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First Session

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 24, 2013

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2013

[Adjourned debate April 18: Mr. Campbell]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise this evening to speak to the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2013. I am generally supportive of the direction that the minister is taking on this. I think it's a good step forward in a lot of different ways.

I want to just spend some time going through a little bit about some of the areas where I think that the minister is making some great progress as well as identify some areas where I have some concern and will continue doing some consultation. I do have a few amendments that I will be proposing when we get into Committee of the Whole. I can give some idea of the direction that I think we need to go there. Hopefully, we'll be able to get some government support on at least one or two of them.

One of the things I do want to start by saying, though, is that my father-in-law was actually one of the principal individuals behind the Metis Settlements Act originally. Dennis Surrendi, when he was in government as a deputy minister, assisted in drafting this legislation. I'm going to be talking with him about some of the changes that are now being made to it to see whether or not he approves of the new direction. I'm quite sure that he will, but I know that he looked at it as an area of great pride for Alberta to have been in a leadership role in advancing the cause of the Métis in Alberta.

I think we've seen as well in the rest of the country that other jurisdictions are now having to grapple with something that we in Alberta showed leadership on many, many years ago. You look at, for instance, the Manitoba Supreme Court decision, which essentially charts out a course for Manitoba to do exactly what we have already done here in Alberta. I do commend the government for having been visionary in that regard and having made such great strides so that we are now at the next stage of assisting our Métis friends in being able to develop even more self-government, more accountability to their own membership, and, I think, open a new era in investing in their own communities, job creation, improving infrastructure, education.

I'm very excited about the direction that the Métis settlements are likely to go in the coming years. I think that the Metis Settlements Act laid the groundwork, and I think that the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2013, with some of the changes, is going to move things even one step further.

I understand the process for this was that in 2011 the government entered into a 10-year agreement to develop some long-term governance structures as well as to address the issue of funding. Both of those announcements have now been made, and I think that that is a good indication as well. What I like about this type of approach is that it recognizes that you can't change

governance roles without dealing with the issue of funding as well. I think our municipal leaders who are going through the process of determining city charters and determining changes to the Municipal Government Act would actually appreciate that the government has recognized this in this area, that you can't change or have a new discussion about roles and responsibilities without also having a discussion about how you're going to increase funding to be able to address that. I think that sets a good bar.

The reason I mention that is because I understand that what the minister is attempting to do with this legislation is to – and we recognize that the Métis have a special status in our Constitution and special roles. They're not like a municipality, although many of the functions they perform are very similar to municipalities, yet under our current legislation they don't enjoy the full range of autonomy that many of our municipalities do enjoy. They have other areas of autonomy that our municipalities don't enjoy, which is why they're a bit of a hybrid. But I think it was important for the minister to recognize and to move forward on addressing some of those areas where they actually were not being treated with the same level of autonomy and independence that our municipal leaders enjoy. It's all very good that we're making progress here with local governance, addressing issues of education, infrastructure, employment. I do think the minister struck a nice balance in this legislation in recognizing the special jurisdiction and in being supportive of that.

Again, I had mentioned that I'm going to do a bit more consulting. I'd like to consult with the Metis Settlements General Council and the Métis Nation of Alberta just to see if there are any other areas that they might flag for future concern or future consideration. I think that any time you have new legislation, especially legislation that is changing the relationship in a substantive way, it can probably always be improved, so we are going to be looking at ways in which we can offer potential improvements.

If I could, I'll go through a couple of the areas where I think that the act strikes the right chord. One of the things that I like that I'm seeing in this legislation is that there's very clearly greater attention and certainly legislative language around increasing transparency on a whole range of fronts, in particular, I think, the transparency around some of the decision-making that happens at the council level, the ways in which they set their own pay, creating some caps for their pay. Financial reporting is, of course, another important area, the fact that they're going to move more in alignment with what we're seeing at the provincial level as well at as the municipal level with developing three-year business plans so that not only the province but also their own people will be able to see the kind of direction that each settlement council intends to go and also the financial reporting to back that up.

There's also extensive language around the issue of a code of conduct. Of course, those of us in public life are accustomed to reading through those codes of conduct that we get on our first couple of days of orientation when we come up here to the Legislature. I don't think that that is an onerous provision to be asking for in other levels of elected office, whether it be municipal or, in this case, our Métis settlements council members.

The other thing – it looks like it's a bit of housekeeping but also a good measure to keep in – is the parity with municipalities in having the four-year election cycle. I know that moving from three years to four years was a very popular move when the government proposed that for municipalities. Allowing for the general elections to take place on Métis settlements on a four-year election cycle is in keeping with, I think, the direction in which the government is wanting to go in trying to make sure that there's at

least some parity on the main elements of the jurisdictional framework for governing both municipalities and our Métis settlements.

The areas of concern that I have, though, are on the issue of eliminating completely the Métis ombudsman. Now, I know that the ombudsman had some difficulty in the past, I think a couple of years ago, when there was an issue at the Elizabeth settlement regarding the development of a gravel operation in the Edmonton area. There were also some issues on the Elizabeth settlement with another business venture that had not panned out. I think that there was some difficulty in being able to get to the bottom of what happened there to provide the full transparency to the community. There was a big shakeup in the office, and I don't know that we ever really did get to the bottom of understanding what happened in that community.

I don't know that you necessarily throw out an ombudsman process just because it didn't appear to work in an individual case. I have to say that this is the one area where I am hearing from members of the Métis community, maybe not from those who are in elected office but certainly from those who are living in those communities, about whether or not it is in their best interest to have lost this opportunity to have another avenue to appeal when they do see that things are going wrong.

I recognize what the minister has said, that there is still an opportunity for any issues to be brought forward before the ombudsman, and there is also another appeal process. I'm prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt that that is a process that is going to work to address some of concerns that I'm hearing from Métis living in these communities, but I did just want to flag that because it did seem to come a bit out of the blue. It was a bit of a surprise, and it didn't seem to be one that was universally hailed as a good move. I think that there might be some language around greater accountability or the appeals process that some members of our Métis communities might like to see to feel a little more comfortable that that provision has now been eliminated.

There are also a few issues that I'm seeing around the role of the chief administrator in a settlement under these new provisions. I think I understand where the minister is attempting to go by establishing a governance board that will hire the chief administrator essentially as their principal employee and then empower that administrator to hire their own staff. I can understand why that might be a better approach. It's certainly what we do at the municipal level. It's what we see in many nonprofit and other charitable organizations. It's certainly the structure that many governance bodies use so that you don't end up having a board of directors interfering with the day-to-day operations and hiring managers and individuals who may or may not then know who their direct boss is.

7:40

I understand the structure that he is moving to, but I do think that in empowering a chief administrative officer in that way, it does require additional barriers, executive limitations, to be built around the role of that chief administrator. I know that there is extensive language in here about code of conduct and how it applies to council members. One of the amendments we'll be proposing is that that same code of conduct provision also apply to the chief administrative officer. We think it's important. Because they are going to be the arm implementing so much of council's decisions, they do need to have the same code of conduct provisions around them if we're going to be able to get at addressing some of the issues with governance accountability.

The other way in which I think there do need to be some limitations or at least some empowerment of the council built in is

that in changing the language the way they have to allow for the council to only hire the one employee, not all employees, it seems like they have taken away the provision of council to be able to set parameters around the type of pay structures or pay grid that the administrative officer is then empowered to implement. I think that's important, too. Once again, if you're going to try to build a fence around the decision-making power of the council so that you can get better governance, they do also need to be able to set executive limitations around their chief administrative officer in this regard to ensure that there is some clear direction about what the parameters should be.

I mean, the minister is going to great lengths to make sure that the council members themselves are going to have a more open process for determining pay as well as a more transparent process for determining and reporting what the level of pay would be. You want to make sure that that same high standard also applies now to the employees that are going to be determined by the chief administrative officer. That's another area where I think we just need a little greater clarity.

I think it's worthwhile going to the actual act to see what the current provisions are when you get to the issue of direct democracy. Actually, as a party that believes in direct democracy and wants to see more measures for the general public to get involved in approving decision-making of their governing bodies I found some of the parameters that are built into the current legislation about bylaws to be something that we could probably look at adopting not only at the municipal level but also at the provincial level.

I will just make note of the act under sections 54 and 55. I mention this because there are provisions in the proposed new bill that do have me quite concerned with regard to budget.

In the current legislation under section 54 it talks about the process by which Métis settlements approve bylaws. What it says is:

- (1) Every proposed bylaw must be presented at a public meeting in the settlement area after second reading but before third reading.

How fantastic would that be if we actually had that same parameter on provincial legislation, if before we could move from second reading to third reading and approving something, we actually had to go to the public and do a public meeting so that they could hear what it is we were talking about and give us some feedback?

In addition, it says:

- (2) At least 14 days' public notice of the date, time and place of the public meeting must be given.

This is kind of an interesting proposal. I think it's in keeping with what the Premier promised in the last election about making sure that there was more time to debate legislation through its different readings. What I find so fascinating, as we're talking about debating changes to the Metis Settlements Act, is that the Metis Settlements Act already has most of its bylaws operating under these rules.

I will go one step further, and this is even more interesting. It talks about approving the bylaws. It's not just enough to have the elected members approve bylaws. In this case,

- 55(1) A quorum for public meetings called to vote on settlement bylaws is 15 settlement members.

They actually have members come out who are eligible to vote, and then any member who is eligible to vote can actually vote on whether the bylaw should pass or whether it should fail. So anyone who's affected by the issue under discussion can show up at the public meeting and be able to have a vote.

- (4) A bylaw voted on at a public meeting is approved if a majority of the settlement members who are eligible to vote and who vote at the meeting vote in favour of the bylaw, [and]
- (5) If the vote at the public meeting is not in favour of the proposed bylaw, the bylaw is defeated, and all previous readings are cancelled.

I think this is fascinating, that the government has created legislation that has this level of direct democracy and accountability on our Métis settlements. I think there's something instructive that we can actually learn from that in how we would approach all of our bills that we're debating in the Legislature, especially since there is a great possibility that we'll be here until 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning over the next number of weeks. Just thought I would mention that to the members opposite. There is a better way to do it. There is a different way to do this. They were the ones who came up with this in consultation with their Métis settlement leaders, so what do you know?

But the reason I'm raising this is that while I love this direct democracy process, what I am concerned about is that in the provisions that the government is now suggesting for how budgets will be passed, it now says that those two sections that I made reference to – and this is under section 14 of the Metis Settlements Act – they're going to add a new section, section 55.1, under budget bylaws, and it says that sections 54 and 55 do not apply to a budget bylaw.

That has me a bit concerned because, as we've seen with this last budget at the provincial level, there is a great deal of policy that gets set through the course of bringing forward a budget. As we've heard the members opposite and ministers often say, when we ask them, "Why didn't you consult with anybody? Why didn't you tell anybody what was coming?" we kept hearing, "Well, we couldn't do that because it was in the budget, and if you leak details of the budget, it could impact markets." That was the reason why all of these policy changes came through the budget without consultation.

What I'm worried about is that by enshrining that practice here now in this legislation, we're actually moving away from what the minister is hoping to have, which is more accountability. I think there's a danger of less accountability. Now, I might be able to be convinced into the argument that the membership of the settlement should not be able to vote down the budget at a public meeting. I mean, we don't have our municipal governments operate that way. We certainly don't have the provincial government operate that way. So I think I could appreciate perhaps exempting the budget from section 55.

But I don't know how you can exempt the budget from section 54, that requires it to be presented at a public meeting, requires 14 days' public notice. I think it should be pretty clear that if we're trying to create some parity with other levels of office in the way we have our Métis settlements governed, there clearly has to be some mechanism for public input and public feedback. We go for weeks with our estimates process. Everything is posted online. At the municipal level they have public hearings, and they also go for weeks in their budget process.

It does seem to me that this is a bit of a hole in the act. The way it is now written does actually allow for a great deal of policy-making and a very important piece of legislation to pass seemingly without any requirement to let the public know, to give oversight, to have any public meetings. I don't think that that is what the minister had intended to do with that, but I do think the way this amendment is written does take it one step too far.

The other issue that I do have is the issue of consultation. It does say that the minister can make regulations in consultation with the general council and the settlement, and I think that's a

good provision to have. But I think we do need to see a little more definition about what consultation actually means. I think we have heard oftentimes the government claiming that it does consult, but then we hear the recipients of the decisions that are being made telling us that they don't feel they were consulted. So one-way consultation, with the minister telling a council what he's going to do in regulation and just informing, doesn't quite cut it, I don't think, with our higher standard of obligation to our Métis since they have a special constitutional status.

If we can actually get some clear language around what constitutes proper two-way consultation, I think that there would actually be some good value in being able to use that language in many other types of changes, regulatory changes, that happen in many other different applications. It certainly will be of interest to me when the minister brings forward his aboriginal consultation legislation, which I think is expected later this month, to be able to see whether or not we can get some clarity there. If we can get some clarity in that aboriginal consultation legislation, perhaps some of that language can be built into this act as well.

I don't have too much more to say. I know that people were probably worried when I got here tonight that I'd be going on for 90 minutes. Don't worry, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go on for 90 minutes tonight. Aw, come on. I thought I'd get applause from the other side for that. [interjections] There we go. Thank you.

7:50

As I said, Minister, there's lots of good in this legislation. Having seen that some of the amendments in the bill are housekeeping, changing names of ministers because ministers' names have changed – it's no longer minister of environment; it's now Minister of Environment and SRD – I did find some amusement in certain portions of the bill about some of the anachronisms. It does actually demonstrate how old this legislation is, for instance, when in schedule 2 it talks about how some of the required investments or allowed investments would be securities in the Alberta Energy Company. I don't think the Alberta Energy Company exists anymore, so if we're going to be trying to clean up some of that language, it might be an opportunity to clear that up.

I was also greatly interested in the way in which the composition of one of the appeals councils is determined. Let me just find the page on that. I think the minister may decide that he might want to make a revision to that one as well because it did seem like it may have been a little out of step with the times. It talked about the Metis Settlements Appeals Tribunal Existing Leases Land Access Panel being established, consisting of five persons. The reason why I was attracted to this is because, of course, when the Minister of Energy brought through his Bill 2, this is the kind of granular detail that we were trying to get him to write into his Bill 2, to actually talk about the types of groups he would consult before putting different persons on the panel.

It says:

- (a) a chair appointed by agreement of the Minister of Energy . . .
- (b) 2 persons appointed by the General Council.
- (c) one person appointed by agreement of the Canadian Petroleum Association, the Independent Petroleum Association of Canada, the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Landmen.

I think all of those names have now been updated. I think some of the associations have merged, and I think there are others who have grown out of that. If you're going to do a housekeeping amendment, that just may be one area that the minister might want

to take a look at, to update that to identify the proper associations that should have some input into that appeal tribunal panel.

I also would encourage the Minister of Energy to take a closer look at that because that's the kind of approach that we were hoping to see him take when he was populating the board for his new energy regulator, actually identifying in legislation the groups that should be consulted from an environmental perspective, from a landowner perspective to make sure that you've got the full range of input into the people who should be on the council. It seems to me that if we've done it once before in legislation, heck, I think we can probably do it again.

Maybe it's something that should be done in regulation, though, because if changes to names happen, then we end up with this difficult position where we've identified companies or associations that no longer exist. It would still be nice to see a similar type of approach in other legislation. I did just want to flag that for the minister. I think there might be other areas just because the legislation is a little out of date, a little old. There may be some additional housekeeping amendments that need to be done.

In any case, I do think, generally speaking, that this legislation heads in the right direction. It certainly does strike a more respectful tone. One of the things that I have heard from members of the Métis and aboriginal communities is that they often do feel like the other orders of government take a bit of a patronizing approach in their dealings with those who are living on settlements or living on reserve. I think that this does strike the right tone.

I know that many of the powers that the settlements have are similar to municipal governments', so I'm glad to see that the government is addressing some of those areas.

I still think there may be additional work that needs to be done around all of the other areas of constitutional jurisdiction that our Métis settlements have. Perhaps that will take place over the course of the next 10 years as the government develops the new funding model to ensure that children's services, health care services, seniors' services, education, community colleges, employment, and other economic development services are developed on the reserve with a coadministration type of approach.

I've heard often from our friends in the Métis community and even from our First Nations that they want to have a productive, constructive relationship with the provincial government, but they want to make sure that they're doing it as equals. They want to make sure that the province looks at them as another order of government and treats them as such. I do believe that the government is going in the right direction with this bill, but, you know, bills can always use a little bit of improving.

As we identify some of the amendments that we may bring forward – I think I've identified about six or seven that we're likely to bring forward – I do hope that the government gives them due consideration and that we'll be able to move forward on improving this bill in the interests of making sure that our Métis settlements and the leaders in those have the tools that they need to continue to lead their people and that we also respect the grassroots decision-making and grassroots interests of rank-and-file Métis members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. leader.

Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, I'd just remind you that if you would like to speak, please indicate. Send me a note.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak on Bill 19 here this evening, the Métis Settlements Amendment Act. Again, it's a very interesting piece of legislation. It's quite comprehensive. Considering the historical precedents our province has set in regard to the recognition of our Métis land base here in the province of Alberta, I think it's entirely appropriate and timely that we are again leading this initiative to make amendments to update this set of regulations and laws for 2013.

In our view, most of these changes are not contentious. They seem, in fact, Mr. Speaker, to be technical, and indeed I do see noticeable improvements. However, there are some questionable changes that I would like to bring forward, and we will do so in this and subsequent readings.

Just going through the legislation, then, starting with governance, I suppose, and this idea of the annual meetings for settlement residents, including the presentation of a business plan and an audited financial statement. Currently it seems, to my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that the Métis settlements must hold an annual general meeting every year within 180 days of the end of the financial year and then present audited financial statements, discuss any matters raised by those present.

So this amendment means that the council will also have an obligation to present a business plan, to my understanding, at the annual meeting and to allow discussion of that along with financials amongst the participants. As well, this legislation seems to have settlement chairs continue to be appointed by successful councillors. However, there seems as well to be a new provision that allows a settlement to enact a bylaw providing for the election of a settlement chair. I'm guessing that would happen at the same time as when the councillors are elected as well. Some interesting technical and substantive changes there that I think are mostly good.

We know that there have been extensive negotiations by the minister and several ministries in regard to this amalgamation, and I do recognize the minister's work on this and recognize the integrity that he took to the table in regard to these amendments in Bill 19.

One area, though, that I wanted to talk about here this evening is in regard to this elimination of the Métis settlements ombudsman. This ombudsman had become critical, really, of how the PC government had been treating his office. For example, Mr. Speaker, in the 2011-2012 annual report from the ombudsman he wrote that the migration of this office

from a contracted organization to the Government of Alberta . . . had the effect of undermining primary key components of an Ombudsman's role – independence, impartiality, and confidentiality . . . In effect, this change has created a schizophrenic organizational structure whereby staff report to and are responsible to the Ministry's administration but are required to comply with the operational directives from me as the MSO.

Some confusion here that I think deserves to be clarified.

He goes on to talk about impartiality. He says in one of his writings that

legal advice and opinions are now provided to the Office of the Métis Settlements Ombudsman by Alberta Justice – the same people who in fact provide legal advice to the Minister and to the Ministry. In my opinion, this situation is not only a conflict of interest but this closely-related relationship was clearly not envisioned . . . In addition, any properly established 'classical Ombudsmen' and the vast majority of departmentally appointed Ombudsmen have their own legal counsel.

This does seem to be a structure/reporting relationship problem.

8:00

You know, on a similar theme, the office is at a minimum one member short to complete the reviews and investigations regarding complaints that take place throughout the area. It seems to be a problem, as far as I can see. I just wanted to identify this for clarification so that we can perhaps get an explanation in regard to why it was necessary to eliminate this ombudsman. What are we going to do to replace that important independent role, especially when we are moving forward with amending the Metis Settlements Act?

Specifically, in Bill 19 on the first page section 2 amends section 1 of the act by redefining councillor as “a member of a settlement council, including a settlement chair.” The previous definition indicated that a councillor was “a settlement member elected or appointed to a settlement council.” I’m just wondering why it was necessary, Mr. Speaker, to remove the reference to councillors being, quote, unquote, elected. Again, why wasn’t this reference to elections maintained in the new definition?

Section 4 of this bill before us pertains to the selection of a settlement chair and creates two different systems, as far as I can see, for choosing that chair, either through appointment by councillors from amongst themselves or through direct election. The council would then decide the process that they want to follow. This creates two different types of removal process as well, as far as I can see. Appointed chairs can still be removed by their fellow councillors, but elected chairs, as far as I can see, cannot. So an appointed chair who is removed remains a member of the council as a councillor, but an elected chair who resigns is no longer a member of council.

This gives rise, Mr. Speaker, I think, to several questions. One, why was it decided to create two different systems: appointed chairs, elected chairs? It seems to create a degree of local decision-making autonomy for each settlement, which is good, but it also, I think, two, creates potential confusion in relation to the significant differences that will exist between different settlement councils who will choose their chairs and the ability the different councils will have or not have to remove that chair. I just really wonder why it was necessary to create two different processes.

Section 10, which repeals section 23.1 of the old act, stipulates that the minister and the general council shall review the procedures and make recommendations for changes not later than December 31, 2005. According to the website the last amendments to this act were made in 2004. I’m curious to know if the consultations and recommendations were met by that date in 2005 and, if so, why no changes were made to the act at that time. Do the changes that are now being proposed here in this Bill 19 relate to the recommendations that are, I guess, almost eight years old now? I’m just wondering about that, too.

Finally, why is there no provision retained in this act for a future review process, unless I’m missing something here, and consultation relating to the election procedures and recommendations for improvement?

I just wanted to bring up those few points, not to suggest that ultimately we are not interested in supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I think it is in some way an improvement, again, like I said from the outset, setting a direction for amendment of I think a fairly high-standard and unique situation that we’ve created here in Alberta in regard to the Métis settlements.

So with amendments and with some debate and revisions, answers to the questions that I brought up and some more that I will bring up later, I certainly think that the Alberta New Democrats are supportive of this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I’ll recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and speak to Bill 19. As an MLA from a constituency with significant Métis populations – I have two Métis settlements, the Kikino and Buffalo Métis settlements – I’m really happy to see that the government is finally taking some steps to improve some of the legislation surrounding Métis settlements.

Of course, I did quite well in the election in those two different settlements, and part of the reason was because I think that some of the individuals, not all, had believed that Premier Redford and this government were not consulting with them. The Premier was not consulting with a significant number of the individuals within those settlements. So it’s nice to see that there’s at least something going on here and that they’re addressing some issues.

The legislation attempts to improve the governing capacity of the Alberta Métis settlements. I know the Leader of the Official Opposition has thoroughly gone through a number of the legislative provisions. She is going to be putting forward a significant number of amendments to try to improve this legislation.

I thought I would talk just briefly and highlight some of the issues that I’ve seen. Of course, there are over 66,000 Métis people in Alberta, I believe, and the lion’s share of that population is located in northern Alberta. I do have some comments from one of the stakeholders, and that’s the chairman of the Kikino Métis settlement, Floyd Thompson. He was one of the four Métis officials who were appointed to the long-term arrangement negotiation committee and was involved in developing Bill 19 and the long-term agreement itself, which is a 10-year, \$85 million investment plan with the Alberta government.

Mr. Thompson has been looking forward to, as he has stated, some stricter guidelines and greater accountability. One quote that he has stated is that with local and provincial government, people want their government to be up front and centre, that they don’t want things behind closed doors. This legislation sets the stage so that anyone coming into leadership knows that they have to be accountable. They’ve been elected to serve the people, not correct them.

I think those are, of course, wise words, Mr. Speaker. It’s too bad that those words and that wisdom weren’t acknowledged by this Premier because I think it would be very valuable advice. If you’re going to – and the Leader of the Official Opposition alluded to it – make these types of substantial changes to the Métis settlements, some of those are very equally applicable to this current PC government.

The other comment that Mr. Thompson had indicated is that the election period goes from three years to four years. I just want to indicate that he is indicating that he is in favour of that, that it puts Métis settlements in a good position for business planning and assessing outcomes.

Another interesting amendment is in the legislation. I believe that currently individuals within the settlements can elect five council members. With the legislative amendments, if the settlement members prefer, they can elect four council members to run for election, with a separate election race for chair. That, obviously, is a synergy with municipalities where, if there are a sufficient number of individuals within a municipality that want to directly elect, in a county’s case, a reeve, they can put that forward and have those elections.

The other aspect is a code of conduct. That would be an official code of conduct for settlement councils that will be supposedly

developed in the near future and will ensure that the requirements of those council members are defined. In that area Mr. Thompson indicates that he is in favour, and essentially he is indicating that they want to ensure that the councils act responsibly, ethically, with professional conduct, impartially, with integrity, honesty, and treat people with respect, maintain confidences while not withholding public information.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, again, a lot of wisdom there. It would be fortunate if some of the ministers, in particular the Minister of AT and T, would listen to some of those principles and apply it to Alberta's legislation, not just Bill 19, with respect to Métis settlements.

8:10

One thing that our leader had indicated is that there is some concern within settlements that the government in their communications are saying that a settlement is akin to a municipality. You know, I'll just quote from what Mr. Thompson is stating: all governments have similarities, but the bottom line is that Métis settlements are never going to be municipalities, and we don't care to be referred to as municipalities. I hope that the hon. minister would take that into account. Of course, Mr. Thompson is quite accurate in that Métis settlements have different constitutional rights, and although the minister is trying to align some of the principles and government structures of municipalities with the settlements, he should not refer to settlements as a municipality. I think that would be some wise advice for him to take.

The other aspect is that the legislation will create standardized financial reporting for all the settlements and require three-year business plans with strategic plans laid out for achieving goals. Of course, anything that provides forward-looking requirements I think is positive. I've discussed this with some of the individuals on the settlements, and they see this as a positive step forward.

I look forward to the debate in Committee of the Whole. Our party will be putting forward substantive amendments. I hope that the hon. minister looks closely at those amendments so that we can pursue and have some positive outcomes in this legislation. You know, I think this minister has done a significant amount of consultation. I hope that he will look at our amendments thoroughly and genuinely give them some due consideration to try and strengthen the legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand and speak to Bill 19, the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2013. I give a lot of credit to the minister for his leadership on this. I think it's long overdue that we have a constructive and leadership relationship with all our First Nations. The Métis are a unique part of our history. Indeed, they went through some of the same troubling times that our other First Nations did, suffered a lot of the same kinds of experiences, deprivations, and abuses by a system that tried to destroy the Indian culture.

I think we have a lot to make up for, and investing in these folks, investing in their stability, their educational processes, their cultural enrichment, and assisting them in finding their way into the complex management world and the accountabilities that we know all governments have to face and meet is an important step. Everything I've heard about the settlements has been that they're challenged in a lot of different ways, not unlike some of the

reserves, and the minister has taken it firmly in hand and addressed some of the key issues.

As many will know – and I want to put it on the record – this government did conclude a long-term agreement with the Metis Settlements General Council, directing \$85 million in provincial funding to the settlements over the next 10 years, after which it's presumed these settlements will become relatively self-sufficient. They will have the capacity to set tax or other revenue streams. They will then have full accountability, as outlined here, to have democratic elections, four-year terms now instead of three-year terms.

They will have financial accountability guidelines that will preempt any, I guess, concerns that have been raised in other contexts and make sure that they get off to a good strong start with the training, the opportunities for feedback, and appropriate, constructive oversight as they move into their roles on these councils, with more clear roles and accountabilities, as I say, which are very appropriate.

I have a few questions about some of the sections. They may well have been addressed in the bill itself, but I couldn't see them. Section 14 amends section 55 of the Métis settlements agreement by stipulating that, unlike all other bylaws, budget bylaws are exempt from public notice and public approval requirements from settlement members. That, in the face of it, doesn't appear to be a democratic process. It doesn't seem to address some of the *prima facie* case for accountability, transparency, and democratic process.

Section 15 amends section 57(1) of the MSA by stipulating that settlement members may petition the settlement council for a bylaw about any matter other than annual settlement budgets. Again I have questions about why that would be exempt, and I'm sure the minister will have some opportunity to explain that further.

Section 21 repeals sections 175.1 to 175.3 due to the fact that the \$700,000 Métis settlements ombudsman office was eliminated in the 2013-14 Alberta government estimates. As I raised at the time, I think there are concerns that the ombudsman was receiving twice as many appeals and concerns about due process as the council. It raised questions in my mind about whether the ombudsman was more accessible, whether he was seen to be acting independent of the council and therefore having a significant ongoing role, and whether we're going to lose some of that sense of accountability through this process. We haven't yet heard from the Métis communities themselves about what they feel the impact is going to be of eliminating this ombudsman, and I think we need to hear more about the impact. If this is simply a cost-cutting measure and is going to undermine the confidence of people and the ability to have due process, then we will be very much pushing back on that.

Another area. I've just begun to read through the Metis Settlements Act. It's my understanding that energy and subsurface rights do fall within the Métis jurisdiction and that there will have to be joint agreements and due consultation and accommodation for any developments on their lands and, if I'm not mistaken, comanagement as a result of the arrangement that has been made with Métis settlements. I'd like to hear more about that and how, in fact, the new consultation agreement that is being developed and proposed by this government will impact, how the consultation accommodation process may or may not be different between First Nations and the Métis. It's not clear to me yet where that falls, and again I would like very much to hear from the Métis communities themselves on some of these issues.

With those provisos, again I congratulate the minister and the government for moving forward on some essential work that

needs to be done in terms of social development, economic development, education, responsible and accountable democratic processes, financial accountability on the Métis settlements. From the limited interaction I've had with Métis people, I think it is a real step forward.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to be brief, which is a nice change of pace. [interjections] I notice they did not hesitate, compared to my hon. leader. [interjections] I will be brief because most of what my concerns were have been questioned.

I rise because although I do not have Métis settlements in my riding, I have many Métis people, and the CFO of my campaign is Métis. I actually had a chance to talk to him about this bill.

8:20

I want to thank the hon. minister for bringing this bill forward, but I do have a question. Hopefully, the minister can address and answer the question. Some of the other members have brought it up. How does the appeal tribunal differ from or enhance what the ombudsman was or is today? That's been brought up, I think, a number of times, and maybe we can get that answered to the level that we can deal with that.

Beyond that, having debated the budget – and we will have some more speeches on the budget later and on the other bills where we will disagree – it's always a pleasure to rise and agree and see something brought forward that we can have bipartisan support for and actually take positive steps in the governance of our great province. From where I sit reading this bill, I'm pleased to rise to support it. I ask my fellow members to support it, and I want to thank the member for bringing it forward.

Thanks again, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'd invite the hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really do appreciate the comments from the hon. members about this bill. I think it's quite timely that 2013 is the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Métis settlements in this province, which I think speaks volumes about the long and productive relationship we've had with the Métis community.

Mr. Speaker, settlement members and their elected leadership want improved governments, they want increased transparency, and they want clear roles and responsibilities, which this bill is set to achieve. The Métis settlements have nothing but my admiration and respect for the work that they continue to do. This bill supports the Métis settlements long-term arrangements which were negotiated between the province and the Métis settlements leadership, which is a prime example of what is achieved through dialogue and a positive working relationship.

Mr. Speaker, I just want you to know that we took about two years to get to the point where we were actually able to sign the long-term agreement. That's because we had real good dialogue, and we wanted to make sure that we had a bill and an agreement in place that would allow the Métis settlements to move forward. That's what they wanted to do, and they made that very clear to me. Again, I have nothing but admiration for the leadership of the Métis settlements and the work they did.

One thing that I do have to say because of some of the comments is that members have to understand that there's a very distinct difference between the MNA, which is the Métis Nation of Alberta, and the Métis settlements. Those are two different organizations. When we look at talking about that, hopefully, I'll be able to clarify that a little bit more in Committee of the Whole.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate the support of the members of the Assembly. I look forward to talking about the amendments.

With that, I would call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 12 Fiscal Management Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 12, and I'm pleased to rise and move that.

You know, government first committed to a renewal of the fiscal framework in Budget 2012. Last fall we consulted with businesses and financial leaders and academics and everyday Albertans both in person and online. They told us that the province should save for future generations in both good times and in challenging times. They said that we should consider borrowing to build infrastructure but only when it made financial sense. I've seen that most recently in the Leger poll. And they said that Alberta needed to reduce its reliance on nonrenewable natural resource revenues.

Mr. Speaker, we have a duty to prepare this province for the future. The province is expected to expand to more than 5 million people in the next 17 years. That's the equivalent of adding another city the size of Calgary. Population growth means good things for Alberta: more diverse and vibrant communities, more tax revenue, more customers, and higher consumer spending at local businesses. It also means more pressure on existing programs and services and more pressure on our public infrastructure. We know that adequate public infrastructure goes hand in hand with quality of life, and Albertans have told us that access to schools and health facilities and maintained roads and highways are priorities for them.

The Fiscal Management Act is our response to what we heard. Bill 12 legislates the requirement for an operational plan, a savings plan, and a capital plan, and it retains a 1 per cent legislated limit on in-year spending increases in total operational expense. It also sets limits on borrowing for infrastructure and prohibits borrowing for programs and services.

In addition, Bill 12 establishes the new contingency account, a short-term savings fund that will act as a fiscal shock absorber and stabilize revenue fluctuations. The Alberta sustainability fund will be replaced by this new account. Bill 12 allows the operational budget to be in deficit only if there are assets available in the contingency account to offset it.

Another important change that this legislation makes will help future generations become less reliant on resource revenue. Each year specific amounts of nonrenewable resource revenue will be set aside for savings: 5 per cent of the first \$10 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue, 25 per cent of the next \$5 billion up to \$15 billion, and 50 per cent of all nonrenewable resource revenue in excess of \$15 billion. This portion will be placed into

the contingency account until it reaches a balance of \$5 billion. The revenue will then be used for other savings such as the Alberta heritage savings trust fund or endowments or the capital debt repayment account.

I would also like to address some questions and comments that have come from some of the members. Concerns were expressed about the repeal of the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act. I would like to point out that the majority of items in the old acts have been included in the new Fiscal Management Act; for example, the 1 per cent legislated limit on in-year spending increases in total operating expense. Information such as the consolidated deficit and change in net assets has not disappeared. These items are still included in the consolidated financial statements that we present. We will see that the depreciating of our assets and debt-servicing costs in this way of presenting the budget is the same as we require of municipalities, separating capital from operating budgets. This method, recommended by groups such as the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, is similar to financial statements that can be found in the business world.

A number of members also referred to government's borrowing plans as borrowing to save. Our borrowing is responsible and strategic, much like the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre suggested. The Fiscal Management Act responsibly sets a cap on how much we can borrow. It limits debt-servicing costs associated with capital borrowing to 3 per cent of operational revenue. It's tied to market conditions and the government's operational revenue. So if our revenue goes down, the limit on our debt goes down. If interest rates go up, the amount of additional debt that we can take on goes down as well. We've said that borrowing for capital projects will be done strategically.

Our one point that we continually made when talking about borrowing for capital has been that borrowing will only be done when it makes financial sense. We're not going to borrow just for the sake of borrowing. We're leveraging our triple-A credit rating to access low financing costs. This strategy will save more money in the long run, and it lets us avoid increased labour costs and inflation that come with delaying projects. By "save," I don't mean add to our savings. I mean pay less costs. This way much-needed capital projects such as schools, health facilities, and roads like highway 63 will be there for Alberta's growing communities when they need them instead of needing to play catch-up. Debt repayment plans will be established at the time of borrowing.

Speaking of capital projects, if members wish to see a list of priority projects, they just need to have a look at our capital plan on the website.

Throughout the debate I heard strong support from all sides of the House for our approach to saving. Albertans have told government that saving is a priority in both good times and challenging times. They continue to support strongly the heritage savings trust fund and believe it to still be the best way to save for future generations. Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act, provides the province's first savings policy in more than 25 years and will ensure a degree of saving each and every year. We're putting into law a responsible savings strategy where a portion of non-renewable resource revenue will be set aside into savings.

Some would like us to accelerate our savings plan, and this act does allow us to do this. We had a good discussion about that in one of the amendments last night. While it sets out a timeline of 2015-16 to start saving specific amounts of nonrenewable resource revenue, we do have a full intention of accelerating this plan. Income from the heritage savings trust fund will also be retained in increasing portions, ultimately retaining a hundred per cent of the income by 2016-17. Under the new savings plan the

province's total savings in various funds and endowments will grow to more than \$24 billion over the next three years. That's significant, Mr. Speaker, and it is reflective of this government's focus on building Alberta's future. To suggest that our savings are depleted is wrong. The Fiscal Management Act is important not only because of how it changes the way we save for the future but also because of enhancements to the rules around how we spend and borrow.

I would ask all members of this House for their support of Bill 12, and I look forward to debate in third reading.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to briefly talk on Bill 12. Of course, what this back-in-debt budget does, despite the debt, is that it also repeals the Government Accountability Act as well as the Fiscal Responsibility Act. It's interesting to see day in, day out how the Finance minister tries to spin this. He says: well, we're going to borrow to save. If you actually go into *Hansard* and take a look at the number of times this Finance minister has used the word "debt," it would be an interesting word count. I'm sure it's dozens if not hundreds of times. This is quite a substantial difference from the past. Of course, we've gone from \$17 billion in the sustainability fund to eventually having \$17 billion in debt by 2016.

I just wanted to close with a statement that was actually done in the third reading of the Government Accountability Act back on May 11, 1995. Since we're doing third reading of Bill 12, I think it's quite relevant. It was by the then Treasurer, Jim Dinning, who said:

I'm proud that my colleagues have been willing to set the standard and set a high one such that no matter who may come behind us, they will not be able to water the standard down without looking at the whites of the eyes of Albertans and saying, "We're going to deliver to you substandard government."

I hope that these members can go to their constituents and look into their eyes and say these same words, that they are indeed going to have substandard government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to again make a few comments in regard to Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act. I have made my comments and views fairly clear in readings that we've had of this bill already. Just to remind people, this really lies at the heart of this spring session and the budget. The problems that we see in Bill 12, I think, are largely indicative of the cuts and the other issues we have in each of the other ministries before us here this spring.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, the biggest problem with this bill is that it does very little to change the structural revenue problem that we have here in the province of Alberta. We need to not only reverse the cuts that we had felt and experienced over the last 17 years but also start to restructure our corporate tax rate and royalties rates so that we are capturing a fair share of the revenue and of the wealth that is being produced in this province.

Everyone knows that Alberta is becoming more and more the economic engine of the entire country. While other jurisdictions in North America and in Europe are experiencing recession, our economy is in fact growing. So for us to have a budget that is

essentially a cutting budget in the midst of a growing economy, there lies an essential contradiction that, I think, should become abundantly clear to most Albertans, and I know that it is for regular working people. This budget doesn't match the reality that they are experiencing on the ground with their own lives and with their own budgets in their families.

Our population is growing, too. While all of the classic indicators of an economy in healthy, substantive, long-term growth are here right before us, right in front of the doors of this Legislature, suddenly you come in here and you have this alternate reality where we are making cuts and somehow looking to reduce our public expenditures for the essential services for which this government and this entire Legislature has been created in the first place, to provide public health care, education, roads, and so forth to meet the needs of a modern industrialized society.

You know, I find it kind of unfortunate that we are running up against these two realities here in this Legislature. It's not just a moot point that we're debating for academic purposes; it means actual dollars that affect the lives of regular Albertans, millions of them across the province, everyone from someone who might have a school-aged child to seniors or someone who is needing to access the health care system. So many of us have all of those things in our lives all at the same time in regard to school-aged children, postsecondary children, aging parents, and so forth and require extra care. You know, when we take dollars and we debate these things here in this House, it's not just for ideological purposes or for moot points of debating; its effects are direct and measurable in the outside world, in people's lives.

As well, the problem is that this bill really doesn't save money, and I cannot see it saving substantial amounts of money until after the next election cycle or until somehow we hit another oil boom or energy boom in the province – right? – which could entirely possibly be soon. But, again, when have we learned that we should put systemic things into place that will see us through the vagaries of the boom and bust cycle that invariably causes damage, both societal and physical damage, to our province, both on the boom and on the bust cycle? That's not to say that the boom doesn't do those damaging things to our social fabric and to our physical environment as much as a recession does, too.

We need to learn from these mistakes, and while, you know, Bill 12 certainly – I mean, I'm not suggesting that it's not worth the paper that it's printed on. It has some provisions to ensure responsibility and some sense of saving. At least it acknowledges those concepts, which, I think, Albertans consider to be very overdue. We just have to, I think, categorize these things much more carefully and make substantial savings and not spend the royalty and revenue from our nonrenewable resources but, rather, save those and start building a structural change that allows us to diversify our economy and make something that is sustainable and something that we can be proud to hand down to subsequent generations.

This budget also, I think, has this sense of confusion – right? – between money in and money out. I know that this budget is separated into three sections, but really I don't see it making a deficit calculation, in my mind, at all. You know, this drastic reorganization makes it hard for us to track things, and I think that goes against the grain of both the substance and the theme of transparency that we strive to achieve here in the Legislature.

As well, so many of the reporting provisions in this bill are up to the discretion of the minister and the ministry. I think that we could have more required reporting in Bill 12 in our budgets and make those problems go away, right? It's not as though people are not capable of reading budgets and reading sophisticated budgets,

but this whole idea of discretion, I think, is not entirely appropriate.

Again, I know the minister talked about this, but, I mean, this Bill 12 was replacing the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which actually made it illegal for actual expenses to exceed the revenue plus what was contained in the sustainability fund. This present act abolishes that requirement and replaces it with a requirement that only the operating accounts in the budget must be balanced, opening the door for borrowing for capital expenditures. It makes a promise not to have that operational deficit ring. It sends off a bit of an alarm bell, I think.

8:40

Certainly, it's not necessarily an imprudent thing to choose to borrow for capital expenditures, but I just find a contradiction here in what I had heard for many years in this Legislature when I was here before. Suddenly you see the turnaround. I just wonder how sincere the government is in regard to these things or if they're just saying what they think people want to hear.

You know, the questions that I asked before are something that I just wanted to bring forward again very quickly, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, what is in the way here that would just stop this government from moving the goalposts again if they don't find enough revenue to pay for the level of services that Albertans demand, right?

Part of this budget exercise that we've just gone through here is very much less substance in terms of a shortage of funds and more of an excuse to continue down the path of privatization and this neoliberal concept of reducing the responsibility of government to provide the essential services that a modern industrial society requires. This ideological attack would have come regardless, even if we had a billion billion dollars in surplus. I know that the pattern over the last 20 years is to have a cutting budget, to make attacks on public services immediately subsequent to an election victory. That hasn't changed, and I find that to be cynical and ultimately destructive.

This bill is only part of a strategy, I think ostensibly only, to make Alberta less dependent on nonrenewable resources, but it doesn't seem to achieve that. There's nothing in the bill that helps to diversify the economy, nothing to address the revenue problem, as I said before. The only thing that this might accomplish, I hope, is some small revenue savings that can smooth through and build the heritage trust fund into something more substantive that we can use as part of our ongoing budget if it builds enough size and scope.

So, Mr. Speaker, for the sake of brevity I don't want to go over all of these points again. It's safe to say that the budget that we've dealt with over the last few weeks is disappointing, and this Bill 12 is just a pale shadow of that disappointing news that Albertans are having to face.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also glad to rise and speak on Bill 12. Bill 12 repeals both the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act and replaces them with a single statute that changes the way the government administers and reports on the province's finances. One of the key features of the new legislation is that the government will now be required to have a distinct operational plan, a distinct savings plan, and a distinct capital plan as parts of the overall annual fiscal plan. It

also establishes a new short-term savings contingency account whose purpose is to provide funding for those years in which the actual operational expenses exceed actual operational revenues, as operational deficits will now be illegal with this bill.

The contingency account is a renaming, repurposing, and continuation of the Alberta sustainability fund within the general revenue fund. The balance in the contingency account is not permitted to be less than zero.

It also repeals the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which had made deficits illegal. Under the new Fiscal Management Act only operational deficits are illegal now. It also, you know, waters down the Government Accountability Act. It incorporates seven watered-down sections of that statute into the Fiscal Management Act, including the following: fiscal plan, business plans, reports on progress, government annual report, ministry annual reports, accountable organization, and contents of public accounts.

The new section pertaining to the government's annual fiscal plan creates the requirement for an operational plan, a savings plan, and a capital plan. The references to the Minister of Finance that were found in the Government Accountability Act have been replaced by ones to the responsible minister in the Fiscal Management Act.

Absent from the new legislation are those sections of the Government Accountability Act that require some measure of accountability from the Minister of Finance. Section 11 obligated the minister to include a statement of responsibility within the consolidated fiscal plan and the consolidated annual report, and section 12 required the minister to make public a written statement explaining any omitted information or noncompliance with the act and produce those two documents.

Also gone is section 6, which required the inclusion of the major economic assumptions that the Minister of Finance made in preparing the province's consolidated fiscal plan and the anticipated economic conditions for the fiscal years to which the plan related. Repealing the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act was necessary to give the government the flexibility it needed to borrow, to go into debt, to pay for capital projects. I don't think we would need to repeal the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act had the government not been mismanaging the money.

By committing the government to a savings plan as well as an operational plan and a capital plan, the Minister of Finance claims that Alberta's major savings accounts will grow to over \$24 billion within three years, which, it should be noted, is an estimate of all the money that will be held in a new contingency account and the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and other savings. This is not to be interpreted as the heritage savings fund being worth over \$24 billion within three years.

The bill needlessly reduces the fiscal accountability and transparency on the part of government for election finance reporting requirements. It doesn't change the potential tax mix or diversify its revenue streams. It offers no real plan or lifeline for paying off the province's growing debt and does nothing in the short and medium terms to reduce the province's overreliance on nonrenewable resource revenues.

The government claims that this legislation reflects the results from the Dollars and Sense consultations held in the fall of 2012. By the government's own admission only 6,000-plus Albertans participated in that process according to page 3 of the government's Dollars and Sense: What We Heard report. This begs the question: why is the government setting fiscal policy based on the feedback and advice of less than 1 per cent of Albertans?

When the government first announced that it was borrowing up to \$1.1 billion to pay for the twinning of highway 63, the Transportation minister said that it would be paid back within 20 years. Since then it was revealed in Budget 2013 that the government plans to borrow 12 and a half billion dollars over four years for various capital projects. The debt keeps growing, Mr. Speaker, yet this new legislation contains no plan or timeline for paying off this debt. This debt is going to be like a runaway train.

I think this bill should be defeated because it needlessly reduces fiscal accountability and transparency on the part of the government for election finance reporting requirements, it doesn't change the province's tax mix or diversify its revenue streams, it offers no real plan or timeline for paying off the province's growing debt, and it does nothing in the short and medium terms to reduce the province's overreliance on nonrenewable resource revenues.

If the government is going to repeal and amend laws to make itself less fiscally accountable and transparent, it should at least have the courage to admit that it's doing so of its own choosing and not because a relatively small number of Albertans apparently told them to do this through the Dollars and Sense consultation.

With this bill Alberta Liberal members are once again being asked to support several questionable proposals in order to get one desperately needed one passed; namely, a legislated savings plan. The government must not use Bill 12's requirement for an operational plan, a savings plan, and a capital plan as a shell game to obfuscate the province's finances. Why is this government setting fiscal policy based on the feedback and advice of less than 1 per cent of Albertans? That boggles my mind, Mr. Speaker.

For those reasons, I won't be supporting the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it interesting that over the last number of months the PCs have been looking at their historic leaders and the legacies that they've left and how much we hear about Peter Lougheed, how much we hear about Ralph Klein, how proud they clearly are of the legacy that both of those leaders left behind.

I think it's worth remembering why it is that Peter Lougheed enjoys the legacy and the admiration that he does today. It's because for most of time that he was in government, when he was in the Premier's office, he balanced budgets, ran surpluses, and put money into savings.

I think it's important to remember why Ralph Klein has the admiration that he does today. It's because for most of the time he was in office, he ran balanced budgets, ran surpluses, not only became debt free but also put money into savings, some \$15 billion by the time he left office, and he also instituted rules that created greater transparency.

8:50

You don't hear the PCs talk much about some of their other leaders, like Don Getty, who racked up \$23 billion worth of debt, who lost his own seat, who spent billions of dollars on corporate welfare trying to pick winners and losers in the economy. You don't hear them talk that much about Mr. Stelmach, who depleted savings, who also started down a path of corporate welfare with the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage.

I think it's instructive for the members opposite to think about what kind of legacy their current leader is going to leave. When you look at two of the most important things that those two leaders had done and how they actually changed the expectation in this province about what their government ought to do, I think you see a massive mismatch with what the Finance minister has proposed in Bill 12 and why Bill 12 should fail.

I look at this bill as a bold step backward, a bold step backward to the kind of standard government that my colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills was talking about. I hope they look at the whites of the eyes of the people that are in their constituencies as they go back and try to sell why it is that a year later they're taking a step away from the legacy they often claimed to be so proud of. Had they followed in the path of Peter Lougheed, who in 1976 established the heritage savings trust fund, if they had done then what they claim they're going to do now, keeping the interest in that fund, it would have grown to \$136 billion today. It would be generating \$7 billion to \$8 billion a year in additional investment income. We would have already weaned ourselves off of the reliance on oil and gas revenues if only they had been able to keep with the good decisions that he made back in those early days.

If you look, as well, even at some of the more recent decisions that have been made, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation points out another substantial way in which this budget is taking a step backwards. The Premier likes to talk about raising the bar on transparency and accountability. We're absolutely going in the opposite direction in this legislation. "Repealing the Government Accountability Act will gut the most important accountability measures required by law." This is according to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's Alberta director Derek Fildebrandt. "This will leave taxpayers without the most basic information required to know what their government is up to."

There's no requirement to have consolidated revenues and expenses, a consolidated deficit or surplus number; revenue sources by category; expenses by category; a breakdown of liabilities and assets; borrowing, or debt, requirements; or detailed spending of capital by ministry. These are ways in which the government I think is breaking some of the early pioneering work that had been done by the previous leader Premier Ralph Klein and his then Finance minister.

I am going to address in my brief statements tonight this notion that the Finance minister likes to keep putting forward about borrowing for capital and when it makes sense. I've noticed that the Finance minister seems to suffer from selective hearing. I will try once again to get across to him what others, what economists and business leaders, are telling him makes sense when you're looking at the issue of borrowing for capital in this province and, in particular, government borrowing.

What the Alberta Chambers of Commerce said is that for debt to make sense, it had to have five key parameters, five key restrictions. One, there had to be a spending limit law because if you do not have a year-over-year spending limitation, you will always put yourself in a position where the government is spending well beyond its means. This has absolutely been the case with this government over the last 10 years, doubling inflation and population growth, which is why we're in the trouble that we're in today. So a broken rule 1 about when borrowing makes sense.

Two, borrowing only makes sense if you have a priority list and you have preidentified all of the projects that you might borrow for for capital, and this government does not do this. Directing us to their website to look at what their priorities are going to be for

the next three years is not what we have been asking for day in and day out in this Legislature. They know exactly what all of the priority capital projects are for every single school board, for every single health district, for every single municipality. We want to see a long-term, 10-year priority list so that we can start identifying those projects which should be near the top of the list and those ones which can wait a little bit longer. They refuse to give that, and you need to give that kind of priority list if you're going to be able to prioritize your borrowing. That's what the Chambers of Commerce actually said.

They also say that you shouldn't be borrowing for things that are going to have a higher operating cost than the cost of capital. You shouldn't be borrowing for things like schools and hospitals, which we know in some cases can . . .

Mr. Horner: They did not say that.

Ms Smith: They absolutely did say that. I will show the minister. I will send that over to you, Minister. I will show you exactly where they did say in their budget submission that you should not be borrowing for items that will have a higher operating cost than capital cost. The Finance minister continues to break that third rule of when it makes sense to borrow.

The fourth. When they began, they actually proposed a much stricter limitation on what the borrowing limit should be based on a percentage of revenues. The government has said 3 per cent. The Chambers of Commerce has said 1 per cent. They started off even lower than that, at .05 per cent, a few years ago, but I think they saw there was no way the government was going to be able to match that. That would still put a spending limit in there of \$12 billion. Their 3 per cent spending limit gives the Finance minister the latitude to go up to \$36 billion or \$40 billion depending on what the interest rates are.

Now, of course, he did say this evening that if the interest rates end up going up, that means that we borrow less. Well, what happens if the Finance minister borrows to his spending limit on the basis of today's interest rates? Then when he goes to refinance, as we know he's going to do – we know he's going to roll over – when he rolls that debt over and we end up not being able to be within those parameters, what do you think is going to happen? Well, I can already predict it. We saw what happened when their debt repayment rules were inconvenient, when they got in the way. When it was inconvenient because they had a balanced budget rule and that got in the way, and when it was inconvenient for them to have a zero-debt rule and that got in the way, they changed the legislation. That's exactly what this Finance minister is going to do. This spending limit law is a sham. There's absolutely no limitation when you're going to have a 3 per cent limit.

Then we also have the fifth rule that the Finance minister has broken for when it makes sense to borrow. If you're actually going to borrow, you have to have a plan to pay it back. He's constantly told us how this is like a family mortgage. This debt is not structured like a family mortgage. When a family takes out a mortgage on a property, when they make their payment every year, not only are they paying a portion of the finance charges; they're also paying a portion of principal. So year after year after year the amount of the outstanding debt gets smaller and smaller and smaller, and a greater and greater portion of their payment goes to pay down the principal, and less and less goes to finance charges. That's not what the Finance minister has done.

What the Finance minister has done is that he's taken out long-term bonds so that when we get up to the \$17 billion that he

intends to borrow by 2016, we are going to be spending \$600 million year in, year out, every single year, until that money is paid back. And I don't believe it will be paid back. I don't see any evidence that there's a debt repayment plan that will allow for him to make that end-of-term balloon payment when that debt comes due. I'm already going to predict that if this government is still in power in 20 years, what we'll actually see is a plan to just simply roll it over and roll it over. Who knows? Maybe it'll take 20 or 40 or 60 or 80 years to finally pay that debt back. We've done the calculation. With the kind of money that they are setting aside right now, it would take 83 years to pay back \$17 billion worth of debt. So he's broken the fifth rule of what the Chambers of Commerce say makes sense for borrowing for capital.

I go one step further because, quite frankly, I do not think it makes sense at all for a government that is awash in resource revenues, as this government has been for most of its history, as it still is when you look at \$7 billion to \$8 billion a year worth of resource revenue, windfall revenues that any other provincial Premier would be delighted to have, that this government can't seem to live within those means. It absolutely is unconscionable that on top of not putting any meaningful amount of those resource revenues away, this government is also intending for us to go back into debt.

I'll just share a little story. The hon. leader of the fourth party, the NDP opposition, and I were at a debate at the University of Calgary a couple of weeks ago put on by the students of the Economic Society of Calgary as well as the Wildrose and the NDP clubs on campus. I can tell you that we had a pretty good debate there. One of the things he said was: the NDP is not a party that believes in deficit; we would not go into debt. The NDP would increase revenues – at least they're being honest about it – by increasing taxes. I can tell you that the kids in that room gave him a round of applause for saying that he would not mortgage their futures.

9:00

Here's the interesting thing when we're trying to figure out where the political paradigm is in this province. It's quite clear to me that the Progressive Conservatives are actually not just to the left of the Liberals; they are actually to the left of the NDP, absolutely to the left of the NDP. There is no question in my mind.

Here's what Jack Mintz had to say about this. This is why I believe, once again, the Finance minister is not listening or he's having selective hearing when he listens to what it is that economists tell him. Jack Mintz has said that in a resource-rich economy like Alberta we should not be borrowing at all. We should be putting money away like Alaska and Norway because if we spend every dollar worth of resource revenues, we are actually dipping into the wealth of future generations. We should be putting some of that money aside so that not only do we have those resources to be able to take care of our own needs, but they also have those resources to be able to take care of future needs. When the government not only spends every dollar worth of resource revenue but, in addition to that, starts borrowing money, Jack Mintz says that they are double-dipping on future generations. That is exactly what this government is doing.

I can tell you they do not have the support of the younger generations, people who have not even had the opportunity to vote, to take out billions and billions and billions of dollars' worth of debt that they and their kids and their grandkids are going to have to pay back. This is not smart debt; this is foolish debt. It is not fair to future generations. I hope that when the minister goes back to his riding and looks those young people in the eyes, he

actually has a much better explanation for why it is that he's mortgaging their future, because what he's told us here tonight, in my view, gets a big fat F, a big fat fail.

I'm going to be voting against this bill.

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

The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I know that we're moving on to the appropriation bill, and I really want to get there. On behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* – I know he would want me to put a couple of things on the record.

First of all, the Liberal caucus really strongly believes that this government has to stop supplementing 30 per cent of its operational budget in its budget by using nonrenewable resource revenue. It has to stop that. That is spending the next generation's money – it is intergenerational theft – and they have to stop doing that. That money has to be put into, we would suggest, endowment funds, postsecondary endowment, infrastructure endowment, the heritage fund, arts and social sciences. That's our suggestion. You can come up with something else.

We do need to return to a progressive tax. That gets more support than I thought it would. People are asked: "Do you want the services? If you want the services, this is what it's going to cost." They're willing to pay that. So I think we should be returning to a progressive and fair income tax system and taxing our corporations appropriately.

You know, I made a lot of fun of the government when I first spoke to this bill, that it still has to pass laws to stop itself from doing what it should be doing in serving the people. I do find that really odd. We have to pass a savings bill to make ourselves save. I just think that's weird. But the government seems to need to do that, and I've been through three Treasurers who have done it. It seems to be part of the Conservative culture, I guess. I don't know.

The last thing that I'm going to say here is about the need for a surplus plan. I'm going to keep talking about that. This is a cyclical economy. We are going to have surpluses again. What plan does this government have as to how it will spend those surpluses? They're going to come even through oil sands royalties and the postpayment option payout that I was referencing earlier.

We had during my time – I haven't even gone back and counted it. I don't know how much it is. Maybe \$15 billion worth of surplus money has come while I've been serving, and I can't tell you where that money went. You'd think that with \$15 billion the highway from here to Calgary would be paved with gold. It's so much money, and I can't tell where you guys spent it because you had no plan, and everybody that got there first with their hand out got the money. I'm not really sure how it benefited everybody in Alberta. You need to get a surplus plan about what you're going to do. Nobody is looking me in the eye, which just tells you how – oh, there he is. The Treasurer looks me in the eye as everybody else was looking anywhere but there. That tells me how uncomfortable they are with the idea.

That is my last requirement. My colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo* had raised a number of very reasonable amendments, none of which were passed by the government majority. You know, he was asking for things like a fiscal plan being expressed in plain language, that there be a consolidated statement each year and an actual total surplus or deficit – I mean, this isn't radical stuff; well, I wouldn't have thought this was radical, but evidently it's way out there to ask for plain language and consolidated statements – also, empowering the Auditor General to investigate

anything that happens under this act or as a result of this act, reviewing the income tax rate and looking at the appropriateness of increases to it, and allowing the citizens to know how their tax dollars are being spent. It's very reasonable. Sorry; I thought it was reasonable. I guess it's radical.

Those are the points I wanted to raise in connection with Bill 12, the Fiscal Management Act. Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to close debate.

Mr. Saskiw: If I just could make a motion first to have one-minute bells, please.

The Deputy Speaker: I don't know if that's in order at this point, hon. member. We'll come back to that.

Go ahead, Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am going to be, I hope, fairly brief, but I do have to cover off some of the information that was put on the floor of this House, which was, frankly, a little bit misleading in terms of the information that was provided.

First of all, we talked about the opposition talking about the back-in-debt thing, and we had a point of order on it actually earlier on today, Mr. Speaker. They talked about the fact that we're going back in debt, back in debt. If they actually looked at the books of the province of Alberta, they would know that we've been in debt. We've been in debt for some time. Since 2005 we've been building infrastructure using debt financing. It's unfortunate that they're not looking at that and are trying to convince people to look at it as a back-in-debt budget, which, frankly, I find kind of interesting. If that's all they've got, that's it.

The other thing that they're talking about is repealing two acts. They're not talking about the fact that we're replacing with one that actually contains almost all of the requirements of the previous two and bringing those two together as well as putting in a savings piece and a debt ceiling that is sensitive not only to our revenues but also to our interest rate costs.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition also mentioned Mr. Dinning and talked about how this would be contrary to his views. I can inform the hon. member that I had a very long chat with former Minister Dinning. We have had a lot of chats about how the budget would go. He was actually one of the CEOs that I consulted with last year around the fact that we should be using capital in the capital markets for financing debt. You know what he said, Mr. Speaker? He said: that's the right thing to do. He said that you should be moving in that direction because it makes financial sense.

We committed to not raising taxes in this budget, and we didn't, Mr. Speaker. Promise made, promise kept.

You know, frankly, as some of the other members in this House can do, I can talk about the legacy of Peter Lougheed. I can talk about the legacy of Ralph Klein. I can talk about the legacy of Premier Stelmach. Quite frankly, I can talk about the legacy of Don Getty because I grew up in both of those, in Peter Lougheed's and Don Getty's. I still have a relationship with former Premier Don Getty. He served this province extremely well. He sacrificed a lot for this province. To talk about someone who put his family and his life into the hands of the Albertan public and served this

province the way the hon. leader did, frankly, I find a little bit distasteful.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, Premier Lougheed knew that we had to build in this province. When you travel around this province and you go to the airport terminal in Medicine Hat, there's a plaque on the wall that says: built by the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. When you move through the hospital where my first child was going to be born, in Consort, Alberta, where I lived for a period of time, it's a beautiful facility, built with Alberta heritage savings trust fund dollars, capital dollars, cash.

When you talk about things like the sustainability fund, the majority of that \$17 billion actually went in when Premier Stelmach made the conscious decision not to put \$8 billion into the heritage savings trust fund but to put it into the sustainability fund. Premier Stelmach built infrastructure in this province by utilizing that sustainability fund. Did I agree that he should use cash? Not really because even then the markets would have sufficed.

The hon. leader likes to use the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as her guide for all things financial. I understand they've used political science advisers in the past. It hasn't worked out too well for them. I don't think this one has either. When they talk about, frankly, that we're gutting the most important aspects of the act, we're not. We've proved that already by the amendments that came forward, by the discussion that we've had in this House. It's unfortunate she obviously wasn't paying attention to that.

The Chamber of Commerce. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is talking about the submission that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce gave to this government before the budget, what they said before the budget. Let's talk about what they said after the budget, after they actually saw what we did, after Ken Kolby, who is the president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, was in the lock-up and read it and understood it probably better than members opposite. He said:

The Alberta Chambers has also long supported the need to strategically invest in capital projects to secure our province's future . . . For that reason, it supports the provincial plan to leverage its solid credit rating to borrow at today's low interest rates in order to proactively build infrastructure to accommodate Alberta's growth.

Mr. Speaker, that was after the budget was tabled.

Let's talk about the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce has said:

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce agrees that borrowing to invest in infrastructure, by taking on debt, can be a good way to help fund needed infrastructure projects, which can significantly boost our economy and increase quality of life.

Let's talk about the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. This is from Ben Brunnen, the chief economist with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce: the approach of using debt to finance capital is actually a prudent one in the sense that these infrastructure assets last decades, and it makes good sense to finance them over their useful life.

Mr. Speaker, the Chambers of Commerce are obviously supportive of the plan that we presented after the budget.

The hon. leader talks about a list. They've been asking for the list. We've said that the list is there. Where's yours? They have \$4 billion worth of capital in their supposed plan. They haven't told Albertans what they're not going to build. They haven't told Albertans what they're going to cut, a \$3 billion cut to operating over and above what we've already done. They haven't told

Albertans about that because they don't have a back-to-back budget.

Mr. Saskiw: Carbon capture.

Mr. Horner: Carbon capture and storage. How much is in the budget this year? How much, hon. member, is in the budget this year for carbon capture and storage? Less than a hundred million dollars. How are you going to save a billion dollars with less than a hundred million? It doesn't add up.

The other thing they talked about is the capital plan debt repayment. You know, Mr. Speaker, we keep talking about this document which we tabled in the House on March 7, this document which is the budget, which talks about, among other things, how we're going to borrow, what we're going to borrow, the cash adjustments: all of the things that the hon. members say that we don't present to Albertans. It's all here. Just about everybody who actually understands, you know, the reading of the financial statements: they find it. Evidently, they don't.

For the hon. members I'll come back to page 128. Line 23 is the capital debt repayment account year-end balance. Gee, that sounds like the capital . . .

Ms Smith: Yes. You calculate that up: 83 years to pay it back.

Mr. Horner: Well, if it was a very simple calculation like that, you wouldn't be running a \$40 billion operation, Madam Leader.

Jack Mintz. I've got to comment on Jack Mintz. I love the idea that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition brings up Jack Mintz but only brings up a very small piece of what Jack says. Jack says: don't borrow; when you've got all this money, you shouldn't borrow. But what else does Jack say? Jack says: put in a sales tax. Jack says: we should increase and close the gap on the taxes. Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? You can borrow pieces from all these folks and say that this is the way to go, but if I'm supposed to listen to what Jack Mintz says, perhaps the hon. leader should, too. I'm telling you that we did not agree with putting in an increase in taxes in this budget.

Another thing the hon. member talks about is: why aren't we like Norway? Norway, Mr. Speaker, has a 25 per cent sales tax, the highest personal income taxes in Europe. I don't want to be like Norway. I kind of like the taxes that we pay in Alberta in terms of the lowest in the land, and this plan, this budget will actually maintain that.

Alaska. I actually had a very interesting discussion last week with the chief investment officer of the Alaska permanent fund. Do you know what the Alaska permanent fund is up to, Mr. Speaker? Forty-five billion. All this time that they've been doing, evidently, what the right thing was and would have this big fund, the savings that Albertans will have after three years of this business plan will be \$24 billion, but we will also have built the infrastructure that the Alaska state government is looking for investors from outside to build because they can't use any of their own resources.

Mr. Speaker, we've taken a balanced approach – and Peter Lougheed is the one we'll thank for the balanced approach – to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and what we do with nonrenewable resources. Peter Lougheed understood something very, very important. If we want Alberta to grow and to move from where it was in the Social Credit era, we need to invest, and we need to put our faith in Albertans being entrepreneurial and keep taxes low and build the infrastructure that we need to bring Albertans to this province. That's what this government and this

Premier are going to do. [interjection] I know she's chirping over there, but the Leader of the Official Opposition is talking to . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please. The minister has the floor.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has said: why don't you look young people in the eyes? You know what? I do. When I look young people in the eyes, I say: what's the Alberta you want to have 20 years from now? Is it one where we're still waiting for that school for your kids? Is it one where you can't get to work because the road isn't there? Is it one where you couldn't drive around the city of Edmonton on a ring road because ideology said that we shouldn't enter into P3 debt, that we shouldn't be doing that, to wait until we pocket \$8 billion somewhere before we build any other infrastructure? Young people understand that you build today for success tomorrow. They want that infrastructure here, and that's why we're going to build it for them.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members in this Legislature to vote yes for this bill, vote yes for this budget because it's about living within our means, building for the future, and creating opportunity for Albertans. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The exuberance is great, hon. members, but we do want to get home tonight.

The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has moved third reading of Bill 12, but before I call the vote, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I believe you had a request that may require unanimous consent.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would ask for unanimous consent that we forgo the standing order on division bells and that we go to a one-minute bell.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I'll ask one question. Does anyone oppose the motion?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: With that, I will call the vote.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:20 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Fenske	McIver
Bhardwaj	Fraser	Olesen
Bhullar	Horner	Quadri
Brown	Hughes	Rodney
Campbell	Jansen	Sandhu
Cao	Jeneroux	Sarich
Casey	Johnson, J.	Starke
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Webber
DeLong	Khan	Woo-Paw
Dorward	Klimchuk	Xiao
Fawcett	Lemke	

Against the motion:

Anglin	Hale	Saskiw
Bikman	Kang	Smith
Blakeman	Pedersen	Stier
Eggen		
Totals:	For – 32	Against – 10

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2013

The Chair: Hon. members, are there any comments to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. This is the part of the budget process that I've been looking forward to because I get the opportunity to put the comments, questions, and concerns of a number of my constituents on the record around this year's budget. No surprise to anybody, I made quite a fuss about there being enough time for opposition members to speak to this bill because we do feel that we didn't have a lot of time to be checking out the other departments when we were in the policy field committees for debate. This is our chance to be able to speak with a sort of overarching view of the budget.

Let me get right down to business here. I did table a letter earlier this week, I think, from a senior who was very concerned about the changes that were happening to the medical oxygen program. I see that concern repeated a number of times. Every time the government changes the delivery of a program, which is not to say that they shouldn't change – they should. You know, our ability to govern should move with the times. But there always seems to be that period of incredible instability and indecision and lack of information for vulnerable people. Those of us that are up and around and in the thick of things here have access to information. Well, we should have access to it. I think that a number of times we actually don't. It sure causes a lot of concern and stress in, particularly, the seniors community when they don't know what's going to happen. A lot of them don't really like change that much.

On this particular project, changing who's going to deliver their medical oxygen, I've heard from a number of seniors with concerns about that. I didn't get a chance in the Health budget to say: "Why are you doing this? What is the point of changing this or looking to find a new contractor? Is it to save money? Is it, you know, to share the opportunity for other local suppliers to get a contract?" I don't know. There's the question.

I did get a chance in the Culture debate to raise the huge concerns that are generated in the charitable, not-for-profit communities under Culture around the cancellation of the STEP program and the community spirit matching grant program. I don't know quite how to describe this. For a number of years the CFEP program has been oversubscribed, and often extra money slipped that way. This year I think it was supposed to be \$45 million that was actually going to be spent although the budgeted amount was \$38 million, so the budgeted amount for next year is \$38 million. Well, essentially, that is a cut of \$7 million. I count that because, you know, if you're not going to put that extra

money in there, that's money that that community doesn't have access to, and they need it.

These are not communities that have a lot of cash lying around. This is a volunteer-based community. They're not-for-profits. Any money that they make, any surplus they have goes back into strengthening the services and programs that they provide. The stretch is enormous. This is public service. This runs the gamut from the United Way and all of the services that they raise money for – Big Brothers Big Sisters, youth-based organizations, the youth emergency shelter in Edmonton – through to all the poverty organizations and the shelters and the housing organizations, faith-based communities, disability communities, and I will talk specifically about one of them.

9:30

This was just an unbelievable blow. I was really surprised that this government would miss the mark on this one so badly because this is a connection to community, and usually this government is a little smarter than that. I think what's happened is that the lines of communication are so bad with this government right now – by that I mean between caucus and individual backbenchers and cabinet – that they didn't get a chance to express how damaging this was going to be. Big mistake. This one I think is going to cost you in many ways more than anything else you did in this budget because it's going to affect so many people. When they can't get that service, they're going to say, "Why not?" and the finger is going to get pointed back at you folks for taking money from front-line services. I've been wrong before, but I've also been right a lot, and I think this is one that I'm going to be right on.

Let me just talk about the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. Again, they wrote to me. They've already had a funding cutback from the Harper Conservatives. They've just been told, basically, that funding is going to be phased out for any disability assistance groups over three years. At least they gave them three years. It's a 35 per cent cut this year, moving to 65 per cent next year, and the last bit of funding would come in '15-16. That's pretty devastating for groups that are trying to help people participate fully in the life of the province. So what does the government do? It cuts the STEP program, cuts CFEP or isn't going to go over on it, and eliminates the matching community spirit project. Yikes. That's a blow. That's a huge blow. They have communicated that to me really well.

The other group that wrote specifically about that cut, aside from all the groups I've already talked about in the Culture debate, was Changing Together, which is a group that serves immigrant women – by immigrant women, for immigrant women – a really vital organization. They're volunteer based. The thing about the whole volunteer community is that there is a disproportionate number of women that volunteer for these organizations, and they are also the recipients of these organizations. So making a cut into the not-for-profit charitable volunteer sector really has an effect on women's lives in this province.

The point that Dilara, who is their executive director, was making to me was that they're criticized for how they manage their money, yet the model actually creates the duplication that they're criticized for. It keeps being offered as a project-based grant, and it's announced that it's all about youth this year or bullying this year. Well, everybody writes the grant, doing essentially the same work they're doing, but they target it now towards youth so that they can get some money to keep going and offer the services that they're offering. So, yeah, you get duplication. Well, you know, you set that one up yourself. Next year it's bullying, and everybody will write the grant targeted

towards bullying. You shouldn't be surprised about that. You created that situation.

She also makes the point that I just made about the preponderance of women who are volunteers, who keep these agencies going but who are also recipients of the services. She goes as far as to say, you know: isn't this an exploitation of labour, an exploitation of women? Now, I don't think I would actually accuse this government of doing that, but it sure works in your favour, doesn't it? It sure lets you do some stuff that ideologically you wanted to do. I don't know if it's an act of commission or omission. Nonetheless, it has a huge effect on women in this province.

A constituent wrote to me. I'm not making fun of the constituent, but he started out by expressing his dismay. He'd always supported me as a Conservative member and liked the work I was doing, but he was really upset with this particular decision. I, with heavy heart, wrote back and said: "Hmm. Not a Conservative. Never have been. Glad you like my work, though." His point was that he was very concerned about – his name is Bruce. I'll quote: However, I am dismayed by the government's decision in their last budget to slash funding to postsecondary institutions while not permitting an increase in tuition fees. He goes on: attaining higher education is an investment. Yes, indeed. I agree with him.

Specifically, what he was writing to ask is if the Conservatives had considered the model introduced last year in the United Kingdom. Last year their tuition fees tripled, but access was not denied because the government introduced a student loan program through which students could borrow money to pay for the fees. The students are not required to repay the loans until they earn an annual salary higher than 50,000 Great British pounds annually. This scheme acknowledges that the students are eventually likely to earn such large salaries, so the government will recoup their costs. The increased revenues through income taxes will cover the costs of the unpaid loans by those who do not earn such a high salary. During their degree the students are free to devote themselves full-time to their studies with no fear of bankruptcy if their investment does not pay off.

Elsewhere in the letter he talks about the fact that, you know, almost all of our university students are also working full-time at a job, and it's not conducive to great learning, and it takes them longer to do it. Thanks very much to Bruce for raising that point. I've now been able to raise it with the government and just kind of drill that home again.

This was another area where I was really surprised by the government because there was a lot of talk in the election and in the Premier's leadership race about postsecondary education and diversification and research and how much they value that. And then, yikes, they get in and make moves that really hurt postsecondary education, like serious cuts, really putting our universities in a very odd position, and then really-out-there explanations that came from the new minister of advanced education as to why that was being done.

I don't know why it was done. It really didn't make sense with what I'd heard from the government previously. It didn't jibe, but – you know what? – recently a lot of things don't mesh very well with what I heard people say earlier. It's the difference between what they say and what they do, and, boy, is there a big gap on that one.

Another big issue in my constituency – and I have started to get letters about it again – is the cost of rental housing. This government is adamantly opposed to any kind of rent cap, even a temporary one. Well, you know, I'm glad that you're in a position

where you don't have to worry about that kind of thing, but my constituents aren't. In this constituency we have probably the largest stock of rental housing in all of Edmonton because it's older housing stock and it's cheaper housing stock. We, too, have had a lot of conversions to condominiums. We can see as the economy is doing really well here – the government is not doing so well, but the economy is actually doing pretty well with the number of people employed, blah, blah, blah. So the rental rates are starting to go up again. People are writing to me going: how am I supposed to afford this? There's no cap on how much they can increase it, but they can only do it once a year, which was the result of the last change.

I don't know what to say to them. What do you say to somebody when their rent goes up by like, I think the last guy said, \$700? Well, you know, you're paying whatever, \$850, and all of a sudden it goes to \$1,500. I don't know how you cope with that. I think the answer is that you don't. You move. You try and find an even cheaper place, which is probably a little less safe in the structure and in the age of the building, whether there's any mould there and how likely it is to have vermin and all the rest of that stuff that you deal with in lower cost rental housing.

It is an issue for my constituents, and I wanted to make sure that I got that on the record because I think it's going to become more of an issue. I really do seriously think we need to look at temporary rent caps when that kind of thing happens. Eighteen months max, but it needs to be enough to ride out that real peak in what happens.

9:40

The government's excuse is always: well, you know, the landlords have to tough it out during the times when they've got more vacancies and they aren't able to charge as much. But you know what? They never drop the rent. They say: well, we'll throw in the Internet cost, or we'll throw in the cost of cable TV. But they never actually drop the rental rates on any of these places. I don't actually see them hurting very much, not that I want them to hurt, but I'm told that this is such a tough time for them. Well, it's a tougher time for people that are trying to find a secure place to live.

Housing security and food security are two really vital issues in our urban areas today and, for all I know, maybe in the rural areas, but I'm not going to comment on that because I don't have enough expertise to say it. But food and housing security are real issues for people, and they cause huge stress. I used to say: "Oh, stress-schmess. C'mon, who cares? Just, you know, suck it up. Get on with it. What is this stuff about stress?" But I'm persuaded by the evidence. You start to look at the medical evidence of what stress actually costs us in lost productivity and doctor visits and hospital visits, and you start going: "Okay. All right. I'm convinced. This counts." Creating situations like that does create stress. It is paid for in another part of our society. So don't think you're getting away with this, because we're going to all pay for it somewhere else.

That's part of the lesson that you actually did learn with the housing first project, that to insist on the old way of thinking about homeless people was costing all of us a lot of money because those people still got services. They got them through emergency rooms in the hospitals. They got it through the police services intervention. They got it through courts. They got it through jails. They got a place to sleep. They got food. They got it through places that we didn't think they were going to get it from, and it cost us money. It costs us way more money to do it that way than if we would provide the housing that they need and the housing security. So put that on the record.

I want to talk about the Condominium Property Act and the building codes, two things that need to be updated. That condo act is 30 years old, I think, or close to it. It is not dealing with the fact that we've had people living in condominiums now in the larger urban centres for 30 solid years. The issues that are coming up are long-term structural problems, so sinking funds and additional assessments are becoming a huge issue for people. I mean, imagine that you've almost paid off your \$100,000 or \$150,000 mortgage and your condo board decides that they're going to need to assess you \$25,000. Oh, my God. Like, you're not living in a grand place, and now you're going to have to try and come up with this additional money on top of the mortgage that you're already paying. It's a life-changing event, I'll tell you. That's their single biggest expenditure that they will ever lay out. It's the single biggest thing that they'll ever purchase. When we can't provide them with legislation that offers consumer protection, we're doing something wrong. We're doing something very wrong in this place.

So I will continue to push for much stronger changes to the condo act around both the building codes and what's possible and reasonable there but also around how the condo act actually works and how it's implemented for boards of directors and property managers and realtors and owners and sellers. The consultation process has been very frustrating. There have been, I think, three different committees that have come and gone and made recommendations that didn't particularly go anywhere. Now the minister is running another public consultation. You know, Minister, with all respect, we're kind of done with that. We really need to see these changes move faster rather than slower. I understand we're not going to see these changes come before us for another year, which is going to be very difficult.

I also want to put in a plug for this government to please develop life lease legislation. Life lease, as you probably don't know, is another kind of housing that is being provided that on the continuum sits between a rental property and a condominium. You are in a shared property, and you've paid money, a significant capital outlay, that goes into a fund that actually pays for the building of it. It's long and complicated. I'm not going to go into it right now, but there are a number of life leases in Alberta right now, and there is no legislation governing them.

I'm coming to the end of my time. Well, it's a good thing I'm on duty for tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Chair. I'll be able to get up in third reading and put the rest of my four pages of notes on the record.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with great interest to speak briefly on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013. This is, again, not dissimilar to Bill 12, that we were speaking on before. It's sort of a summation of the budget that we've just worked our way through and, I guess, an opportunity to highlight some areas that require improvement and why we, in fact, as New Democrats will be opposing this Appropriation Act for this year.

Again, I would just like to start off talking about broad strokes. When you are doing a budget, Mr. Chair, you have to ensure that you are not just dealing with your expenditures but with your revenue. Perhaps the fundamental failure of the budget for 2013 was the failure to deal realistically and honestly and with enough scope in regard to royalties, in regard to corporate taxes, and in regard to the flat personal income tax that we have here in the province of Alberta.

You know, Albertans are wily and intelligent. They know how budgets are produced and how you have both revenue and expenditure. They do it themselves. We do it ourselves, and we've become adept at watching how the government does it, too. By some magical sleight of hand, as I said before, while our population is increasing and our economy is increasing, somehow the government claims poverty and has run short of cash.

The explanation was long and elaborate, and it strained credibility with each passing week. In fact, by the time we are here, in these last few weeks, we know that the so-called price differential for our energy here in the province, the bitumen bubble, as it was coined, is pretty much the way it has been over the last number of years, with the usual vagaries of market fluctuation. You know, that whole explanation or excuse, as you might describe it, Mr. Chair, in fact just didn't hold water.

Yes, we do have a price differential between Alberta's energy and other places in the world because we are located in a different location on the map. One, we are in a different place, and transporting our energy products takes longer than if you are in another part of North America. Number two, we are dealing with a different energy source. All of these things Albertans know, right?

We are intimately involved in the oil and gas industry, where many of our jobs are. We read about it. Our family members are part of the energy industry. So, you know, you can't pull the wool over the eyes of a population that already is driving and is employed in the industry. I have lots and lots of relatives and friends, people that work in the oil industry and gas industry. They know exactly what the price differential is, and they know that that explanation rang hollow at best and, in fact, was an excuse to make another attack on public services here in the province of Alberta just like this government has done after the elections many, many times over.

When we're dealing with royalties, for example, we know that our royalty rates are lower than they should be, and Albertans know that, too. We saw a poll that just came out in the last 24 hours that demonstrated abundantly, clearly that, in fact, our royalty rates are bargain basement. They are inadequate, and they are leaving us with a deficit in our public expenditures that is resulting in the cuts to everything from education to health care to advanced education to municipalities.

I mean, just take a look at the roads, right? I only have to point as far as, you know, the roads that we drive on to and fro here in Edmonton to see that the level of infrastructure that we invest in in this province is not commensurate with the wealth and the industry that takes place within the boundaries of the province of Alberta. It's just not happening. It's embarrassing to see the level of road maintenance. It's one small example that people bring up to me all of the time.

9:50

It goes on, Mr. Chair, in regard to K to 12 education, some of the areas for which I'm responsible as a critic. You know, we know that we were fully capable of having an expenditure on public education, K to 12, that was commensurate with the increase in our population and the increase in the expense of living and of producing a public education system here in the province of Alberta, but instead we chose to make cuts, the extent of which is now becoming more clear.

We talked about this today, how one school board has taken all of the various bits and pieces, nooks and crannies of cuts and come up with just how short they actually are for their budget. It's a significant amount of money. It's almost \$19 million just for one school board. Here in the province of Alberta you can extrapolate the figures that they worked on there to suggest that, in fact, we

have a shortage of at least a hundred million dollars in our public education system for this next school year.

You do not make that sort of cut in a public education system. We know that we spend 80 per cent on education workers. If you take a hundred million dollars out, it's going to result in layoffs of teachers and layoffs of other support staff and larger class sizes and all of the things that go along with that. You know, stable, predictable funding for our public education system didn't happen. We failed to see the full-day kindergarten that we were expecting and hoping for over this next fiscal year and long-term funding as well. The AISI funding was eliminated, and we will see the negative results from all of those sorts of cuts.

In regard to Treasury Board and Finance, Mr. Chair, we were looking for stable and predictable funding for these public services. We didn't get it. We wanted to reduce our dependence on the oil and gas revenues that we're spending for operations, which we failed to do. We haven't fixed our revenue problem, and we end up with the vicious cycle of boom and bust that we have been locked into here in the province of Alberta for many, many years.

Advanced education. I mean, people know what sort of mayhem has been unleashed on our advanced education system, right? The stable, three-year, predictable funding that was promised was broken, of course, and capital funding taken away. We have effectively an 11 per cent reduction to postsecondary education, which will result in higher fees being charged to students and to the families of those students, one of which is mine. We're going to see reductions in faculty and so forth.

Again, an unnecessary cut not for the sake of the economy or the population growing in our province, Mr. Chair, but for the sake of ideology and confused priorities and the unwillingness to look realistically and seriously at our revenue problem in this province and this predilection of this government to serve and to follow the wishes of the very most wealthy in our province, individuals and corporations as well.

It's not a proud thing. I'm hoping that we can look for some constructive places where we can make some compromises here. I know from living through these kinds of public service cuts like we did 15 years ago that they cause systemic damage that is very difficult to fix. For example, if this government is allowing these sorts of cuts to fester in the health care sector, if you allow that to take place for more than a year – right? – which is bad enough, then you start to have the health professionals that actually make the system function, the boots on the ground that actually deliver health care, making decisions about moving to other places.

We saw that before, and if it happens again here, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, I will not stand for it. I not only have a great deal invested in the integrity of our public health system systemically but personally as well, right? I know that for my own family and the choices that they've made to become health professionals or to be trained as health professionals, if this doesn't get resolved, Mr. MLA from Edmonton-Manning, playing with your lips over there like you are, and we end up losing that next generation of student nurses, of which my daughter is one, I will hold you personally accountable for that. Do you know what I mean when I say that? Just so you know.

So, yeah, that's the way it's going to go, right? I take this job as a legislator, but I also take it as an Albertan who is raising my family here, and I find these sorts of cuts unnecessary. I find them to be objectionable. I find that the social fabric of our province is only as good as the next investment you make into it, Mr. Chair. I just hope that we can find a way to mitigate some of the damage that is taking place here now and in the immediate future;

otherwise, again, we end up having to pay down the road more than the original cut that's taking place.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm also pleased to rise and speak on Bill 20. There are issues with the budget. We are debating \$40 billion that we are going to spend, and we only had about 70 hours to scrutinize and debate the budget. There are cutbacks, and we are still going into debt. The debt was paid off in 2004. That was a \$23 billion debt, and there was a sustainability fund of \$17 billion. That is gone, and four years down the road we will be back into a \$17 billion debt again. That is like a runaway train. With the budget cutbacks teachers are getting laid off, class sizes are going up, and professors are getting laid off. There's no full-time KG, the STEP program has been cut, PDD lost \$45 million, I believe, and there's a \$146 million cutback to the PSE.

We didn't need to go down this road, Mr. Chairman. We heard the talk about Mr. Lougheed and Mr. Klein. They had fiscal plans in place, and we have deviated from those plans. Had we stuck to Mr. Lougheed's plan and had we been putting away 30 per cent of our oil revenues every year and had this progressive government stayed on course, you know, we could have had about \$150 billion in savings, not \$15 billion. If we placed \$3 billion per year into the heritage fund starting in 2013 until 2030 and if we get an 8 per cent rate of return and reinvest all of the profits of those first 10 years, the heritage trust fund would grow from today's \$15 billion to almost \$75 billion. That's lots of money. With the return on that money alone we wouldn't need to do any cutting back. We wouldn't need to borrow.

The government is claiming that they can borrow at preferred interest rates, but who knows what's going to happen five years down the road, 10 years down the road? I think we are going on the wrong path, and this budget is going to take us back into debt, Mr. Chair. The cutbacks to the PSE are really going to hurt.

10:00

I got a letter from my constituents that goes on to say:

Calgary, the 2012 Cultural Capital of Canada, is about to feel the affects of drastic cutbacks to Provincial Government funding to post-secondary institutions.

Tuesday it was announced that the entire Theatre and Music Program at Mount Royal University will be cut. Students, faculty and supporters of the arts are astonished and outraged at this very short-sighted decision. The ripple effects of such a decision will reverberate across the city.

Calgary is fortunate to have amazing high school band and theatre programs. At issue here is the commitment to maintaining a high quality training ground at the post-secondary level for young musicians and artists in Calgary. These programs serve to stimulate and grow arts and culture in our city. Enrollment in the MRU Jazz program is consistently two or three times the capacity, proving that young Calgarians demand to have a local option for training in Jazz music. Now, just as the current school year is ending, and with very little advanced notice, local students will have to leave the city to audition for and find other postsecondary music and theatre studies programs.

This letter goes on to say:

Just one year ago, Calgarians celebrated receiving the national distinction as the Cultural Capital of Canada. It began with enthusiastic statements by Calgary-Centre MP Lee Richardson who made the announcement on behalf of Heritage Minister James Moore. "Calgary is one of Canada's fastest

growing and most vibrant cities, and we look forward to working with the city to continue to promote the arts, boost tourism, and grow our economy.”

The government of Alberta, through its 2008 *Education and Lifelong Learning* policy in “*Spirit of Alberta*” says that “It is essential that the education system, from early childhood development to post secondary, contribute to Alberta’s cultural development. Our schools have a valuable role to play in transmitting cultural values and in enabling cultural and creative exploration for young people. Investment in lifelong learning institutions such as schools, post-secondary institutions, interpretative centres, historic sites, libraries and museums will ensure the long-term viability of our important cultural resources.” If the proposed cuts to the MRU Theatre and Music Program proceed, many talented individuals will choose to leave the community and seek employment elsewhere. Our local aspiring theatre and music students will leave the city and/or the province in order to study.

Unfortunately, what began in 2012 on a high note for arts and culture in the city of Calgary is ending in tragedy.

I’ve got another letter here saying:

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed cuts to the Theatre and Music Programs at Mount Royal University. Due to provincial funding cutbacks, the university has had to make some difficult choices. On recommendation from academic administration, you will be voting to suspend intake into the Theatre and Music Performance Diplomas effective Fall 2013. While current students will be able to continue next year to finish their diplomas, no new students will be accepted into the forthcoming years. This equates to a loss of 120 student seats in theatre and music programs and possibly the end of the University’s Shakespeare In the Park program – a twenty five year Calgary institution [will be gone.] These cuts have a significant impact on the mentorship of emerging artists in Calgary. These programs provide a constant flow of new creativity to the vibrance of the Calgary community. Without them, Calgary’s cultural identity will suffer. I urge you to reconsider this decision and recognize the impact it will have on all aspects of this community from professional theatres, dance, opera, musical performance venues, clubs and entertainment and cultural life of this city.

I’ve got another letter here saying:

I cannot fathom how such a misguided decision can be made with regards to cutting the Mount Royal University theatre and Music Programs.

As a former teacher of the arts it sickens me the way this province has eroded our band and music programs in our schools and is now taking aim at the university level. What will our legacy be? What happened to a ‘well-rounded person?’

Keep culture in Alberta. Please.

There’s another one here. It goes on to say:

I was disheartened to learn about the impending budget cuts to postsecondary education following the 2013 budget announcement on Thursday, March 7, 2013. A hundred-forty-seven million dollars in budget cuts to the postsecondary education is no small amount, and this challenges each and every postsecondary institution in the province that mandates to provide quality learning to young adults.

It goes on to say:

I am an employee at Mount Royal University. As one of the leading undergraduate institutions, MRU has done an excellent job of creating experiential learning experiences for its students, and everyone who is a part of this community takes pride in the role we play in the lives of our students and in helping to fulfill this mandate under an already strained operating budget.

It goes on to say:

I am a member of your constituency, a citizen of this province, and a tax payer of this province. I feel that our government has made a decision that is not in the best interest of Albertans by causing a huge unnecessary burden to our PSEs. It is through the PSE system that our province will be able to sustain its economic engine in the country. In order for the government to diversify our economy and take care of our environment, we need to invest even more in our PSEs so that we have a highly skilled workforce. Investing in our youth is the only way that we are able to keep our economic engine propelling forward and compete in a very competitive global market.

Please rethink this action against post-secondary education. Students have had to deal with increasing tuition costs; they should not have to deal with a compromised experience or a decrease in the quality of education they receive.

Education is an investment. Money put toward education is an investment. I get so many other letters. Albertans are demanding that there should be no cutbacks to education. There was a promise that there would be three years of sustainable funding and, you know, an increase of 2 per cent every year, but there has been \$146 million cut from PSE. That’s going to make students leave the province.

You know what happened during the ‘90s with the cutbacks. We lost all the nurses, doctors. We’ve got people moving to Alberta, and we’re going to need our doctors, nurses, and all the skilled people, so if you keep on cutting back on education, everything is going to suffer. We will pay for this in the long run. This budget is affecting not only one segment of the population; it’s affecting a whole lot of Albertans. For those reasons, Mr. Chair, I will not be supporting the budget.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers?

If there are no other speakers, I’ll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That’s carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 20.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

10:10 Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 15
Emergency 911 Act

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 16
Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment with the requisite copies that I would hand to the Clerk.

The Chair: We'll get the pages to circulate that.

Hon. members, this being the first amendment, it will be amendment A1.

Proceed, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief. This is the only amendment that I'll be putting forward. What this section does is amend Bill 16 by striking out section 2(c). Typically the review board consists of three members, and what section 2(c) does is eliminate that requirement in certain circumstances and would allow for essentially one person to make a decision to dispose of property. I guess the rationale for this amendment is that if in the act there's a reason to have three people make a very important decision, why allow a cop-out by allowing only one person to make that decision?

It's a very simple amendment, Mr. Chair. We take, obviously, the process of taking someone's property rights as a very serious thing. We think that the appropriate due diligence should occur, and if it is three members that typically make this decision, I would ask that the government consider this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Speaking on the amendment, I understand that the minister and the MLA spoke this afternoon. Bill 16 was drafted with extensive consultation with the Criminal Injuries Review Board, the CIRB. There's general agreement with the CIRB to go ahead with this clause. The CIRB administers appeals, which is a vital function. CIRB members are very strong advocates for victims, and the appeals will happen faster with section 2(c) as it is.

We won't be supporting this amendment, but I'd like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for his input.

The Chair: Are there other speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Chair, I'd ask that we rise and report Bill 15 and Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 15, Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the opposition for the work we've done tonight. I think we've made some substantial progress. I would suggest that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:16 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Alberta Hansard
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