

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, December 3, 1990 8:00 p.m.**

Date: 90/12/03

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SPEAKER: Be seated, please.

May we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Solicitor General.

head: Introduction of Special Guests

MR. FOWLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty years ago I had the privilege of leading a Cub pack in St. Albert. Tonight we have some of the grandchildren, I'm sure, of those Cubs I led at the time. In the visitors' gallery we have a group of 27 from the 1st St. Albert scouting group, the Wolf Cubs that are here this evening. They are accompanied by leaders George and Jackie Fowler, Dave Odegard, Rick Sawatsky, with parents Steve Barr, Fred Bachewich, Paul Sissons, Penny Odegard, and Gail Marshall. If they would rise, I would hope that the Assembly would welcome them in their usual manner here today.

MR. SPEAKER: The Solicitor General again, please.

MR. FOWLER: Thank you. On behalf of hon. member Pat Black I am also pleased to introduce six members of the 59th Venturer company, senior people in the scouting movement. They are accompanied by their leader Dr. Alan Skeiley with Mr. David Wilson, who is the assistant Venturer adviser. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Assembly welcome this group in their usual manner.

head: Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 57

Electoral Boundaries Commission Act

[Adjourned debate December 3: Ms M. Laing]

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, at issue is the failure of this Bill to recognize the importance of a commitment to the principle of one person, one vote. We've heard many reasons why this is not possible in Alberta. However, the commitment has not been to one person, one vote but a commitment to regional disparity. The principle of one person, one vote has not been taken into account even in this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at representation in this Chamber, quality is important; quantity alone is not enough. I am reminded of when I was Education spokesperson for our caucus and I went into the heartland of central Alberta to a small town named Delia to hear the concerns of some parents there in regard to school closures and busing of their children. There was at least one government MLA, the local rural member. After he spoke he got some scant applause and after I spoke I got a standing ovation, because the constituents there recognized that not only had I listened, but I had heard what they had to say. [applause]

MR. SPEAKER: There you are, hon. member; you're standing, and you've had an ovation.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Speaker, I think what we are saying here is that it's not good enough just to have a member. Much of the alienation and disenfranchisement that rural people in Alberta feel now has occurred when they have had a disproportionate number of members in this Legislative Assembly. I'm not sure in fact whether the problem is that rural residents have not been heard or whether their representatives have not been able to speak effectively on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, we hear that MLAs need to be able to communicate with constituents, to meet with them, but we sit in this Chamber for less than half the year, approximately five months. When we are not sitting, that is the time for us to be meeting with and hearing our constituents. That is the time, if one is a full-time MLA, that one can do that, whether in fact they are rural or urban MLAs. If they make their job as MLA a top priority in their lives, then they have adequate time. Most difficulties do not arise overnight; they are ongoing. I think of the foreclosures, the bankruptcies in rural Alberta, the closing of schools. Those kinds of things don't happen overnight, and members of this Legislature certainly have time to learn about it from their constituents if they make that a priority.

Mr. Speaker, in a democratic society the basis of that democratic society is one person, one vote in this Assembly. At the present time for some constituencies one vote in here means one voter in their constituency, but for many voters in this province one vote in here means three voters in their constituency. There is no fairness in that. It is after all in this Chamber that decisions are taken, laws are passed, and funds are allocated, and each citizen should have an equal voice in how we shall live together and how tax moneys are to be spent. What we have at the present time with the unfair allocation of seats is almost taxation without fair representation in here. We know, too, what happens to kings and leaders that would impose that on the people.

If we hold to the principle of fair representation, then we look at how to achieve that representation being effective. If we hold to the principle, then we say: how will we make this work? I talked in my speech to the motion that preceded this Bill of a number of ways that would allow rural members, members with large constituencies the kind of resources that could be put at their disposal so they could meet and effectively represent their constituents. The Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place also has made a number of very worthwhile suggestions that would work if there were a will and a commitment to the principle of one person, one vote.

We see in this Bill not a commitment to fair and equal representation. Indeed, this Bill has not left it to the commission to determine how the boundaries shall be drawn, has not left it to them to determine how fair representation shall be worked out. In fact, this Bill sets out that unfair legislation, unfair representation will be the principle. How else can you have in a Bill 51 percent of the voters represented by 43 seats. This Bill is a political document to direct what should be a nonpartisan process. For fairness, this Bill should allow for the nonpartisan commission to establish boundaries so that the boundaries cannot be seen to fulfill a political agenda.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The Member for Drumheller.

MR. SCHUMACHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I should say something at second reading of this Bill, but certainly the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore have probably caused me to get up a little sooner than I otherwise would have, because I happen to be one of the other MLAs at the meeting in Delia in 1987 I believe it was. I must say that the hon. member understated the case a little bit. I don't recall that I got any applause at all; I just recall getting a lot of boos. I also have to point out to hon. members that Delia is not in my constituency. It happens to be in the constituency of Chinook. At that time it was represented by our late great friend the hon. Henry Kroeger, who was also present at the meeting, and he did get some applause. Nevertheless I'm advised that in the by-election that followed shortly thereafter and the last general election, that poll of Delia certainly didn't support the New Democratic Party in any great measure.

8:10

Before commenting on some of the remarks by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, I'd like to reply to some of those remarks made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn. He also said, and I guess the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore also agreed with her colleague, that Bill 57 is unfair. I can clearly recall the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn saying that the labour laws that were passed in 1988 were also grossly unfair and that this government would be punished severely when it next went to the polls. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all hon. members to ask where that punishment is, because I really don't see any great change in the representation in this Chamber after the 1989 election from that preceding it. A slight change, the smallest possible change is what happened. There couldn't have been any change that was any smaller. And what happened to the Labour critic for the New Democratic Party in that election? He was retired by the electors. We're happy to have the hon. Solicitor General with us tonight; he did an excellent service for St. Albert.

I heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn saying very clearly that we would be punished for this patently unfair legislation. He's saying it again now, and it'll be the same result next time.

MR. FOX: So you won't be punished for unfair legislation. Oh, I see.

MR. SCHUMACHER: The fact of the matter is, hon. Member for Vegreville, that we have produced very fair legislation; there couldn't be fairer legislation at all. This legislation carries on the tradition of Albertans since we joined Confederation in 1905. We've always had a principle of fair representation in this province, and we are continuing along the same line.

He talks about every single Calgarian being opposed to this legislation except for the MLAs from Calgary who are members of the government caucus. He says that they're the only ones who favour it. Every other Calgarian is absolutely and unalterably opposed. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say the only ones really opposed to this legislation that I've heard of are the mayor and some of his uninformed aldermanic colleagues. Those are the ones who seem to be opposed, and they don't understand what the legislation is all about or the tradition of this province. It's too bad that they're also joined in the claptrap of noise by the mayor of this city, Jan Reimer, who doesn't have a clue what she's talking about when she talks about the representation of Albertans in this Legislature.

MR. GIBEAULT: Point of order.

Speaker's Ruling Reflections on Nonmembers

MR. SPEAKER: Just half a moment. The Chair was listening to the rest of the sentence. The Chair doesn't need to be directed by Edmonton-Mill Woods above all people in this place and especially in light of the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was busy chatting in a rather loud fashion with some other colleagues in the House. I'm sure the hon. Member for Drumheller is going to now come around to some specificity about the comment about claptrap and the mayor of Edmonton and will indeed, in the usual sage way of a Deputy Speaker, find an interesting way out of it.

Debate Continued

MR. SCHUMACHER: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I hear the mayor of Edmonton and the mayor of Calgary saying is that the philosophy proposed by the committee report and the legislation upon which it's based is absolutely unfair to the cities of Calgary and Edmonton. I would like to hear those two worthies come up with an idea of how it is unfair. Where have Calgary and Edmonton suffered in this province over the last number of years on the representation they've had in this Legislature? Can they demonstrate a lack of growth? Can they demonstrate a lack of high-paying jobs in their cities? Is there anything like that that they can demonstrate? No, they cannot do that. That's why I characterized their comments in the way I did. It is absolutely ridiculous what they're saying about the representation of their cities in this Legislature.

Now, we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry saying that he's very, very fearful that his constituency might be polluted with constituents who don't live within the city of Edmonton. That's really the impression I get when I hear these Calgary and Edmonton politicians decrying this legislation. They think they're on a level above anybody else in the province. That's what they're really telling us. Mr. Speaker, I don't know how you characterize what they're saying in any other manner that is more descriptive of what they're really saying to Albertans. You know, they don't even admit that there's a city of Red Deer or a city of Lethbridge. Those aren't considered real single-municipality areas.

MR. FISCHER: What about the town of Irma?

MR. SCHUMACHER: Well, I don't know about the town of Irma, but certainly as far as they are concerned, they think that they are the only urban centres in our province. Mr. Speaker, the attitude they have is ridiculous.

A short time before we resumed our session here, I received a call from one of the journalists representing one of the Calgary papers who asked me whether it was true that I at one time represented a large area of Calgary. I said, "Yes, it was," and he said, "Well, it's also true, isn't it, that that was a very difficult thing to do and really wasn't very satisfactory." I said, "No, that's not true at all." "Oh, thank you very much," and he hung up. He wasn't interested in hearing that answer at all. That is what we're getting out of these newspapers as well, parroting the mayors of their respective cities.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I did have the honour to represent the federal constituency of Palliser for 11 years. In 1968, when it was formed, it looked like strictly a nonurban constituency, stretching from about 18 miles east of Drumheller

in the east to the Stony Indian reserve on the west, but in fact it surrounded Calgary on three sides. By the time the 1974 election was held, half the population of my constituency was within the city of Calgary. I have to say that that was a very, very good experience for me as the member and also for the constituents of that constituency, because they came to understand each other a lot better. There was no conflict. I have to say that as a result of that I've had some experience in representing urban people. They're not that different than representing nonurban people. People are people wherever you find them.

I hope that the Electoral Boundaries Commission that will be established as a result of Bill 57 will certainly use the principle of mixing up single-municipality people with multimunicipality people. That would be a good thing for healing some of the divisions that have been created or will likely be created if we have people like the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton carrying on in the future the way they have been. They're also being parroted by many members of this Chamber.

8:20

Really, Mr. Speaker, I can't understand why these people are decrying what's being proposed. You know, I think the figures were that in 1971 Calgary and Edmonton had the same proportion of the population that they do now, but it has to be said that there's been some progress along the lines demanded by the members of the opposition party, because those people have risen from 36 percent of the seats to 43 percent. We talk about this business of vast disparities between single-municipality constituencies and the others. Really, where is it so great when you have a 57 percent to a 43 percent? Does that add up to a hundred? I hope it does. It doesn't sound that far different to me.

I would ask the question of somebody from the New Democrats or the Liberals: what would they see happening if the percentage was absolutely representation by population? What would they see happening? That would give a few extra seats to Calgary and Edmonton I guess. Do they feel then that they would be reducing the school and education and health and other budgets for the rest of Albertans? What would they be doing with the extra money in Calgary and Edmonton? Is there some evidence that Calgary and Edmonton are not getting a fair shake in education and health care? We see the vast, vast, vast majority of our money voted in this Legislature going to those two cities in those two areas. Are they not getting enough? Can somebody bring forward some facts and figures to show that they're not getting enough? What do they really want? It's all very well for them to speak in here about how unfair the legislation is, but I would still like to hear, and I'm sure other hon. members would like to hear, what the results of this unfairness are. What is so unfair? What are the horrible results that are going to flow from this? What are the horrible results that have already flown from the type of representation that this government is now carrying on, as have previous governments in the last 85 years of our history?

They say that this 25 percent variance is really an extreme thing. That's what the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn said it was: an extreme thing. I suppose he's accusing Madam Justice McLachlin of being an extremist, because in her characterization of this variance she said that it was probably very acceptable. Maybe there could be reasons for increasing the variance above 25 percent, but she thought that it was certainly a reasonable thing. I would ask hon. members: if the federal Parliament has a 25 percent variance allowed in the popularly

elected lower House of its bicameral institution, why would 25 percent be an extreme here, where we do not have the benefit of another Chamber to represent regional interests?

They talk about the Charter of Rights. Of course, the government is going to refer this legislation to the courts for interpretation. I haven't one bit of doubt but that the courts will say that our legislation meets any test of fairness to the population of Alberta, none at all. If they did that, if they knocked this down, they'd have to knock out the federal electoral laws. I don't see anybody challenging them or even thinking about it.

Then what about the laws in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island that allow a one-third variance? There hasn't been a redistribution in Nova Scotia since 1978, I guess, somewhere along that. [interjection] Another little chirp from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who doesn't know what he's talking about at all. I suppose the New Democratic Party is not active in Nova Scotia at all. I suppose it's dormant and moribund. If it was such a terrible situation there, why can't they go to court and challenge the legislation? There isn't a peep out of the Nova Scotians. They're absolutely happy, they're sensible. So don't give us the gears, hon. members over there, about being unfair. As a matter of fact, I feel we should have gone for a one-third variance. I think that the government is bending over backwards in being fair, because I think that a higher percentage than 25 percent could very well and legally be justified in our present situation.

Where did this business about one person, one vote come from? It certainly didn't come from Great Britain. Where did it come from? As far as I know, the only place it's come from is the United States. I just cannot understand the New Democrats. I can understand the Liberals; they were always very pro-American. They bring in the worst parts of anything that the Americans have to do with political life. But I don't understand the New Democrats wrapping themselves in the stars and bars for this one person, one vote business. Of course, that one person, one vote business is in a republic that has bicameral Legislatures at both their state and federal levels throughout. So what is the application of this one person, one vote here? For gosh sakes, hon. members.

In any event, I want to congratulate the committee. The committee did a fantastic job of bringing the facts of the situation before Albertans. I congratulate the government for acting on the report of the committee, and I urge all members to give quick and speedy passage to this really exemplary piece of legislation that's before us this evening.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm sure the House will be very attentive now, please. Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have to rise to register my opposition and grave concern about Bill 57, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I am not going to stoop to the level of the Member for Drumheller and insult his mayor the way he insulted the mayor of Edmonton, but I am going to try and talk about some of the serious problems with this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, quite clearly this Bill is unfair to the urban voters of this province, and the Member for Drumheller admitted as much in that the government is not confident enough in its own legislation; it's got to now submit it to judicial ruling. Now, I ask the Conservative members of this Legislature: when was the last time this government did that? When was the last time they were so afraid of a piece of their legislation being legally challenged that they referred it to the courts before it was

even passed? I don't hear any reply, Mr. Speaker. I don't remember that either in the four years I've been here.

I would suggest that it's because this government is totally unconvinced and uncertain about the legitimacy of this piece of legislation, that that is why in fact they have had to look at making this legal reference. I'm glad to see that is going to the courts, because I am sure that when it gets that unbiased judicial review, it will be found wanting very clearly, because it does not respect that fundamental principle of one person, one vote. I am shocked and stunned that the Member for Drumheller has such a low regard for such a fundamental democratic principle as that.

The current situation in the province, Mr. Speaker, is really totally unacceptable, and this Bill is not going to be a satisfactory improvement. We have a situation now where the riding, for example, of Cardston, barely some 8,000 voters, compared to a riding like mine, Edmonton-Mill Woods, with approximately 30,000, virtually a 4 to 1 difference: your voters in Cardston have almost four times as much influence as the voters of Edmonton-Mill Woods. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we could find many examples of the emphasis of this government which gives short change to the concerns of the increasing number of residents of our province who have chosen to make their homes in the urban communities of Alberta.

8:30

Mr. Speaker, we want to acknowledge that the citizens who live in rural Alberta make a very valuable and important contribution to all of us, certainly in food production and in many, many ways. I am certain that if they had a chance to look at this legislation before them, they would realize that this is really quite unfair. I am convinced that the members of the rural community do not want an unfair advantage over their urban counterparts, and I think the principle of one person, one vote is one that's easily understood by all right-minded, thinking persons. I regret to observe that that doesn't seem to include the Conservative members of this Legislature.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, that's not the correct label for that.

MR. GIBEAULT: But I suspect that when we do get this judicial review, it will be found wanting.

I want to just show a few items that show the kind of bias that exists when a Legislature is composed of an unfair representation of the citizens in the urban districts of the province. For example, fair labour laws have been repeatedly demanded by people primarily in the urban communities of the province, and it's interesting to observe that, again, the Member for Drumheller pooh-poohed this particular request of so many citizens of our province. But it's interesting to note, isn't it, that the Conservative candidate in Edmonton-Strathcona is arguing just exactly that, for improvements to the labour law, for the right to strike. Is that because he is more in tune with some of the urban concerns in this particular city, or is it the fact that this government is totally out of touch with the needs of urban Albertans? I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that come December 17 the Conservatives are going to find once again another humiliating defeat because people in Edmonton-Strathcona know that there's no point electing a Conservative member who says he's in favour of the right to strike when all the members of this government are totally opposed to it. It would be pointless. So they're going to elect someone who can articulate and represent in a very legitimate way and not have to be ashamed and fight

the government on this but be proud to stand for fair labour laws for working Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me just identify another area of public policy here in the province that shows the kind of skewed mentality that exists and that will not be corrected by Bill 57. That's, for example, in the area of landlord and tenant legislation. We have in this province legislation which allows landlords to raise rents any time they want for any matter whatsoever. Now, for example, we've got a situation currently in my constituency where we have landlords who are proposing to raise rents of my constituents in January. They say for the GST, but when in fact I asked them about this, they admitted that they are raising the rents twice the amount of the GST. In other words, they don't have to account for that one bit. In fact, they're misleading my constituents, I would say, in a fraudulent way. They are saying that they can raise the rents for any reason whatsoever. They're blaming the GST, that wonderful tax initiative of my Tory counterparts here across the way, and there is nothing the tenants can do about that.

Now, tenants have argued and MLAs who represent urban ridings, at least in the New Democratic Party, have argued that tenants have a right to rent review so that landlords have to give some kind of justification for their rents. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that in rural ridings like many of the Conservatives here represent, maybe these problems are not as pressing because in a smaller community the landlord cannot gouge the people who rent from him as easily as they can get away with it in a large city. In a smaller centre you have people who know each other, and landlords who would gouge their tenants like that would be ostracized. They would be outcasts in their own community. So there's much more of a degree of social responsibility that exists in a smaller community that simply doesn't exist in large areas. For example, in my particular riding in this complex that I was just referring to, the owners are from Toronto. They're not even here in Alberta. Their property managers, Re-Max realty, just raise rent anytime they want. There's no accountability whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, those are the kinds of things that Bill 57 simply is not going to correct. If we had an electoral mechanism that gave one person one vote, you would see that this Legislature would be concerning itself with the kinds of legislation that are required by urban Albertans as well as rural Albertans and not to the exclusion of rural Albertans but in proportion to their numbers in the province.

Now, we also point out the importance of education and health care concerns in urban ridings. I know that people around the province value education highly, but I know that particularly in urban areas, where we have the universities and the colleges and the technical schools, these are heartfelt concerns. The cutbacks that have been going on in health care and education – and we've had the example of the Royal Alex hospital and so on; I won't go into those details – are examples of the kinds of misguided priorities that come out of a government that does not have a proper representation of urban members in this Legislative Assembly.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there are others. There are areas like social services, and we have the question of day care. Now, maybe in the rural areas and on farms day care and child care, after school care, are not as pressing matters as they are in the city. But I want to tell my friend from Drumheller and the other members who don't live in the cities that that is a very important service to urban Albertans. It's important because most families in the urban areas require two family incomes to survive. We have a lot of single-parent families in my riding, for

example, and I know many of my colleagues' from urban ridings, and these services are essential. Again, here we have a problem where the reflection of the population and our concerns in urban areas are simply not being reflected in this Legislature, and Bill 57 will not improve that.

Now, let me just give one more example. I mean, there are so many we could give, but in rural communities, as I said, there's more of this feeling of community responsibility for one another. In the cities that doesn't exist as much, so we depend on not only government services but services from nonprofit agencies, the food banks and many others, to provide services to our citizens. I would be willing to bet you, Mr. Speaker, that if we had an Assembly and a government that represented in proportion the urban citizens of our province, we would not get the idiotic kinds of comments that we get from the spokesperson from the department of social services, who suggests that people on social assistance should go grovelling for pop cans and bottles. Those kinds of insulting comments would not come forward from a government that had a proper understanding of the serious problems that are faced by people in the urban communities.

We've got very serious problems in the inner cities. For example, in Edmonton-Norwood and in Edmonton-Highlands and in some of the comparable districts of Calgary like Forest Lawn and so on, we've got serious social problems that don't exist in some of the rural communities. Here in Edmonton, for example, native Albertans who come to the city have serious problems adapting to the life here, and there's a variety of problems that flow from that. I would hope that my friends like my colleague from Athabasca would understand some of these things and could help us . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. GIBEAULT: Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

. . . and would be able to support us in the city so we could try to provide the kinds of services that are so desperately needed, Mr. Speaker.

Then, of course, if we had, I would suggest, a government which had a better sense of being in touch with our citizens in the city, we'd understand more clearly the need for better health and safety regulations for the work force in this province. In rural communities, where for the large part people are independent farmers, they run their own show and they know the importance of safety. They make sure that they operate their farms and so on in a safe manner, especially when it comes to their own personal safety and that of their family members who help. But, you know, in the city there's a lot of contractors and employers who don't seem to care much about safety. We have a very disturbingly high rate of accidents and injuries. Many of them occur in urban areas on construction sites and elsewhere. Of course, then after people get injured, they have problems dealing with Workers' Compensation.

Maybe workers' compensation is not as important an issue to some of my rural colleagues here in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, but I want to tell them that that takes more of my time and energy and my office staff's time and energy to deal with than just about any other area of government service. I have to believe that if we did have a government that had more of that sensitivity based on the numbers, not because of any altruistic motive but just because the people of Alberta in urban areas warrant it, if we had a proper representation of the urban community here in the Legislative Assembly, we would be able

to get a lot of these kinds of things done and move forward on behalf of the pressing needs of constituents in urban Alberta.

Now, another example, Mr. Speaker, is the question of what we are doing for our children in urban Alberta versus rural Alberta.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, take your place, please. There's been enough of this moving around various departments. Perhaps you'd be kind enough, having given us such a lengthy preamble, to come back to Bill 57 on some other points, please.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 57 we're talking about the principle of electoral boundaries and how we are going to allocate those. I have to tell you that I am concerned that this report of the electoral boundaries committee, which formed the basis for Bill 57, has recommended some strange things, one of which, of course, is that we may end up with constituencies – instead of Edmonton-Mill Woods, maybe after the next election I'll be the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods-New Sarepta-Beaumont-Leduc-Wetaskiwin. Now, those are all fine communities, but I would suggest to you that Edmonton is a dynamic community which has commonalities of interest, and if the population of our city of Edmonton, the capital city, was properly represented in this Legislature, instead of 17 representatives we would have 23.

8:40

Of course, that would mean that we'd have to have a few less in some of the rural areas in order to reflect the fact that there has been a population decline. Now, I know that some of my rural colleagues have said: "Well it's so hard to get around. It'll be difficult; we've got all these towns and so on." We're not living in the Stone Age anymore. We've got telephones and faxes and hot lines and toll-free lines and the RITE line. We've got special travel allowances already on the books for members in rural communities. They get increased mileage allowances. They have increased access in certain constituencies to air travel and so on. I'd even be prepared to look at more resources for some of the members who represent those widely dispersed rural ridings. But to suggest that somehow the votes of some smaller communities have to count for several times more than those of urban communities is simply unacceptable.

I know that even young people in my constituency – one of my constituents, a girl by the name of Jenny Cisek is a student at Holy Family school. Maybe these things don't apply in rural communities, but there's a problem in our area, for example, of kids hanging out in malls. They have nothing more challenging to do. She suggested a project whereby they could put concrete on the skating rinks in the neighbourhoods so that they could be used for roller skating and skateboarding and so on during the summer and then used as skating rinks during the winter instead of just being used as skating rinks now. They're prepared to take on . . .

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me, hon. member. We're not going to spend the whole night doing this. You've been chided now for the third time. Start concentrating on that Bill, or you're going to lose your right to speak.

Debate Continued

MR. GIBEAULT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to give examples to the principles here, but I am going to try to stay on those principles.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Please proceed.

MR. GIBEAULT: Yes. Well, I've made, I think, a good case why the principles of this Bill are quite unfair, and I have no intention of supporting them unless they're substantially modified along the lines that have been represented to the committee in the public hearings by urban Albertans across the province.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Smoky River.

MR. TRYNCHY: Am I Smoky River?

MR. SPEAKER: No, sir; you're not.
Smoky River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity of spending this past weekend visiting with many of my constituents, and they asked me to share with you and with the House the position that they reflect. This one may surprise some people in the House; it may surprise everyone in the House. They suggested that they would indeed be prepared to agree with the concept of one vote for one constituent. But they've put a bit of a proviso on that, and the proviso basically was that if the cities of Edmonton and Calgary are willing to give up and move all the government offices and facilities into the Smoky River constituency so that they can be accessible in as easy a manner as what they are to the city residents of Edmonton and Calgary, they would be prepared to support that concept. I, too, will support that, and I want the Member for Calgary-North West to realize that we have support for your concept, sir, but we have to be willing to compromise. I would suggest that the hon. Member for Calgary-North West should listen. You have support out there, but so do we. As soon as you are willing to move all the facilities so that my people can have accessibility within a matter of half an hour or 15 minutes to the government facilities that we offer the constituents of Calgary and Edmonton, we will indeed be prepared to support that concept.

I want to spend a few moments, Mr. Speaker, discussing my constituency. On the weekend my constituents asked me to do this, and I think it's fair that I do, because I represent what is I think generally considered a fairly normal rural constituency. This past year I drove 100,000 kilometres within the constituency itself. I fly to Edmonton at all times, so basically the only driving I do is within the constituency. The Solicitor General has some very strong rules and recommendations that state that we are to stay within 100 kilometres an hour, so that means that I have spent 1,000 hours driving the car, a thousand hours that I could have spent dealing with issues that the constituents may bring forward, a thousand hours to sit down and talk to the constituents.

MR. GIBEAULT: Get a car phone.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: A car phone helps, but have you ever tried doing all your business by phone? If that's the case, we don't need all these government people. We can get rid of all

the government people in Alberta. Maybe that's what we should be doing.

In the one constituency I have almost two dozen school jurisdictions to deal with, Mr. Speaker. That's almost as many as the Minister of Advanced Education has in the whole province. I have to ask every member from the Calgary or Edmonton constituencies: how many school jurisdictions do you have to deal with? Each school jurisdiction has their own unique problems, has their own issues. My people basically have asked not for equal representation but fair representation, not from me as an MLA and not from the city representatives as MLAs but from government – government, not MLAs – and that's what we have to provide, and that's what people are asking for. You cannot provide that with one person, one vote, so what you must do is be fair minded in the whole process. There are compromises that have to be made, and that's what the people in Smoky River are asking for: fair representation, not equal representation. They realize that they probably won't be able to achieve the opportunities that some of their city brethren are able to achieve.

Let's look at the town I come from, Sexsmith: typical rural town, 1,500 population. We have one government office run by one person with a helper. The office basically is a liquor store. The Solicitor General has been very explicit that he is not to sit down and deal with social issues. He is not to sit down and deal with the issues that the minister of Occupational Health and Safety may have. He is not to deal with any of the problems that the government agencies can deal with. He said very explicitly: you are to stay within your line of business. The Minister of Transportation has indicated to him that he's not to talk about the traffic problems that exist out in the rural community. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has indicated the same thing. So in the town of Sexsmith we do have a government person. Unfortunately, the people from Sexsmith have to travel afar to be able to deal with issues that come forward, or they have to sit down and spend some time with the MLA. It's not the same as living in the city of Calgary, and it's not the same as living in the city of Edmonton, where you have all the facilities available within a matter of 15 to 20 minutes. So there are some differences.

8:50

I really hope that we as a group – and I'm disappointed in some of the members of the committee who had the opportunity, who had the privilege almost, so to speak, of traveling throughout the province and meeting with all the people in the province to try and better understand the needs of all the people. To come back and say that the needs are no different in rural Alberta or in urban Alberta or in any other part of Alberta is, I find, somewhat disappointing, because there are some different needs. That doesn't cast rural Alberta against urban Alberta. That's not the intention. We're all people, and the needs are all people needs. We as MLAs are an arm of government that is to serve these people needs. We've been chosen by our people at home to bring forward their needs. We're spokesmen, and that's all. We're not to be decision-makers of equal proportions, as is suggested that they had heard out there, that indeed there is an imbalance in the way the process is brought forward.

The suggestion was made that we have to use enumerated lists rather than electors. I defy any MLA who sits in this House to turn away any constituent, whether he was enumerated or not. I don't think it's fair to turn that type of person away. I don't think that's a fair criticism either.

I heard the criticism that the ordinary process of a judge being part of the commission is not fair. Judges are appointed for a reason: because they are considered to be fair and responsible. To suggest that one judge is fairer than another judge I don't consider very responsible.

Two or three times we've had members allude to some of the progress that we have had within the province. I'll quote, from November 28. *Hansard*, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore:

It was much more difficult to travel through a large constituency in a horse and carriage than it is in a car on paved [roads]. We have telephones and means of communication that were not part of our history.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had telephones in Sexsmith since 1919, and I really don't think that the telephone process has changed that much since 1919, that it's so much different today than it was in 1919. If telephones were such a major breakthrough – my God, I'm rather surprised that telephones have suddenly today become such a major weapon.

MS M. LAING: I meant that change is long overdue.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yeah, well, I'm impressed. I really am.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I'm impressed also that we acknowledge the need for paved roads in rural Alberta, because we've all heard on numerous occasions that there was no need for paving the secondary roads of rural Alberta.

MR. FOX: That was Decore.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Okay, that's fine. We've heard it on several occasions: why are we paving all these roads in rural Alberta? Yet we have the hon. member from the opposition alluding to the tremendous progress that rural paved roads provide for us.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to dwell a great deal on this particular Bill. I think it's a good Bill. I think the people that have put it together have put some earnest thought into the process. I want to congratulate them for it. I think that the people of Alberta will be the ones that will decide whether they are satisfied with the process or not, not the hon. members across in opposition.

It'll be the people of Alberta that decide whether the process is fair or not. I think it is important that we strive to achieve what the people of Alberta are asking for, and that is fair representation. The process that's coming forward is indeed fair representation, and for that reason I will strongly support Bill 57.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Call for the question?

The minister of Occupational Health and Safety, and then we'll call it.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say at the outset, before I get into my discussion, that I do think this is unfair. I think this Bill is unfair, and I will relate to you why I think it is unfair.

I listened to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I want to make a few comments. He said that we have great concern, and I don't know why I listened. He said that the government is not certain about the Bill, and I suggest to you,

Mr. Speaker, that's just garbage, and that's nonsense. He talks about being in tune, but he'd be the last one I thought would be in tune. He went on and talked about labour laws, rent control, GST, and the need for more MLAs in Edmonton. I agree: with the way he's operated, they need more MLAs, because he's ineffective. He's never done a job. He has failed dramatically.

He went on to talk about accidents.

Speaker's Ruling Criticizing a Member

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think we have to be just a bit more cautious in terms of criticizing the actions of members in the House.

MR. TRYNCHY: I'll take that back. I won't criticize him, but I'll let his constituents do that for me.

Debate Continued

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Speaker, he talked about accidents. I'd ask him this question: what has he done about it? We had just the other day government open house where I spent three days talking to constituents and some of his. So I asked these people that came in where their MLA was; had they gone to him. They said, "Yes, but he couldn't do anything for us." That's the message I got. He says that it takes just about all his time to resolve these cases, yet he's never been to my office once, and he's never written to me and said, "Look, let's discuss four, five, or 10 cases." In the last three days I met with some 30 people, and as of today – this is off the subject, and I'll get on to the Bill – there isn't one Albertan that wants to see me that hasn't seen me. So when he says that he's got troubles, then I can see why he's ineffective, and I know why he needs more help.

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 57, hon. member.

MR. TRYNCHY: Bill 57. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hear it's not fair, and I agree it's not fair. We hear it's not democratic, and I am not so sure I understand just what that means. The NDP say that it's not fair. I agree; they want an American system: one person, one vote. Yet nowhere in Canada, nowhere, do we have that system. They have no respect for rural Alberta. I'm waiting to see the champion of rural Alberta, the Member for Vegreville, stand up and take his stand and talk about what he's going to do.

MR. GIBEAULT: It's coming; it's coming.

MR. TRYNCHY: Yes. The rest of his colleagues have got him so brainwashed that he'll be on one hand and on the other. I can see it coming. But, Mr. Speaker, we have to let rural Alberta know where they stand in respect to the people of rural Alberta. I'm going to spend a lot of time telling Albertans just what they think. Both the NDP and the Liberals really don't care about the votes in rural Alberta. So it's our job, members, to let Albertans know.

The Liberals say that they don't support Bill 57 and they want to take it to court. Well, I listen and I ask myself: why? Why do they want to take it to the courts? It's the easy way out. If the courts decide one way or the other, they can say *in* urban Alberta, "We stood there and fought for you." In rural Alberta they'll shrug their shoulders and say: "Well, we tried. We couldn't convince them." So that's what they're going to do. Yes, I know the double-talk of the opposition. I've heard the Liberals. I recall in the last election they talked about rural

roads and then they went out and shook the empty wallet. They were going to do all the rural roads, and then they said that. The Member for Calgary-North West – this is quite great – said that we've got to be concerned, because our kids have to go 14 blocks on a school bus in Calgary. Fourteen blocks on a school bus: I believe that's what he said in *Hansard*. And you look at rural Alberta where the kids get on the bus at 10 after 7, 7:20, and do all those trips to their schools. They go on to say they believe in a triple E Senate, yet they don't believe in this Bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, why is it unfair? Here's my idea why it's unfair: Edmonton has 17 MLAs . . .

9:00

MR. GIBEAULT: We need 23.

MR. TRYNCHY: Yes; if they operate like the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, they need more than 23.

Calgary will have 19 MLAs. So let's compare that. They have one council to deal with. They probably have one hospital board, one or two school boards, one rec board. When I have to fight for my constituents, I'm one MLA for the constituency of Whitecourt and I have to compete with 17 for the city of Edmonton, 19 for the city of Calgary, or if they combine against poor little old me in rural Alberta, there are 36 of them I have to compete against. So it is unfair. It's very unfair.

A city constituency is 12, 16 square miles? Some of them, yes. I just looked at the map, and I'll talk about that. What's a rural constituency in miles? I can only speak for myself; mine's over 12,000 square miles. In the city they have 12 aldermen; they have 17 MLAs in Edmonton. Now, what's so unfair about that? What's wrong? Can't the 17 MLAs do as good a job as 12 aldermen? Now they want 23, and he says they need 30; the same in Calgary. I just can't understand it.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I have to represent three town councils, five village councils, two summer villages, two counties, three local improvement districts, 15 to 20 recreation boards, four hospital boards, six school boards. In the city of Edmonton they might work with one or two. I'll give them credit; they might have three. These people need your time. They don't want you to pick up the phone and phone them. They want to see you in person at a meeting, and we have to get there. They travel 15 minutes . . . I believe, because I looked at a constituency here, in 15 minutes you can go across the constituency. What does it take a rural MLA to go across their constituency? I can leave Fallis, at one end of my constituency, and travel 150 miles before I reach Fox Creek. You don't do that in 15 minutes, not even at the speed I travel. So that's the unfair portion of it. The people of Alberta deserve the attention of an MLA, and they must have him or her for equal time. When you travel across four or five blocks to a meeting or two meetings, you can do it very quickly, but you can't do that in rural Alberta.

The people want to share their MLA. I've never heard any problem with Cardston having 8,000 voters and mine having 16,000 or Edmonton having 24,000. It's never been raised by my city cousins or anywhere, because they know they can reach their MLA very quickly when they call on the phone say, "Look, we'd like to see you." Every Saturday I get calls, on a party line yet: "Can we see you? Would you come over and see us? It's confidential." So you travel to Peers or Wildwood or wherever, and that takes time. But it doesn't matter to the urban MLA. No, it doesn't count. One person, one vote is all they've got on their minds. They say, "We'll give you a little more money for gas." It's not the money for gas I want. I need more hours in

a day, and they don't make that, Mr. Speaker. They don't make more hours. I've found myself on many occasions on a Saturday attending three functions. They probably do too; I don't say they don't. But I'll give you an example. I'm at a function at 6 o'clock in Mayerthorpe. I then get in my car and travel to Evansburg and attend a function at 9 o'clock. Then you travel from there to Sangudo for midnight because these people want to see you. Then from there you travel home. You know, you're expected to do this as an MLA, and they're expected, but surely to God they should have some compassion for those in rural Alberta. If they don't, they're missing it.

I am surprised at some of the members who were on that commission that traveled out to rural Alberta. I sat there one day and talked to them. I see the member across the way smiling and laughing. Well, let him laugh at rural Alberta.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're laughing at you.

MR. TRYNCHY: We'll make sure the people know where they stand. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. There's still plenty of time for other members to enter this debate.

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really interested in hearing what the champions of rural Alberta for each caucus have to say. I'm interested in what the Member for Vegreville will stand up and say about rural Alberta. I understand the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, the Liberal rural champion, has been there and has made his comments. Mind you, you can't read from those comments just which way he's going because he's on both sides of the fence and, as one member said, you have to watch or you get slivers doing that. But I look forward to seeing the stand of the Member for Vegreville, because I want to go around rural Alberta – and I will – to talk about where they stand. I am sure he'll be on our side. I say he'd better be on our side if he intends to stay here. But he can't convince the rest of his colleagues because he doesn't have the strength, he doesn't have the command in caucus. We've heard that, and it's proven so.

Let's have a look at the votes cast in a rural election. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about how terrible it was in the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood, so I quickly looked at the ballots cast in Edmonton-Norwood. Let me see. The leader of the NDP had a total of 7,358 votes cast in the last election, 1989, in Edmonton-Norwood. We'll look at the constituency of Whitecourt. In the constituency of Whitecourt we had 7,798 votes cast. So where's the difficulty? Where's the unfairness? Where is the unfairness in those two constituencies, the leader of the NDP and poor old country boy Peter Trynchy from Whitecourt?

Mr. Speaker, I tell you it's unfair. It's very unfair, because it's too much the other way when you have a constituency of Edmonton-Norwood which is 12 blocks wide, some 36 blocks long, and is – what? – 12 or 16 square miles, compared to mine, which is approximately 80 miles wide and 150 miles long. You talk about fairness; let's compare fairness. People want to see you, and you have to make that extra time. They don't care. They smile and laugh and say, "Well, pick up the phone." And it's been proven, because he's had some of his constituents in to see me. He couldn't help them. I'd say: "Why not? Why isn't he here with you?" Well, they don't know. And I ask him: why isn't he there with them? He hasn't got time for them.

Mr. Speaker, we've got to get this message out to rural Alberta because it's important. I don't say we shouldn't treat urban Alberta right. We should. But for God's sake, let's look at it on the time you have to spend. There are only so many hours in a day, and I'll tell you, if this is unfair, which I think it is the other way, I don't know what they're talking about.

Mr. Speaker, I support this. Even though it's unfair in comparison to what we should be doing for rural Alberta, I will support it.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know it will come as a surprise to some of the members of the House, but I want to assure all of them that the conclusions I've come to in terms of my support or lack thereof for the principles of Bill 57 are conclusions I came to on my own. The feelings I have are ones that are deeply held and ones I've shared successfully with members of our caucus, and we've had many good discussions.

9:10

It shouldn't surprise anybody that we're in the position we are in this Legislature, having to debate this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Something in our previous legislation compels us to re-examine electoral boundaries and redraw the boundaries of constituencies, if necessary, after every second election. Now, that was just done prior to the '86 election that brought me and several other members of this Assembly to the House, and some changes were made to the constituency I represent. The Vegreville constituency was increased in size somewhat with the addition of the town of Tofield and some surrounding rural area. But we're into the process again much sooner than people would have thought necessary, because we've had that second election already and it's time for a review.

The process, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, normally would have the government introduce a Bill, not unlike Bill 57, that would make some prescriptions as to the number of ridings and the guidelines the commission established by the legislation would use in drawing those boundaries. We would have a new electoral map and would be off and running. But something intervened, and that was the historic decision of the Supreme Court of the province of British Columbia. Justice McLachlin, whose name has been used frequently to justify a variety of points of view in the debate thus far, came down with a decision that basically said that in terms of elections, each person in a jurisdiction, be it a province or the country – in this case the province of B.C. – has a right to have relatively the same impact on the outcome of that election, that that is something that ought to be guaranteed by the Charter. Her decision not only changed the process in British Columbia and will change the process in other provinces, but had influence in the province of Alberta, where the government deemed it advisable to introduce an intermediate step; that is, forming an all-party committee of MLAs to go out and solicit input from Albertans to determine how these boundaries ought to be drawn, what sort of guidelines should be used to draw the boundaries.

Though I recognize that the inequities in terms of the size of ridings in the province of Alberta are not as great as they were in the province of British Columbia, they certainly exist and need to be addressed. People have talked about the size of some of the smaller ridings in the province populationwise having between 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 electors and some of the larger ones having, at last count, 29,000, 30,000, 31,000. So the issue needs to be addressed. The process is that the government had

appointed the committee and now we've got a Bill that purports to examine that.

I really object in a very basic way to the principle of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, because in spite of the comments I've heard from members opposite that they don't accept the fact that there is a rural/urban split in the province or that the interests of rural and urban Albertans are somehow different, they describe many ways in which they are. I believe they try and emphasize that division. In fact, it's been promoted. There's a feeling out there in Alberta, and certainly it was expressed by people who attended the committee hearings, that there is some sort of balance currently in our electoral system, where we have 42 seats that are designated urban and 41 seats that are designated rural. Somehow the feeling is that there's a balance there and that even though we're losing population from our rural ridings, if we reflect that by decreasing the number of seats, things will be worse off; the interests of rural Albertans will suffer as a result.

I want to remind members of the Assembly that the designation of rural and urban was a very artificial one. When I think of rural and when most people think of rural, they think of fields and farmers and rural areas. But that's not the 41 seats that are described by our current situation as rural. Many of those ridings are in fact urban. We look at the city of Fort McMurray, the city of Stony Plain, the city of Leduc, the city of Airdrie. Many of these, members will agree, are distinctly urban jurisdictions that were described, for the purposes of the last go-round, as rural. Indeed, many of the rural ridings that are described that way as one of the 41 ridings are not ridings whose people depend on agriculture for sustenance. My colleague who represents the rural riding of West Yellowhead, for example, estimated that he has something less than 20 farmers in his constituency. The main industries there are forestry, mining, and tourism. You know, they're very important industries, but they're not agriculture; they're not rural in the sort of traditional sense of that word.

I believe the inequities have existed for a long time. The government tried to enshrine them in the minds of Albertans through that very artificial designation last time, and I don't think they've done much better with the introduction of Bill 57. I think what they've tried to do is change the description somewhat so we're dealing with single-municipality and multi-municipality ridings. I'll refer to that in greater detail, Mr. Speaker, as I proceed with my remarks.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

But the government decided that this committee ought to hold hearings. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the hearing process, as much as I respect public hearings, was in this case largely an excuse to stall, to delay the process, to delay the inevitable, if you will. Please remember that this is coming from a government that showed no interest in holding public hearings when it came to important matters like Meech Lake, pulp mill development around the province, game ranching. All these things were issues that weren't important enough to be subjected to public hearings. The government had their own agenda, which was to rush these things through without any public consultation, so hearings weren't important. But on this they were not only important; they were so important that it had to delay the process by at least another six months because we had to have another go-around of hearings. I just find it a curious double standard in terms of hearings when it's appropriate when it suits your agenda and no hearings when the concern is something different than that.

The concern was expressed during the hearings. I was able to attend same in the town of Viking, the hearings that were closest to my home, and I certainly appreciated members of the committee taking time to travel out to eastern Alberta to hear the concerns of people there. The concerns people were expressing were very real concerns, some that I've heard expressed by members on both sides of the House in the course of this debate, and that is concerns about the quality of life in rural Alberta, about the futures people and their families have in rural Alberta. People are understandably worried. They're concerned about their futures because they see their neighbours folding up the tents and moving to the city. They see their schools closing. They see businesses in their communities unable to sustain themselves because there just isn't enough business around. They see a rural economy that's becoming less and less certain. They see conditions in agriculture deteriorating to the point where people who have been encouraged over the years to become more efficient find that every time they do, they get paid less for what they produce.

So the concerns are very real. We've got a situation out in rural Alberta that could be described in somewhat desperate terms, Mr. Speaker, where we're not just dealing with farm bankruptcies in an isolated way or people being forced to abandon their futures in agriculture; we're dealing with a situation that's impacting entire communities. The Member for Drumheller, who spoke earlier, would know that only too well. Representing a rural riding himself, he would recognize that many of these communities are really concerned about their survival, and not their survival over the next hundred years. I think over the next five or 10 years is a legitimate concern some of these people have, a very valid concern.

How do I as a rural member address that concern, Mr. Speaker? I want to tell you that it's that concern that motivated me to seek a seat in this Legislature and motivates me to come here every day and argue for the things I and my colleagues in the New Democrat Official Opposition consider important, because I think it's time people in rural Alberta woke up and looked at the fact that they've had a Conservative government with an overrepresentation of MLAs for almost 20 years. Things haven't got better; they've got worse. Maybe it's time for people to take a good long look at the kind of representation they've had, not just assume that because MLAs come from rural Alberta, they stick up for rural Alberta or they promote programs that will be good for rural Alberta. Maybe it's time they looked at the federal government, in place since 1984 with an overwhelming majority of rural MPs who have done . . . Well, it's not a matter of what they do for rural Alberta; it's a matter of what they do to rural Alberta that occupies most of the conversation in coffee shops. Certainly it's caused enough concern amongst these Conservatives that they're looking at changing their name, Mr. Speaker. They're so embarrassed by other members of their Conservative family that they're thinking of changing their name.

So Tory times are tough times in rural Alberta, and if people want to have some examples, let's talk about some of the things that come up in this Legislature. Whether it's talking about the constant erosion over time of adequate funding for education, especially with respect to rural jurisdictions – we have to look right across the floor and see that it's a Conservative government policy, Mr. Speaker, to erode the funding for education to the point where instead of providing 85 percent of the basic cost, it's now something just over 60 percent in rural constituencies. We can look at deteriorating health care and problems with access there.

9:20

I've talked about business. I know as a rural representative that I get people coming to me saying: "I've got an idea. I have a business plan. I think I can employ some people. I've got a good idea. What can the government do?" You have to tell them, "Well, folks, if you were Peter Pocklington or Nader Ghermezian, had more money than you knew what to do with, and needed another \$5 million or \$6 million, the government's got it for you. But if you're a small businessperson struggling to make ends meet in rural Alberta, you've got nothing."

Point of Order Relevance

MR. GESELL: A point of order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Clover Bar is rising on a point of order.

MR. GESELL: Mr. Speaker, I have some difficulty. I would cite *Beauchesne* 640 and 459(1) with respect to relevance. I've been listening intently to the Member for Vegreville. He's arguing but he's not on the Bill. I would ask that maybe you direct him to get back to the Bill.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vegreville.

Debate Continued

MR. FOX: The principle of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is not that we address the electoral unfairness that's existed in this province for decades but that we enshrine it, that we institutionalize it, through sections of the Bill that really skew the kind of process that we should be involved in. What I'm trying to do is establish my point of view: how I as a member representing a rural riding, a riding that's considered by anyone examining the process as too small, can defend that position in view of the arguments being presented.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's been the New Democrat Official Opposition that's stood up here time and time and time again, my urban colleagues joining me, and arguing for programs of fairness for rural Albertans, and farmers in particular. It's us that have been insisting. My good friend from Taber-Warner has a look of shock on his face. I want to remind him that when we proposed amendments to the Farm Credit Stability Fund Act that the interest rate be made 6 percent instead of 9, even though many members knew that was the right thing to do, that that was something which would be of benefit to rural Albertans, there wasn't one Conservative, rural or urban, who voted for that. They wouldn't vote for it.

You know, I could sit here and talk for half an hour, if you'd let me, Mr. Speaker, about what free trade has done to agriculture, about the economic impact of the loss of the two-price system for wheat, about what it's done to farmers . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Talk about Bill 57.

MR. FOX: Yeah. I'm talking about Bill 57, Member for Smoky River. The principle is that electoral fairness should be our objective, that we ought not to put up with arguments that suggest the interests of rural Albertans are different from urban Albertans, and that if we lose representation from the less settled regions of our province, we'll somehow be poorly represented, because I don't believe that for an instant. I don't believe it for an instant.

I think we need to argue for electoral fairness, Mr. Speaker. What does that mean? Does that mean one person, one vote? I don't think it means one person, one vote. I think that should be an objective. It means fairness and it means being reasonable, that we should try and move to a situation . . . [interjection] This is what my colleagues have advocated, hon. minister: that we have a situation of electoral fairness where the principle of one person, one vote ought to be respected.

I must admit that I find it more than a little curious that Conservative members, led by the hon. Government House Leader, choose to sort of beef up their arguments by an unwarranted attack on our closest neighbour, the United States of America. They might even be against free trade, for pete's sake. I've never heard such inflated anti-American rhetoric coming from Conservative politicians in my life. I don't know. It's shocking. It's shocking, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, the principle of electoral fairness. Now, in the United States they do have a system of one person, one vote. Granted, they do have a bicameral system. With the exception of one state, they have a house of representatives and a senate, and the senate is supposed to provide regional balance, regional representation to counterbalance the one person, one vote sort of philosophy. There are exceptions to that because some states are less settled than others. But to hear the Member for Smoky River or his colleague from Drayton Valley suggesting earlier today that because we don't have a bicameral House, because we don't have a senate-type system to provide regional representation, we need to institutionalize unfairness in our electoral system by passing the provisions of Bill 57 I suggest is flimsy logic at best, Mr. Speaker. Whether you live in Vegreville, Vermilion, Edmonton, Calgary, Entwistle, or Taber-Warner, you have common interests. You believe in a strong, healthy economy for the province of Alberta. You believe in access to quality health care for you and your family. You believe in education for your kids and your neighbours' kids. You believe in tax fairness. You want to have a government that's open and honest and that isn't going to waste your money like it was growing on trees. The interests of Albertans, though the issues may change, in a basic sense are the same from one end of the province to the other, and that is in good government, good representation.

MR. PAYNE: That's us.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. FOX: Well, I don't know if it's a partisan argument, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, because one thing that you can't be sure of is who's going to represent which riding or who's going to be the government after each election. We should not try and predetermine that here; we should leave that up to Albertans. It's going to be up to Albertans to decide who they want to represent them. What we should be trying to do here as legislators, in the context of our debate, is to make sure that they have the tools to make that decision, that the best tools are at their disposal, and that means a fair and representative system of government. I don't understand why members have trouble accepting that or following that.

Mr. Speaker, I think the principle of electoral fairness is not only a good one, but that's the kind of principle that we need to enshrine in our legislation. We need to make sure that people can be encouraged to take part in the electoral process because they know that it's fair; they know that it's well thought out and that it encourages their participation.

The members opposite seem puzzled by my position on this because I represent a rural riding. Well, I not only represent a rural riding, but I represent a rural riding that is small in comparison with other ridings, based on population. In the terms of the way ridings were decided until this point, based on the number of electors, we have just slightly over 12,000 electors at last count, and that by my count makes Vegreville the 15th smallest riding. Now, I understand that the Bill proposes that we move to a system that describes ridings in terms of their overall population rather than the number of electors, and I think that's a positive move and something that I'll support in this Bill. The impact on my constituency is to make it even smaller, Mr. Speaker. In relative terms I think we become the 11th smallest riding in comparison to the 83 in the province when we go to population, and that's because we have, as I've said in this Assembly before, the highest percentage of citizens over the age of 65 of any constituency in the province. So a greater percentage of the people in our constituency are eligible to vote, and that's why the riding gets smaller when described in those terms. So even though it could be perceived as a disadvantage to me or to future representatives of the Vegreville constituency to describe ridings in terms of population instead of electors, I support the move because I think it's a fair description, because when we stand up in this Legislature, we don't just represent the people who vote for us.

MR. SPEAKER: Forgive me. Hon. members on this side of the House, might it be taken down a notch or two? Thank you.

MR. FOX: We don't just represent the people who vote for us, Mr. Speaker, and I know all members recognize that, nor do we just represent the people who are eligible to vote. We represent all of the people in the constituency, and so I think the move to describe the size of ridings in terms of their overall population is a fair one even though it could be perceived as causing some problems with my constituency in terms of size. I've had other people, including members of this Assembly, say, "How can you support your party's position that ridings ought to be more equal in size, that we ought to move towards electoral fairness, when you know that means you'll be gone?" I said, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, we're going to get rid of Vegreville. We're going to carve it up and get rid of it, and that way we'll get rid of you." I really have to scratch my head, Mr. Speaker, because I just don't understand that. You know, I don't think I'm here to make decisions about what I may perceive as being best for me in the short run. I'm here to help make decisions about what I think is best for Albertans in the long run. I believe very earnestly that means moving towards electoral fairness, a system where Albertans, regardless of where they live, can be assured that they'll have relatively equal impact on the future decisions that govern their . . .

9:30

MR. PAYNE: That's Bill 57.

MR. FOX: Well, I don't think it is. I don't think it's Bill 57 at all, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I think that's what Bill 57 should be, and that's what we're going to try and do through some amendments that we propose.

I think the view of government members is influenced somewhat by their reluctance to give up the sort of power base that they have now, and I think that's shortsighted. There's no assurance that any member in this House will be here after the next election. There's no assurance that any of us will last till

the next election; there are many things that can happen to people. I think some of the members – I believe this fairly describes their position – are worried about running against each other for nominations in the new riding of Lloydminster-Vermilion, for example, or the new riding of Alberta Southeast or something like that. They're worried about running against each other for nominations. Well, it doesn't worry me. I don't worry about running against the Member for Lloydminster or the Member for Smoky River or the Member for Redwater-Andrew or the Member for Clover Bar. If that's the way it's going to be, that's the way it's going to be.

I believe that as politicians we should try and remove ourselves as much as possible from the process of redrawing electoral boundaries and concentrate on serving Albertans. If Vegreville isn't a riding – perish the thought, because Vegreville has been a riding for many, many years, and it's an important centre in east-central Alberta – if these guys try and carve up Vegreville, Mr. Speaker, I still live in Alberta. Regardless of where the boundaries are drawn, I still live in Alberta. I live in a constituency, and I plan to run in a constituency. But I hope the integrity of the Vegreville constituency is respected and that some way is found to accommodate the need for electoral fairness. If that means making the riding larger, then that's what's going to have to happen.

Now, I've heard a lot of talk from members about how many school boards, town and village councils, hospital and recreation boards they have to work with. I'm no stranger to that, Mr. Speaker, because that's the case in the Vegreville constituency as well. I, too, travel long distances. Indeed, as someone who takes his critic area responsibilities seriously, I even do some travel outside my constituency to try and find out of what service I can be to Albertans in other parts of rural Alberta. So I don't look forward in a personal sense to representing a constituency that's larger, a constituency that has more people, more boards, more roads to travel, more demands to meet. That's going to be a challenge.

The only true thing, from my point of view, that the Member for Whitecourt said was that what he needs is more hours in the day, and they're not making them. That's for sure, and I don't know how we're going to get around that. There's going to have to be some creative application, some thought given to how we do that. Because, with respect, there are ridings that are a heck of a lot larger than Whitecourt or Vegreville that members currently represent. I look at Peace River as an example. I don't hear people up there complaining about representation, even though their member has one of the largest ridings in Alberta. So it's going to be a challenge for us, but I think we should be true to our principle, try and move towards electoral fairness, and try and find solutions to the problems that we have. We're all there to provide service for our constituents.

I'd be interested in having some member of the government side tell us just how many Members of the Legislative Assembly had constituency offices to serve their constituents prior to the election of a large and aggressive Official Opposition, all of whom opened offices for their constituents.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Not many.

MR. FOX: Not many. With respect, Member for Chinook, you came after the fact.

There was never one in the Vegreville constituency. There was never one in several constituencies. It's been a new standard in representation, and I think it's about time that members . . . [interjection] I beg your pardon? Anyway, I'd be

interested in hearing that figure, Mr. Speaker, because as much as I've sat here and listened to my colleagues in the Official Opposition criticized by government members opposite, we've certainly worked very hard to provide representation for our constituents wherever they may be and whoever they may be. I think that's got to be an objective of all members. Certainly there's more travel involved. Certainly there's more distance to transcend, but I think people have to understand that when they vote in an election, they're not just choosing someone to represent them. They're not just choosing someone to represent the Vegreville constituency or the Lloydminster constituency. That's the mini-election, but there are 83 mini-elections going on in the province, Mr. Speaker, and the decisions that people make at the local level are part of the broad decision about who's going to form a government in the province, who's going to establish the direction for the next four or five years, or two years and nine months if it's this government.

Mr. Speaker, those are the decisions that people are making, and those are the decisions that are best made by all Albertans equally, not the decision about who's going to meet with their school board or who's going to be there for them to travel the long distances to see them. Those are challenges that we as rural members face, and certainly urban members can articulate the special challenges they face. But the important decision about who's going to form government, who's going to set direction for the province for the next number of years is one that Albertans need to share equally as much as possible. I think if that can be accomplished, then the best interests of Albertans overall will be served, and certainly Albertans will get what they want.

We had a situation in Saskatchewan in 1986 where a majority of people in the province wanted a change in government. A majority of people in the province of Saskatchewan, after four years of Conservative mismanagement, wanted a change to an NDP government, wanted to go back to the stable government they had before. More people voted NDP than Conservative, but the Conservatives got 17 more seats, Mr. Speaker. Is that fair? Did that give the people of Saskatchewan the kind of government they wanted? Well, they'll get the kind of government they wanted as soon as Grant Devine develops the gumption to call an election. He's only got 11 months left to do it. They'll get the government they deserve, but it's going to come several years too late. They'll be many more billions in debt, and it's a problem.

So I think we need to recognize that the decision about the future of the province overall is one that's best made by all Albertans in as equal a way as possible. I think we have to get beyond this sort of parochial vision of things when we're discussing an Act that is as broad as this, Mr. Speaker, that has such broad implications for the future of the province, and not just think about local representation. Local representation is very important, I agree, but we've got to think beyond that.

I agree, Mr. Speaker, that the decision to keep the number of ridings at 83 is a good one. I don't think anybody in Alberta wants more government or bigger government. In fact, I would have supported – and I argued for this in my caucus, colleagues will attest – that we could look at reducing the number of ridings to 75. There are jurisdictions, British Columbia for example, with more people, more area, that have fewer ridings, and 75 seemed like a nice round number. But we're left with 83, and certainly I support that rather than any attempts to increase the representation.

We have to look very carefully, though, at this description in the Bill of single-municipality and multimunicipality consti-

ties, Mr. Speaker, because I think that is the part of the Bill that offends me the most. Now, certainly we recognize that there are some single-municipality electoral divisions and that there are some multimunicipality electoral divisions; that's a given. That's the case right now, it's always been the case, and I think we should recognize that that will continue to be the case. And I don't object to that on the face of it, Mr. Speaker. I don't object to the fact that part of Medicine Hat, for example, would be included completely in a single-municipality electoral division and part of it would be included in a multimunicipality electoral division that may include towns or villages outside and the rural area perhaps up to the Saskatchewan border, for all I know. I don't object to that in principle, because I think we have situations like that where some members are challenged with representing some large urban area, some moderate, small urban area, some rural area. My colleague for Stony Plain is, I think, an excellent example of someone who has a riding that includes a city, town, village, summer village, and rural area. It can be done, and members do it well; members on both sides of the House do that well. So I don't object to it in principle, Mr. Speaker.

But what I do object to is that it's enshrined in this legislation, that the commission that's going to be appointed from the legislation has very little leeway in terms of deciding electoral boundaries. What they have to do – they're given instructions by politicians, a majority of whom fear their eroding electoral support, to have a specific number of ridings within one jurisdiction and a specific number within another, and then sort of describe the gerrymander beyond that.

I think, Mr. Speaker, what we should do . . .

[Mr. Fox's speaking time expired]

9:40

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the issue is not just one man, one vote. That's an ideal, and I'm sure most members would support that ideal. It's also an issue of equal representation and, concomitant with that, equal access to a representative. So the definition of "equal representation" has a broader meaning than just one man, one vote. We also, I think, are talking about something called power. If we are talking about a disparity in the numbers so that the majority or a minority with a large number unfairly and inequitably distributes the wealth to itself, then I think we've got an issue.

So let us look at what we're talking about. If we're talking about 51 or 52 percent of the population that exists in cities like Calgary and Edmonton combined, the two largest expenditures of provincial money are on health care and education. If we look in our books that we have, we see that in 1989 some \$606,617,000-odd were spent in the city of Calgary from provincial funds in education; in Edmonton, \$684,982,000, and in the whole rest of the province, some 48 or 49 percent, only \$718,794,000. That's not equal. Let us look at the number one spender: health. In 1989 the provincial government put into the city of Calgary some \$619 million, into the city of Edmonton in health, some \$828 million; in the rest of the province, less than \$800 million, less than the city of Edmonton got in health care. So if we had that skewed the other way around, then there would be a real case that somehow there's some miscarriage of justice, that somehow there was some inequitable distribution of

power and perhaps of membership. But that isn't the case. So what really are we talking about?

If we look at the historical record, the hon. Member for Vegreville is quite right; his is a historic area. It first appears in Alberta as a province in the 1909 election. In that year there was one seat represented by Vegreville and two for the city of Edmonton. The area that I have the privilege to represent in 1909 and for a number of elections after that was represented by a member from Okotoks, a member from High River, and a member from Nanton. Calgary was represented by two and Edmonton by three. Okay, that's 1909, and today is 1990. But even up until the '20s, we still had in my area three representatives; Calgary had only risen to five. So there was a historic recognition in this province that there needs to be some kind of balance between numbers and area, some kind of recognition of the ease of access to representation, of the difficulties of access to representation.

I was intrigued by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, who indicated that as a member of the Members' Services Committee, he'd like to see whatever he could do for rural members and to offer whatever assistance he could to rural members. Smaller spaces would be something nice, but that's not a reality. All we're asking for is some sort of compromise, because if we are looking at this whole issue, surely there are a number of things here, some ideals in terms of equality – one man, one vote – but also some level of fairness, equity, balance between the various ideals, balance between historic practice, a compromise, remembering also that one man, one vote is something we can all support if we have something like a bicameral House set up whereby there is one part of it representing absolutely the number of people and another body that represents regions. We have a unicameral House. This has been recognized since year dot, 1905, and is still recognized here.

However, there is some significant movement, because if we look to 1971, we see that approximately 38 percent of the members of the Legislature were representatives for the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton at that time represented about 51 percent. This proposal, Bill 57, splits it: still 51 percent for those two cities but now up to between 43 and 44 percent. So we're moving a little closer to one man, one vote, but we're still taking into account those other, equally valid principles of equity, fairness, compromise, historic practice.

A point we might note is that Bill 57 is something that is not deciding for all time to come. It lays it out as something in the next eight to 10 years, and perhaps it may be changed by the end of this century. But it provides us with a perfectly good mechanism to handle the elections from here to there.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods says that the government doesn't have proper representation in the urban area. Now, I'm not just sure what "proper" means, but *if* he means majority, true enough. In the city of Edmonton alone the government doesn't have the majority, but in the city of Calgary it has a majority. There's an absolute majority in Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Camrose, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Wetaskiwin, Airdrie, Drumheller, St. Albert, and the other cities. So I don't know what "proper" means in that definition of the term.

According to the dictionary as produced by that university to the northwest of London, the *Oxford* dictionary, the Oxford people, "equal": same in number, size, value, degree, rank, et cetera; that which is evenly balanced; may refer to equal pay – and I thought the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore would pick up on this part – part of a team, an equal member. How can you be equal? How is the goalie equal to the centre, to a

quarterback, to a guard, to a linebacker, to a first baseman? He's part of a team. If we look at equality in that broader context, then I think we might see that there's something besides just one man, one vote: a team, the whole province. Is there really equality in a country like Canada between Prince Edward Island and Ontario or in the great United States between California and Rhode Island or in the United Nations between Uganda and the Soviet Union, the U.S.S.R? Yet we accept one vote there from each of those, even though they are not equal in terms of number and size or in wealth or in power.

9:50

One of the things I'd like to talk about as a rural member: in my area I would think that at least 50 percent of my families, perhaps more, are actually people who are from the urban area, who live in Highwood but derive their living from Calgary. In our area if you live in the towns of Turner Valley and Black Diamond and want to come to see me in Okotoks or High River, you'd have to drive by bus all the way to Calgary and wait for some period of time. That's if you could get on the commuter bus and try and get a bus ride down to either High River or Okotoks. Taxi: nonexistent for most of those communities to get from one place to another. Telephone: long distance. Where's the equality of access there? Mine is not a large rural riding in area. We're right on the average in terms of population. We in Highwood, as the hon. Member for Smoky River talked about, don't have a McDougall Centre like they have in Calgary or a Rocky Mountain Plaza, nor do we have the kind of government buildings that you have here in Edmonton so that people can physically go by bus or by taxi with relative ease and time to gain access to the actual civil servants who may be dealing with their particular circumstance. We have a problem here in the sense – although the hon. Member for Vegreville talked about wanting to lower the number – that we're working on a fixed number of 83.

One of the things we're also labouring under is that maybe rural members work harder than city members. That's nonsense. I think we all work equally hard, each in our own way, so that just isn't a legitimate argument. But one of the problems in a rural area is that you have so many demands from municipal governments. You take a village. It might have a total staff of three or four, and they want somebody to look after their affairs in the city of Edmonton, to find out about this grant or how do you go about that or what's the status of this application that they have in. The towns might have a working staff of 10 or 12 or 15. They, too, want their MLA to represent them in Edmonton, and part of the job of a rural MLA is running around the different offices doing the work of those villages and those MDs and those IDs and those counties and towns that you happen to represent. So I think the issue of who works harder is irrelevant. What is relevant is that access to representation that I spoke about. I think that if you get a city staff like Edmonton or Calgary, that number in the hundreds, they have people who have much more rapport, much more access to the minions of government than does a village like Cayley or Longview.

So I don't think the issue is just one man, one vote, as important an ideal and as much as we might support that. I think the issue is also another ideal: equal representation and equal access to that representation, historical practice, fairness

and equity, balance. I had understood earlier, when the report came in, that somehow some of the recommendations of the committee were agreed on by all, others were agreed on by most, or all but one, and some were agreed on by the majority of members. However, listening to the debate on Bill 57, I get the impression from some members of the Official Opposition and from some of the unofficial members of the opposition that this is not the case, that it was clearly a partisan thing, that the Tories voted this way and all of the good folks voted the other way. That isn't my understanding, so comments like the ones made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, then, were quite refreshing in their balanced approach.

Mr. Speaker, there are variances within even a city between one ward and another. We have some fundamental principles that we're talking about: one man, one vote; equality – equal representation, equal access – historical practices. All of these things, I think, are important.

Mr. Speaker, in view of the lateness of the hour, I would move that we now adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the motion to adjourn debate, those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion carries.

MR. FOX: Mr. Speaker, might I request the unanimous consent of the House to revert briefly to Tabling Returns and Reports so I can file with the Assembly proposed amendments to Bill 57 from the Official Opposition?

MR. SPEAKER: There's a request. Is there unanimous consent to vary procedure? Those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The matter carries.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to file with the Assembly five copies of some proposed amendments to Bill 57 from the Official Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, the government business tomorrow evening – and it's planned the House would sit tomorrow evening – would be a continuation of the electoral boundaries Bill, subject to the availability of the hon. Provincial Treasurer to deal with Bill 38, the trust and loans Bill.

[At 9:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.]