

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Thursday Evening, May 2, 1974

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair at 8:00 o'clock.]

GOVERNMENT BILLS AND ORDERS
(Second Reading)Bill No. 55 The Northeast Alberta Regional Commission Act

MR. RUSSELL:

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move second reading of Bill No. 55, the Northeast Alberta Regional Commission Act.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to provide in as effective a manner as possible for the orderly development and supply for people of the necessary support and related services that will accompany the very exciting resource development in the northeast region of Alberta.

I'd like to bring to the hon. members' attention, just for a moment, some comments about the region because it is very unique, Mr. Speaker. This bill, I think, is rather non-typical in many ways. But I think it has to be, because of the uniqueness of the region and the uniqueness of the job that must be done and done effectively.

The region, I think, has five characteristics, the first of which is its very location. It's rather remote, both in the context of Canada and our province. So in that regard, Mr. Speaker, like any remote area it tends to be perhaps in many ways behind in general level of services that are available now and upon which we might find a foundation to build.

The second point I think we have to consider is the population makeup of the region, because the region generally is very sparsely populated. Except for the current growth centre of Fort McMurray, it's generally very rural. There is a [large number] of Natives in the region for whom, if the opportunity is handled properly, there is a good chance to enhance the standard of living and give job opportunities.

Another characteristic of the region is the form of government that now exists. I know hon. members are aware that this takes in most of the existing Improvement District No. 18, all that lying north of Township 80. For these very reasons, because of its remoteness, because it is an improvement district, because of its sparse population, it still has what we call in Alberta unorganized municipal government. To that extent there is no form of local autonomy in the municipal government now existing.

So we simply don't have a base to fall back on in the regional context, by way of a regional planning commission or any sort of local council that might be of assistance or provide us with the very necessary help.

The fourth unique characteristic of the region, of course - this is unique in the world - is the resource which it contains. Hon. members are well aware of the value and the uniqueness of the Alberta oil sands.

I shouldn't leave the region without commenting on its future. If there is a part of our nation or part of this world that has a golden opportunity to advance for the general benefit of all participants involved, it certainly has to be the oil sands region of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, thinking about that potential development - I am sure all of us at one time or another have pondered the very exciting possibilities that exist there. There is

no doubt that the resource will be developed. We're all aware of the applications which have been made public, the interest by large corporations and the interest of the citizens of Alberta in becoming involved there. I think on that basis it's absolutely essential that the support services are provided in an effective manner, that they come on stream on time and that they work in concert with the resource development that does take place in the region.

Hon. members will recall that at the time the bill was introduced I tabled this organizational chart showing how the government hoped the vast challenge in resource development might be organized, and how at the same time the very complex, complicated and costly array of government services, both physical and social, might be provided in the very critical time frame which faces us as we develop the oil sands region of Alberta.

I think in weighing the merits of this bill it's absolutely necessary that we also weigh and keep in mind the fantastic investment which is going into that area, Mr. Speaker. We've heard of plants that are proposed, and it looks by current market values as if the value of each plant might be in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion. We can all do our own arithmetic as we multiply that by each plant that might come on stream in the coming years. I don't know what the value of supporting or allied industries that may go along with the plants might be, but certainly in anybody's form of arithmetic the investment dollars for our Alberta future which are going to be put into that region are mind-boggling.

The support dollars which are going to be necessary to build the communications network, the human settlements, the housing and the social services facilities that have to go in are also pretty mind-boggling.

At the time I tabled the organization chart for the assistance of the hon. members, I was also able to file an estimate for the provincial funds that will be invested in the next five-year period in all probability just in the existing town of Fort McMurray, and they come to about \$121 million. Mr. Speaker, that's a tremendous investment. That really only provides for the development of the town for residential and industrial lots and for housing funds. That figure really doesn't include the costs of support services such as schools, hospital beds or all those very necessary things. So we're talking in terms of large amounts of money here, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's essential that we make sure those dollars are invested for our future wisely, with some organization and with the necessary dispatch.

There have been some moves made to date with respect to this region in Alberta and with respect to the town of Fort McMurray itself. I have mentioned, and I think all members are aware of, the extraordinary amount of attention in the planning field in order to try to achieve a good urban centre in Fort McMurray. I have talked about the dollars that have been expended, and in fact those figures have previously been tabled in the House - and again, Mr. Speaker, it's a lot of money.

We are now ready to embark on a similar kind of planning but with wider parameters, and I'm talking about the regional planning. We've given this considerable thought in the last two years, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the regional planning or the thoughts of what might happen once Fort McMurray developed and got on the road, had been given very much attention, and it was really only a couple of weeks ago that we were finally able to commission a large consortium of Edmonton-based consultants who will be responsible for the various aspects of this necessary regional planning.

We've encouraged Alberta firms to be used wherever possible in planning or construction, either by private industry or by government. I'm happy to say the firms that will be involved, all Edmonton-based, in the regional planning in Fort McMurray will have in excess of 185 employees working on that particular project.

When we looked at and analysed - and we did this in many different ways, Mr. Speaker - what the challenges were in that area, it seemed to break down into four very basic subject matters.

First of all, somebody has to undertake the planning. We have to plan the region. Somebody has to build things, and by things I mean big things like new towns and communications networks, transportation facilities and all the more detailed infrastructures and facilities that go with those kinds of things. So I think it's a planning and building job that probably not many people in a lifetime get an opportunity to become associated with.

Along with that very exciting project, of course, is an orderly method of arranging the necessary financing. And as the region develops, as it becomes populated, as perhaps new towns grow up around the new plants, it's going to be necessary to arrange for the orderly transfer of local administration to the new municipalities. In that regard again we perhaps want something that is a little better coordinated than the past experience we have had with The New Towns Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, we now come to Bill No. 55. It's a short bill but it's a very powerful bill. It gives a lot of authority for very obvious reasons to a person who is going to have tremendous responsibility. It tries to look ahead, Mr. Speaker, at what might happen. I have outlined some of the more obvious things, but also equally obviously there are going to be things occurring in that region that perhaps none of us foresaw. And with literally every department of government involved in one way or another up there, it's absolutely essential that we get a very strong, centralized and well thought out project coordinator. For that reason we want, through this legislation, to provide for that authority, provide for those responsibilities in the form of the northeast regional commissioner.

This leads us to the obvious question, how does this bill infringe on local autonomy or the traditional pattern that we've been familiar with in most parts of Alberta? I say most parts of Alberta because ...

MR. STROM:

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you would mind if I asked a question of clarification. You mentioned five points. I got four, but I didn't get a fifth one. I'm wondering if I missed it. I'd like to get it, Mr. Speaker, if I may, please.

MR. RUSSELL:

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was talking about the five characteristics of the region and the four points that are the main duties of the commissioner. Those four points were to plan, to build, to arrange financing and to arrange for local administration to be phased in.

So again, in the context of local autonomy, we have to look at the existing situation there.

First of all, the entire oil sands region does not now have local autonomy, and it will not have it if we follow the traditional Alberta pattern of development until there is substantially more development, a better developed tax and assessment base and considerably more people there ready to take on the responsibilities of what we call organized government.

So it's like many other regions in Alberta that we call improvement districts. It has an advisory committee that advises the government, mainly through the Department of Municipal Affairs, on things that seem current or important in their area.

We go to the town of Fort McMurray, the one organized municipality within the region, and we find that really a similar situation exists there. At the present time they really do not have full local autonomy. But I think certainly it would be everybody's hope in this room that they would develop to the point where that would come. Fort McMurray is an old settlement in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and at one time it did have autonomy.

At the time of the oil sands boom and the coming of the first plant, the town out of necessity and choice reverted to what is known in Alberta as new town status. Since then it has gradually gone through the steps that are associated with new town status.

From a totally appointed board of administration which is appointed by the provincial government, they went to the next form of board which is half elected and half appointed and finally reached, at their last election some two and a half years ago, a fully elected board. Since that time they have had three resignations and in the by-elections that have been carried out we have seen one appointee of the provincial government return to the board. This was at my request in discussions with the existing board as to whether or not they thought it would be a good idea to have at least one appointee on the existing board, and they agreed to that. So we now have six elected members and one appointed.

Mr. Speaker, I can't really see that situation changing. By change I mean reverting. I would expect in the normal course of events that Fort McMurray, hopefully in the near future, will be able to grasp the reins of financial responsibility and full local decision-making authority and go on to regular town status. The exact point of time when that might happen I can't say. To a great degree that depends on the town of Fort McMurray itself. There is really no reason, if they are able to cope with the array of challenges that are now before them, that the office of commissioner should interfere with the degree of autonomy they now have. I'll return to this aspect of the bill in a moment because it is an important part of it.

I'd like to talk about other towns that will in all likelihood develop. I would expect that they would go through a similar kind of process.

We have before us now a very current example of a rather glamorous new town based on a resource industry. I am thinking specifically, Mr. Speaker, of Grande Cache. It is easy to look back and see where good intentions went awry. I think we'd not be using our

responsibility properly if we did not all benefit from the mistakes that were made in that particular experience. I think we have gained, all of us, some good experience from what went wrong there and why some extraordinary measures had to be taken later on to help the new town of Grande Cache. In a way they are in a growth period similar to Fort McMurray's. They are both new towns. They both have elected and appointed members on their boards. They are both trying to cope with local problems to the best of their ability.

The other thing I wanted to mention, because I think it's particularly important, is a mandatory provision in the bill for an advisory committee of citizens. I know that under the ID act we would automatically have the ID advisory committee. I think it's essential that in addition to that we have this other committee of local citizens who would be more directly involved in the current problems that face the area and could advise the commissioner and his staff and through them or perhaps directly to government advise us of good and bad directions that might be occurring. So I think the mandatory provision for the advisory committee in this whole context of local autonomy is a very important provision included in the act.

There has been a great deal of surmising, I guess is the word, about how long this process I have mentioned might take or how long the commissioner's office might have to be in existence. I would only be guessing, probably very badly, if I tried to put a figure on that. Mr. Speaker, as far as I'm concerned, the sooner and the smoother this transition period of growth and the taking over of local responsibility occurs, I am sure the happier all hon. members will be. Obviously this is going to be a phasing-in period, and the commissioner's responsibilities will perhaps be greater in the early years and phase out finally to nothing in the later years. But I couldn't, and I don't think any hon. member could, accurately predict how long that would be. Hopefully, not very long.

Mr. Speaker, I hope those opening comments I have just given will cause all hon. members to pause for a moment and think of the magnitude and importance of the task that is obviously going to be in front of us, must obviously happen better if it's well organized and of necessity will obviously have better results for everyone concerned if it has a strong man at the helm. You'll find in the act that the commissioner is given rather extraordinary powers with respect to seeking regulations through order in council that can do some of the things we were talking about earlier today in debate on another bill. We do have the provision in the act that these must be ratified or cease to be in effect by the last day of the next ensuing session of the Legislature. And again I think that is a very important provision.

But I want to be very frank with the hon. members in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. There may be times when, in order to get the job done, the commissioner will have to seek those powers that are provided for in the legislation. I would hope they wouldn't happen very often. I can think of a current example where, had the commissioner been in office, the government would probably have asked him to use this authority. I am thinking now specifically of the provision of a new high school in Fort McMurray.

Mr. Speaker, this was an urgent problem when this government took office some two and one-half years ago. I am disappointed to say that despite the best efforts of myself and many of my cabinet colleagues, particularly the Minister of Education, that critical new high school still isn't started. I don't think a pencil has even been put to paper. Yet the student population is increasing at a very rapid rate and we simply have to have the facilities.

In cases like that we would ask the commissioner to say to the school board, if you can't reach a decision on this critical issue within ten or fourteen days, or whatever a reasonable time might be, I'll decide for you. Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to have the necessary facilities in the area. I have tried to outline the sense of urgency, the sense of vastness, the sense of huge investment and the motives and needs of this bill. I would hope that all hon. members would support it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER:

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray.

DR. BOUVIER:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in saying just a few words on this bill, I would like to start by pointing out that I am aware of the problems in the oil sands development area, especially those in the town of Fort McMurray, and of the necessity to coordinate and expedite the activities of the provincial government and its agencies with the local authorities in the region to effect orderly and efficient development in the region as the bill proposes.

I am also of the opinion, Mr. Speaker, that drastic situations often require drastic action. However, Mr. Speaker, I am not at all certain that the situation is so drastic that it requires the action proposed in Bill No. 55.

It has been obvious for some time that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been unable to cope with the orderly development in Fort McMurray, even with the assistance of his good friends Cohos, Evamy and partners. The result has been a lack of development, an acute shortage of housing. Also the area has become a speculator's paradise. Prices have generally escalated beyond reason with speculators raking in the bonanza at the expense of the average citizen and the taxpayers.

One is also aware of the fact that the town board of Fort McMurray has had problems in dealing effectively and efficiently with the development within Fort McMurray. They have often been accused of holding up development. They've had problems, the main problem being lack of coordination with other local authorities and, of course, especially with the provincial government. An example which the minister has cited, of course, is the high school site. Everybody, I believe, is aware of what transpired there, or what has not transpired.

The bill, Mr. Speaker, proposes a one-man dictatorship, and that's all we can call it, to deal with the development of the oil sands region.

SOME HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

DR. BOUVIER:

I can see many pitfalls to a one-person commission, even with an advisory committee, and I have no choice but to oppose this bill in principle as it now stands. A one-man dictatorship would certainly be effective and efficient. The government is obviously aware of the efficiencies of dictatorship. Decisions can be arrived at very rapidly, but not always wisely. The most important consideration of a one-person commission would, of course, be who the person is. I must admit that if the person is the right one, it might function. However, we have no idea who this person might be, how effective he might be and how he would exercise such vast powers.

I am also concerned about a one-man commission or a one-person commission because the lobbyists would have a field day. It's much easier to influence one person than it is to influence a larger group. I'm sure that the speculators, or the developers as they prefer to be called, would like this process. Things would likely proceed at a faster pace, but at what price?

I'm also opposed to an advisory committee being appointed by the government, as the end result would likely be a committee recommended by the commissioner to which he wouldn't even have to listen anyway. We've previously seen in the area a committee appointed by a government and recommended by the person who was in charge and whom they were supposed to advise. I'm referring to the NewStart project.

I realize that the commissioner, according to the bill, would hold office at the pleasure of the Lieutenant Governor in Council and therefore, in theory, would be responsible to elected officials. But it's more likely that the cabinet would be responsible for the commissioner. Having given him full powers, it would be very difficult to restrict him. They would have to stand behind him, like it or not, or they could fire him and start over again.

I think The Edmonton Journal in its editorial of April 30 summed up the situation, and probably what I am trying to say is pretty much the same thing; that the motive seems to be excellent but the method is objectionable. I was a little surprised when I read this editorial. I was just thinking that if this editorial had been written in 1971 about a Social Credit government trying to pass this bill I wouldn't be holding this paper right now, it would be too hot for me to hold or it would be self-destructing and burning up by now. But this was a very light slap on the wrist to the government and I think it must be a pretty serious situation if the Journal came out and slapped the government on the wrist.

The Journal in its editorial also suggested an alternative. They seem to want yet another department in this government to deal specifically with the oil sands region. Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had a minister in charge of the oil sands development up to now. I feel quite sure that the people of Fort McMurray would be quite willing to accept a change in ministers but I don't know whether a new department would really answer the problem. We've seen departments trying to operate within government which cut across the lines of other departments, we've seen the Northern Alberta Development Council, we now see the rural development and we can see how ineffective this becomes. For various reasons they don't seem to be able to get a job done because they are always dealing with

other ministers where the other ministers have jurisdiction and it doesn't seem to work too well.

However, Mr. Speaker, if the government is bound on going the way of a commission then I'd like to offer my own alternative suggestion. I'd like to suggest that this commission be a three-person commission, appointed by the minister in consultation with local authorities as local authorities are defined in the bill, responsible to the minister with the minister, of course, in turn responsible for the commission to the Legislature and accountable for its actions. Such a three-person commission with some reduced powers, would be small enough so as not to be unwieldy, but would have the benefit of constant consultation among the members of the commission and, hopefully, decisions would be arrived at more wisely if not as rapidly. A three-person commission would also be more difficult to influence by people with vested interests.

As far as an advisory committee is concerned, I agree that one is necessary. However, I would certainly prefer to see such a committee elected in the region and responsible to the electors, as was suggested by the Journal, or at least appointed by the various local authorities as defined in the act, but definitely not appointed by the government. As I've said, I'd also like to see some powers placed in the hands of this committee so that it can't be absolutely ignored as most advisory committees have a tendency to be.

I just can't see placing as much power as Bill No. 55 suggests in the hands of one person, Mr. Speaker. I realize the minister has said that the area is unorganized now, but Fort McMurray to some extent has local autonomy. It had almost full local autonomy at one time but Section 7 of the act could erase that very rapidly, where a commissioner may act on behalf of local authorities under certain circumstances and, of course, we don't know what those circumstances are likely to be. They could be almost any circumstances.

But Section 8 of the act is even worse. It gives not only the commissioner but the government dictatorial powers. Under this section they could suspend any act and, of course, we've seen that this government will do just that. So we have no reasons to think that with the powers in this bill they are not going to do just that.

The minister has referred to this part, and looking at it it would appear from the chart - if I read it correctly and I hope that the minister will correct me if I'm wrong - that he's visualizing and having the Northern Alberta Development Council as the advisory committee to the commissioner. The way the chart is drawn up, that's the way it appears to me. There is nothing on the chart that suggests an advisory committee, and where the advisory committee appears on the other side of the chart a northern development council appears on the one side.

So, Mr. Speaker, in referring to what the minister has said, that the region is unique, that the region is remote, behind in services and sparsely populated with Natives, I wonder if he also thinks that the people are rather behind. I must come to that conclusion after reading Bill No. 55.

He says there are fantastic investments in the area. We've been given a sheet that projects the investments of the provincial government, by 1979 to \$129.5 million. I suppose to that you could add the half million that Cohos, Delesalle and Evamy received in 1973 only, just for some planning.

He said planning was very important and I suppose that only Cohos could be charged with doing this job, although they'd had no experience in planning before they went to Fort McMurray. It's quite obvious that they still have very little.

Well, Mr. Speaker, in closing, if some of the principles I've outlined are incorporated in this bill I could probably find it possible to support it. Because, as I've said, the situation requires some action. However, with Section 8 in there I don't see how I could support it at all.

MR. GRUENWALD:

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make just very few comments on Bill No. 55. I would have to say at the outset that I believe the Minister of Municipal Affairs in his approach to this bill, as with other things, is usually quite dogmatic and quite true to his training as an architect. He has planned his presentation and his reasons for preparing this bill quite well. I can understand that. I can see what he's trying to do and I can why he's trying to do it, but I'm a little concerned about the amount of authority that may be given to a single person. This is probably the underlying criticism or concern that the minister will find most people will have.

In looking at the bill though, the thing I wonder about, Mr. Minister, is that there are more 'mays' in it than there are 'shalls'. Now I would just like to briefly refer to two or three parts without being called to order as far as going into sections is concerned. But even in Section 2 they said, "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may establish a region" and in the next part, "The Region may include" certain parts. But the

next part, Section 3, is the one I was more concerned about: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint an officer". My question is, if that means what it says, if it is permissive, if an officer is not appointed, then what would be the alternative? In other words, it would appear to me that the option is left open as to whether one would be appointed or not. This implies a certain uncertainty in that section. It would be of interest to me to know what the real intention is.

Under the functions, and certainly they are far-reaching and much power is given under Section 4, I would be concerned also about a single person having authority to outlaw or rule against any local authority that is there now. Before I forget, I wonder if the minister could tell us what the status of the Northland School Division is at this particular time - if they are functioning, if there is a board there yet or if there isn't, just where they stand on that - and whether the minister has consulted with the local people in the Fort McMurray area, in particular where there are some governing bodies at the present time, whether they are excited about this, whether they are concerned about this bill or whether they really agree with it.

On the matter of advisory committees, generally speaking I think that people on advisory committees find themselves in difficult positions. The word means exactly what it says. They are only advisors and no one is compelled to take their advice. This is a frustrating thing. With that in mind, generally speaking I look at advisory committees as little more than pacifiers. It would seem to me - and this is where I would have to agree with the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray - that if we are going to have more than one person, and I really believe there should be, I think they should be appointed, if they want to be, or elected, but with authority. I really and truly think that an advisory committee - I'm not very high on them because you don't have to take their advice. If you don't, you have a very frustrating type of situation. You are better if you didn't have them in the first place because all you do is make people mad. It really upsets them.

Now in Section 5 also it says, "The Minister shall establish a committee". But then down further it says, "The Minister may ... appoint the members". Now I'm just wondering what is meant there. If members are not appointed then what would be the alternative to them? This leaves me just wondering.

I'm also wondering, when we talk about the tremendous duties the commissioner would have, would he have also the right to tax like a local authority would, for example, in order to raise funds for the local people's contribution to the funds that would be needed to do the various necessary things that we refer to here? I think it would be very interesting to know whether his powers could go that far.

One of the bad things about having one person appointed in a situation like that is he is really not responsible to the local people. I think this could be a frustrating thing also. It is true that he's responsible to the minister and to the Executive Council. But very often there's a good chance that he may make his mistakes, but it's after the cause. I mean it's much too late then. About the best you can do is fire him, and that makes it rather difficult as far as correcting mistakes is concerned.

For that reason I really believe that if there were, say, three or four people appointed with authority, it wouldn't be a cumbersome board, but I believe there would be a lot of merit in that procedure as weighed against the suggestion of one particular commissioner. Like I say, the one person having full authority - it's just like he's judge, he's jury, he's everything - I'm sure that this is bound to cause some headaches for a lot of people, even for the minister himself.

I think these are the types of things, Mr. Minister, that I would be interested in having and that would have a big bearing as to how enthusiastically I could support this bill.

MR. NOTLEY:

Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate, I'd like to say at the outset that I appreciate the very comprehensive introduction that the minister gave in introducing this bill. I think that shows at least some courtesy to us on this side of the House so that we know what the government is thinking and we know their line of argument. I'd just like to express that appreciation.

There is clearly no doubt that some form of coordination is necessary in the oil sands region. Regardless of what concerns I'm going to express in a moment or two, there is a necessity for coordination of planning and the delivery of support services. The minister, in introducing the bill, cited the example of Grande Cache. That's a fair example. He could also, for that matter, cite the example of Fort McMurray itself as an indication of what a lack of long-term planning can mean as far as housing prices spiralling, speculators making enormous profits and what have you.

When you consider the whole range of problems we have to deal with in developing the oil sands, and by problems I'm talking mainly about the human resource problem, it is necessary that we have some kind of coordinated planning process. So I don't argue that point.

But I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I share some of the concerns which have been expressed both by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray as well as the hon. Member for Lethbridge West.

The bill provides enormous powers to the commissioner. He, first of all, has the power which can be assigned to him by any jurisdiction in the region. I wonder if a jurisdiction for one reason or another is a little unwilling to assign powers whether or not they might find themselves under pressure to do so. Indeed Section 7(b) makes that very clear because the Lieutenant Governor in Council may assign the powers of the local authority to the commissioner. So if the commissioner isn't successful, for example, in enticing the new town of Fort McMurray to agree to the surrender of certain powers, well, the Lieutenant Governor in Council can soon fix that and the powers will rest with the commissioner.

Section 8 has been cited by both of the former hon. members who spoke [as having] tremendous powers to vary regulations under a tremendous range of acts. We're talking about The Improvement Districts Act, The New Towns Act, The Municipal Government Act, The Municipal Election Act and The Municipal Taxation Act. The hon. Member for Lethbridge West raised the question of whether or not the commissioner will in effect have the power to tax. It would seem to me that for that period of time anyway, before the regulations come back to the House, he will have the power to tax because The Municipal Taxation Act is concluded, and The Local Authorities Board Act, The School Act, The School Election Act, The Northland School Division Act, et cetera.

So he's given just unbelievable powers, almost the powers that one saw in Canada during the War Measures Act when it was imposed in 1970. While I realise that there's a necessity for integrated planning, I really have to stop and ask myself whether or not the urgency is sufficient that we in effect are going to say to one-eighth of the province that we are going to put many of the basic rights which Albertans should expect into cold storage for a number of years, whether that's two years, three years or five years. The minister at one time was quoted in the press as saying, as long as 15 years. Tonight I notice in introducing the bill he was a little more careful in outlining how long he envisages the commissioner concept to last.

But for a period of time in any event what we are doing, in effect, is relegating one-eighth of the province to the position of being little more than a colony administered by one person.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to ask ourselves how this proposal squares with the recommendations of the civil servants who prepared the report tabled last fall on oil sands development, because I think their report, whether one agrees with every aspect of it or not, was a pretty thorough documentation of many of the problems in the oil sands region with some concrete suggestions.

I quote, Mr. Speaker, for the information of the members from page 75 of the report. The report talks about two options. For instance it says;

... it would be possible to establish a single Athabasca Tar Sands Development Commissioner responsible for all government administration within the bituminous sands region and reporting to a single Cabinet Minister.

Obviously that's the approach which is implicit in Bill No. 55.

However, the civil service report goes on to say:

However, a concept of administration embodying the concepts of dispersion of authority and the reliance on consensus appears to be more acceptable. This would mean adopting the structure similar to current structure found within government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the report goes on to suggest that an office of commissioner could be established. But it says, and I cite page 80:

This would not be an administrative function, but it would be one of monitoring, evaluating, coordinating, integrating and expediting decision making for reference to the government. ... a regional systems integrator providing lateral integration within a specified geographic region resulting in a bridging of functions and administrations into a comprehensive matrix.

Mr. Speaker, as I read the civil servants' report, what I see in their recommendation is a much more modest proposal which recognizes the urgency of coordination but at the

same time doesn't arm the commissioner with the broad sweeping power which he possesses under Sections 7 and 8 of Bill No. 55.

A very important question we have to ask in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, is what steps will be taken to make this commissioner accountable, first of all accountable to the Legislature? I realize that when the minister introduced the bill he advised us that under Section 8(2) all the regulations will expire after the last day of the next ensuing session of the Legislature unless they are reported to the Legislature, so there will be some report processed.

But I am concerned that there should in fact be no block between the minister being responsible for this commissioner and the Legislature. I would hope - and I am not making an accusation now, but rather [I am] saying this in the form of a question expressing an opinion - I would hope that everything the commissioner does in his work and his activities would be fully reportable and accountable to the Legislature through the minister. I wouldn't like to see the sort of situation we find with the Minister of Telephones and Utilities when it comes to something that the Public Utilities Board does. We are told that this is a quasi-judicial body and therefore the minister can't comment on it. I would hope that under Bill No. 55 everything that commissioner does and the complaints brought to our attention as members of the Legislature be raised on the floor of the Legislature and that during the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs every aspect of the commissioners operations from top to bottom could be fully examined in this House. I assume that is what the minister has in mind but I want to stress the importance of it because when you consider the tremendous powers given to this individual, I think accountability to the Legislature is critically important.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray also raised another valid point, and that is the question of the advisory board.

I doubt that an advisory board, Mr. Speaker, which is appointed by the cabinet or in effect by the minister on the advice probably of the commissioner, is really going to be a very effective means of making that commissioner accountable to local residents. I suggest we seriously consider the election of the advisory board and the definition of its powers in the legislation setting up the commissioner's office.

The suggestion of an election is not that far out. As the minister probably knows - and certainly the minister responsible for northern development knows - one of the things the province of Saskatchewan has done is to make the northern development council an elective body. Now I am not suggesting that making it an elective body is going to solve all the problems, far from it, but at least it is going to make your advisory committee independent from the government. I think that what you want from an advisory committee is candid advice from people who are quite prepared to bite the hand that is feeding the area and people who are quite prepared to stand up to the commissioner or to the government, because there really isn't much point in having an advisory board which isn't able to effectively carry out the important role of maintaining some sort of local input.

I would just like to say that when we look at something as large as the oil sands there is the automatic assumption that it's necessary to have one man with enormous power and somehow this one man can cut through all the layers of bureaucracy and expedite decision-making and what have you. I'm inclined to agree with the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray that a dispersion of authority is wise. If you have too much authority in one man's hand it is going to be easy for vested interests of one kind or another, various lobbying groups, to influence the one man rather than a situation where you have a dispersion of authority. I think that you probably minimize the impact of lobbying by large groups if you have some dispersion of authority.

Now, I wanted to say just a word or two about the commissioner concept. I know the argument is made and, in part, well made by the minister that one man has to have enormous power to carry out the purposes of this act. Yet at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I think we have to candidly look at other parts of Canada where one man does have that kind of power. Let's take a look at the Yukon or the Northwest Territories for example where, while you have elected assemblies, you have the commissioner with enormous power. He can really play God in both these regions. They are little more than colonies in Canada. I can assure the hon. members of this House that I am sure anyone who has been to either territory would agree that the commissioner system there doesn't necessarily lead to the most efficient kind of government. Far from it. What it generally leads to is a centralization of power in one man's hands. Often decisions that should be made are stymied because the man in the centre hasn't got the time to make all the decisions which the umbrella of his power permits him to make.

I want to say another thing, Mr. Speaker, about the whole area of local input. I think this is very important. It relates back to the question of the advisory committee. If we are going to learn from the mistakes of Grande Cache and perhaps even some of the initial mistakes that were made at Fort McMurray, and certainly the mistakes that have

been made in a multitude of new communities right across Canada, it seems to me that one of the most important things to keep in mind is the need for ongoing local input.

There are just too many decisions which are made by people who haven't got the foggiest idea what the implications of that decision are in the local community. You can have some high-powered planners, both private and public for that matter, who may be able to make a very logical position on paper, but it just doesn't have any practical application in the community itself. So the local input isn't put, especially when we are talking about housing. When you have a chance to chat with people who live in Fort McMurray about the housing arrangements in that community and some of the problems they have had in the last few years, it is pretty clear that whatever mistakes the new town board may make, at least those mistakes are no worse than some of the mistakes of the appointed administrators or the hired consultants.

I want to raise still another point and that is to ask the minister if he can be a little more specific in pinning down the timetable for the reinstatement, if you like, of local government, especially in the community of Fort McMurray. I realize that is a difficult question to answer. But the fact of the matter is that the minister is asking this Legislature to vote sweeping powers to the commissioner. Therefore, I don't think it is unreasonable that we in return must insist on some timetable. Clearly 15 years, as it applies to Fort McMurray at least, would be ridiculously long. I would like the minister to be perhaps a little more specific in closing the debate as to the timetable for self-government in the community of Fort McMurray. By self-government I mean city status because Fort McMurray will probably within a short time, I believe, have a population high enough to make it a city under the acts in Alberta.

The final point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that while I agree there is a sense of urgency, at the same time, when you consider the overwhelming social, economic and development problems and the difficulties in providing back up support of one kind or another, it seems to me that this just confirms the underlying thesis of this civil servants report. And that is, while the development of the oil sands can be orderly, it should not be hasty. Rather than getting caught up in rapid development of the sands, frightened that if we don't move quickly they're going to develop the oil shales overnight - I can assure members that the problems and the tasks of developing the oil shales make the tar sands look pretty small by comparison.

It seems to me, however, if we let the threat of oil shales development force us into premature and far too rapid development of the oil sands here in Alberta, we're not only going to have environmental problems, but we are going to have social problems which will far surpass any of the other difficulties which we face in that kind of development. So I would hope, Mr. Speaker, in looking at this bill that perhaps we should all consider that orderly development means just that; orderly development at a pace which allows us to develop the other services necessary and at the same time not do away with the rights and the privileges of individual Albertans.

So in general conclusion, while I agree that it is necessary to coordinate, I would hope that the government would make some changes in this bill, at least recognize the need for the election of the advisory committee, specify certain powers in the bill and perhaps beyond that put some checks on the rather substantial and unnecessarily substantial authority which the commissioner is given under this bill.

MR. SPEAKER:

The hon. Minister of Public Works followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc.

DR. BACKUS:

Mr. Speaker, it's certainly with real interest that I've followed this debate. It would certainly be surprising if we did not hear the considerable concern expressed by previous speakers as to the danger of giving one man the power that is recommended in this bill.

I think I'd be very worried if the members of this Legislature did not express concern. It is certainly one that I share and I think all the members of the cabinet as well as all the members on this side of the House share. There is always danger associated with putting power in the hands of one individual. I think that perhaps we have to justify doing something that is dangerous. It's probably dangerous to put the power of an automobile into the one hand of a driver. On the other hand, I can see probably even more danger if we in fact had a committee of three sitting in the front seat trying to determine the way the motor car should go at any time. I think the special circumstances which have occurred in this area and have been brought to our attention so well by the minister should indicate to us that there is certainly in Fort McMurray and area a situation which demands very special and possibly dangerous actions.

This isn't altogether a new situation. I was in Britain during the war and when that island - where I think probably we have people as interested in independence as the

people of Fort McMurray - was faced with the emergency of wartime, with the mobilization of the Home Guard and Civil Defense people. Where services were required to take care of people in emergencies such as bombing raids and where supplies of various needs in the emergency were of tremendous importance, it was considered by that government that the best way to resolve this was to appoint not one regional commissioner, but single regional commissioners to cover five separate areas of England. In each area there was one man appointed to the job of regional commissioner.

The dangers that are upheld here I think we are all concerned about, however we're not experienced. In that country we didn't break up into five dictatorships. None of regional commissioners were so influenced by pressure groups that they got more Anderson shelters than other people in the area. In my travels around the country at that time, I felt that the separate regions were equally well organized and that the separate communities within those regions received an equal share of attention from the regional commissioner. In fact, they were very happy to have a commissioner whom they could go to and get action rapidly rather than having to go through all the red tape of the central government in order to obtain those things that were needed for their particular community.

We often hear in this House of the 'objectionableness' of red tape. When we do take a chance to cut through red tape because we feel it is necessary in a situation that is emergent, the great outcry comes that the action taken gives somebody power. You can't cut through red tape without giving somebody the power to do it.

There are other ways an emergent situation can be dealt with. You can appoint, as suggested, a committee of three commissioners. Some people say that the giraffe is an animal that has been designed by a committee. I think this probably portrays a situation that could well be occurring in any area where you have a body of several people trying to make rapid decisions in resolving problems.

If you had three people there, three regional commissioners all presumably on equal footing and presumably consulting back and forth among each other, I think it would take very few months before one of them became recognized as the senior regional commissioner. I certainly wouldn't like to have my department run by three equal deputy ministers who made all the decision we have to make in the department in consultation with each other.

Maybe we feel that the efficiency achieved by having one man is outweighed by the danger of putting that power in the hands of one man. But we have not handed over the area to a regional commissioner and we are not proposing to by this act. We are proposing this method of resolving a problem that we all are aware of and we are quite capable of changing the whole thing at the next session.

We're also quite capable, in the interim, if we find that we've put an Adolf Hitler into Fort McMurray, of taking him out again. I think that this government, and certainly this government with the strong opposition that we have so well represented in the Press Gallery, will ...

AN HON. MEMBER:

... never had it so good.

DR. BACKUS:

... see that we don't allow a dictator to subjugate the one-eighth of this province as has been suggested by one of the other speakers.

I do see another danger in this situation - not one of power - but the concept of putting a horizontal type of authority in a position over the vertical forms of authority that exist at present. We have a local council that is concerned about the local problems of the area. We have the advisory council of the ID, we may, before not too long, have some expansion in the Town of Fort MacKay and we may even have a Russellville in the near future, all of which will have local bodies that will have a vertical type of authority.

In the area as well, we have various government departments all working in a vertical type of activity. When you try to control the activities of those vertically oriented groups or authorities with a horizontal authority that cuts across all of them, it becomes a very serious problem. Every time somebody, say in the Department of Highways and Transport or the Department of Public Works, decides they want to go a certain route, they refer back to their departments and are given orders from their departments to do it in a certain way, and suddenly you impose on that somebody else who says, no you can't do it that way, you've got to do it this way.

I think there is a real danger here of this causing considerable friction. I think if that horizontal authority is weak, then you will create real chaos in the area. Therefore, I think the only way you can avoid this danger is to give that horizontal authority sufficient power to be able to override, in some instances, the vertical

authorities that are being applied to the problem. This is why I believe it is necessary to give a regional commissioner this type of authority.

I can speak with some experience of the situation in Grande Prairie. When Procter and Gamble moved in there the government of the time anticipated problems in that area. Although relatively small compared with the problems that are being faced in Fort McMurray, they were similar in some respects. Therefore they provided in the area a group known as the coordinating authority which followed very much the lines recommended by one or two of the previous speakers. It was made up of representatives of industry and local government and other various representatives in the area. They were all extremely capable men - I'm not trying to be critical of them at all. They were given the high and mighty name of coordinating authority, so one got the impression that this group of very competent people would be in a position where they could really do things in coordinating the activities in Grande Prairie.

They were in fact very ineffective. They were ineffective because they were not given the power that was needed in order to get results and action from all the various forces involved. I can certainly see the proposed watering down of the authority recommended in this bill as achieving exactly the same thing, that is a complete failure to really do the job that is required in the area.

It's therefore with very strong conviction that I feel we all understand the problem or understand to some extent that there is a severe problem, a real problem emergent in this area. I feel that some solution in the way of coordination is required. I feel that that coordinating authority must be given power to act. I think safeguards are built into the bill that still give control over any authority there. I think the concept of a multiple authority is liable to lead to more problems than solutions.

Therefore, as a result of this reasoning I feel that in fact this bill, even though it's dangerous, even though it's giving power where we maybe wouldn't like it to go, nevertheless is the only type of authority that will be really successful in an area where we have an emergency which I think is very comparable to a wartime emergency.

MR. HENDERSON:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer a few words on this particular bill. May I first say in addressing my colleagues in the House, those on the floor and those in the galleries, and particularly the previous speaker, the Minister of Public Works, viewing the fifth estate as a member of the Loyal Opposition is an occupational hazard of being a cabinet minister.

[Mr. Diachuk in the Chair]

In examining the bill, I think first that all members of the House should be able to accept in principle the premise that there's some form of unusual authority required to deal with the problems which appear to be on the horizon in northeastern Alberta.

I think, if I'm correct, the opposition a year ago made statements to that effect. At least the party, with the exception of one member who is seated to my left here, went on record to that effect. It was obvious there was a need for some sort of overall comprehensive development authority in this part of Alberta. I think the whole question is what type of authority it should be.

I find, Mr. Speaker, in all sincerity in looking at the bill I was more enthused about it before I heard the minister and the second minister speak to it.

AN HON. MEMBER:

You're right there.

MR. HENDERSON:

I would like to suggest, Mr. Speaker, while I am prepared to accept with an open mind, I'm going to have to hear much better arguments than I have heard thus far before it's going to gain back the ground that they've lost thus far in the debate. I really haven't heard any reasons which really convinced me that the bill, as it's now drafted, is necessarily the most desirable way to do it. I don't say the best way because I'm not sure I know the best way, but I do have one or two suggestions.

The suggestion of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that the commissioner won't interfere, for example, with the jurisdiction of the Fort McMurray town council as long as it can cope with the problems, I find a little difficult to swallow. I have no doubt if Fort McMurray had the authority that this commissioner is going to have, they could cope with the problems.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Agreed.

MR. HENDERSON:

So that in itself cannot be taken as a justification, to say the local authority can't do it because that's one of the problems - the local authority does not have the powers that are in the bill.

I find it hard to accept the argument of the government being unable to make a decision about a school in Fort McMurray over a two-year period particularly convincing either. As I read [The Department of Education Act], and I have it here in front of me, the Minister of Education has ample authority to make those decisions. He has authority under Section 9 of [The Department of Education Act] to appoint a committee: "... to inquire into and report upon complaint or dispute ... condition of one or more schools ... any other school matter". And "The Minister may upon receipt of the report make such order thereon as to him seems proper."

So very clearly the educational matters, as they now stand, do not justify this type of authority. The Minister of Education has adequate authority under the Act to act, and so the minister lost two marks so far with his presentation in that regard.

I get the feeling, Mr. Speaker, very frankly - and I'm not saying it's wrong - but I think if it's going to be done, let's be direct about it and not beat around the bush that the bill, as now drafted, constitutes an exercise on the part of the provincial government to take over direct authority in the area, but build a buffer in the middle so that somebody else will take the heat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS:

Right.

MR. HENDERSON:

This is a nice political move, I agree, but I'm not convinced it's the one that's the best decision with a view to dealing with the problems presented in Fort McMurray. The question of urgency of decisions has been mentioned many times. As I say, inaction on the school matter doesn't really make the question of urgency sound all that convincing. Well, nonetheless I suspect there might be some better arguments we haven't heard yet.

But very obviously, Mr. Speaker, if it is the desire of the government to take over direct control of development of the area - and I'm not necessarily arguing that this is a bad thing, because some form of pretty potent authority is required - you want something that's going to be a decision-making authority that can make decisions expeditiously and deal not just with the problems of local authorities. A significant majority of the problems that local authorities are going to have in the area are going to be problems imposed upon them by the provincial government, by the problems of vertical chains of command such as the Minister of Public Works talked about.

Very obviously a commissioner is not the way to go about dealing with those problems because he does not have access to all the members of the Executive Council in order to get those chains cut. He's got to go to one minister, the Minister of Municipal Affairs who is already burdened, I think, with the rest of Alberta. I find it difficult to think that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is going to have time to devote to the problems of northeastern Alberta in the degree that he should.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the arguments I can only conclude that the idea of the commission should be forgotten. Because - and I say this very sincerely - it is not going to be the way of exercising the authority that is necessary nor [the way of] making the decisions expeditiously, nor [will it be], as I think it should, satisfactory to the members of this Legislature when it comes to dispensing the tremendous powers that the one man is going to have. I would like to suggest to the government that a far more logical, far more effective and I think politically more acceptable measure, at least as sent to this Legislature, is going to be to put a minister in charge of the exercise.

I'd like to suggest that the Premier give serious consideration to wrapping up the two minister without portfolio propositions he has - and I say this completely free of any inference relative to the personalities of the two individuals - but appoint a full-time minister to take responsibility for these authorities, powers and problems. A minister will have direct access to the councils of government. He isn't going to have it second hand. He isn't going to have to try to go through a minister who has got a lot of other problems on his mind.

This commissioner is going to have geographically about 20 per cent of the province of Alberta and, I would guess at the most, 1 or 2 per cent of the population [while] the

Minister of Municipal Affairs is occupied with the other 99 per cent of the population and all the problems that go with it.

Clearly having to go through a minister to get to Executive Council to make urgent decisions is not an expedient way of doing it. This can best and most effectively be done by a minister who sits in this House and I like to think most members of this Legislature would feel far better about delegating the type of powers to a single individual such as are asked for in this act if that individual is directly accountable to the members of this Legislature, because he is then going to exercise those powers knowing he is directly accountable.

He is elected, and this in itself implies an element of accountability beyond that of the Legislature which a commissioner doesn't have. The commissions are a handy deal and I realize this. In the short time I was minister I set up three of them. But I like to think there were better excuses then than there are for this one because I have not heard a single argument thus far on the question of urgency of decision-making or comprehensive powers that makes the selection of the office of a commissioner anywhere near as effective as having a minister in charge of it. And I would suggest to the government in all sincerity, in the efforts of dealing with the problem this is the way the authority should be structured.

This comes into the matter of the advisory committee. I have to agree I can't see, in light of the sense of urgency that has been presented as justifying the bill, the advisory committee working for a commissioner who has to go to a minister who has to then take problems second-hand to the minister in question and especially because - without any disrespect to the minister - he is preoccupied with other problems he is going to mainly be a messenger boy for the commissioner on the issues.

I think that what has been stated about the inability to make a decision relative to the school issue is a pretty good example of the problem. The role of an advisory committee in such an authority is going to be pretty nebulous and I think unsatisfactory from a local standpoint as well as from a government standpoint and a legislative standpoint. I agree there has to be a local input but I have to side with those who suggest that at least some of the advisory committee should be people who are selected from the local populace.

This doesn't mean that the government shouldn't then, beyond that, select people with particular expertise. I see in this capacity even senior civil servants, with particular expertise in the departments of government, to be seconded and assigned under the jurisdiction of this minister in an advisory capacity to help him with his problems. In fact, there probably should be somebody from every major department involved on such an advisory committee to the minister to help work out the problems.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the government should seriously consider some pretty major amendments in the bill. If they can't draft them to deal with some of the problems that have been presented at this time, possibly they should give serious consideration to holding the bill over until the fall and bringing it back in again. I have to say this because I think setting up a commission that is not going to function effectively, setting it up with an administrative structure that isn't going to work and setting it up hastily in the long run is going to do more damage than waiting another six months and coming in with legislation that is going to be far more acceptable and far more effective than has been presented in the bill in its present form.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I can only say what I said at the outset, I have not heard any arguments presented thus far that really convince me that the bill in its present form should be approved. The arguments that have been presented, I think, detract from the bill rather than favour it. Certainly the argument, with all due respect to the Minister of Public Works, about what existed in Great Britain in wartime is not relevant to this issue. I don't think the British people at that time had very many options available to them. We have one option here, that is some options as to the rate at which we go about inflicting the problem upon ourselves. At least I like to think we have some options unless we view the federal government as an alien country. But clearly, there isn't an analogy between Great Britain in wartime and the particular proposition before us.

I say again, Mr. Speaker, that the major weakness in the bill is that the authority should be delegated to an officer of this Assembly, an officer who has direct access to the councils of government. I think that priority more than justifies the dispensing of the two ministers without portfolio and appointing another full time minister to look specifically after that. I would feel that with those changes so far as I'm concerned, Mr. Speaker, that major change, I could certainly support the bill.

I support in principle what the government's trying to do. I certainly am all in favour of them trying to have the best tools available to do it with, but I suggest very sincerely the office of a commissioner is a very, very poor second choice as compared to the proposition of a minister directly in Executive Council sitting in this Legislative Assembly.

MR. LOUGHEED:

Mr. Speaker, in participating in the debate on second reading of Bill No. 55, I thought that because it involves the Executive Council at large and because of some of the observations that have been made by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc, I should make some observations in addition to those made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs with regard to the bill that had been raised by members opposite. Frankly I think they were valid points that needed to be raised about a bill that has caused us some concern because it is certainly different than the normal situation that we face in this province.

The position as I see it, in terms of the need for the bill, can be related to the unique factors that the minister pointed out in introducing the bill. But the really essential reason for the bill, in my view, is in terms of the people who are either now living in the area or going to be living in the area, in terms of the services that need to be provided to them in their daily life. The fact that makes this situation so much different than any one we've perhaps seen for some period of time, except Grande Cache times ten, is clearly the tremendous rapidity of growth that even with existing plans is going to occur in a very concentrated area in a relatively remote part of the province, with demands by people, and very legitimate demands by the citizens who are living there or the citizens who will be moving there and working there, in terms of housing, in terms of education, in terms of the whole ambit of provincial government services from one end of this row to the other, together with the normal problems of a growth area, together with a tremendous focus of attention that is placed not only now by Canada but by the world upon the whole area. Because of that need we are committed as a government to attempt to create orderly and effective development in a way that was well expressed by the Minister of the Environment in his recent speech that was referred to in the House.

There is no doubt in my mind that, as the Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc has pointed out, there is the need for an overall authority that can in fact coordinate and make decisions in this particular part of the province, with its distances from the capital, in a way that is not detrimental to the citizens who are living there. So the whole objective of the bill is services to people. The need and importance of this legislation is not in relationship, as the hon. Member for Spirit River-Fairview made by way of comparison in looking at the situation in the Yukon or Northwest Territories, [to] where you have a relatively slow and a sometimes stagnant growth. Here we have literally a boom town in the extreme.

We've seen problems that have already developed in our nation - and I look at James Bay in Quebec as an example of one sort of problem - if we're not able to cope with them in a quick and rapid way. There's not one member of this Legislature, as the Minister of Public Works pointed out, who isn't aware of the very difficult nature of line authority that exists within government, and efforts to attempt to overcome the problems of compartmentalization of the various government service departments is certainly [something] we grapple with and we work on in terms of cabinet committees. We have evaluated some of the things that we could do in terms of an assessment of a better overall authority in that area.

The Member for Spirit River-Fairview pointed out that one of the ones the officials have looked at is just what's being proposed here in Bill No. 55. They didn't say that it was not acceptable but they said that perhaps there were others that were more acceptable. But in our judgment there is a need for an individual who can, in fact, make decisions in the field, on the spot. The weakness, with respect to the suggestions that were made, and are well appreciated, from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc, is [that] these decisions have to be made on the spot in the field, in the area of northeastern Alberta - not sitting in some office here in Edmonton, but there. When the Department of Telephones and Utilities is moving along as it may be moving along to provide some sort of utility in the area - and we're all very familiar with this situation - and runs headlong into the Department of Highways going in the other direction - we're very familiar with that in the City of Calgary in Stampede Week - this sort of thing happens. And in a boom-town situation they have to be resolved in the field, not by paper work, not by long-distance telephone, not back to a minister in an office here in Edmonton, but in the field by a commissioner residing there. That's the need for the decision. I think the need is clear.

Now then, there can be other ways to do it. I don't see the advantage of having - I've thought about it and thought about it at considerable length - a minister here who would be in the position to do that. If we'd worried about approaching it in that way, for those on the other side who are somewhat concerned with regard to local autonomy, if those are some of the arguments they've either made to date or want to continue to make, the legislation was there. If we wanted to use the all-encompassing and powerful legislation, if they want to check my speeches about what I said about it and what they said in reply, it's right there under The Human Resources Development Authority Act. [It could] strike out in a moment municipal government if it wanted to do it, but what did it do with it? It placed it in the hands of a cabinet committee, in essence. Our view was that that wasn't the better approach. Even though the effect would have been similar in

terms of local autonomy it was the approach, clearly, of taking a commissioner and giving him these powers and these responsibilities.

We've heard some suggestions in regard to possible ways in which the bill could be amended regarding the advisory council. Those are certainly ones we'd like to take and think about. That, I think, is what the nature of this debate should be.

I think a couple of things should be quickly cleared up. If it has to be expressed in the act that there is absolutely no way that this commissioner can be involved in the levying of taxation, and if that needs to be placed in the act as a negative provision, let's put it in the act as a negative provision. It just doesn't seem to me that was in any way intended, and that should be done.

With regard to the question that was raised by the Member for Spirit River-Fairview, I would think quite clearly by the nature of our system, not only is the protection in the section [that] the regulations conclude at a certain point, but the fact is, that the minister who will be the minister reporting on behalf of the commission, will have an appropriation and that appropriation will be before the House and in the estimates and the subcommittee of the estimates, which is something else that could be thought about. One of the advantages, in my opinion, of our subcommittee system is to give an opportunity to have it done that way and have the commissioner there where he can have direct access to the legislators on a year-by-year basis. But certainly the minister is responsible in the House in terms of the estimates that are involved.

What I thought was the best argument made so far in this debate, by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc, was the problem of accessibility, in running into a situation where it was merely reporting through one minister. I think that may have been a communication problem that we have expressed by way of a chart. If one reads the act, the appointment of the commissioner is an appointment of the commissioner by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the cabinet, not by the minister. But the coordination factor flows through, because it should flow through, the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's our intention to have the commissioner personally bring a report to the cabinet of Alberta on a monthly basis, at least in the early first year, as we see how this works out. We want him out of the field and into the cabinet room once every four weeks directly reporting to us. We want him saying that department X or department Y is not cooperating in terms of the need for moving as quickly as we need to move in providing services in this rapid growth area. I think that is a very appropriate way and we're doing it more - in bringing people into this situation, before cabinet, to be directly responsible to us.

The idea of a three-man commission, frankly, seems to me to have all the weaknesses and none of the strengths because when we are dealing with one man, as we've found in situations such as the ombudsman situation where there is clear individual responsibility, that responsibility is there. As the Minister of Public Works points out, you're simply going to end up, in any event, with one of the three emerging at the top. I think it's clear, at least in my judgment, that the way to do it on the commissioner route is [with] one commissioner. We've taken the view that this is something that we'll watch. We'll listen to the comments that are raised in the Legislature year by year.

It may be that we can phase it out in a matter of time or that we can alter the nature of local government in a matter of time. But frankly, it strikes us that our responsibility with less than 1 per cent of the population of Alberta - with an expenditure per capita from the provincial budget that is going to go into this area far greater than per capita in any other area - clearly places the responsibility on this government, in terms of providing provincial government services to people, to take the measures that are contained in Bill No. 55. We take them with some reluctance, but we take them with the feeling that there needs to be an appreciation that the end result of Bill No. 55, in our view, is what we are all here for in the first place: improved services to the citizens of this province.

MR. TAYLOR:

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make five comments or five points on the bill. Before doing so, I would like to thank the hon. minister for the comprehensive introduction to the bill which he gave. I found it very interesting and the information is certainly very valuable.

The first point I would like to deal with is that of planning and coordination. As the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Leduc mentioned, members on this side of the House a year ago were asking for some kind of overall coordination of this vast area. I support that concept. In the northeast of Alberta there's going to be a lot of problems and if we don't do some very careful planning at this stage there is going to be chaos down the road and then it will be too late to do anything about it.

We have the vast area of Fort Mackay, Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray, to say nothing of the vast areas where there are very few people living. In my view, planning and coordination are absolutely essential if we are going to avoid chaos in the future.

The second point I'd like to mention is that of responsibility and of one commissioner. I don't have the fears of the one-man commission that some hon. members do. As a matter of fact, had the federal government appointed a three-man commission to resolve the postal strike, I think the postal strike would probably still be on. One man was able to get right down to the nuts and bolts of the case and deal with it. Several years ago, as matter of fact the first year I was appointed Minister of Highways in 1951, we were faced with a strike by truckers which would have meant that very few highways would have been constructed that year. After interviewing the truckers in both Calgary and Edmonton at mass meetings it was my view that we should appoint one man to resolve that strike, which we did. That one man was able to do it so that the truckers went back to work the following day. I shudder to think what would have happened had we a three or five-man commission. So I personally favour a one-man commission.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Having said that, there's one other thing I'd like to say. Some hon. members feel that the man is going to be a dictator and that everybody else is going to say "Heil Hitler" as they did to Hitler. I look upon this a little differently. Hitler was responsible to no one and my only concern is that this commissioner be responsible to a minister, that the minister assume responsibility and that the government assume responsibility for everything that commissioner does. I think that is the safeguard in a democratic set-up.

If this man was going to be outside the authority of the Legislature and the government, then I would certainly say "dictator" was the right word. But he's going to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and consequently he can be fired by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. He's responsible to the Lieutenant Governor in Council and whether it is written in so many words in this bill or not, the Lieutenant Governor in Council or the cabinet of this province will have to assume full responsibility for the actions or the lack of action of this commissioner, and that's democratic government.

That is the safeguard I am more interested in, whether or not there is a one-man or a three-man [commission]. I personally favour a one-man commission to get a job done properly and quickly, providing he's responsible to somebody else who must answer to the people.

So I'm not going to presume to advise the hon. Premier on who should do this. I personally think the present minister has the ability and the depth of understanding to handle this along with the rest of his portfolio. I am not going to advise the hon. Premier. It's his responsibility how he organizes his cabinet. But the point that I'm making is that as long as a minister is responsible, then I think the democratic process is being looked after and I think that is very important.

I was glad to see the word "may" in Clause 3, because I would hope that the situation would change and the cabinet would be able to gradually phase out this commission. Now if we said the cabinet "had to" or "shall" appoint a commissioner, then whether the commissioner is needed or not the cabinet would be required to appoint that commissioner. Here, whenever the time arrives when the commissioner is no longer required, he may be discharged honourably or otherwise and he does not have to be reappointed. Personally I think that is wise because I would hope that the day would come, perhaps sooner than any of us dare to hope, when the commissioner concept would be dissolved and we could go back to straight local government.

The responsibility is an important item, and I think as long as the man is responsible to the Lieutenant-Governor through a minister I'm reasonably happy with the set-up.

The third point I'd like to deal with is the assignment of powers. Now, had the government wanted to run this entirely on its own other than for the town of Fort McMurray, they already have that set up - it's a vast ID, an improvement district. Where does a government have more authority to do exactly what it wants to do than in an improvement district? There's no other elected official except the MLA and the MP. The advisory council advises but with no authority at all. In spite of that I think there is merit in the advisory council, but the assignment of powers as set out in the act I look upon as, number one, the local authority may delegate, and I don't see anything too wrong with that. The local authority may delegate the power, and it may well be that a hospital board or a school board or a town council, even though it's partly appointed in Fort McMurray, may well say, we think you should look after this. There is coordination necessary with the entire area, and it's better to have it done that way, not that there advice wouldn't be sought by any tactful or any reasonable commissioner in regard to any important item.

In regard to if they don't want to do it, I would think it would be a very emergent situation and that we have the Lieutenant-Governor given authority to assign powers. I don't take too much exception to that. I think there are times, and there are times in every annual operation, where ministers have to be able to assume powers, at least until local authority is fully established in the area. As long as that power is used with

reason and only in situations that can't be resolved otherwise, I can't see too much difficulty in connection with that.

There is a fourth point that I'd like to mention in connection with regulations. Here I have to say that I would like to see the hon. minister strike this section out. I think it's wrong for any man to be given the authority to go beyond the law. The very roots of democratic procedure are based on the people's representative passing laws.

When we say that the cabinet or somebody else will have the authority to vary, substitute, add to or make inadmissible laws that have been passed by the Legislature, then I think we're getting on very, very dangerous ground. I can't see the reason for this. If there is local authority established to the nth degree, that local authority would have to live within the laws. Surely it's not asking too much for this commissioner to carry out his work in accordance with the laws as they are written and in accordance with the regulations as they are written. To say that the Lieutenant-Governor would have authority to vary and substitute and add to and make inadmissible laws that have been passed by the Legislature is bad. It's bad legislation and frankly I can't see the necessity for it.

I think the legislation would be strengthened. We are going to say to the people of the area, yes, we are appointing a commissioner who is going to have tremendous power. But that power has already been defined in the statutes by the Legislature of this province, or by the Legislatures of this province. If we say to them, this man is even going to have authority to go beyond, change what the Legislature has ordained or has decreed or has passed, then I think we're weakening the legislation. We are providing opportunities for other people to go beyond the laws too.

This is really the second time this week that we have had similar provisions, where we are going to by regulation change, make inadmissible or substitute laws that have been passed by the Legislature. I would urge upon the hon. Premier, the hon. minister and the government that this is bad, it's dangerous. It's setting precedents that may well lead to something even worse than what the present may. I believe there's strength in saying that the commissioner or the ministers or departments must live within the law as it's passed until it has been changed.

There were many times when I was a minister when I would have liked to have done things, but the Solicitor General's department said, you can't do that, you haven't got the authority from the Legislature. It may be frustrating at times, nevertheless this is democratic government. Once we get beyond that, saying some of us or some have authority to change or make inadmissible or substitute the law as it has been passed by the representatives of the people in the province, then I think we're on very dangerous ground.

So in connection with regulations, I would urge the hon. minister to review that and see just why we want to give this man authority or the area authority to go beyond the law as it's written. Surely if there's something in all these acts that are mentioned, there's something to cover almost everything, and I would think that that should be good enough.

Now the fifth point that I would like to mention, and the last one, is that I think any commissioner who would carry the support of any cabinet would have to listen to the people. Surely he's not going to go into this area and do what he thinks irrespective of what the people think. That would not be democracy. If this man or woman, or whoever it happens to be, will make it a point to find out what the local governments want, what the advisory boards want, what the people want, the local organizations, and then endeavour to enact policies that reflect the thinking of the people, that's true democracy. That will keep the government out of trouble and give the people of the area the type of thing they want.

I have great faith in the decisions of people.

AN HON. MEMBER:

Hear, hear.

MR. TAYLOR:

I think people may make the odd mistake, but you get a mass of people and give them the facts and their judgment is very, very sound. When we acted on the decision of people in any problem I ever came up with, I think it worked well and good. Certainly we have to have the experts, but we need to reflect the thinking of the people.

There's just one other point in connection with the commissioner and input. I would hope the commissioner would never have the authority to override another minister in the government. That would be bad, if an appointed official has the authority to override a decision made by a minister of the cabinet. There are other ways of doing it. I don't

think any commissioner with anything between the ears would do that, or think of doing that, because there are ways of resolving it by bringing it, as the hon. Premier said, through the minister to the cabinet. And there, if the minister is wrong, is where it should be resolved. But no commissioner should have the authority to override the decision of a minister of whatever department. That I think would be very, very anti-democratic and not in the interests of representative government.

Mr. Speaker, in connection with the bill those are the comments I have to make and I plan to support it in second reading.

MR. HINMAN:

Mr. Speaker, I think any of us who have observed the 'dumfuddling' of democracy have thought many times that if we could just get that all-wise and benevolent despot it would be very much preferable to what we have.

Now in this regard Solomon had a lot going for him, but you remember that he got preoccupied with the accumulation of a harem and certain relationships with the Queen of Sheba, whom the Bible says he took to the garden and gave honey and nectar [to]. Had it not been for these failures perhaps the system might have still been going.

Now this bill has two principles, the first of which has been discussed at great length here tonight. The principle that constitutionally this part of government is assigned to this part of government and that they are quite within their rights to appoint a commissioner and to give him the powers which he will need to carry out his duties, has been well established. The dangers have been pointed out. Now to think that in this day a man could become a despot in this situation is sort of unthinkable. You're going to have gathered very quickly, in the area about which we're talking, a great many sophisticated people who have backgrounds in community work and perhaps in administrative work and in local governments and they are not likely to accept dictation without protest.

Whoever finds himself willing to take this job will have to have a considerable amount of humility, so I am not worrying very much about that aspect.

The second principle is another one. It's the coordination of the services which we must have in an area. I've been worrying about this coordination for many years. Our system evolved slowly. First we had the school boards under the old administration before we were a province. Finally we had the little municipalities and these boards were close to the problems at hand and they did a pretty good job. It amounted, as far as the school board was concerned, to getting together to build a schoolhouse, hiring a teacher and having an annual meeting at which everybody was properly criticized.

When it came to municipalities it was very much the same. Now, there were local politics of course. But our system has evolved very differently from that. We have grown from service to service. Perhaps the mistake that has been made is that of thinking each service required a separate board. Consequently we have a multitude of boards, not commissions but boards elected to do things, and they are so very often at cross-purposes that this principle of coordination seems doubly important to me.

In the treasury, as my honourable friend will realize, you have to deal with all departments and you become very much aware of the lack of coordination. It's bad enough within the provincial government but what would it be like if our people elected 22 governments, each one to handle a separate department? If the government we have can do a pretty good job, as I submit it is doing, why could we not then have one government to handle the affairs of a location?

It was with this in mind that I at one time devised a bill and circulated to some of you and to some other people the idea of the rural urban county. The context of it was simply this, that we do not need a multitude of boards, that we have progressed to a time when considerable sophistication is required and that no board can have all the sophistication they need.

I read in the paper from time to time that the council ought to keep out of school matters and vice versa, but I notice that the school board is perpetually changing. Each man who comes there comes with no background, no experience, and is able to do all right. So it seems to me that it would be quite an order to have a rural urban county. There's nothing that can be to the advantage of a town or a local community that isn't to the advantage of all the people who are centred around it. This bill comes pretty close to what I have suggested. You are going to coordinate administration in the hands of one man. Now if the man realizes that he is on the hot seat, he is going to seek all the advice he can get.

There is an alternative to the way the minister has proposed, and that is to set up a group, a council if you want to call it that, of official trustees. I had the experience of being appointed official trustee to handle a district where democracy had broken down, and I had problems. So I have some idea what this commissioner is up against. At any

rate you do have to have some power. The alternative, I say, might be to appoint a council of official trustees, to appoint the chairman and to assign to him the coordination of the policies there. This would mean that, as it is now, perhaps the town which does exist might elect its member. But it would make such a system very easily shiftable from the commission system, which this bill suggests, by stages to a completely elected rural urban county council. This council would have, as the government has, largely the business of directing policy. They would choose administrators as the government finds it necessary to choose, trained and sophisticated administrators who are responsible to them.

Now if the minister could see fit to work during the next year on a bill which would make permissive a rural urban county, and if he would use this area and the system which he finds necessary to evolve from a commission, through perhaps what I have suggested as a council of official trustees who are gradually replaced by the elective system, then we would have a good chance to evaluate this type of government.

Now I submit that policy-making is about all that that council has time for any more. And I submit there is evidence day after day all around us that this multitude of administrative boards needs some coordinating. All over the province we have examples of senior citizens' homes misplaced, of nursing homes misplaced, of the incomplete use of laundry facilities which could have served the whole area. This just goes on and on.

So my pitch is really this: if you feel there is any need of assistance for this administrator, perhaps the next step would be, as I have said twice already, to establish a council of official trustees. These would be men who are knowledgeable in the field and who already have experience. The next step would be to evolve a rural urban county act which could be permissive. It wouldn't work everywhere. It might have some disadvantages. But we certainly need to try something better than the multitudinous administrative bodies which we have now and which are so difficult to coordinate.

In my experience it was difficult to get the municipality to cooperate with the school division on where school bus roads ought to be and where snowplowing ought to be done. I watched the evolution of the health unit. I think perhaps I was at the head of the first quasi-health unit in the province. We hired a nurse in the Pincher Creek School Division to do two or three things, one of which of course was to carry out the immunizations which were just not there. We had one doctor at that time serving the number of people now served by eight doctors. So you can imagine the need.

But I have watched the health unit evolve into a system that does not justify the costs any longer. We have watched our health services develop so that there is nobody who needs this special care. No longer do we need to be running people out to a little schoolhouse to give mothers instructions on prenatal care and things of that nature. Everybody is within a half hour except in the most remote areas.

What I am saying to you is that if we were to use this situation properly, if we were to develop a rural urban county act and if we were to use evolution which must take place here, we would know whether or not there were some very distinct advantages. It could be permissive. The best part of it would be that we could evolve into it very slowly. We would not in any way upset the coordination which is so necessary. I intend to vote for the bill because with all the dangers and flaws I see in it I find I'm unable to just sit down and rewrite a better plan.

Certainly as the years progress, and the Premier is kind enough to let us have one more session after this before I'm no longer here, I might have some more to say about the evolution which takes place. But I would urge the government to consider this point of view and that alternative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DRAIN:

Mr. Speaker, my remarks on Bill No. 55 will be very brief and, I hope, to the point.

One thing I would comment on is that what is occurring in northeastern Alberta and what is going to occur in that particular section of Alberta is probably one of the largest dishes of pudding the province of Alberta has ever been faced with digesting. I look at it from the standpoint of a major problem that will require a considerable amount of gearing up to overcome.

We have in that particular area now improvement districts and new town status in the area of Fort McMurray, a vast concentration of people because of the occurrence of one plant and more plants on the drawing board. It would not take a seer or you would not have to cast out the entrails of a sheep to determine that there's going to be a fantastic amount of pressure placed on the Province of Alberta to accelerate the development of the tar sands.

I also see this process continuing for a period of 20 years at least. I see many, many millions of dollars of provincial money being poured into this particular area. I see a vast transient population that will eventually evolve into a permanent population. But in the interim there will be violent shiftings, if that is the proper word to use, of population bases in the area and very little stability.

I am rather loathe to accept Section 8. But when I look at the dimensions of the problem in all seriousness and relate it to how I would assess it if I were looking at it personally, I would concede, having regard for the built-in factors we have in the Legislature - one simply that there is the accountability under Section 8(2) that "Any regulations made under this section cease to have any effect after the last day of the next ensuing session of the Legislature" - this gives a certain amount of freedom towards developing a reasonable package to deal with a situation that the people of Alberta and the administration and the municipal administration of this province have never been faced with, or any particular area in Canada.

As an analogy, the population of the Yukon Territories from 1898 to 1900 went from about 1,500 to 87,000 people. To even have some sort of discipline enforced, the military power of the mounted police was used in policing and maintaining order and government. We very well know that at this time such a situation would not be acceptable.

So, having regard for the foregoing, I endorse the principle of the bill and I feel it should be passed by this Legislature.

MR. BENOIT:

Addressing myself to second reading of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I believe that theoretically speaking, according to the rules of the House, I must address myself to the principle of the bill.

The more I listen, the more I wonder what actually is the principle involved in the bill? Much has been said about the necessity for coordinating the northeastern part of the province. Is that the principle we are discussing, or are we discussing the establishment of a coordinating authority for the northeast of the province or the establishment of a commission or commissioner for the northeast of the province? I can see that possibly all three of these principles run through the bill on three separate threads. But if we are to vote on the principle of the bill, we should have it clearly in our minds because there are differences of opinion.

[There is] no difference of opinion with regard to the necessity for a coordinating authority. [There is] no difference of opinion with regard to the principle of the necessity for coordinating the North. As the hon. Premier pointed out so plainly, it is the people of the North who are involved in this and who are going to have to pay the price if the job isn't done properly or who are going to be rewarded if the job is done properly.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it gives me a bit of difficulty to know where I would stand with regard to voting for the principle of the bill unless we are certain of what the principle is. If we go by the title, it says it's The Northeast Alberta Regional Commission Act. It doesn't say anything about being the northeast Alberta coordinating act or coordinating commission act. It just says, Commission Act.

In looking at the entire matter, I see that there are alternate ways of accomplishing what I consider to be the main principle of the bill; that of coordinating the affairs of the North. As good as the arguments are for a one man commission with such powers as this man is being given, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, these do not really justify the violation of the democratic parliamentary system in order to accomplish the end we hope to accomplish.

Somehow it looks to me like the foot in the door. When I look at Section 8 of the bill, we have exactly the same thing we were dealing with last night in The Provincial Parks Act. Identical. Identical wording. Only in this case it looks to me as if it is even worse from the standpoint that in order to enable the commissioner to carry out his functions with diligence and dispatch and so on and so forth, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations with respect to the region. So the Lieutenant Governor in Council is making regulations to satisfy the requests and the desires and the powers that have been given to the commissioner.

Then comes this idea of changing in four different ways, if necessary, eight different acts. As the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Crowsnest pointed out so well, the only redeeming feature about it is Section 8(2), and I'm not sure that gives me any consolation.

Mr. Speaker, I would dearly love to be able to vote in favour of the principle of the bill if the principle of the bill is to establish some way of coordinating the affairs of the northeast. But if the principle of the bill is primarily to set up a one-man

commission with the authority this man has, with Section 8 included, I would find it very difficult to do so.

So once again I must conclude my comments on this bill as I did on the parks bill. The only thing I could do is vote for second reading and if things don't change in the course of Committee of the Whole I would be forced to vote against it on third reading, not against the idea of coordinating in the North, not against some kind of coordinating authority, but against the principle of the bill for setting up the means to an end. In this case the end does not justify the means that are being used in my opinion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. YOUNG:

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn the debate.

MR. SPEAKER:

May the hon. member adjourn the debate?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. HYNDMAN:

Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER:

Having heard the motion by the hon. Government House Leader, do you all agree?

HON. MEMBERS:

Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER:

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.

[The House rose at 10:29 o'clock.]