I talked with a special constable who does traffic work in the province, and he told me that on two occasions in the last year he was the first to arrive on a murder scene, before an RCMP officer arrived. Now, what is his role in that situation? How does he relate in terms of accountability to the police officer? What are his powers of arrest? If a special constable stops a car on highway 63 and discovers that there are drugs in the car, what can he do other than call in an RCMP officer who may be hundreds of kilometres away? Will this just mean, in effect, a lot more work for the RCMP in trying to keep track of these special constables since the special constables or peace officers are dependent on the RCMP to do their work? That is the issue of accountability in the field, and I think it's a serious question that has to be addressed.

The bill deals mainly with the lines of accountability between the peace officer and the public, on the one hand, and the police officer and the Solicitor General's department. There are lines of accountability for police officers in terms of their relationship to police commissions and the chief of police and the Solicitor General. We dealt with that when we were discussing the Police Act, when it was being amended, and we had all kinds of discussion about civilian oversight of the police. We expressed a lot of our dissatisfaction that we didn't have an adequate civilian oversight process in this province, and much of that discussion is relevant here. It appears from this bill that the only line of accountability is between a peace officer and the director, defined as "the Director of Law Enforcement appointed under the Police Act."

Well, there are a lot of unanswered questions about this. I mean, what is the relationship between the authorized employers and the peace officers? Is this line of accountability between just the peace officer and the director of law enforcement adequate? What kind of control over peace officers do municipalities have? There doesn't seem to be the equivalent of a police commission for peace officers.

I think there are lots of questions about that. In fact, I guess it comes down to the whole issue. I mean, many people argue that special constables and private security officers are much less accountable for their actions than the police because legislation does not establish independent oversight mechanisms. But they do much the same work as the police, so the argument is that there should be a greater integration of governance and accountability, and perhaps the same mechanisms, the same kinds of governance and account-

ability, should be present, whether you're talking about the police or whether we're talking about peace officers. I see a lot of potential for difficulty and conflict in the future because we haven't figured out a more integrative model.

Well, one of the most controversial aspects of the work of special constables is traffic safety work. I have received phone calls and e-mails about not just the issue of public safety but also the personal safety of special constables. A special constable who had called me told me that in stopping a vehicle, he does not know what he will encounter, whether it's a soccer mom or a drug dealer. Police admit that stopping vehicles is one of the most dangerous things that they do, so we have to really go slow here and consider what we're doing when we put young men and women with less training and less experience out there on dangerous highways like highway 63.

In fact, this is the key issue, I think, to debate with this bill: the issue of training. Unfortunately, issues like training are left to the regulations. Recently I had an introduction to some aspects of training by the RCMP when they discussed with me their model – it's called IMIM – incident management intervention model, where they take recruits through the whole process, beginning with verbal intervention, through the use of weapons, depending on the situation. It was very instructive to me to see how elaborate and how complex that training is. I would hope that the same kind of thorough training would be available for peace officers, especially because they need to have tremendous ability to converse and even to use nonviolent tactics to deal with people in the first stage, before they get into the use, of course, of weapons.

I think there's a difficulty here because the government MLA review of the special constable program, which released its recommendations on December 7, 2005, I thought made a good attempt to organize the whole area of special constables, peace officers into different categories and levels of authority and also levels of training in each of the categories, but unfortunately that is not in the legislation. That's left to the regulations, so the clarity we need on this very important issue of training and the status of peace officers is not in this bill.

Bill 16 is an overall framework, so this is similar, I suppose, to what may be coming with the third way, which is being put forward as an overall framework, and everything that's really important is left for regulations. I think minimum standards for training, what actions special constables can and cannot perform, accountability issues in the field are all left for the regulations, so it's very difficult for us to even talk about this topic when all we have before us is a framework, and the substantive issues are left for others to decide. I don't find that very adequate.

Well, Mr. Speaker, these are the issues I wanted to raise, and I look forward to hearing other speakers on this very important topic. Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again in debate on Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. The object of this bill is to bring all peace officers, previously known as special constables, under one piece of legislation that will clarify their roles and their responsibilities, increase accountability, and strengthen provincial standards for training, use of force, and qualifications.

The immediate result of this bill will be to increase the role of peace officers in the province of Alberta. It is the stated goal of the Solicitor General to find ways to deliver strategic and seamless law enforcement services across the province. It appears that the primary way to enhance delivery of law enforcement across the province will be through the utilization of peace officers to comple-

ment existing police services in Alberta. Bill 16 is the framework that the Solicitor General will use to deliver the enhanced role of peace officers.

Mr. Speaker, some of the key changes to the old special constable programs are changing the name of the special constable program to the public security peace officer program – this is designed to raise the profile of this specific area of law enforcement – establishing different levels of authority based on the peace officer's role and responsibilities. There will now be four different levels of peace officers, with varying levels of authority. It ranges from the ability to carry firearms for traffic enforcement and the transfer of prisoners to working in administrative roles, such as exhibit custodians for police services and animal control specialists, ensuring that peace officers have access to the best system of communications to ensure their safety and to better co-ordinate their activities with the other law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Speaker, what is obvious in this bill and in these new rules is that the new standard of peace officers is designed to increase their presence in law enforcement, and this Bill 16 is the vehicle through which this second level of law enforcement will increase in prominence and use in Alberta communities.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, the outcome of this bill is that the peace officers will assume a new level of authority not previously held under the old provision in the Police Act. There are many areas of concern around this new use of peace officers. Primary amongst these is: how will these officers be utilized? It is important to remember that they are not trained police officers but peace officers who have some training in specific areas and specific authority to enforce certain provincial statutes. They do not have the full range of police training and thus cannot and should not be put into roles that require the full set of skills that police officers have.

For instance, if they are utilized to do traffic stops on primary highways, as the recent pilot projects on highway 63 and highway 21 have them doing, do they have sufficient training to effectively enforce this? Traffic stops are one of the most dangerous aspects of policing and require a full range of abilities, including knowledge of tactical communications, the ability to defuse hostile situations through verbal techniques, knowledge of the legal aspects of moving violations, sound judgment, and finally and of utmost importance, the judgment to responsibly deploy weapons if the situation escalates.

Police officers are subject to an incredibly rigorous process before they get hired – interviews, polygraph, psychological examination, extensive background checks, et cetera – to ensure that those are the right people to be able to use weapons. Will peace officers go through a similar process before they are hired as a level 1 Alberta police officer to ensure that they have the ability and judgment required to carry a side arm? Will these level 1 peace officers endure the hours of scenario training for traffic stops that police go through? These are the questions that must be answered before support for this bill can be given.

Mr. Speaker, the peace officers will have weapons at their disposal. These range from collapsible ASP weapons to pepper spray to carrying side arms. The Solicitor General has stated that they will receive the best training in the use of these weapons, but they develop the training protocol for all peace officers in the use of weapons and the use-of-force model. What type of training will they receive, and how long will it take? Special constables under the old model received two weeks of training at the Alberta Justice college in Edmonton: one week of legal training and one week of human relations training. Then it was up to the employer to provide self-

defence training, known as PPCT, or pressure point control tactics. PPCT training and training in the use of weapons for most special constables, such as those in hospitals, would last for 32 hours, or four days.

The problem with this new model is that we have no idea what level of training these officers will receive and for how long. Who will administer the training? Will they be trained by the police training section members, or will it be through private security agencies? What is the duration and the content of the training? How much time will be spent on tactical communications? The most important weapon an officer has is his or her verbal skills. Unfortunately, the Solicitor General cannot tell us the detail of any of this because they have not developed these training models yet. This will be done through regulations.

We cannot support this new, expanded role for peace officers until we know absolutely that these officers have received the appropriate amount of training to ensure the public's safety and the safety of the officers. Some of these officers will carry 9 mm handguns and shotguns. We absolutely need to know that they had the full training needed to be able to responsibly and safely deploy these weapons.

Another factor is: who is ultimately accountable for these officers? The municipality or institution that employs them or the Solicitor General through the director of law enforcement? There is a distinct level of accountability for police officers: the chief of police and internal affairs investigations, the Solicitor General. But who will these peace officers be accountable to? Will it be the employers who have authority to discipline the police service that they are working with, the municipality that employs them, or will the Solicitor General through the director of law enforcement be accountable?

The issue of accountability is crucial in this bill. Before I support this bill I need some more details, more information because I'm still not sure. I will listen to some other speakers; then I will decide. At this stage it's very hard for me to support this bill.

Thank you very much, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoy the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act. I appreciate this being brought forward to our attention at this point in time because, you know, we have an interesting situation with our law enforcement direction in this province. It's something that I think a lot of people find troubling, and this is a tendency to use more private security and people with less training to execute the police needs of our province. So while, actually, we do find Bill 16 mostly favourable, I guess it speaks to a larger direction that we are seeing that is a problem in this province, and that is, as I said, the use of officers with less training or private security firms, in fact, carrying out law enforcement in the province.

So this proposed act seems to bring all peace officers under one piece of legislation to presumably ensure better communication and co-operation and collaboration between employers of peace officers and the police services across the province. I would like to perhaps plumb the depths of how, specifically, it does do that. I can see it in some ways, but there are some specific concerns I have to see if the proper lines of communication are, in fact, there. As far as I can tell as well, it seems to want to clarify the role, the responsibility, and the accountability of peace officers and to strengthen provincial standards such as training, the use of force, and the qualifications of the officers, which we can all, I guess, appreciate if Bill 16 comes to do that for these peace officers.

9:20

There are almost 3,000 peace officers in the province, and they're working for any number of different groups from the RCMP to colleges and whatnot across the province. They're meant to be enforcing provincial and municipal bylaws. Of course, we all know that these amendments seem to be stemming mostly from the Alberta special constable review from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I commend him for that work, certainly.

We applaud the effort to improve efficiency of peace officers as that will ease some of the police officers' workload undoubtedly. However, I have expressed on a number of occasions, and I think it's becoming glaringly apparent, that we need more police officers in our community, so I'm wondering how the police community, in fact, views this extension of the use of peace officers in their line of work.

You know, it's a very sensitive issue, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about police enforcement of the law in any society. What's most important is the integrity of either the peace officers or the police officers to uphold the law but also to be able to manage situations in the most circumstantial sort of way. Certainly, I don't propose to suggest that peace officers might be any less able to manage circumstances as they come forward to their attention than police officers, but you do get what you pay for. If we are in fact placing people out to enforce the law with less training and less attention and paying them less money, which is a large part of this whole movement from police to peace officers, then you can expect that perhaps you won't get the same level of coverage that you might with a fully trained police officer.

I mentioned it this afternoon, and I will just briefly again, that our per capita police coverage in this province has been slipping considerably. I think that it's incumbent upon us to of course strengthen the laws around peace officers and private security firms, but also let's not forget our responsibility to have adequate police coverage in our province too.

There are a number of areas that I would like to discuss specifically in each section of Bill 16. I'm loath to do that at this time save to say that in general we intend to try to support this bill as it moves through, Mr. Speaker, perhaps with some amendments, particularly in the areas of being able to watch over these groups and be able to make judgment against officers if they are sort of having some problems with the public.

One of the issues that I would like to just telegraph here a bit is this whole idea of how we might supervise and discipline individuals who might be in contravention of any number of police officer rules and regulations. It's difficult to know because this is sort of a general framework, but it's the individual regulations that actually determine, I would suggest, the quality of policing. So I would hope that we would be able to look at those details as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to just get a few brief moments to speak to this Bill 16, the Peace Officer Act, in second reading. I remember the genesis of this because I believe that I was the Official Opposition critic for Justice and the Solicitor General when there were a couple of different reviews done but, specifically, an MLA review of the Police Act that was actually done in two parts. Both times there was consideration of this deputy constable, a sort of second level, a tiered level of police officer. I have the same concerns today that I had then, and

a number of them have been reiterated. They are around training and whether we let someone out there with a gun that doesn't have the same kind of training that police officers have.

You know, what's really at the heart of this for me, Mr. Speaker, is a philosophical idea about: why can't we just pay the people that we have to do the job? Why does this government constantly push to find a cheaper way to do it, to find somebody else that will come in and do basically the same job for a lot less money and less protection and less benefits and maybe a bit more danger because they don't get the same kind of training? It's a Wal-Mart economy. Every time or every year there's got to be less cost.

I don't understand this philosophy. I don't understand why this government keeps doing this. I don't understand why we can't just say: "We've got good Albertans here that have worked hard. They've trained hard. They've reached a level of expertise. They deserve to be paid a certain salary to do what they do. Let's pay them to do it." But we don't do that. We say: "Okay. We've got this one level of people, and now we deem they're too expensive. We want a cheaper version so that we can make them do basically the same things but without the same amount of money." I don't understand that, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't make sense to me why you would constantly look to downgrade it, basically, and try and find someone to do basically the same job for less money. But they keep doing it.

I'm sure there have been other arguments made that, you know, this is unfair to those individuals. If they are qualified to be the top tier and to get into the police academies and be chosen, good, then they should be, and they should be paid as such. If they're not, then maybe it's not appropriate that they serve the public in that capacity. Maybe there's a good reason for that, and they shouldn't be given a gun and sent out there. I think those questions need to be asked. I know that's not a popular thing to say with this particular government, but I have to ask those questions. We've seen it happen in so many professions, and I continue to hear that kind of attitude and this government seeking other opportunities like that. In what other profession can we get people to do the same thing for less money and pay them less money with less benefits and all that goes with that?

I'm going on longer than I thought. Sorry. The second thing that's bugging me about this is the name of it because we do have a struggle here between whether we're talking about someone who is here for peace, order, and good government or someone who is here on sort of the military side. There are two sort of strains of police officers. Just let me give you a few definitions. I mean, on the military side you get people called law enforcement, and on more of the community-based you would talk about a police service, not a police force but a police service. At some point in there you get that peace officer. That's what I was raised with. I mean, police officers were peace officers. They were to uphold the peace. Over time we've seen that movement to more of a military style. It's about law enforcement. It's about police forces. Even the uniforms have changed towards a more military style where you're getting the belts. They start to look like commandos and the stuff that goes with them, the accoutrement I think it's called in here.

9:30

I find it really interesting, the choice to call this secondary level of officer. I don't want to be insulting, but I don't know how else to call this. The second tier, the entry level: what do you call it? It's not what we started out to look at, which is fully trained police officers. It's some other kind of level here. I find it very interesting that they've chosen to call it a peace officer. It's Orwellian because that's not what these people are doing. The essence of what is being

set out in this act, the services, the tasks they will perform are not about keeping the peace. They're about security and ticketing. It's almost exactly the opposite of being a peace officer. So it's interesting choices that have been made on this one. I'm looking forward to the rest of the debate on it.

I know that there are other issues that we want to debate tonight, so at this point, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 16.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 19
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006**

The Chair: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, you had adjourned debate.

Mr. Stevens: I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any other comments, questions, or amendments offered in respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I look at Bill 19, the supplementary estimates, I feel that it's time for us to wake up to the revolving credit through which the government is going yet again and on which it is taking us as citizens yet again. Revolving credit is like the revolving doors in department stores. They're intended to keep the building inside warm, keep the cold outside, and make it easy for people to pass through the doors when they're carrying a load of parcels. That's how the system is supposed to work: for consumer credit, to keep the bills under control, food on the table, and get on with the business of people's lives.

That's how it works with grown-up people until some kids come along without anything better to do. They're not there to shop or buy or even look. They're just along for the ride. They go round and round through the doors, tying up traffic, forcing serious visitors to take the side doors, letting the warm air out and the cold air in in the process. Some people may think these kids are cute. Most serious shoppers just think they're a nuisance as they go round and round and round and round, like the Wanderer, the guy in the 1960s hit who admits that he can never settle down.

Mr. Chairman, this is the roundabout that's going on regularly with the financial resources of this province. Budgets are meaningless because we don't really need to work within limits. Thanks to the oil bonanza, we can always make another round through the revolving door, letting more of the heat out. Every few years we go through a round of D and D: debt and deficit reduction. We say that we're being mature because we have to live within our means and cut spending, but we're not being mature. We use manufactured crises to cut back on our responsibilities to the homeless, those on assistance, children, hospitals, and communities, all in the name of self-reliance, fiscal management, getting our house in order. The moment we've off-loaded these, we're back at it again, another round through the revolving doors, running up unbudgeted expenses.

We say that it's not really overspending because the carelessness

is covered by resource revenues rather than from taxes. Would we use that reasoning as homemakers if we were selling off the trees, the pavement in the driveway and garden, the groundwater, and the topsoil to fund a spending spree? Would we say: I'm not really being irresponsible as I'm still living off my monthly paycheque? Would that justify stripping our houses down outside, selling off the siding, shingles, and eavestroughing to cover a trip to the casino?

I would like to consider the heritage savings trust fund. Of the \$122.9 billion in natural resource revenue collected in Alberta from 1977-78 to 2004-05, 91.4 per cent went into a combination of current consumption and debt repayment while 8.6 per cent was saved in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In 1987-88 the Alberta heritage savings trust fund was valued at \$12.7 billion. In the 2005-06 second-quarter update the fund was valued at \$12.5 billion. If the heritage trust fund was inflation-proofed in 1987-88, it would be worth over \$19 billion today.

Mr. Chairman, the essence of parliamentary government is financial control by the Legislature. This oversight is not limited to direct or indirect or any particular kind of taxation. It includes the management of our entire portfolio, all the assets with which we've been blessed. The injection of \$1 billion is a good step toward better management. It is long overdue.

[Mr. Rodney in the chair]

I would also like to look at continuing care, AISH, and PDD as I consider Bill 19. As I think about different kinds of care, I do not believe that people believe in care for its own sake. They may support care if it's good business or go along with it if there's a profit to be made. But if it's the simple matter of putting public dollars into care for the homeless, the unemployed, the aged, or the children of working parents, then we hear a different story. We hear about the need for self-reliance, for getting a job, for families standing together. In other words, they're saying: we don't care. There are public dollars available for new projects. There's far more interest in putting them into incentives for industry, exploration, development, research, and tourism. Care, like religion, is becoming a purely private affair. If the state or its supporters are to be involved, they want to be able to charge private fees for services or offer corresponding tax cuts to the private sector for it to take up the slack.

9:40

I'm going to step into the realm of religion for two quotes. Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me and the statement that the whole law can be summed up in this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. It is not in our separation of people into taxpayers and consumers, into contributors and beneficiaries, into categories of age, health, gender, and specific competencies but in the recognition of our connectedness that society and communities hold together and individuals, families, and other groups become strong. The divide and rule, survival of the fittest approach has spawned many inhuman experiments, including the one last century that gave rise to this quotation.

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist. Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoeller's words remind us that this state did not come about all at once. It took about a decade from the first steps to separate people until the conclusion, where some people came to be

seen not as people but as a problem that required a final solution.

Mr. Chairman, it's been a little more than a decade since this government introduced a leaner, meaner approach to public support for those in need. Now it has been joined by a new federal government that says: caring for the unviable is not our concern; let them fend for themselves, or let them depend on private charity.

I'm going to paraphrase Niemoeller's words to show what is happening to care among us. The abandonment of the national child care agreement is simply another step on a slippery slope to a less human society. First they cut back welfare payments, and I said nothing because I was not on welfare. Then they cut seniors' benefits, and I did not complain because I was not a senior. Then they cancelled the child care agreement, and I let it pass because I did not support public child care. Then they began to privatize health care, and I did not object because I could pay my own way. Then I found myself homeless, unemployed, and ill, and I could do nothing as they had cut off me.

Let us resolve that we will go down this path no farther. It's time for government with a heart.

As I look at the continuing care \$10 million injection, I'm wondering how this money will be allocated and monitored to ensure that it goes towards improving the quality of life of seniors. The current system is not meeting the public need and expectation for ensuring the safety and well-being of residents in continuing care. The Health Facilities Review Committee and protection for persons in care office do not have the power to inspect facilities or the enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify any problem identified. When will the minister take action to solve the problems with enforcement and accountability?

The biggest dilemma that the facilities seem to be facing, both in seniors care and for people with developmental disabilities, is a huge turnover of staff and a shortage of staff and not being able to get them in there or entice them to that work. I commend you on the \$10 million to increase the wages because that's certainly a major problem, but I'm wondering what we are doing to attract people into this profession and to make sure that they feel recognized and worthy.

When I look at the PDD funding, it seems that they're having to make a reduction in their costs, and there isn't enough funding for them to go forward. With PDD funding there's not been an overall cut, I understand that, but there's been only a 2 per cent increase. The point that the groups and the PDD are making when they talk to us is the reality that institutional inflation does mean a cutback in the services they're providing.

Those are the major concerns that I have in those two areas. Also, with AISH, we looked at that class-action lawsuit. I don't know how much money has been allocated so far or how many claims have been made, but I'm wondering what action has been taken to prevent future problems with Alberta's social programs.

I have questions about the PDD funding formula. I am concerned about the lack of staff to take care of our people in continuing care centres. I also am concerned that we have lost the vision of taking care of our people, of supporting our people, of taking care of the vulnerable because that really is the mark of a civil society.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Seeing no members from the government side, I'd now call upon the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to stand and discuss supplementary estimates for 2005-06. It has been well expressed before that we have limited opportunity to discuss financial issues. This is a case in point, where it's after-the-

fact spending, outside of budget, a reminder, I guess, that credibility and accountability have to do with the ability to discuss and hold to account the government of the day on the basis of budgetary planning.

Just to itemize some of my specific comments, I'll begin with the Finance department and talk about the need to better balance the social spending, the environmental protection investment, and the economic focus that this government takes and the lack of balance between those, that we still look for and call for as the Official Opposition.

I note in relation to the Human Resources and Employment sector that a \$6 million allocation was provided for the partial settlement of the class-action lawsuit, an unfortunate reflection of something that I hope the department is looking at very seriously and is going to prevent in the future. It relates, again, to what my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has been talking about, and that is the caring gap, as we see it, in relation to those disadvantaged and those who are most in need of public support.

In this context the AISH increase has been small and inadequate for people who have to live in a society where the cost of living is increasing and where, indeed, we have the highest standard of living in the world. It's unconscionable that we are still keeping our most vulnerable people so far below the poverty line. They have not yet seen fit to index their increases on an annual basis on the basis of the cost of living and inflation. How is it, Mr. Chairman, that we can give ourselves a 4 and a half per cent increase and somehow not find it legitimate to give those on AISH and some of the most vulnerable in our society at least equal and, indeed, index these income supports?

In relation to people with developmental disabilities – and I'm now shifting to the Seniors and Community Supports side – clearly there is a call, again, for fairness in our society, for balancing the economic interests with the social development and the illness prevention and health promotion issues that an adequate income entails for these people in the most vulnerable situations. How is it, again, that we can give a 2 per cent increase to persons with developmental disabilities and give ourselves a 4 and a half per cent increase in this Legislature? It's a serious legitimacy problem – illegitimacy problem, I would say – and I hope that the Legislature will come to grips with this. PDD should also be indexed to inflation and cost of living. There's no basis for being so stingy with the people who are the most vulnerable in our society and being so generous with ourselves, Mr. Chairman.

In relation to Municipal Affairs, the \$39 million increase listed in the supplementary estimates, this had to do with the \$7 million for the targeted investment program to assist urban and rural communities with weak assessment bases, and the rest, 32 and a half million or so dollars, for disaster assistance.

9:50

I wanted to raise the issue that has increasingly plagued our constituency; that is, market value assessment. How are we going to address this without increasing the wrath and the profound despair of some in our constituency who can no longer afford to stay in their homes because the market value assessment has increased their tax share to the point where many of these seniors and people on fixed incomes simply can't continue in their homes. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, it may surprise you that some couples have talked of – actually, I've heard of one instance where they formally separated as a couple in order to claim income less than the cut-off point at which they would receive health benefits and other benefits because of the increase in their tax on their housing.

We need to find another way to assess particularly inner city

housing besides the market value assessment. There needs to be a ceiling beyond which we don't go or a percentage of the lowest tax rate in that area. We cannot continue to see the skyrocketing market value assessments and the taxation that goes along with that. Particularly irate are some young families who have a relatively modest house but whose land values reached the point where they, too, are being squeezed seriously.

In relation to Sustainable Resource Development, a \$15 million supplementary for firefighting, primarily, and for the pine beetle, these are not items that can obviously be avoided in the real sense, but forward-thinking and prevention in terms of what we understand to be determinants of forest fires and getting early attention to the pine beetle issue is what all of us expect in this province.

I want to focus also on the lack of any investment that I can see in a serious commitment to integrated land-use planning. The committee has been struck, but I'm very much hoping that we will not be seeing a repeat of the last two attempts to have an integrated land-use framework and a land-use plan in this province that will simply not function and not be seriously . . .

An Hon. Member: What happened?

Dr. Swann: It was not seriously integrated into the various departments that need to be integrating it: Agriculture, Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, forestry. All of these sectors need to see the legislation. They need to operate under the auspices of the legislation in a very consistent manner. We cannot have regulatory bodies overriding them. The land-use planning framework has to be in stone. The minister should not be able to make these kinds of decisions, so everyone can operate, including the business community, in a framework under which they can have confidence. It can be clear, and everybody knows how it's going to work. So I'm really calling for some investment in both time and money to ensure that these plans for land use in the province are clear, they're integrated in all the various departments, they have good public involvement, and they are legislated.

Those are my comments around . . .

The Acting Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but speaking of ministers, I would invite the newly social Minister of Innovation and Science to take his seat as we allow the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to continue with his comments and give him the respect that is due. I appreciate your co-operation.

Dr. Swann: Those are my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Seeing no members from the government side standing, we have the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to report.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure again to rise and speak to Bill 19, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. Community Development has requested an additional \$30.2 million. It's a huge amount, \$21.2 million for community services: \$20 million for a one-time grant to assist with cost pressures associated with the operations and maintenance of libraries and \$1.2 million for featuring Alberta at the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, in July 2006. Wow. I like it. I'm not against that, but I want to ask the Minister of Community Development: how much do we pay to our local festivals like the Heritage Festival, Klondike, and the Stampede in Calgary?

I have some other questions. I'll start with this \$200,000 that will be used by the department to act as liaison for the Smithsonian

Folklife Festival in Washington. How long has your department known that they would be featured at this festival? Why was this cost not foreseen? How specifically will the department be spending this money in Washington? Is it appropriate to have this cost within your department? Is this not an International and Intergovernmental Relations cost? These are a few questions.

Given that the additional money is more than was originally budgeted for, why did your department underestimate this cost so grossly? Obviously, library maintenance and operations are not costs that suddenly appear without warning. Why did you not account for this money in your budget? How will this money be distributed to the numerous libraries throughout the province? Are there a few libraries that need substantial funding, or is this money to be split amongst all the provincial libraries?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

This one is very interesting, Mr. Chairman; \$1 million will be granted by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to the Smithsonian Institution to assist with the management of the festival. Why is your department helping to fund a festival that is taking place in the U.S.A.? How will this money be utilized by the Smithsonian festival? What benefit will Alberta see from helping to fund a festival in Washington? Again, is this not a cost that should fall under International and Intergovernmental Relations? Will this money that went to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts be considered arts funding? If so, why? Considering the fact that AFA has been grossly underfunded in the past, I hope that this is not considered arts funding as it appears to have no impact on Alberta artists. What input did the Alberta Foundation for the Arts have in deciding to grant this money to the Smithsonian Institution?

Mr. Chairman, \$9 million is being used to redevelop Calgary's Heritage Park. Given that many requests for centennial grants as small as \$1,000 were denied because there was no grant money left over, where did this additional \$9 million come from? I just want to remind the minister, that the one grant that I . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is rising again, making it very difficult to hear the hon. member that's speaking.

Please continue.

10:00

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm talking about that Mill Woods Presidents' Council grant. They were asking only for a few thousand dollars, and the grant was denied. They celebrated Canada Day and centennial day last year, and the money was short because HRDC denied a \$5,000 grant. I requested of the Minister of Community Development only a few thousand dollars, and if you remember, you said that you don't have money. Now I don't know where the money is coming from, \$10 million, \$20 million, \$30 million. My God, there's no limit.

Actually, that was a real celebration; 60,000 people on the south side celebrated Canada Day as well as the centennial day. They couldn't get even a couple of thousand dollars, and now we are giving the Smithsonian, I think – how much is it? – \$1.2 million. We don't have money for our own people here in Edmonton and Calgary and \$1.2 million? I'm not saying anything against the Smithsonian folk festival in the U.S.A., but it should be fair. The preference should be given to our own cities, especially to Albertans, who sacrificed a lot in the last 10, 12 years. Given that many requests, as I said, even small grants like the Mill Woods Presidents' Council's, were denied, I want to know why and what's happening. How do they assess the applications?

I remind you of another grant. Five million dollars was given to a film director, and that grant was decided, I think, within a day or two. How the deal was brokered nobody knows. I don't know what's happening. I mean, there are lots of questions, a huge amount of money. It's the taxpayers' money, and we're all sitting here. We're elected by the people, and we are answerable to our constituents. Think about it. When we give a huge amount of money to someone – you know, I don't want to say under somebody's pressure – how do you guys decide? How do you assess the system of this grant? Given that your department handed \$5.5 million to a single Albertan after a private meeting with the Premier – this is the one I'm talking about – and now you are asking for an additional \$9 million, why has your department mismanaged this grant money so badly?

This is another question for the Minister for Community Development: how specifically will this \$9 million be spent? Why could this redevelopment not wait until the next fiscal budget? What is the urgency in redeveloping this park? Mr. Minister, you always answer my questions. I request you again to provide me with details in writing as soon as possible. You always do, and I commend you for that in advance.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the supply changes here just in as most general a way possible and quickly. You know, the biggest issue that I have – and I've spoken about this several times over the past year and a half – is this fundamental problem with underestimating and lowballing the original budget that we pass in the spring and then adding such large amounts to each department and ministry later on down the road. This stems from a number of, I would say, categorical problems with the way that this government is being run.

The first, that I would like to just speak on briefly, is the issue of revenues. Now, we knew where the royalty rates for oil and gas were going, and it was nowhere but up in this past 12 months. For this government to set the projected revenues from royalties at such a low number I think does a disservice to any ability of these various ministries to engage in long-term planning for the future. The royalty rates and the commodity prices of gas and oil are difficult to plumb. Certainly, if we knew for a fact that they would stay high or stay at any particular level, then we would all be able to plan better, but the deliberate lowballing of revenues can only harm the ability of the government to be responsible for the various departments they are in terms of being able to make long-term plans.

Just on that level alone, here we are looking at very large unbudgeted additions to each of the departments, and I find that to be irresponsible at best. You know, the people of Alberta deserve better than that. They deserve to have an honest projection of what their budgets are going to be. Each of these ministries represents a fundamental part of the social fabric in people's lives. When we're talking about education here in Edmonton, we're talking about the ability to retrofit and build schools or not build them. The shortage in the budget for infrastructure in terms of schools has resulted in Edmonton being shortchanged in regard to retrofitting buildings and building new schools, and that's a direct result of deliberately lowballing revenues from oil and gas. This is just one example, Mr. Chairman, that we could use.

Of each of these ministries I would suggest that health care is perhaps the mother of all lowball casualties. With that plus a deliberate underfunding of our public health care system we are in this perceived or otherwise manufactured crisis that the government

now wants to somehow act on through privatization. Each action has an equal and opposite reaction, we learn in physics and perhaps in a larger sense in terms of karma. The basic mistake or deliberate misleading mistake of building a budget based on very low figures results in these supplementary pieces having to come in. Now, fortunately, we can do that because there's such a tremendous amount of revenue out there, but that's not something that lasts forever, Mr. Chairman. It's a problem that will only become worse if, in fact, we were dealing with tighter numbers.

You know, you get this illusion of conservatism by bringing in prudent and streamlined budgets in the spring, and then you get this great pitchforking of money around afterwards, sometimes approaching and even exceeding the original budget that we debated in the spring. I think that Albertans have caught on to this, Mr. Chairman. I'm hoping that we can make some resolution to that in the spring budget that's coming up that we will be debating here, a more sort of honest and reasonable estimate of how much money we're actually going to spend in 2006 and 2007.

Making long-term plans for the future. As I said, Mr. Chairman, one place where we can go but we can't go unless we are making some honest projections about our revenues is building a green fund for the future. You know, I was so happy to hear the Minister of Environment speaking about building a billion-dollar endowment. At least it's something, a hundred million dollars for 10 years or something like that. I'm not sure what the Minister of Environment was detailing, but this is the sort of long-term step in the right direction that we could get our heads around. It's a very small amount, and perhaps we'd do it in a different way, but these things cannot be talked about if we continue to lowball our royalties.

10:10

The Minister of Environment specifically said that we could have a very modest increase in our royalty rates to accommodate for this, and this is becoming a buzz around in the public. You know, we used to talk about royalty rates, and maybe people's eyes would glaze over, but it's starting to become a public issue. I'm the last person that would ever give electoral advice to the hon. Conservative Party across the way there, but in terms of electoral politics the royalty rates issue is getting on the radar screen of people because people know that if there are billions of dollars of extra revenue coming in, there are billions of dollars being lost by having an inadequate royalty regime that pays the people of Alberta properly for the oil and gas revenues that are being extracted from this province each and every day.

So, again, we lowball the overall estimates during the year plus we have a royalty regime which gives away a lot of our energy at bargain-basement prices, and I think we have together, Mr. Chairman, a recipe for disaster down the road. Now, the only thing that keeps it afloat is the fact that there's lots of money floating around there to stop the gaps in between, but it's no way to run a railroad or a ministry or a government, and I think that the people of Alberta would like to see some resolution to this.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 19.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 17
Libraries Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, 2006.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again to speak in support of Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act. The bill makes four major changes to library administration. It allows for the creation of intermunicipal library boards. Number two, it defines a financial reporting process that clarifies financial accountability. Number three, it provides for the dissolution or amalgamation of the library board in the event of municipal dissolution, amalgamation, or annexation. Number four, it removes the right of municipalities to levy a public library rate or local property tax to fund the library.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 should improve library services by making it easier for municipalities to co-operatively provide library services. There is the risk that more municipalities will choose to provide one large intermunicipal library rather than smaller libraries in each community if the stakeholders in the affected regions feel that the option is an intermunicipal library or no library at all.

This bill will not help the significant problem with libraries in Alberta: underfunding. Libraries were funded at the same per capita rate funding for the last 14 years. Although \$20 million was just announced, Alberta's libraries will continue to be one of two jurisdictions that charge fees to access library resources. Why won't this government take action in any of these areas?

Mr. Speaker, the groups I consulted are in favour of the changes and believe they are long-awaited improvements. We support local democracy, that is local library boards. We support literacy. Learning begins with reading; therefore, we encourage the library system to improve their services and make more books available. We believe in access to libraries in rural areas, and these changes will make that easier. We would like to see greater funding for the libraries and the removal of library user fees.

Mr. Speaker, the libraries are the basic services of all walks of life. It's an investment in the building of intellectual resources and also

a cornerstone of democratic society. In Alberta's very first Public Libraries Act in the year 1907 the act stated very clearly that "all libraries and reading rooms established under this Act shall be open to the public free of all charges." Public libraries started out in the early years of this province's existence as open-door institutions, free to all Albertans. But in recent years, starting in the late '80s, public library after public library across this province has introduced annual membership fees in order to generate funds. As a consequence, today in Alberta every major public library with only two exceptions charges an annual membership fee that Albertans must pay if they want to borrow books. In this practice of charging residents a fee to belong to their local public library, Alberta is alone in North America with the sole exception of Quebec. Everywhere else in North America public libraries are free to the local residents, whose taxes support the libraries' existence.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, over the last two decades provincial funding for public libraries has been far from generous. From 1986 to 2002 the library operating grant funding formula was \$4.04 per capita, and today it's only \$4.29 per capita to determine the grants. This province should increase its share of the funding formula to increase the funding available to public libraries and compensate municipalities for the lost revenue. Recently the Alberta government announced \$20 million, as I said, for public libraries' one-time infusion to purchase new materials or develop community-based programs that support literacy for all Albertans.

Under this amendment act the ability for municipalities to levy a special public library rate is being repealed. This change was not included in the government press release. Why was this change to the act not included in the press release? That's a big question. Did they complete a comprehensive survey of all municipalities to see if any were using the public library rate? What consultations were done with the municipalities? This omission is cause for concern. The municipalities I contacted don't use it, but one of the 300 municipalities with libraries could. So we should be concerned that this may impact the municipalities' ability to collect money for libraries and therefore to deliver services. Our position will depend on the answers to questions in this area. If no one is using the public library rate, then you could make the argument to remove it for housekeeping sake.

When I visit elementary schools, I tell students that if they want to be successful, they must read absolutely everything and everything they can. I support any policy that improves learning, literacy, and our future. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I consider Bill 17, the Libraries Amendment Act, I have some thoughts about libraries, books, and literacy. In her latest book, *Dark Days Ahead*, Canadian author Jane Jacob warns of cultural amnesia, where we not only forget but forget what we've forgotten and what makes us what we are. Books and reading are a prescription to keep us from that kind of forgetting. In the movie *Fahrenheit 451*, long before Michael Moore's 9/11, there's a scene where a crew of firefighters torches a pile of books in the street. A small boy asks, "Daddy, is it true that firemen once used to put out fires?" That's the type of amnesia Jacob is warning against and that books, libraries, and literacy help to keep at bay. It's not accidental that totalitarian regimes censor books so their simplistic views can become total for their followers.

Here in the western so-called democracies we face a different

challenge. We're so used to throwaway images and ideas that are on the screen, current at one moment and then passé, that we forget how to hold more than one idea at a time, how to juggle, wrestle, rework our thoughts: qualities that make for an informed and educated human being. It is possible to imagine a gigantic crash of the Internet that would force us back to earlier forms of communication. It would take longer to get information, and some live sources wouldn't be available, but it wouldn't cost us our long-term memory, our knowledge of who we are, where we've been, and a sense of where we're going.

It's possible to envisage a breakdown of the movie industry, bankruptcy in Hollywood, and even a shutdown of video stores with their DVDs. That would force us to do something else on Friday nights, perhaps to rediscover earlier forms of entertainment. We'd miss the visual memories and classic performances and would have to learn to make our own mental pictures again, but it wouldn't leave us without ideas.

I cannot imagine how we could lose our libraries, the books in them, and our ability to read them without a fundamental collapse of our civilization. Our capacity to talk to ourselves, time travel, nourish an inner love life, and ride the shoulders of the greats: all this depends on having the words and ideas in a form we can hold and carry. Someday we may perfect telepathy and be able to transmit pictures and movies to others. Until that happens and as long as we use language, we'll need books to encode, enlarge, and interpret our experience. They are the fundamental building blocks of the good life.

As I look at this Bill 17, I am in favour of the changes and believe that they are long-awaited improvements. I support local democracy; that is, local library boards. I support literacy. Learning begins with reading. Therefore, we must encourage the library systems to improve their services and make more books available. Finally, I believe in access to libraries in rural areas, and these changes will make that easier. And I would like to ask for greater funding for libraries. Why do we still have library user fees?

I do support Bill 17 as a positive step, but there is much work to do to really support libraries, books, and literacy. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) there is a five-minute comment and question period. Anyone wish to participate?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will make some very brief comments in regard to Bill 17. We don't see a great deal of difficulty with the wording of this bill or its intention. I think it does in fact clarify reporting requirements and provide a mechanism for dissolution if a municipality somehow changes.

It seems straightforward, but my concern – and we will work with this in greater detail as the bill passes through, with my other members as well – is: is this a way by which municipalities, with the regionalization of municipalities in rural areas, can in fact dissolve and leave behind a library easier than they could before? We see with the regionalization that has been occurring that, potentially,

libraries in smaller centres could be at risk. I just hope that this is not part of the way by which Bill 17 is designed for the closing of libraries around the province.

You know, we've seen some encouraging signs of commitment towards libraries. We've got the – what was it? – one-time \$20 million investment in libraries around the province, but I think that the state of these institutions is such that we need sustained investment over time. I realize that municipal libraries and school libraries are under different funding mechanisms, but, you know, we saw over the last 10 or 15 years school libraries being in decline in regard to their funding and their staffing. This is indicative of a lack of commitment towards libraries and building that habit and interest in students while they're in school. Right? So what I'm hoping to see is an integrated approach towards the support of libraries through building and strengthening library services within the public schools, thus creating a population that values libraries in a broader way when they are, in fact, adult citizens and taxpayers and using the library.

It's a question of proximity and quality, and libraries have to change over time in order to meet the changing tastes of the population. That takes money. The benefits are probably not commensurate but, I should say, multiplied from the original investment to help to educate our society, for people to access new technologies, just a place to meet and to improve the quality of a community, Mr. Speaker.

10:30

The library system that we are fortunate to have here in Edmonton is just part of the way by which the quality of life of the city is enhanced. I know that my family has built a lifelong habit of using these facilities. In smaller centres I think that we should be looking at the public library as being a focal point to build community and to build a sense of belonging and education and all of the good things that we want for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, is there anyone else wishing to speak on the bill?

Does the hon. Minister of Community Development wish to close debate?

Mr. Mar: Nothing further to add, sir, except that I will take into account the comments made by members opposite.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

