

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: **Monday, June 13, 1988 2:30 p.m.**
Date: 88/06/13

[The House met at 2:30 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRAYERS

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us.

As members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country.

Amen.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, a distinguished visitor seated in your gallery. Our visitor today is Dr. Vladimir Pavicevic, who is the ambassador to Canada from Yugoslavia. We had an excellent visit today and discussions over lunch -- an enthusiastic representative of his country to ours, and we look forward to continued good relations between Canada and Yugoslavia. I'd ask that the members warmly welcome our guest today.

MR. SPEAKER: Colleagues, it's my pleasure to introduce to you a fellow Speaker from Australia, Speaker Lin Powell of the Queensland state Legislature. He is accompanied by his wife Jan and by his deputy clerk, Mr. Robert Doyle. They're seated in my gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and be recognized by the House.

On this day I would also like to remind members of the House that those of you who came into the House for the first time in the 1986 election are celebrating your second anniversary.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****Bill Pr. 17****St Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Congregation
at Calgary Tax Exemption Act**

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 17, St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Congregation at Calgary Tax Exemption Act.

The purpose of this Bill is to provide for a tax exemption for a community organization.

[Leave granted; Bill Pr. 17 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 19**Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties
Authority Amendment Act, 1988**

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill

Pr. 19, Calgary Municipal Heritage Properties Authority Amendment Act, 1988.

The purpose of this Bill is to establish the nonprofit nature of the authority. Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill Pr. 19 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 20**Maskwachees Cultural College Act**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 20, the Maskwachees Cultural College Act.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to provide for the constitution and powers of the college.

[Leave granted; Bill Pr. 20 read a first time]

head: **TABLING RETURNS AND REPORTS**

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table information gained through the Legislature Library which indicates that at least two countries in the western world had environment departments prior to Alberta and which corrects the information sent by the government to 1.5 million homes in the province.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, it's nice today to be able to introduce a group of school students from the Sweet Grass elementary school, grade 6. There are some 55 students, who are in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by teachers Miss McLean, Mrs. Forman, Mrs. Smith, and a parent Mrs. Wright. I'd ask them to stand, please, and receive the welcome of the Legislature.

MR. ALGER: Mr. Speaker, we have within our midst today a former municipal politician in the person of Tom Harvey, who at one time was the mayor of the county borough of Saint Helens, a town within earshot of Liverpool, England. He is the uncle of my secretary, Kelly King, and I would ask them to rise and accept the welcome of the ladies and gentlemen of the Legislature.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly today, 52 grade 6 students from the Peter Svarich school in the town of Vegreville. They're seated in the public gallery and accompanied by three teachers: Mr. Raymond Charuk, Mrs. Lil Humeniuk, and Mr. Randy Footz. If I might ask members to give them a warm welcome when they stand to be recognized in that gallery.

head: **ORAL QUESTION PERIOD****Family Support Strategies**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Despite the posturing last week about caring for the average family, there are

many serious -- and I say serious -- economic issues facing families, and if I may say so, they have not been addressed by this government. We're hoping sincerely that the Premier's desire to make political gains through expressions of support for families will actually be translated into policies which benefit average families. Unfortunately, when we raised the issue of parental leave and the treatment of single mothers by Social Services, we were disappointed by the lack of response. But hope springs eternal. My question is to the Premier. Will he advise whether he is considering helping families cope by reviewing the myriad of taxes paid on all three levels of government by an average family in Alberta today?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously taxation is a matter that's reviewed constantly by the provincial government and, I suppose, by all other levels of government as well. In the course of attempting to work our way through, as I described to the House last week, the complex nature of families these days and the complexity in trying to support families -- which we're determined to do -- we will consider all options.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, rhetoric is cheap. I think people are looking for some dollars and cents in the taxation system. But the Premier last week noted -- and the correct one, if I may say so -- an imbalance in the benefits available to families who use day care compared with those who care for their own children at home. The Premier has raised this matter himself. My specific question: is he prepared, then, as the Premier of the province to recommend much greater family deductions or, better yet, a tax credit to offset this imbalance?

MR. GETTY: As I said, all options will be considered. I also point out to the House, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta has the lowest taxation in Canada.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, that rhetoric means nothing to average people. You're not including things like medicare premiums and other myriad user fees.

I'm trying to be specific to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, if I may, then, give a specific example. Many working families, especially, if I may say so, in the inner city, are renters of low and modest income. The Premier is aware that last year the provincial government, we believe unfairly, withdrew the renters' tax credit. Now, my question to the Premier. If the Premier is so concerned about families, especially those of modest incomes, why did they move in this regressive way to remove this tax credit?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, obviously, when a program is put in when rents are high and vacancy rates very, very low, then it's needed. But when rates are very low and vacancy rates are very, very high, obviously you don't continue the program that was put in for other conditions.

To follow through on the matter of taxation, obviously the more programs you carry that are not needed, the higher taxation it will be for all Albertans. So I think it follows that that move was certainly a logical one.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the Premier, that caring person, for the family . . . It was unfair. We're talking about a specific program. It gave some equity between renters of modest income and the property-owner rebate. My question to the Premier is simply this: is the Premier now prepared to

recognize the harm that this has done -- and it has done it in the inner cities -- and will he move now to reinstate that tax credit?

MR. GETTY: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, how the socialists are trying to get on the side of the family now, having blown it so badly last week.

But I will just say, as I said earlier, that we will consider all options.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. In view of the fact that it is often said that when you educate a man you educate one person, but when you educate a mother you educate a whole family, therefore is the Premier considering opening up and increasing the grants that are available to single mothers who wish to go back to school and improve their standard of living or their ability to earn money?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the full context of the various training programs and career development opportunities that the government provides, I'll certainly look at that representation from the member.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to designate my second question to the Member for Vegreville.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

Rural Post Office Closures

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The number of people who are concerned with and opposed to the federal government's plans to close a number of post offices in rural areas is growing, and certainly the caravan initiated by Rural Dignity that crossed the country highlighted that concern and drew a lot of attention to this important matter. Now, the government repeatedly refuses to acknowledge its responsibility to represent Albertans on this important issue by passing it off as a federal issue. In light of the fact that the Saskatchewan Legislature on May 18 in its wisdom gave unanimous consent to a motion opposing the federal government's plans to close and privatize rural post offices, I'd like to ask the Premier if he would agree to giving unanimous consent to a similar motion in this Assembly so that we can present a united western front on this important issue.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, one member certainly can't give unanimous consent.

MR. FOX: That's a curious answer from someone who purports to be the leader of government, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to . . .

MR. SPEAKER: It's inappropriate to comment on the answer, hon. member. Let's get into the supplementary.

MR. FOX: I would like to ask the Premier: in view of the fact that this issue was not discussed, apparently, or commented on at the recent Western Premiers' Conference in B.C. and in view of the fact that they did discuss a number of other federal issues of concern, I'd like the Premier to explain: does this indicate

the kind of priority that he assigns to the closure of post offices in rural Alberta?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that there were many things discussed amongst the western Premiers that didn't find their way into either print or into communiqués.

MR. FOX: Well, it's fortunate that at least one Conservative provincial government has the guts to stand up and say no way to Mulroney when he plans to close post offices.

But recent information has come to light, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government is indeed planning to privatize all 5,200 post offices in rural areas. I'd like to ask the Premier if his government has had a chance to assess those plans, and if they have, do they support them?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member says, recently it has come to light. This is a federal matter. The government has not been investigating.

MR. FOX: Do I take it to mean, then, that the Premier is going to stand by, not study the issue, not make representation to Ottawa, and just allow his cousins in Ottawa to go ahead and close and privatize post offices, regardless of the impact on rural families?

MR. GETTY: No, that's not our intention, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Stettler, briefly.

MR. DOWNEY: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. Considering the fact that possible privatization of a rural post office could contribute not only to the continuing health of the community but also to the better health of local small businesses, will the Premier confirm that in looking at this program, privatization is not a bad option in comparison with closing the post office?

MR. GETTY: I think, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a good point. Obviously, there's a variety of ways of delivering services. We've had problems with the postal service in its present form. Perhaps with some innovative thinking we can provide this very valuable service in other ways.

MR. SPEAKER: Once again the Chair has to remind the House of the difficulty with the line of questioning about the post office. It's clearly the responsibility of the federal government under the Constitution Act of 1867, section 91.5.

Westlock-Sturgeon, main question.

Municipal and Hospital Liability Insurance

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 20 of this year I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Attorney General whether they were aware that eight U.S. states had initiated legal action in March against a cartel of insurance companies, many of whom operate here in Alberta. As has been increasingly common, this government knew nothing about it. However, they made very valiant promises to fill me in down the road. My question to the Attorney General. Have you after this length of time been able to review whether or not your department is ready to take action against the insurance companies

in this province for obviously high and exorbitant rates?

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal Party has contained in his question some very serious allegations which to our knowledge are not substantiated. What I did undertake to do and will be undertaken at the forthcoming meeting of the attorneys general of the United States -- where I had hoped to attend, but in view of the length of the session it appears that I will not attend personally -- is have the official who attends on my behalf review the actions which have been taken by various states and report back after I've been informed.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, my apologies for denying you your chance to kick up your heels down south there.

Mr. Speaker, again to the Attorney General then. However, this was an action in concert with other attorneys general of the States. There was a meeting of Canadian attorneys general in May. Did the minister take it up with them to see whether there could be some common action, as there was done in the U.S., to look into the whole question of fixing of liability insurance?

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the Liberal Party is not preventing me from doing anything that I should do. My duties here, of course, take precedence over the particular meeting in question.

AN HON. MEMBER: Was that the question?

MR. HORSMAN: Well, it was part of the hon. member's preamble, so I think perhaps I could respond to it, Mr. Speaker.

At the meeting of the ministers of justice, the issue was not an agenda item. It may very well be under discussion at the ministers of consumer and corporate affairs' meetings, but this matter will be reviewed in the Alberta context. It has not been customary in Canada for provinces to join together in joint actions. If actions are warranted, they will be undertaken by individual provinces after a review of the facts take place within the individual province. So far as I'm aware, the matter has not been discussed at the meetings of the ministers of consumer and corporate affairs.

MR. TAYLOR: Button, button, who's got the button?

Then, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, who I understand is supposed to be in charge of the superintendent of insurance. In view of the fact that the acting minister back in March or April promised me that they would look into it, has the minister had a chance -- I know she's been busy -- to ask the superintendent of insurance to look into the whole question of price fixing of liability insurance to municipalities and hospitals?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, I noted with fond memory that the day the hon. member raised the question was April 20, which was the day after my wedding, so I must thank him for recalling to me that wonderful event.

We had our consumer and corporate affairs annual meeting among ministers from across Canada and the territories in February this year, and the matter was not raised at that time among us. It was subsequent of course, that it did occur. My department is monitoring the situation, but I would point out to the hon. member that we are talking about an anticompetition Act. The anticompetition rules in this country are, of course, federal, again by the very Act that you mentioned earlier, Mr.

Speaker. I can advise for information that the competition tribunal in Ottawa is monitoring the situation in the United States very closely to see what the outcome of that particular lawsuit will be.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, to misquote the Premier, the best place for a woman is in the House, so thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry; I shot over your head there.

Mr. Speaker, this is back to the minister, then, of health. Has the minister done anything to add his voice to the municipalities and to the hospital boards that are so concerned at a nearly 25 percent increase in liability insurance? Surely he could put some weight on getting this thing solved instead of just bouncing around. Has he . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. That's enough.

MR. TAYLOR: Has he made any . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. This is a supplementary.

MR. TAYLOR: Well, he's shaking his head there.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Fine.
Mr. Minister.

MR. M. MOORE: Perhaps the hon. member could finish asking his question. I did not hear it; I heard all the preambles.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I tried to, but you had a duet going there for awhile.

May I ask you, then: have you put any heat on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and the superintendent of insurance to investigate why this huge jump in liability insurance for hospital boards over the last couple of years?

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member must have been missing from the Legislature for several months or perhaps as long as a year. We changed the system with respect to liability insurance coverage for hospitals two years ago by way of agreeing to a self-insurance program operated by the Alberta Hospital Association.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Petrochemical Refinery Incidents

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of the Environment. Last week there was a flare-off at the petrochemical plant in the eastern part of the city which borders on my constituency and the hon. Member for Sherwood Park's. Last night there was a power failure again, and there was a large flare-off. Can the minister indicate what has happened between the time we had the first flare-off and last night to find out if this petrochemical refinery is going to be able to control the emissions from those stacks in an emergency situation?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the two events are unrelated.

The first event that the hon. member refers to is one that took place on June 2, 1988, when TransAlta Utilities was doing some work in two of the maintenance power plants that they have. There are basically three main power feeds that go to the Petro-Canada refinery. As a result of an error by TransAlta Utilities, it seems that in essence there was a whole shutdown caused by the petrochemical plant. The power-out necessitated a flow-through of certain products in all of the piping within the Petro-Canada plant to avert fire, explosion, and the like. That matter is under investigation right now and has been under investigation in consort with Petro-Canada and TransAlta Utilities and Alberta Environment people.

The second event that the hon. member referred to is one that occurred on June 12 at about 8:30 in the morning, and it lasted for approximately five minutes. It related to a trip in the power blower system.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate what steps the department is taking to ensure that this facility will have adequate emergency power so that this doesn't happen as frequently as it has happened?

MR. KOWALSKI: That's part of the review of the whole operation of the petrochemical plant, Mr. Speaker. That matter remains under review, and when the review is concluded, I'll be very happy to make that information available to all members of the Assembly and to the public.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, what steps has the minister or the department taken to assure the people in the affected area that there is or is not any danger to their health?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, we have a reporting system that is in place, and in the case of both events, they were simply hydrocarbon releases. There was no impact of any contaminant that was released into the environment. A statement was made within a few minutes of the release on both occasions, alerting the media and in essence asking their co-operation to alert the citizenry at large that there was really nothing to be disturbed about other than a very dirty looking black cloud.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, a final supplementary. Can the minister indicate if the department or the minister has looked at alternatives, other than a burn-off, to diffuse a potentially dangerous situation?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I had indicated, really, in the response to the second question that that's part of the investigation that's ongoing. In essence, if there is a solution, another alternative, that's one that I would want officials not only in Alberta Environment but in other departments of government to bring to my knowledge and to my attention, to basically see whether or not there is need for these alternative backup systems to be in place. The reality is that in essence what was released were hydrocarbons, basically harmless, but they have a very negative impact visually in looking at a black cloud emanating.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, in spite of the Minister of the Environment's statement that hydrocarbon is not dangerous, it is.

Could the minister ask his people to check in both California and in Wales and the west of England for the system they use of

total power substitution if the main power goes off, so that there's no necessity to dump the stuff into the air?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the response to the question is yes, we'll certainly ascertain ourselves with that information that may be available in other jurisdictions in the world. There is a question, though, in terms of the one event that occurred on June 2: that from a safety perspective and a safety point of view there was no other alternative but to, in essence, have that bum-off. It was from the safety perspective that it was permitted and it was undertaken.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Supplementary, Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Community and Occupational Health. On May 15 of this year a fatality occurred at that particular plant as well. Could the minister tell us as to how the investigation is progressing on this particular fatality, and what's his involvement in it?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the investigation is ongoing, and my involvement is one that will begin once I have the results of that investigation, which I expect sometime by midsummer.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Glengarry,
Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Waterfowl Habitat

MR. DOWNEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are also to the Minister of the Environment. On Thursday last the minister tabled three reports in this House. On the same day the *Calgary Herald* in a leading headline article announced, and I quote, "The province should invest up to \$4 billion draining important waterfowl wetlands." [interjections] My question: is the minister planning major new drainage expenditures?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, on June 9 documents were tabled in this Assembly as a follow-up to recommendations made . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, would you [inaudible].

MR. KOWALSKI: I can continue, Mr. Speaker? Okay, thank you very much.

Last Thursday, June 9, I tabled in this Assembly three reports that were written as a follow-up to recommendations made by the Environment Council of Alberta to the government of Alberta in December of 1984 asking that certain studies be undertaken to look at agricultural land use classification in the province of Alberta and, further, that certain specific areas of improving or intensifying land usage in our province be undertaken. On Thursday last those reports were tabled. The reports are simply an inventory of options that are available in the long term, the 50-year to 100-year time frame from now, and there is absolutely no commitment on behalf of the government to undertake any of the 10 areas that were looked at. There's certainly no anticipated expenditure of the kinds of dollars that were talked about by the *Calgary Herald*. Not only the *Calgary*

Herald wrote a report; there was one in the *Edmonton Sun* on Sunday last -- both, I think, Mr. Speaker, in the realm of fantasyland, cuckoo approaches.

MR. SPEAKER: The difficulty the Chair has is that our rules are established that we're not to confirm reports held in newspapers. While the Chair allowed the Member for Stettler to read the headline, that was all that was read from one particular newspaper. It's better to ask the question and deal with the answer without dealing with these extraneous sources.

Stettler, supplementary.

MR. DOWNEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your guidance. My apologies.

To carry on, then, could the minister elaborate? If that is not what the report said, what exactly did the report say, and what is his intention in acting on those recommendations?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reports have been filed here in the Assembly. They're available to all members of the Assembly. They're very easy reports to read, and it's very, very clear. The preface was written by the Minister of the Environment, and it's open to anybody in this Assembly to read. If an hon. member wants me to comment with respect to a particular statement in the report, I'd be happy to do that. But it's not my understanding that that's the intent of the question period.

MR. DOWNEY: Then, Mr. Speaker, a specific question to the minister. What initiatives are the minister and his department undertaking specifically to improve and enhance waterfowl habitat?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, number one, the reports in question will be circulated to literally hundreds and hundreds of organizations in the province of Alberta that have an interest in this whole particular matter. Number two, this government, through the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, has for years been undertaking a very aggressive campaign to ensure that we upgrade our wetlands programs in the province of Alberta. Some of those initiatives are solely by the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. Others are done in consort with the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Agriculture. Ducks Unlimited has been a very, very major player in our province in terms of wetlands upgrading. There have been numerous examples of facilities being opened in recent years and in recent months. Only recently, in the last month, an agreement was reached with Ducks Unlimited and Cargill to ensure that in fact we were going to have another wetlands project commenced, using the effluent that would come out of the Cargill plant in the High River area.

MR. DOWNEY: A final supplementary, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture. Will this minister assure the House that the government is not planning to announce a program to expand our agricultural land base by the 22 million acres suggested in the report?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to confirm what the hon. Minister of the Environment has indicated. It's a discussion paper. It's a long-range paper looking at the next 50 to 100 years. It's there for discussion purposes, and we look forward to input from interested groups.

MR. SPEAKER: Okay.

Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the out-of-date nature of agricultural prices and other economic factors used in the report, could the minister guarantee that the report would never be acted upon until the economic predictions were redone in the light of existing agricultural conditions?

MR. KOWALSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can do much better than that. In the letter that I penned to go with the report to all of the players in the province of Alberta, I have a very, very specific statement in there that not only are we going to be concerned about that but we're also going to be ensuring that the environmental impact mitigation and resource conservation initiatives will be a requirement before any approaches are taken with respect to the report in question.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Yes. To the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, with perhaps supplementary information from the Minister of Agriculture. Wildlife habitat is presently disappearing at an alarming rate, and there's a need to reverse the process. I'm wondering whether the government has in mind any initiatives which would encourage or provide incentives to farmers to maintain and indeed increase such habitats, specifically the farmers.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, that's a great question because the answer is a very resounding yes. We have a number of programs through Buck for Wildlife and through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, which will mean that billions of dollars will be spent on habitat. There's a booklet called Buck for Wildlife 1987 that enhances those significantly. We're also working with farmers, as well, in wetlands projects and trying in every way possible to create permanent bodies of water for wetland projects.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Wildlife Programs

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some more great questions for the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife. Just as I'm sure this minister did, I breathed a sign of relief when the Minister of the Environment distanced himself from the appalling blueprint for wildlife destruction that he tabled last Thursday. Nonetheless, wildlife and wildlife management are in a sorry state in the province, as indicated by reductions in hunting and fishing opportunities enacted in the recent past. In view of his statement in estimates debate, and that is specifically

I'd like to emphasize there's been no proposed reduction in the number of uniformed officers for 1988-89. I don't have enough of them; everyone agrees with that, is the minister committed to greatly increasing the number of wildlife enforcement officers in the very near future?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I've never heard so much insinuation and innuendo -- that creates an 'insinuating' -- in all my life about things. Wildlife in this province is not in a disastrous state. We're working on habitat improvement projects,

and it's a high priority with our government.

As far as distancing ourselves from the report, we do reports on oil sands and coal and a wide variety of other things. The opposition's always asking for reports and what studies have been done. This particular report makes no recommendations; it's simply a report that looks at a number of options. We'll look at it on that basis, along with a number of other reports.

With respect to the third part of your question, on enhancing or increasing the number of fish and wildlife officers in this province, that's a pitch I'll be making to the Provincial Treasurer come fall.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you. You'll have my support.

Terry Grosz, assistant regional director of law enforcement for the United States fish and wildlife department publicly stated that organized poachers see Alberta as a patsy, where enforcement is almost nonexistent. Is the minister concerned that such a view is indeed well founded and indicates that we do need many more enforcement officers?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where that individual is supposed to have made that comment. He never made that comment in anything I've been made aware of. It certainly isn't a spot here that is a target. If we don't do our job well, it can be.

We cannot possibly have enough enforcement officers in Alberta. We need the public, and that's why we have the 1-800 hot-line number. You couldn't have enough officers to have them in every position in this province, and that's where all the public . . . We ask them to call the 1-800 hot-line number, and we'll investigate any of those. If there's anything like that, we always look at our policies with respect to making sure our wildlife is protected and enhanced and will be here for generations to come.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you.

He made the statement at a public meeting in Edmonton, to which the minister probably got the same invite I did. In view of the public's interest in wildlife, will the minister take the advice of the Alberta Fish & Game Association and institute a task force on wildlife management in Alberta?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not considering that at the moment. There are a number of aspects in fish and wildlife management in Alberta that . . . I'm working with Fish & Game. One of the areas that I have had discussions with them recently that I think we can co-operate and come to some resolution on is the poaching issue. Poaching for meat in Alberta is one area that I think we can work very closely on. There are a number of aspects, but to have a task force on a wide variety of issues I don't feel is necessary at this point in time.

MR. YOUNIE: Thank you.

Will the minister at least concede that a task force on wildlife management would allow the public to give him some solutions to the many problems facing our wildlife resource before poor management and nonenforcement cause even greater problems?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, we have MLAs all across this province that hear, on an ongoing basis, from their constituents. As well, we have fish and game clubs in communities

all across the province that receive that input. Any of that input that comes to my office, I look at it very seriously and refer it on to the department. We are a proactive department and will continue to be that way.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the minister. Quite often we hear that so-called sportsmen take 10 times their limit of fish, game birds, et cetera. My concern and my supplementary question to the minister is: what steps is the government taking to encourage the Alberta Fish & Game Association to encourage the young and new hunters to understand that game laws are basically a moral issue that you cannot enforce? You cannot have an enforcement officer behind every tree or behind every pond. What is the government doing to encourage that organization, through its young hunter training program, to encourage young people to protect animals and game?

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, it's making suggestions just like that just made by the hon. Member for Clover Bar that go a long way. The Fish & Game members in this province do have a responsibility to work with their hunter education and the recently released fishing education program and work on catch-and-release programs. There is far more awareness and use by nonconsumptive users now, and I think the Fish & Game Association should also be working with them. Because our wildlife resource is one that we want to see continue, and each one of those clubs and each one of those individuals can play a very large role in seeing that happen.

MR. SPEAKER: Westlock-Sturgeon, followed by Vermilion-Viking.

MR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker, supplemental to the minister. As the minister well knows, the whole case of allotting non-resident licences and the control of wildlife has been off again, on again, back and forth. Is the minister now prepared to commit to a date when he will come out with absolute, clear non-resident licences? Because it is costing one of our great industries, the outfitters and guides, a lot of money because of the indecision of this government.

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, I've been meeting on an ongoing basis since September with the outfitters and guides and with the Fish & Game Association and hunters across the province. We've come up with a process this year that seems very acceptable to the guides and outfitters as well as Fish & Game, using a trophy rule on elk and the allocation of hunting licences. We've also recently instituted a new permit for outfitters and guides that will help them to bring some more order to their industry. So we are working with them on an ongoing basis, and we'll continue to do so.

MR. SPEAKER: Vermilion-Viking.

DR. WEST: Yes. Supplemental to the minister. The native hunting rights that allow them access to hunting on a year-round basis in the province put's a lot of undue pressure on animal management. Is the department or minister looking at anything which may help to control some of the native hunting rights in certain areas at certain times of the year?

MR. FJORBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, over the course of years

it's been the traditional right of natives to hunt for food for their family, and no one is saying anything about that particularly. There are areas, not only with natives but with nonnatives, in the poaching for meat area that are being significantly abused and, I think, need to be tackled. That's where we come back to the Member for Clover Bar's suggestion and recommendation as well as my own to the fish and game clubs: that we all, including the fish and game clubs and the Indian Association of Alberta, need to look very seriously at that issue and recognize that we can do all of the wonderful things with our hunting regulations that we like, but if we allow poaching to take place, we defeat the purpose in the long term.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Calgary Mountain-View.

Pay Equity

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In spite of himself the Premier in his statements last week implicitly recognized that our society and his government place a diminished value on much of what women choose to do. It is true that we undervalue the contribution of women who choose to work in the home. We also diminish the economic value of much of the work of those women who choose to pursue careers outside the home. To the minister responsible for the status of women. Has the women's advisory council ever provided the minister with a documented list of gender-based pay inequities in her own government's public service?

MS McCOY: No, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Is the minister aware that the Red Deer public health unit, 99 percent funded by this government, pays public health nurses requiring a four-year BSc university degree no more than public health inspectors, all of whom are male and all of whom require only a two-year diploma?

MS McCOY: I was not aware of that specific instance, Mr. Speaker, but I'm interested to hear it. I would also say at this time that it is information, suggestions, opinions, and concerns that we wish to hear from men and women in Alberta when we launch our Alberta Dialogue on Economic Equity for Women. That Alberta dialogue will speak to employers, both large and small, all around Alberta. One of the employers will be, of course, ourselves, and we intend to speak to civil servants at various levels in our own organization. That will, I'm sure, elicit many good ideas, although I would encourage all members of this House to bring forward good ideas.

MR. MITCHELL: Clearly, speaking to it is one thing; doing specific analysis is another.

Now that the minister is aware of the inequity in the public health unit in Red Deer, could the minister please tell us how she feels about that kind of inequity and whether she is prepared to take concrete action to do something about it?

MR. SPEAKER: The first question is out of order. You can't ask an opinion. But the second question is . . .

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, I certainly will dialogue with the Minister for Community and Occupational Health on that issue.

MR. MITCHELL: The minister always avoids the issue of direct . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. It's inappropriate to comment on the answers. Let's have the supplementary. It's the final.

MR. MITCHELL: Why is it that this government, which consistently utilizes subsidies to promote certain things of economic and social value such as job creation programs and economic development and initiative, as soon as it confronts the question of gender in any of those formulae, conjures up a variety of self-serving arguments to justify not pursuing pay equity for women in the work force?

MS McCOY: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that we are searching for a made-in-Alberta response to the indisputable fact that taken on the average and overall, women are earning some two-thirds of what men are doing. But the causes are not simple nor is there any one cause. Occupational segregation, as it is often referred to, is probably the major cause. We have taken admittedly long-range strategies and initiatives in that regard, but we've taken concrete steps. In fact, our program is called Stepping Stones, and we are speaking with junior high school students who are facing serious options at that stage in terms of their education which will then lead them into a wider range of options for later occupations. That program will probably yield greater dividends over the long range than any other single initiative.

Pay equity: even those who advocate it recognize that it only accounts for some 5 percent of the one-third disparity in wages, yet in Ontario \$4.3 million of public funds are going directly to fund civil servants in their new jobs as pay police. We're not certain that Albertans are going to want to take that option.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Edmonton-Avonmore, supplementary.

MS LAING: Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for women. Will she and her department undertake a systematic analysis of the employment practices and pay practices of both employers in the private sector and in the civil service to determine how representative the cases like that one cited by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark are? Certainly I have had cases like that.

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, we will take the matter under advisement.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Stettler.

MR. DOWNEY: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Community and Occupational Health. I wonder if he could confirm for the House that despite what's happening in the Red Deer health unit there are in fact female public health inspectors in the province and that they do enjoy equality of opportunity and pay in those positions.

MR. DINNING: Yes, Mr. Speaker; to the best of my knowledge that is the case.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

Lubicon Band Land Claim

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A week ago the Assembly was told that a written proposal for a non-binding tribunal to resolve the Lubicon land claim had not been submitted to the federal government. For his part the federal Indian affairs minister appears to still be rejecting the tribunal proposal, apparently in the mistaken belief that it would be a binding one. I'd like to, then, ask the Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs minister if he could confirm for the Assembly that it was made clear to the Indian affairs minister that the tribunal would be nonbinding. Is it that nonbinding tribunal which the Indian affairs minister still appears to be rejecting?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, we have two questions, and they both raise the same problem.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, the discussions which took place between myself and the federal minister of Indian and native affairs covered the prospects of both a binding and nonbinding tribunal. It would of course have been the preference of our government to have had the tribunal process binding, to have ended the matter once and for all. It was clear, however, that the federal government -- and that was evidenced by the material they released in written form when they indicated that they were prepared to have the matter dealt with in court -- found legal and other concerns with respect to a binding arbitration proposal, and therefore subsequent discussions which took place canvassed the possibility of a nonbinding process. That took place both in discussions between myself and between the two negotiators, between the federal and provincial governments.

With respect I think I can answer the second question. Having rejected completely the concept of a binding arbitration process, the current proposal which has been rejected is the non-binding process.

MR. SPEAKER: Time for question period has expired. Might we have unanimous consent to complete this series of questions, if they are not sub judice?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

Hon. member, but one question at a time instead of two, please.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs minister . . . I'd like him to confirm or clarify his last statement just as the bell was going. Has the federal Indian affairs minister rejected the nonbinding tribunal proposal put forward by the Premier?

MR. HORSMAN: At this particular stage the question becomes more difficult to answer by reason of the fact that the legal process has commenced. Not only have statements of claim been issued, but the chief justice of the Court of Queen's Bench has started the process by which the matter will be resolved through the legal steps and has indicated the timetable procedure which he is prepared personally to supervise. So it becomes difficult to answer the question without ranging into the field of where we are in the legal process. Nonetheless, I could say this: that the government of Alberta is still open to resolving the issue by settlement without the necessity of pursuing the matter through

to the final conclusion of a legal process, which might take a very long time.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the legal process did not preclude negotiations being undertaken in the context of this tribunal. The Premier seemed to indicate earlier this month that he had personally discussed the nonbinding tribunal proposal with the Prime Minister. I'd like to ask the Premier whether since that time -- or will he once again in the near future personally approach the Prime Minister to convince him to agree to proceed with a nonbinding tribunal as a way of reaching a negotiated settlement to this issue?

MR. GETTY: Now that the court case has started, Mr. Speaker, I have to give a great deal of thought to ever trying to get into negotiations again.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Is the Premier saying to the Legislature this afternoon that he feels that a negotiated settlement via a nonbinding tribunal process is no longer an option that he's willing to pursue at all in resolving this issue?

MR. GETTY: No, that's not what I said, Mr. Speaker.

MR. CHUMIR: To the Attorney General, Mr. Speaker. One of the most important financial aspects of Mr. Fulton's report is his recommendation that the federal government compensate the province of Alberta for mineral rights transferred, beyond the original 25.4 square miles. I'm wondering whether the minister will confirm that the federal government in fact refuses to agree to such compensation and that the provincial government's support for an information tribunal is partly based on a thought that we could get a better deal on that basis.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, that is clearly, if not marginally, completely over the line of the sub judice rule, so I'd be very reluctant to provide an answer at this stage without having carefully reviewed the exact wording that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo just used. I will try and respond, if I can, without bending the rule.

MR. SPEAKER: The difficulty with the sub judice rule, as all hon. members know, is that it's the responsibility of the asker of the question, let alone the one trying to respond. The Chair surely can rely on the legal backgrounds of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the Attorney General not to get us into this kind of a discourse.

Is there a point of order arising from question period? Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Though I realize you didn't rule any of my questions with regards to the post office out of order this afternoon, it is an issue that I believe you've raised on every occasion that I've asked questions in this Assembly about what, if anything, this provincial government plans to do about the federal government's initiatives in that regard. *Beauchesne* section 359(6) that you've referred to on occasion: "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." With respect, I recognize that the post office is a matter of federal responsibility. What I'm trying to seek is some indication from this government that they're prepared to represent Albertans on that issue. Certainly the government of Sas-

katchewan allowing consideration and unanimous passage of a motion in that regard is significant.

But I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that I'm puzzled by your indication every time I try and ask questions on that matter that it's a federal issue and ought not to be dealt with here. I don't hear that same sort of interjection, if you will, being made when government members ask questions about payment of federal transportation subsidies to grain producers or producer cars or motions considered by the Assembly in regards to strategic arms limitation, if I might name a few. Certainly it's within the competence and jurisdiction of the Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs to . . . I can quote his Act:

Shall conduct a continuing review of

- (i) all policies, programs, and activities of the Government of Alberta and its agency in relation to the Government of Canada.

I submit that I'm doing what ought to be done and urging this government to do the same, Mr. Speaker. I don't quite follow the logic of the questions being called to question because of the federal implications.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Attorney General.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member keeps wanting us to deal with an issue which is clearly solely within the area of responsibility of the federal government. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Perhaps the hon. members could listen to the arguments, please.

MR. HORSMAN: He has just now cited to you references to matters which are shared responsibilities, specifically agriculture and another one specifically designated in section 94, I think it is, immigration. Those are clearly matters that are joint responsibilities, and Agriculture has always been clearly a shared responsibility under the Constitution. Now, there are obviously occasions when the federal government consults with the province on matters that are within the area of responsibility of the federal government, and in those areas it is clear that we do and have answered questions in the past. But where there has been no consultation or request for advice from the government of Alberta, to give it would be gratuitous advice. That's easy to do. But where there is a clear line of responsibility between the federal Parliament and its members within Alberta and the people of Alberta, that's not within the competence of the Ministry of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs to answer.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Westlock-Sturgeon, the final person on this topic.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, if I may add in speaking to the point of order, I think it's fairly common for the provincial government here to have legislation and plans in that wrap around or adjust for what the federal government is doing. For argument's sake, in the field of transportation, the Crow benefit paid to people that are transferring feed to cattle -- in other words, we moved in that area. The other area: in the case of bilingual education, there is a grant that comes out. The federal government has rules; the province tries to make rules around it. So it's not unusual for the province to take something the federal government may not be performing to the standards they wish --

we even have it sometimes in medicare -- and then for the province to enact rules or bonuses or incentives to bring better service to Albertans than the federal government is doing by itself.

DR. BUCK: Mr. Speaker, in all rules reasonableness must persist, and the question the hon. member was asking the government basically was: what economic effect does it have? Therefore, I can't understand, if you use the rules of reasonableness, how that could be ruled out of order. The shutting down of post offices does affect small communities. Therefore, that certainly is within our purview to ask a question such as that.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair appreciates the advice. Nevertheless, all hon. members, including the member raising the purported point of order, seem to have missed the point that all the questions were indeed allowed and the admonition was given at the end of the series of questions to which there had been not only questions but answers. Perhaps the hon. member might bear that in mind.

The other thing is that as pointed out with *Beauchesne* 359(6), that is indeed the relevant area to use as an authority. But also, as pointed out with some of the examples on transportation and the matter of interprovincial transport -- which is a federal jurisdiction, but then, as it interrelates with the grain industry, which is a provincial jurisdiction, you do have the kind of overlapping which is indeed allowed -- the matter as raised is not on that list of 29 categories that are supposed to be exclusively or almost exclusively within the powers of Parliament. So the... [interjection] Does the Chair hear some echoes in the place?

Once again, the Chair would point out that the member was allowed to ask the questions, the responses were given, and the Chair just pointed out with due respect to the House that there are certain issues which the Chair has difficulty with because they are supposedly part of the federal jurisdiction.

Thank you for raising the matter of complaint and concern.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MR. SPEAKER: Might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS (reversion)

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, members of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce 35 adult business students who are here from the Jack Brébin Community Institute in the north part of Edmonton-Centre, an institute I visited several times and found to have excellent programs. There are some terrific students, and I'm glad they've taken the opportunity to come and visit us here today. I'd ask that they please stand and receive a warm welcome from the members of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: It has come to the notice of the Chair that last Friday one of our hon. members got married. So the Chair, on behalf of all Members of the House, would like to extend congratulations to the Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn and his wife.

head: GOVERNMENT BILLS AND ORDERS (Second Reading)

Bill 27 School Act

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured and privileged to move second reading of Bill 27, the new School Act, on behalf of the government of Alberta.

This new legislation is the culmination of over four years of review, of discussion, and of consultation on a variety of issues fundamental to the education of Alberta's young people. The new legislation will provide a framework for our children's future. It will provide a clear direction to our education system and a firm foundation for its future development and growth. The process we have been through as a government has been essential to the development of this important legislation. Like all public policy issues, the role of government is to provide the necessary leadership in raising issues and encouraging discussion of alternatives and, finally, taking decisive action. The process we have undertaken to develop this new legislation is an example of how such important public policy must be formed. As a government, we've listened to the advice of literally thousands of Albertans, Albertans who have a direct interest in the education system, such as trustees, teachers, administrators, and parents, but also Albertans from a broad cross section of the province who value education and simply offered us their views.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank many who have participated in this extensive consultation and review process and who took the time to express their views and give their advice. It's an important reminder of the strength of the democratic tradition. I want to thank in particular a few who I would like to name: certainly all the members of my government caucus and, in particular, the Education caucus chaired by Halvar Jonson, the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey. Their patience was great and their support even greater. I want to thank as well school boards, the Alberta School Trustees' Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association particularly for their advice and their shared concern about students in this province. I also want to thank Albertans generally for their interest and concern. It is a testimony to the care and the compassion of Albertans that they cared enough to speak out on an issue as important to our future development as a society as education is.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

A thanks to the staff of the many government departments who have been involved in the review and the drafting of this legislation. A thanks in particular to the staff within my own office, and a special thank: you to the Department of Education staff, every single one of them. We have lived through the past 12 months -- and I refer particularly to the introduction of Bill 59 and then the introduction of Bill 27 -- we've lived through those past 12 months together, and I thank them all. But specific thanks within the department go to Dr. Bosetti, my deputy minister, his very capable assistant, Mrs. Peggy Garritty, and Mike Ekelund and Lenore Neudorf in our legislative services.

If I may, I'd like to say a few special words of thanks to Sandra Smith. This is someone who has contributed so much to the development of this important legislation, Mr. Speaker. Since the beginning of this very lengthy process, Sandra Smith has guided all of us through the maze of issues and alternatives. Her patience, her insight, her keen intelligence, her ability to

listen and to translate educational goals into legal provisions and, above all, her profound commitment to quality education for Alberta's young people have been vital to the success of bringing this new legislation forward. Sandra was born in Scotland and is a graduate in law from the University of Glasgow, and articulated in accountancy as well. She taught law for five years in the postsecondary system and is the former director of legislative services for the departments of both Advanced Education and Education. Sandra's interest in education stems from her own background, but perhaps at least as importantly from the fact that she has two children within the Edmonton public school system. I was pleased to hear that Sandra was recently recognized for her contributions to education by the Phi Delta Kappa Education Society in Calgary, and I want to add official recognition and thanks on behalf of the people of Alberta and the government for the important work she did on this Bill. I also want to thank Sandra personally for her help and her courage. She's an example to the women and the men of this province.

I want to begin on second reading, Mr. Speaker, discussing the five underlying principles upon which this important new legislation was based. Really it's interesting, as I was preparing for second reading, it was from a base of principles -- which is what second reading is all about -- that we came to then develop the application of those principles so the flow through between the presentation within this Assembly, as it has been presented to all the people of Alberta, is very consistent. Some may feel it is, in fact, old hat, that too much has already been said about the principles of the legislation and not enough about the important specific issues like property assessment, taxes, local autonomy, and so on. I've heard some people say that the principles may be important but aren't necessarily reflected in the legislation. Mr. Speaker, the fundamental principles of access to quality education, equity, flexibility, responsiveness, and accountability are the very heart of this legislation. All the features of the Act reflect a commitment to those principles and, more importantly, a commitment to students. It's impossible to understand this legislation or to get full appreciation of its focus and intent without referring to the five underlying principles. I would therefore like to discuss each principle and give a few examples of how the principles are reflected in the Act.

First and foremost, access to quality education. This is the key principle and perhaps the most important one for students. For the first time in Alberta's long tradition of providing education to its young people, all children in Alberta will be guaranteed access to the education system and to a program which addresses their unique needs. This applies to all children: those who are severely handicapped, those who have unique talents and abilities, those who may be of the minority faith, those who live in major urban centres or small rural communities in isolated parts of the province. The guarantee applies to all. The new Act will be just the beginning of making this guarantee a reality. There is much that needs to be done. As I've said several times in this Assembly, I'm excited about the potential of our distance learning initiatives to help in making the guarantee of quality education a reality for students in small rural communities across Alberta. The potential is enormous. A second major project will be beginning this fall in the northern part of the province. Consistent with the School Act directions, the focus of that project as well will be on the students, on providing them with an acceptable range of programs that they need to complete their high school and to continue on with further education in careers if they so choose.

The guarantees of access to a quality education provided in the legislation reflect an important commitment on the part of this government. Probably the best reflection, if you like, of the principle of the right of access to education is found in the appeals section of the legislation, section 104. The importance of the section cannot be overemphasized. Backing up a bit to the Charter and its passage in 1982, it is perhaps the biggest single factor which is changing the face of education today. Whereas in pre-Charter times education was the sole and exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces, the Charter has added a whole new dimension of the protection of rights within that education system. Courts have arbitrated the importance of natural justice, and surely the education system can operate in full light of the Charter.

But hopefully the courts will not be running our education system. It was certainly with that hope in mind that my government colleagues and I drafted this new legislation. Natural justice in this instance, then, has generally been interpreted to mean that a decision made by one body should be appealable to a separate and a distinct body. A locally elected school board structure gives us an excellent opportunity to have questions of access clearly spelled out in the legislation appealable to the minister. This does not mean that a program is going to be exactly the program wished for, because no right is absolute. Nor does it mean that the courts will be prevented from interfering in the school system, which surely they should not. But hopefully a decision made by a school board in the best interests of the access of a student to education will be ratified and confirmed, and the courts will have noted that nothing in the appeal process has been done to affect the right of that individual. The process of natural justice is key to that whole appeal process.

The critics in some of the opposition parties have raised the issue in the House on several occasions about their opposition to any charge or fee for the rental of textbooks or special charges for sports equipment or musical instruments if the student is in a music program. But these fees are not onerous, and in order to ensure that they don't go beyond the realm of reasonable, an appeal to the minister under section 104 is allowed to ensure that a fee payment does not become a bar to access to education. Opposition members may well speak to the source of revenue being available to school boards and being opposed to it being a source. We on the government side believe that such fees not only ensure that such things as musical instruments and textbooks don't have to be directly purchased by a parent which would be a good deal more expensive, but also ensure that such items are returned in the condition they were found in and, in providing the appeal, any unreasonable charges are prevented.

The second principle, then, is equity. In many ways this principle relates directly to the principle of access, because by equity we mean not just financial equity but more importantly, educational program equity. The distance learning initiatives I've just mentioned are a key component of this government's commitment to ensuring program equity for students. In recent months much of the discussion about equity has focused on financial equity alone, and financial equity is essential since school boards who are in poor financial positions cannot be expected to meet the needs of their students as well as some others might be able to. But financial equity is not important as an end in itself. Financial equity is important only if it is a means to achieving educational program equity for students. When the School Act was introduced, I indicated this government's commitment to addressing problems of fiscal equity using the general revenues of the province. This commitment stands, and my

colleagues and I have been discussing ways in which that commitment can be met. Over the coming weeks the issue will be a top priority for us, and there are other ways in which the principle of equity can be reflected in Bill 27.

The financing provisions of Bill 27 better reflect the principle of equity than does current legislation. I'll discuss the individual aspects of the financial provisions, but first of all, I want to point out that they must be viewed as a package that achieves the balance. The objective is to achieve an equitable playing field. To isolate a single component of the package and discuss how it may benefit or disadvantage one particular group is simplistic and unfair to the overall issue. The only change that had been made in Bill 59 was the removal of section 59(2) of the current School Act. The removal of section 59(2) for constitutional reasons resulted in the balance being tipped unfairly away from the separate school system. Bill 27, then, contains a carefully constructed package of financial provisions that meet several criteria consistent with the principle of equity. It is constitutionally sound, and I believe it attains the level playing field which has been absent for some time.

An example is the provision that allows the undeclared residential property to be split between the public and separate boards on the basis of the number of students. This would take effect once new properties are coming on stream. There's a transitional section which leaves the existing declarations where they are. When there is no indication of which board the taxes should go to on a new property, is it not fair and equitable for both boards to share in those resources in proportion to their students? Not only is this approach consistent with the principle of equity, but it is also consistent with Bill 27's focus on students -- all Alberta students.

The third principle, then, is flexibility. This principle is reflected in several important ways. First of all, within acceptable standards and policies set by the provincial government, parents should have the opportunity to choose among several different ways of ensuring that their children get a good education. The preamble to Bill 27 sets this out clearly. It says:

parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children.

Those decisions include decisions made within the public system about the placement of their children in particular programs, but they also include decisions about accessing an education for their children outside the public system. This could include private schools or home schooling arrangements.

I'm well aware of the sensitivity by some about private schools and home schooling, but the important issue is the education of children. If private schools and parents in home schooling arrangements can provide their children with an acceptable education in the eyes of the province, I can see no reason for government to try and ban their existence, as some would suggest. As well, the Charter of Rights, and as adjudicated by the Supreme Court of Canada, guarantees parents the right in having this option. Alberta is a diverse society with a wide variety of people with differing perspectives, different views, and different aspirations for their children. Our education system must reflect that diversity, provided that the quality of education the children receive is acceptable.

Flexibility, then, as a principle is reflected in other ways as well. In developing the new School Act we had hoped to provide greater flexibility in administrative matters by moving provisions out of the legislation and replacing them with regulations or policy. To some extent that goal has been achieved, but in view of the advice we received across the province, many

administrative provisions have been put back into the Act. In other areas like school councils, there is clear flexibility at the local level for parents and school boards to work together. The flexibility provided by alternative programs and the recognition that a public system may choose to offer them is very much a part of this whole principle, and rather than encouraging a private education system to develop, I think in fact it will encourage the public system to be responsive.

The fourth principle, then, is the principle of responsiveness. The effect of this principle begins with the very first statement in the Bill, where it says:

WHEREAS the best educational interests of the student are the paramount considerations in the exercise of any authority under this Act.

Simple words perhaps, but the impact is pervasive. It means that all decisions, all actions, all initiatives taken in our education system must consider the student first. As such, this overriding statement is binding on everyone involved in the education. It includes parents, teachers, administrators, trustees, staff of Alberta Education, and the Minister of Education. Programs and services developed as a consequence of this legislation must respond to the needs of students.

And fifthly, Mr. Speaker, the principle of accountability. This fifth principle is essential to the new Act and to all legislation enacted on behalf of the people of Alberta. It is essential to ensure that the interests of the public and, in this case, the interests of students are protected. To ensure accountability, the roles and the responsibilities of the various people involved in education must be clearly established. It is for that reason that Bill 27 outlines the role of teachers, the role of principals, and the responsibilities of students. It is also why considerable attention in the Bill is devoted to the role of school boards in delivering education to the students. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is seen not only in the statement of the role of teachers and the role of principals, but that now students are accountable for accessing the education to which they now have a right. So there are responsibilities and rights which are always having to be balanced off in this kind of legislation, and accountability of students is key to the education.

In the example of the ward system, certainly trustees and the push of the province to have trustees elected by wards in the large urban centres of the province of Edmonton and Calgary is part of the accountability, a principle that Albertans province-wide expressed support for. And accountability on the part of the minister: if school boards do not respond to the needs within their jurisdiction, then the minister can ensure that a ward system is put in place. Certainly we have heard from Albertans across this province, but in particular in the two large metro areas, that that was what they wanted, and I am hopeful, as I have said publicly on many occasions, that the school boards involved will look at the system and determine the best way to respond to their local needs for enacting a ward system.

The five underlying principles are the heart of this legislation. I'm confident that over time the full impact of these principles will be felt across the system and the result will be an improved, always improving education system for all Alberta students.

Before closing, I want to make a few comments about balance. I've said before and I will repeat that an essential component of an effective piece of legislation is balance. Alberta society is diverse. People with different views, different values, and different goals all have had the opportunity to voice their opinions about the new legislation for Alberta's school system.

To expect Albertans to have uniform views on issues as important as education is to seriously misunderstand the very nature of the Alberta people and, consequently, the development of a new School Act has been an example of democracy in action.

As a government, we have spent four years listening to Albertans, debating alternatives, raising issues, and forming consensus. It's a difficult task. It's not for those who are unwilling or unable to take the leadership role in forging a new direction for education. It's also a process in which the views of all individuals and groups cannot be accommodated. On any particular issue in this School Act review process, I can assure you we received countless opinions and suggestions, many of which were diametrically opposed to each other. We've used the guiding principles to strike a balance between opposing views and alternatives. I believe the balance in Bill 27 is an appropriate one, a balance between our strong traditions of the past and new directions for the future, a balance between the role of the provincial government and the role of school boards and, most importantly, a balance which places the student at the centre, a focus which measures the fairness of the balance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to second reading discussion on Bill 27.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I noted when the minister stood that the salt that was given to all members last week is still on her desk. I think it's a safe place today. The wounds that were opened by the introduction of Bill 59 seem to have healed somewhat with the introduction of Bill 27, so I think the salt is rather safe in its perch.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to stand in my place today and participate in second reading of Bill 27, and I'm pleased, quite frankly, for a number of reasons. First is that I'm hoping there will be some attention focused on this particular debate by the media outlets so more Albertans will become aware that Bill 59 is indeed no more. Believe it or not, it was only last week that I received a letter from yet another Albertan who was upset about a particular section of Bill 59. I thought at first that perhaps the postal service was a bit slow in delivering the letter, but it wasn't. It was still another member of our province who had received some information about Bill 59; they'd become concerned with it, and they thought they would write a member of the opposition. So I'm hoping the focus will change and Albertans will start to look at 27 as opposed to 59.

The second reason I'm pleased to be participating in this debate at second reading is that Bill 27 is, quite frankly, a much improved piece of legislation over Bill 59. Bill 59, as I said, was an awful piece of legislation, and I and my colleagues are pleased that we do not have to debate that particular piece. We're much, much happier with Bill 27. I believe it was during estimates debate when I somewhat facetiously congratulated the minister for doing something very few ministers of the Crown have been able to do over the course of time, and that was to unite so many Albertans by introducing a piece of legislation. Unfortunately, what had happened was that the minister had united everybody in opposition to the particular piece of legislation that was introduced last year, and I'm much more pleased that we don't have that with this particular Bill before us.

One might think, Mr. Speaker, that as an opposition party we might enjoy some of the more contentious pieces of legislation, and in fact there's no doubt that on occasion we do enjoy debat-

ing particular pieces of legislation. I think Bills 21, 22 are examples of that and certainly on Bill 10 we attempted to make some political hay while the sun shone. I thought for a while that we would have the opportunity to score a number of political points on a School Act. But in the long run -- and I say this in all sincerity -- while we may have garnered a few political points, while there may have been political points to have been made, I think those who would have been injured would have been the students or the children of the province, and then there are no political points to be had by any side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker: not the government, not the opposition. It would have been a loss to all Albertans.

Also, finally, I suppose, with Bill 27 we have a piece of legislation before us that more accurately reflects and mirrors the image, I think, of what Albertans believe an educational system ought to be. The focus in the proposed legislation is, as the minister pointed out on the student, the consumer of a product that is being delivered, and to that end this legislation seems to be a major correction to what Bill 59 was.

Having said that Mr. Speaker, and knowing that we had Bill 59 before us not all that long ago, I think it is important that we as members of the Assembly extend our congratulations to Albertans who took time to participate in a democratic exercise and contact the minister and contact the opposition parties. They took time to write or to speak to us, pointing out the concerns they had over the education process that would have been with us had we adopted Bill 59. I believe that for many people I spoke with it was the first time they had participated in a form of protest whether it was simply by writing the minister and courtesy-copying the opposition parties or whether it was telephoning a Member of the Legislative Assembly. But they did participate. They were concerned about what goes on in this Assembly, and because of the numbers -- and I believe there were thousands -- I believe the government has responded and that that protest was effective.

Of course, I must go a step further. If I'm going to congratulate the people of Alberta for participating in a democratic process, I think it's important that we also extend certain commendations to the minister for having been willing to listen and responding to a degree by making some rather substantial amendments to 59 and bringing back Bill 27. Certainly, with the kind of majority this government enjoys -- the numbers are there: 61 to 22 at any time -- the government could have come back and rammed through a piece of legislation that as I said, would not have been constructive; it would not have been conducive to the good quality of education for young Albertans. So I think the minister, and to the government -- we commend you for listening and for making those changes that we think are so very important.

But Mr. Speaker, one should not construe that commendation with absolute approval, because while we commend the minister and government for the changes in Bill 27 as compared to Bill 59, there are not so many changes from the existing Act we feel, to 27 that we're completely comfortable. There are a number of concerns that must be addressed. They'll be addressed at the second reading stage; they will certainly be addressed at committee stage, and probably at third reading stage as well.

But I would like to start with the foundation of the Act, as the minister points out. I took a close look at the little booklet the department had put out *Framework for our Children's Future*, the School Act 1988, and on page 10 it speaks about the foundation that the Act hopes to bring about. I think it's impor-

tant, Mr. Speaker, to read a particular paragraph into the record. It says: the new School Act can be compared to the foundation and frame of a house. In the day-to-day activities in education we don't think much about legislation, just as we don't think much about the foundation of a house except when it's being built or we want to remodel the house. But the foundation is vitally important. Without a firm foundation to a house, it will eventually collapse. Without a firm foundation in education, we will not be able to set a course for the future which guarantees that young Albertans continue to receive an excellent education.

I rather like that analogy: the foundation to a house and a foundation to an education system. But I fear that with Bill 27 what we have in the foundation is perhaps the premature removal of the forms. You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Member for Cypress-Redcliff would well know all about house construction. When you start off the foundation of a house, you start off with a form placement. Into those forms you pour the concrete. You allow the concrete to set for a period of time so it will dry, and once it's dry, you can take away the form. Once the form is removed, you have to allow the concrete to cure for a period of time prior to going on to the next stage. It's a long process, but it sets up a very solid foundation.

Well, with the preamble of the Act, we have set the forms in place. With the particular section on limitations, section 3, I'm kind of concerned about the aggregate content of the concrete. However, I think we might be able to muddle through that. But as we go through the Act, as we see this foundation setting, this cement, if you will, beginning to hold and to dry, we start to get a little worried that it hasn't been properly set, that it's not been allowed to hold, that it's not been allowed to dry, and yet we're going to construct on that very foundation.

As I said, we had some concerns about section 2, but when we get to section 16, we become very concerned about setting a foundation that can almost immediately start to crumble, because section 16 says:

- (4) If a parent enrolls a student in an alternative program, the board may charge that parent fees for the purpose of defraying all or a portion of any noninstructional cost that
 - (a) may be incurred by the board in offering the alternative program, and
 - (b) are an addition to the costs incurred by the board in providing its regular education program.

What that says to me, Mr. Speaker, is that if you can afford to pay the extra -- the extra amount that's going to be charged by a board if the board so chooses to implement a fee -- or you live in a part of the province where a board has a sufficient amount of money to start up certain programs, you may be able to access programs that will enhance the quality of education for your child. You "may": not that "you shall," but "you may." I believe this is tantamount to removing the form prior to the concrete being fully set.

Now, when I worked in construction, I saw on occasion a form being removed prior to the concrete being fully set. It's not a wise move, but it's an act that one can compensate for by allowing some extra time for the concrete to cure. But what do we find as we go on further into the Act? We find, we stumble upon, we stumble over -- we're shocked to find that in section 44(2)(i):

- A board may
 - (i) charge fees with respect to instructional supplies or materials.

Mr. Speaker, that doesn't mean equity. That doesn't mean fairness. I don't know how we get flexibility out of that. Perhaps if you're flexible enough to go without food for a couple of days

so that you can afford to send your child to band, maybe that's flexibility. But I believe that flies in the face of the principles that were outlined by the minister for the foundation that we all hope will be created with Bill 27.

Mr. Speaker, this Act doesn't guarantee equal access for all Albertans. It doesn't guarantee the right of education for everybody in Alberta. Far from it. What this Bill guarantees is that parents will be paying more. They're going to be paying more in the way of user fees for children. With the record of the government and its percentage share of financial contribution to education continuously dropping, we may see a fee structure in place for materials, for transportation, for lunchroom user fees, that leads to almost a private system of education -- not a completely private system of education, but a far more private system of education. That's the direction I would not want to see.

In the department's book on Directions to 1990, on page 11, the section under revenues notes there has been a steady increase in the revenues collected by Alberta school jurisdictions from sources such as book rentals, transportation fees, and tuition fees from nonresident students. Total revenues collected increased from \$79.5 million in 1982-83 to \$89.6 million in '84-85, which is about 5 percent of total operating revenue. It goes on to note, Mr. Speaker, in that very same book, Directions to 1990, on that very page, page 11 -- and this is really rather shocking: there may be more need and opportunity for joint ventures between the public and private sectors to raise revenues and/or to provide for alternative educational programming. I think that again, Mr. Speaker, flies in the face of equity, flies in the face of access. There is no guarantee there that we are going to have a system of access or equity for students in Alberta. It's a very dangerous direction to go in. I'm saddened by it. I'm not only saddened by it; I'm frightened by it. Paying for our education system based on use rather than paying through the general revenues of the province is truly alarming. This Act could have and should have -- and I would hope yet may adopt the recommendation that was contained in the 1981 report on financing schooling in Alberta, I believe it was, which recommended that the level of the province's contribution from general revenues to schools be at 85 percent. But there's nothing in here, Mr. Speaker, that takes us to that direction.

The implementation of a system of user fees, the additional costs that are going to be borne by the parents, are an extra burden that parents in this economic climate ought not to be leveled with. This is a public education system, a public education system that is accessible by everybody, not based on who can afford to access certain programs but able to be accessed by every individual. That's what the public system means. That's what the public system is for: it's for all Albertans. But this is going to set user fees. It's going to make allowances for boards to begin charging for educational programs while the government cuts back. This is going to make, I fear, more attractive private and home programs that the minister to a degree, I think, is allowing to increase in number in the province. Because once we have a system of paying for certain programs, when public dollars are going off not only to public boards and separate boards but to private boards as well, it's going to make more attractive private school programs for very many Albertans in parts of the province that may not be able to get access or have close proximity to a school building.

Another concern I have with this Act is one I addressed in the estimates debate, and that's the system of a food program. I truly wonder about trying to impart certain knowledge to children when they've not been able to meet their own biological

needs. There are currently in our province, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of children that go to school without proper food. It's not just a matter of poverty, although that is the primary cause of hunger in the schools; it is also a concern that we have with the changing family environment. We have older siblings looking after younger siblings, being responsible for getting those children off to school in the morning while mom and dad are going off to work. The responsibility is handed down, and quite often an older sibling does not take the responsibility of getting the younger sibling ready for school with a breakfast or a packaged lunch. So here we are, trying to give children knowledge when their biological needs are not being provided for.

I've talked with principals and teachers from a number of schools, and they have a great concern about the level of hunger that's increasing in the school system. There used to be a program that was, I believe, if not financed certainly run through the Department of Agriculture, that showed the nutritional value of foods that were grown in Alberta, a food program that I'm advised was ended only a couple of years ago. It was a program that allowed children to learn the nutritional values of certain foods, how to prepare those foods, and it also gave them some nutritional sustenance so they could get through the day as well. Well, I would like, quite frankly, to see that kind of program back in our education system. We have here so many kids in inner cities -- and not only in inner cities but in constituencies that are in the outlying areas of the cities and some of the rural centres as well -- going to school who haven't got the biological need fulfilled so they can have the educational need coming later.

The Calgary public school board surveyed 132 schools, of which 46 reported, and they found there was a significant problem -- their words: significant problem -- with children going to school hungry. What were their estimates? Twenty to 40 percent of the kids coming to school were arriving without an adequate breakfast.

In Edmonton we have a different kind of problem, or perhaps the same kind of problem but looking at it in a different way. There have been 16 schools I'm aware of that are taking part in a privately funded snack program. What are the costs? Are the costs so exorbitantly high that we can say no? I don't think those costs are so high, especially when one looks at them in the long term, when one looks at the costs of illiteracy, when one looks at the costs of kids that have dropped out of high school because they don't have an interest. Those costs are much higher than providing a food program so that children will want to come to school. The Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation takes a number of donations from a variety of groups such as unions, foundations, private individuals, churches, and they believe their costs amount to 12 cents a student. To feed a child a small amount of food every day, nutritional quality food, the cost per child is 12 cents. How many kids do they feed? Not hundreds but 2,600. That's thousands. Thousands of our kids are being provided for through a private program.

I applaud the work they're doing, but I worry that maybe we're missing some, that we aren't doing enough to ensure that on those days when they don't have those extra 12 cents or 24 cents and a couple of kids go without -- I worry that we ought to be providing that kind of program, a breakfast or a lunch program that ensures that children have sufficient food to meet their biological need so teachers can get on with the job of educating them. One of the programs in the United States, in Seattle, estimates that their school meal program costs \$1.06 a day. Surely when we spend almost \$1.3 billion on education, asking for that

little bit more, that little bit more to ensure that those children's needs are being met their biological needs are being met so that we can properly educate them, I don't think that's too much more to ask for.

What will the cost savings be in the long run? Right now in Alberta . . .

MR. DAY: A point of order.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: On a point of order.

MR. DAY: Citing Standing Order 23(b), Mr. Speaker, I certainly share the concern the member opposite has for people in need, but I hardly think it's relevant to Bill 27. I know he'll debate that point, but I'd ask if you could make a ruling on it and that we could get the discussion going onto the Bill itself.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member is getting close to the line, but I suggest he only has a few minutes left. So I would suggest he be able to complete his debate.

MR. SIGURDSON: Just while you're flipping through the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask you to look at section 29(c) and see if that applies in my case as well. You did say that I have a couple of minutes left, but by 29(c) I think you'll find there's something slightly different for me in this case. Perhaps I could just carry on while you look that up. Thank you.

What are the long-term costs of that? In Alberta -- and we're certainly dealing with education here -- according to the report on Literacy in Canada, a report done by Southam News, it's estimated that there are, give or take 60,000, 360,000 functional illiterates in our province. Now, again with this Act, Mr. Speaker, this Act does not allow for equity of access because it limits access to adults. This Act would deny adults who want to go back and look at a basic education program for themselves. It denies them that right to go back and have that system provided to them user-fee free.

The problem with illiteracy is that there are extraordinary cost factors involved in that. A business study that was released in Toronto last February estimated that the direct cost was \$4 billion a year in lost wages, lost productivity, because a worker couldn't read a manual and instead of fixing the product he was further damaging the product. And hopefully it was only the product that was being damaged and not the worker himself. But we have those kinds of costs that come to us every year: an estimated \$4 billion. Now, if you take into account the social costs included with that \$4 billion, Mr. Speaker, the business study estimated that cost amounted to \$10 billion annually to Canadians.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, under 29(c) a member is allowed to speak for 40 minutes if there's a substantive amendment to more than one statute. I think in this case the hon. member has 30 minutes, and his time has expired.

MR. SIGURDSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe if you look in the back, you'll see that there are a number of other statutes that are being amended as well.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to rise and make a couple of comments with regards to Bill 27. First of all, it has been a long process in dealing with the School Act. As we all know, the minister sent out Bill 59 for discussion purposes. We should understand that and so should our constituents. Those that I have met with certainly do understand that, that Bill 59 was introduced for discussion purposes. We must commend the minister and members of the government caucus for going out and dealing with Bill 59, bringing back recommendations in a positive fashion that were dealt with in the same manner by the minister and her department. We now have a Bill that in general terms has the blessing of, I believe, the majority of Albertans.

The Bill has dealt with equity. It's dealt with balance, the balance of the education system, albeit for private education, home education, our friends in public education or, for that matter, in the separate system. I believe the discussion and the input that has been given to the members, at least those on the government side, that has been related back to the minister has been positive. It has shown that the government not only listens but is caring, caring for those young people who are in the education system today but caring for those young people who will be in our education system in the future, albeit public education or some private education.

There are some that are concerned with some of the options, but I guess the question is: who is responsible for the education of the child? Is it the state, or is it the parent? I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the parents have the ultimate responsibility to see that their child receives the finest education they feel that that child can receive, no matter whether they feel that the public system is most appropriate or, rather, that a private educator is more appropriate. Then, of course, there are the people who have to access other education because of disabilities or because they're a little brighter than others, and I believe this system will show that we are able to deal with the majority of these cases.

It's interesting to note that the Member for Edmonton-Belmont indicated that he got a letter with regard to Bill 59 recently, which I did also. And isn't it interesting how the media, when there's something that is put out for discussion that may have circumstances within a Bill or a motion of the Legislature or because of certain comments made by some, like to blow it up and put it on the front page of the newspaper or make it the headline story in the visual media or the voice media. Yet when you send something out that appears to be a good news Bill, Bill 27, which reflects the major concerns of those people in the province who had some concerns with regard to Bill 59, where is it? Mr. Speaker, it's on the back page. It's not identified in the voice media, and you don't see it on the television. Why? The media is not interested in good news; the media is interested usually in garbage, and especially that coming from the Commies opposite.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister has done an exquisite job, along with her department. Notwithstanding that, I think the members of the government side of the Legislature have participated fully in developing this Bill. I think our education caucus committee has done an exquisite job in working with the minister. I believe that the people of Alberta are going to be well served by this piece of legislation, and our students of today and tomorrow are going to also be extremely well served. As changes do occur, I'm sure that the Bill can be examined from time to time to reflect any of those changes.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I feel comfortable that we have a Bill that will reflect the needs of our society of today and tomorrow.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought for a while when I was listening to the New Democratic Party education critic commenting on how saddened and frightened he was and pointing out many valid concerns and criticisms of the Act that he was persuading himself to change his position and oppose the Bill. Without implying that he has had any persuasive effect on the Liberal Party, I stand and advise the Legislature that I and my colleagues in the Liberal Party are opposed to and will vote against this piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation which sets the education system in a potentially harmful and dangerous direction.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Now, it is true that there is much in Bill 27 that is acceptable -- indeed, there are some improvements -- but these improvements and acceptable portions could have been effected by amendments to the existing Act. However, where significant and important changes have been made to our legislation, they have resulted in an Act which is geared towards satisfying special interests rather than the common good. The changes reflect a philosophy which is at war with and potentially destructive of public education as we know it and which has served us well. This Bill is a move in the direction of privatization, of elitism, and of segregation of children from each other on the basis of religion, race, and wealth. It's a move in the wrong direction, and I must say that as important as anything it reflects in a fundamental piece of legislation a statement of values. Indeed, it's an educational statement by ourselves that is approval of segregation and elitism by the leaders of this community as expressed through this Legislature, and it thereby endorses and encourages this kind of schooling.

Now, the system that we have had for the past, I guess, 83 years is that which is acknowledged in the preamble to the Act and that is one publicly funded system with two dimensions: the public system and the separate system. In fact, as I am going to note, that is a totally inaccurate statement. We now have three branches which are publicly funded; the private school system was added in the mid-1970s.

This system that we have enjoyed and which has served us well originated in an era in which there were two main religious groups composing the populace of the province: Protestants and Catholics. The public school system was designed for and indeed has performed the traditional role of public systems: that of mixing children of differing economic backgrounds, of differing races and religions, of providing an education and an element of democratization and providing a basic education of citizenship in a democratic society. Above all, it provided equal opportunity to receive an education for all children regardless of their economic backgrounds or their races or religions. This system has served the province well. It is indeed a true treasure of our community, and if anything should be conserved in our community, the public education system should top the list of our institutions. Yet here: we have a Conservative government, apparently dedicated to conserving that which is valuable in our society, taking steps to erode and weaken and potentially destroy this system.

Now, since 1905 society has of course changed a great deal

and so have our school systems. The separate school systems, for example, were very much restricted to Catholic children in those jurisdictions where Catholics were in the minority. Not so long ago, and indeed still in some jurisdictions, fees were common, which discouraged mixing of children in differing schools. In Calgary, for example, up to the mid-1970s significant fees were charged to Catholic students who wished to attend public schools. Indeed, the Edmonton Catholic system still charges a fee of \$75 per student for non-Catholics. However, there has been a great deal of change, and now there is a tremendous amount of mixing of students of differing religions in both systems. Calgary has, I believe, in the range of approximately 15 percent of students in Catholic schools who are non-Catholic. The system is in fact working well. The separate system has become part of a larger public system, and it is a system which is based on a constitutional arrangement made in 1905. It's part of our Constitution, and I would like to go on record as being supportive of the existing system in both of its branches.

But that structure was established in 1905, and this is 1988. It's necessary for us to formulate policies which will deal with the problems of an increasingly multireligious and multicultural community. We need policies which encourage tolerance and understanding and equal opportunity for children of many differing races and religions and economic classes. We need a strong public education system which encourages the mixing of students.

Unfortunately, there are groups and individuals who believe in a philosophy opposed to the mixing of children. They support segregated schooling for differing religious and ethnic groups. They are supportive of children of East Indian extraction, Oriental, Sikh, Mormon, and Muslim children, children of differing Christian religious groups, all of these children being encouraged in one form or another to go to their own schools, and they have indeed prevailed with this government. Their goals are manifested primarily in the development and the direction of education in private schools. This government as I noted, has succumbed to their blandishments, and after over 65 years of a very, very sensible policy in which private schools were not funded in this province, as indeed was the case in the rest of Canada and indeed is unconstitutional in the United States with respect to religious schools, this government succumbed and in the mid-1970s started a program of very generous funding of private schools, which is now approximately \$1,500 per student and which in fact encourages the formation of private schooling and has resulted in a very significant growth in the number of children in private schools since the mid-1970s.

Now, let me make it clear that I don't oppose the right of parents to send their children to private schools; in fact, I am supportive of that right. But I believe that is a private obligation. It does not serve public interests -- indeed, it is contrary to the public interest -- and those parents should pay. In the new School Act we find provisions which legitimize this form of schooling and, indeed provide a format for granting to those proponents a legal right to accreditation of those schools. It is significant that there is no stipulation that there shall be no funding of private schools. Indeed, it is implicit in the concept of accreditation that that will carry with it the right to the very munificent funding of the provincial government. Indeed, section 22 of the new school Bill provides that any seven children from two families are entitled to constitute the student body of a private school. This is clearly an open invitation to small groups of families to band together and . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. member. Order please. With due respect, in second reading we're talking about general principles and cannot refer back to the specifics of a clause put in generalities. Please continue on the principle of the Bill.

MR. CHUMIR: There is within the provisions in the School Act the right of groups to force the minister to grant them equal right to form their private schools. It is, in fact, a major victory for private schools, and I wouldn't be surprised that champagne corks have been popped in the manner in which Premier Lougheed popped them back in 1981, when the beloved national energy program was adopted.

The reality is that because of these provisions in Bill 27 the preamble stating that we have one publicly funded school system with two dimensions is manifestly untrue; we also have a third publicly funded private system. Now, let me state that there are some parts of the private school system that I would support being funded; those schools, for example, which serve children with learning disabilities, with handicaps. Schools of need are acceptable, in my view, largely because these do not segregate children on the basis of religion or on the basis of race or on the basis of wealth. But it is becoming an increasingly multireligious and multiracial community, and we should heed the lesson that has been learned in the United States, which has been going through contortions over the past 20 years to desegregate their schools, to have blacks and whites go to school together, at the same time as this government moves the education system of this province in a totally separate direction. We're moving in a direction which is calculated to create social divisions between groups over the next 30 or 50 years.

It is also, I should note, a system which encourages elitist schools which will segregate children on the basis of wealth. The payment of \$1,500 per student encourages parents to add their own funding and set up their own schools to attempt to hire away the better teachers. Over the years, if these schools grow in number, they will take significant numbers of parents from the public system and ultimately threaten to leave the public schools with lower income children and problem children.

Perhaps I might digress, Mr. Speaker, just to note that the problems with these children which segregate on the basis of wealth is that they move us in the direction of a class system in this country. One of the great things about Canada is the relative absence of a class system. We very well know that in places like England, France, and many other countries in the world where they have a strong class system, the schools attended, and particularly private schools, have a tremendous impact upon the opportunities which children have for the rest of their lives, and we are moving in this direction.

Now, all of these comments with respect to the encouragement of private schools, Mr. Speaker, have to be assessed in the context of the preamble which refers to the parents' "right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children." This is fair enough, and I support that as a general concept but I don't support it as a simple one-sided statement in a School Act which doesn't include or recognize any balancing statement with respect to the role of the community in education decisions and doesn't specify that specific rights of parents must also take into account the rights of children and the impact of the community. Children are not chattels of parents. The way they are educated and raised impacts not only upon their futures but upon all of us. This recognition has been at the foundation of our system of education. That's indeed why we have certain requirements with respect to curriculum, why we

feel entitled to insist that children be educated in English and math and science and other criteria. These are philosophies which have been expressed for many, many years by educators, by courts, by political leaders. But it is noteworthy that it is a philosophy which is totally absent from this School Act.

On top of this, I would note that we have the new provisions in the Bill encouraging what are described as alternative programs for language, culture, or religion. These provisions are an invitation to school boards to set up special schools for different ethnic and religious groups. Indeed, they bring segregation right into the heart of the public schools, which were designed to mix children and eliminate those differences. These types of schools were apparently permitted under the existing Act, although without specificity. We had schools of that nature in the Calgary public system. These schools, I note with enthusiasm, were rejected in the 1983 school board election in Calgary. But instead of recognizing that that was a problem and a threat to the public school system, we now see this Act containing a special invitation to those schools to join our school systems. In these provisions with respect to alternative schools the problems are compounded by the power granted to boards to specifically delegate any of their duties to parent councils. This would apparently include the power to hire teachers and to discriminate with respect to the hiring of teachers in a public system on the basis of their religious belief.

These provisions are an open invitation, Mr. Speaker, to private school interests to invade the public system and to change the whole nature of this system. By inviting these possibilities within the Act and by including them, the government encourages groups to apply to school systems for their own segregated schools. It in fact tells school boards that this form of schooling is appropriate, establishes these as desirable forms of schooling for our differing ethnic and religious communities. It tells them that this is quite an acceptable and a desirable form of schooling in the community, and it thereby makes it much more likely.

These provisions, Mr. Speaker, are further compounded by specific provisions which allow for fees to be charged for non-instructional costs in alternative schools. This charging of fees, of course, means that those who can't afford the fees are excluded or alternatively that the motivation for parents to have their children attend the programs is reduced unless they're motivated by ethnic or religious enthusiasm. Now, let me make it clear that I don't oppose language or religious classes or courses in our school system, public schools or otherwise, provided the programs are conducted in such a manner that they don't segregate children from each other on the basis of race, religion, or wealth. Indeed, the city of Edmonton has a system of such classes, and I would note that in these classes and programs the students in those courses usually constitute only a small proportion of the total school population, perhaps 20 percent, and that they attend nonlanguage or nonethnic classes with other students. I believe these conditions to be not only appropriate but essential.

I would also note that another sign of the dangerous philosophical direction of this legislation is the inclusion in the definition of schooling of the concept of home schooling. Home schooling, in my view, is something which should be allowed in a proper case but is certainly not to be encouraged by the community. In any event, a home school, if we can call it that, is hardly a school, and inclusion of that concept in the definition of "school" is a telling sign of the overall philosophy of this Act. On top of this, we find the added bonus being given to private schools of exemption from municipal taxes, all of which further

encourages the development of that type of schooling.

All of these initiatives in Bill 27, Mr. Speaker, encourage a movement away from the sensible model of public integrated schooling that we have. It is a move in the direction of fragmentation of opportunity and standards and, as I never tire of noting, will encourage segregation on the basis of religion, race, and wealth. It will weaken public education. It is cause, in fact, for celebration by those who support privatized segregated schooling.

I note that the publisher of *Alberta Report*, Mr. Byfield, who is a great and untiring advocate of private religious schools, has expressed ecstasy with respect to the changes in the Act and with respect to the minister. His comments in the May 30, 1988, issue of the *Alberta Report* state quite perceptively that a door is now open to make major changes in our schools. He states in the closing portion of his editorial that "the possibility of great change has now been opened in the Alberta School Act." After congratulating the minister on her "dewy gentility," he talks about the profound import of this Bill 27 to public education and states that it's "profound because it makes much more likely the prospects of private education." He refers to Bill 27 as "the product of a very different educational philosophy" which now emerges, and he states that the move in the direction of letting "the independents do the job" has been accomplished in Alberta with this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, instead of these changes, I believe that we should build on the very excellent model that we have in this province. We should work to provide a system which challenges each student to the maximum of his or her ability and provides a range of options, but subject to the condition that children not be segregated further from each other on the basis of religion, race, or wealth. We can and should have language, religious, and cultural options to accommodate reasonable demands, although not the most extreme demands.

Now, all of this movement in the direction of elitism and privatization and segregation is compounded by a broader drift, which I have commented on in this House, towards increasing fees in our schools. The impact of this is to imperil the fundamental equality of access to our educational system. I'm distressed to note that the problem appears not even to have been quantified by the minister. There seems to be no research or concern with respect to the issue. At least we have no evidence that it has ever been or is being addressed by the minister, and I would earnestly be enthused to have correction on that.

Yes, there is a provision in the new legislation for appeals, but it's unlikely, in my view, that we will see any but a handful of very gutsy parents who wish to be seen as hardship cases going to the trouble of making that appeal. That provision is just a small band-aid on a large problem. The difficulty is that we don't know how large the problem is, and we really should determine that and then decide whether or not the provisions in Bill 27 are appropriate.

On the positive side I would like to applaud the attempt of the minister to recognize in the legislation the separate school system and to provide a more equitable funding formula. Now, I have one problem with the proposals, and I would like to reflect on an area of omission. The problem that I perceive is with the family unit, and the difficulty is that there is a very significant constitutional issue with respect to the validity of that approach. It's important that we have a court reference with respect to that provision before we get ourselves locked into and reliant upon the system based on it.

I would also note that the family unit establishes a very im-

portant concept of having taxes follow a child. I'm sure that as the minister knows -- and I think it's my duty to comment on it -- this is a very significant philosophical shift from the idea that we pay for public education as a community and not as individual parents to educate our own children. That is a fundamental distinction, and it is being eroded by this provision, and it needs more discussion.

The omission is that we don't have a provision prohibiting tuition fees between public and separate schools where the districts are coterminous or where a separate school district is within or partly within the boundaries of a public school division. Now, I support fair funding of our separate system and, in particular, the provision dividing taxes where the religion has not been designated. But I recognize, and I'm sure the minister does, that this is a concession to the separate system beyond its 1905 rights, and I would like therefore to see a prohibition of the levying of these between Catholic and public school systems in order to encourage the mixing of students, which I referred to earlier.

Now, there is, of course -- and I recognize a difficult and different situation that pertains when we're dealing with the education of handicapped children and special education, where costs are inordinately high. What that points out is the need for a reassessment of the provincial funding rules in that area altogether. Again on the positive side I'm supportive of provisions with respect to the handicapped and the learning disabled. The concept therein is to ensure the right of all children to receive an education and to provide an appeal mechanism with respect to the manner in which the board fulfills this duty.

The concept is positive; however, I would point out that it won't work properly without changes in funding. There are too many obligations on our school system and not enough resources. There is an increasing role being played by our schools with respect to difficult students, handicapped students, students who have health problems. This has led the boards unhappily, but I'm sure necessarily, in their point of view, to support the proposals in Bill 59 with respect to allowing some children to be declared noneducable and to rely on increasing use of fees. But I believe the support of these proposals is based not on philosophical grounds but because they live in a day-to-day world of economic pressures which has been compounded by the reality that the provincial share of education funding has declined from 85 percent 15 years ago to approximately 60 to 63 percent now. They need provincial assistance; they need an increase in the provincial share of funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Is there a call for the question?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few comments I'd like to make to the minister and commend her for the fine work that she has done and that her department has done on this School Act. It is, I think, a direct result of the input from our constituents and from the public. Being part of the education caucus, I had the chance to review many, many briefs. Many hours of work went into these briefs that were put together, and as a result, they were looked at very carefully. Bill 27 is the result of the input from the people of Alberta. I think this is commendable.

There were 400 letters that came into my constituency office and many, many phone calls, and I know just from the input in

my own constituency and my other colleagues that we have been listening to the public. It's important that we do that. We have created this Act as a result of the public input. I now have received many, many comments and compliments on Bill 27. I really feel that one of the areas, the major issues, we're relating to is the separate school system and interfaith marriages. Having parent advisory groups and having the parents involved have been most accepted. The priority of the child and the right to access are also very important, and access for mentally and physically handicapped children to the system has also been very positive.

I'd like to just make a comment with regards to the religious mix and alternate schools. I think it is important that we recognize that there should be freedom of choice with schools, that there are public and separate, and that alternate programs are very important. Not every system fits every child, but at least there are enough programs for parents to allow their children to access. Having a Jewish school in my constituency has proved to be very beneficial. The children there usually go from grade 1 to grade 9. Most often finish at grade 6, and then enter the public system. So they have had an opportunity to have their own culture taught to them, plus later on in high school years they've had the opportunity to mix with other groups of children. In my belief it has been very beneficial. I see other multicultural groups and languages being taught in the school, and I think this is vital to our system. It creates an excellent mix.

I agree that the strong public education is necessary. We don't want to see fragmentation of the system, and I don't think that is occurring. But I think we have to realize that not everybody is equal, not everybody is the same, and each family requires various programs and various education systems. I don't believe that privatization of schools is elitism. I think it's just another opportunity for parents and children to access a system that is right for them.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

I also want to commend the minister on adopting the ward system. It is very important in the city of Calgary. It certainly has been welcomed by my constituents. I think the accountability is there and that the public will not have to address a long slate when it comes to election time.

The many, many years of work that went into this whole program, this whole system, again have proved to be successful. The number of phone calls that I have received now has diminished, and it's only complimentary. Again, I would like to support Bill 27, and thank you, Madam Minister, for bringing it forward.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Member for Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say a few words following along the line that the Minister of Education had taken. The minister outlined five points, and I have a few comments.

First of all, I compliment the Bill as being light-years ahead of any of the other previous drafts. Whether or not that is something to take joy in I don't know, because the others were about as far backwards as the Court of Star Chamber could put them or something like that. Certainly this is a very great improvement, and it looks as if we're getting near to some solution.

I find it interesting, though, Mr. Speaker, to rise to speak on the cause of public education for almost identical -- and I maybe should have brought something along. One of my ancestors, Alexander Taylor, an old crusty Scotsman, represented a New Brunswick riding for some years, from 1801 to 1811; as a matter of fact, the same riding that the present Premier of New Brunswick comes born up the Miramichi River. One of the campaign issues he had was the advantages of public education. I often keep his name quiet. Although being a Scotsman also, it turned out that unfortunately he was Tory. Somebody always has a black sheep in the family going way back. Others have had sheep stealers; I've had Tories. But I guess he's [inaudible].

Nevertheless, in the early 1800s the cause at that time for public education was championed by the Conservatives, not the Liberals. The classical Liberals of the day -- and there were a great many of them from Scotland, of course, at the time -- believed, as under Locke and Mill and a few others, that the competition of different systems all working together would turn out the best possible system. So it's rather interesting to see the same type of concept rearing its ugly head and, by the sound of it, advised by equally Scottish ancestry, coming up with an idea that the Scots found trouble with way back in the late 1700s and 1800s. Nevertheless, I'm going to take the same line my grandfather did, in spite of the fact that he was of another party, and say that the cause of public education is something that should not ever be tampered with in a democracy.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

I know the minister mentioned access to quality education. I know the approach she took and mentioned, Mr. Speaker, was from the point of view of whether they're handicapped or sick or disabled. That's not the line I would approach it from. If indeed these school systems that take the few thousand dollars that this government has and then assess their own parents another few thousand on top of that aren't putting out a different quality of education than the ones that are not taking the money, then they should be closed down for taking money under false pretenses. Obviously, then, there is not access to the same quality of education. To argue that the poorest paid district and the poorest funded public or separate school district is equal in quality of education to some of these domiciles where little Lord Fauntleroy's with their blue and orange underwear go to school every day, taken by a private bus, for another \$5,000 or \$10,000 in fees, is a little hard to understand. I don't see how you can argue that the access to quality of education is equal if indeed you have two different standards or different standards of financial access.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture for sending over a gumdrop to help my voice. I notice it is green so as to affect my breath.

The next thing I want to touch on: the minister talked about equity in financing. Well, I don't know if the minister is aware, but the governments of Quebec and British Columbia both fund from their central government the public education system in numbers greater than 93 or 94 percent. This makes a charade out of fiscal equity here when we let the local taxpayers dig up 66 or 67 percent of the money. How can you argue that some northern school district that has no industry and is not likely to see industry, with a submarginal culture depending on pulp and maybe some homestead land, is in the same position of being able to finance their school system as, say, Sherwood Park or an area out here where we have a great deal of refineries belching

their product into the air but nevertheless putting a lot of money into the pockets of the local taxpayers? I believe that fiscal equity has a long way to go, and I would recommend to the minister not the principles of Scotland but the principles of B.C. and Quebec, which are much closer to funding to a higher degree from the central government than we do here or many other areas in the world. Last time I looked, it doesn't seem to hurt the quality of their education.

You mentioned freedom of choice for parents. Well, freedom of choice for rich parents: yes, very definitely, if you've got the money. That's like saying that you can go out and buy any car you want. However, the facts are that you can get any wheelbarrow you want. I think it's a very hollow privilege indeed if the private schools are operating within the system and are allowed to charge a large fee and top it up over the top of what the government is putting in. Certainly I believe that private schools are fine; there's nothing wrong with a private school. There's nothing wrong with a Rolls Royce. There's nothing wrong with having gold taps in your bathroom. But why should the taxpayers of Alberta have to pay the basic amount and then the people add the gold taps or the Rolls Royce on top of that? I submit, Mr. Speaker, that private schools, if they are worthy, can exist on their own and do not need the financial care and undertaking that this minister is trying to do.

She also mentions, Mr. Speaker, under principle number 4 -- I'm moving along very fast here -- the question of the student being the centre, I gathered. I might have missed that philosophically. I don't have too much wrong with that, except that there's a possibility that we're talking here of negating the responsibility to pass on the traditions and knowledge of our past to our youth. Now, lest I sound too much like a Conservative there, I am a little surprised to hear the Conservative Party espousing making the student the centre. I'm just a little bit suspicious, and I'll wait to see a little more. When I see the student is the centre tied into the fact that appeals can be made past the local board -- and the local board is often the source of input as far as culture and history is concerned. When I can see that local board bypassed, when I can see the fact that they can forget about public schools and instead start sending their children to private schools with public money -- in other words, the erosion of the public schools could well take place -- I'm a little concerned that this government may well be abdicating their responsibility to pass on a certain amount of culture, knowledge, and history to our youth.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the role of the principal and school board, teachers, and awards: all these I think are probably an improvement over the past, in that they're better defined. But I'm still concerned, and we in the Liberal Party will be moving amendments probably in all these areas. We'll probably be moving an amendment whereby a lot of the decisions that are reached by a school board will not be appealable to the minister but possibly to local tribunals, but maybe more important . . .

MR. SPEAKER: That's hypothetical.

MR. TAYLOR: It's not hypothetical that we're going to make amendments. It's as sure as the dawn of day. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I see what you're getting at. The point is that we will be doing more along that line.

Lastly -- and this is outside the five points that the minister mentioned -- I'm just a little concerned as to where Francophone schools are going to fit in, whether it's here or in the new Act that the government is contemplating, bearing in mind that if

you're going back to Scottish ancestry to get the basis of some of your education philosophy here, I think I would remind the hon. minister that French was a well-accepted second language in Scotland when the British were still swinging through the trees, Mrs. Minister. Consequently, the idea might be that we could go back to that source you claim you've used and see whether we can do something about Francophone schools. I believe that the cause of Francophone schools might be better addressed in the School Act than it is waiting for a new Act covering the whole question of the use of French in the province.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to say. I will wait with interest the further discussion in the committee stage. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and speak on Bill 27. It's on a subject that's very dear to my heart, as I taught school for almost all of my adult life.

I would like to say at the outset that I do congratulate the minister on bringing back Bill 27 as being a much better Bill than Bill 59, but I would point out to the Assembly that the standard by which you measure Bill 27 should not be Bill 59. Bill 59 no longer exists, thank gosh, and the horror story that was Bill 59 is behind us. It's nonexistent. It is not what we should be measuring Bill 27 against. What we need to measure Bill 27 against is what we have presently and what we should have for the future. In that regard, it comes up a little bit short in a number of areas. This caucus, for one, will be looking forward to the Committee of the Whole and some amendments here and there and seeing whether or not we think that the minister is prepared to make some of the accommodations that we think are necessary to make this a good Bill to lead us into the next century.

I must also put in a comment or two about the process. The minister said that this was a four-year democratic process. For the first three years of the four years I would say that the government wasn't listening, not if Bill 59 was any indication anyway. The number of people that brought complaints to me about Bill 59 and then said, "We told the minister or we told the government beforehand what our view was on this subject, and I can't believe this Bill actually is written the way it is." I heard that many times. It's only since Bill 59 created such a furor that the government actually stopped to listen and has made some of the changes that were necessary.

I would like to spend a little bit of time on the principle of the Bill. I agree with the first point, that the interest of the student must be paramount, and the corollary of that is the right for all students to an education. I am really pleased to see that we now have it in the Bill that all students have the right; no definition of people that are noneducable. That change was one that I really felt was essential. I'm glad to see that now all students, regardless of their abilities or handicaps or problems or any other thing that might have stopped them from having the right to an education -- that has been eliminated, and we now know that all students have the right to an education in Alberta.

The second point goes on to say that parents have a right and a responsibility to educate their children in the manner they wish. I find, Mr. Speaker, that there's some ambiguity in that,

or at least there should be if we are to stop and think about those words seriously. Parents have a right to educate their children as they wish. Well, maybe. They certainly have a responsibility to see that their children get an education. But the word "right" seems to imply that the parents have a total right to what kind of an education their kids should get. I'm not sure that we can give quite such an unlimited blank cheque. I think we have to stop and consider whether that's always the case, to what extent that's the case. They have a responsibility to pay for that education; that's true. But they aren't the only ones that pay for our education system.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It happens that my wife and I don't have any children, but we do pay education taxes the same as anybody else. It would seem to me that in some way that gives me a right to have input into what kind of an education system we might have, just as much as any other adult in our society. So we take these rights and responsibilities as parents or even as nonparents, as adults in our society, and we say: how best can we educate our children; what kind of an education system should we have? What you're really talking about here is the right of parents to opt out of the general consensus. In other words, the public system -- whether it be separate or public doesn't really matter. They're both still public systems and are open to all people that want to register with those systems. The minister said that the Canadian Charter of Rights gives the right to parents to opt out of that and have a private school or to have home education. I'm not sure that the Bill of Rights is all that clear on that point. I think it could be argued that it may be not just quite as clear as that: that somehow a province has to allow private schools and has to allow home education.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's the children that we're trying educate. It's the children that have the rights to an education. That's paramount over, in my view anyway, the right of parents to say what kind of an education their children should have. So it seems to me that more time and thought is needed on this particular point.

Mr. Speaker, we're running out of time here, so I guess I would move adjournment and hope that I'll be able to continue this another time. Do you want me to keep going?

MR. SPEAKER: One of us will sit down.

The hon. member has moved adjournment. Those in favour of the motion to adjourn, please signify by saying aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, by saying no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. SPEAKER: That's carried.

MRS. CRIPPS: Mr. Speaker, tonight the Assembly will continue with the debate on this Bill and others on the Order Paper for second reading.

(The House recessed at 5:28 p.m.)

