

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Friday, December 7, 1990 10:00 a.m.**

Date: 90/12/07

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

### Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks as legislators for the rich diversity of our history.

We welcome the many challenges of the present.

We dedicate ourselves to both the present and the future as we join in the service of Alberta and Canada.

Amen.

### head: Introduction of Bills

#### Bill 290

#### An Act to Amend the Public Service Employee Relations Act

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 290, entitled An Act to Amend the Public Service Employee Relations Act.

This Bill will remove the limitations placed by the Act on subjects that can be dealt with by an arbitration board, therefore opening up arbitration processes and creating an environment for effective bargaining. In addition, this Act will restore the right to strike to public service employees and remove penalties for striking.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 290 read a first time]

### head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table 4,000 signatures on a petition to this House asking that the Alberta Wildlife Park, the largest collection of endangered species in Canada, continue to be supported and funded.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, is this a tabling or is this a petition?

MR. TAYLOR: It's a tabling. I'm aware that it does not qualify as a petition.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

### head: Introduction of Special Guests

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure, sir, to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of students and adults from the Father Kenneth Kearns school, which we had the opportunity to meet briefly with earlier. The students are joined by teachers Bruce Plante, Melody Kostiuk, parents Helen Domytrak, Roger Burak, and Corinne Reklow, and the bus driver Lola Zbukvich. Forgive me if I've done an injustice to your names; they're similar to my own: sometimes it's difficult to get your tongue around them. But a very warm welcome to you all, and I would ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the president-elect of

the Alberta Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Gordon Musgrove, and his two daughters, Erin and Kari. They're from Patricia, Alberta. I'd like Gordon and his daughters to rise – they're sitting in the members' gallery – to receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly a school group from my constituency. Fifty grade 6 students from the Caledonia Park school in Leduc are present today, and they are seated in the members' gallery along with their teachers Derryl Engel, Paula Foley, Arlene Van Diest, and parents Howard Roberts and Cory Berryman. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very energetic, innovative, and hardworking Albertan. Mrs. Susan Nelson-Pier is past chairman of the agricultural sector of the Environment Council of Alberta conservation strategy. She was the innovator and the administrator, and still is, of Duck Worth Farm, one of the first agricultural diversification projects in Alberta and now a new tourist and proposed satellite science centre. Her involvement in agricultural diversification has been chronicled in the book, *Harvest of Opportunity*. She is sitting in the members' gallery, and I would ask that she stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Clover Bar, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature, 106 guests from the Ardrossan elementary school. I have four grade 6 classes in the members' and public galleries. The students are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Klym, Mrs. Clayton, Mme Gerard, and Mr. Schell, and by some parents: Mr. Osbaldeston, Mrs. McLure, Mrs. Tompkins, Mr. Dutchek, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Green. They are also accompanied by their driver, Mr. DeBruin. I would ask that all of our guests rise and that the members of the Assembly extend their warm cordial welcome.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that in the public gallery there are 11 students in a very essential program called English as a Second Language. All the best in their studies. They're here with their teacher Joan Farhall. I'd ask that they now please rise and receive the welcome from the members here this morning.

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Calgary-McKnight, I'd like to welcome and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House nine members of the 58th Thorncliffe Greenview scouts, who are in the public gallery along with patrol leaders and/or parents Ryan Shutko, Brad Clark, Wes Jamieson, and Dale Reid. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't any guests in the House today, but on behalf of Little Burnt Farms in

Fairview it is a pleasure to give every Member of the Legislative Assembly a small jar of saskatoon jelly. After last night some members of this Legislative Assembly need to be sweetened up and get in a Christmas mood. In Dunvegan we strongly believe in agricultural diversification, and this is one way to diversify. If any of you pass through our beautiful area, Little Burnt Farms welcomes you to stop by and pick saskatoons, currants, cranberries, chokecherries, gooseberries, raspberries, and strawberries.

MR. SPEAKER: That was a berry nice statement.

#### head: Oral Question Period

##### Provincial Tax Regime

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Yesterday in the Assembly the Premier stated that there would be no increase in personal income taxes next year. Well, here they go again. I remember in the last election that the Premier also made a promise that there would be no increase in taxes. We know that wasn't the truth because since the Premier has been in power, this government has taken over \$4 billion out of the pockets of ordinary Albertans in tax hikes, including income tax, but he doesn't call them that. They've raised health taxes, boosted fuel taxes, increased liquor and tobacco taxes, raised more in vehicle licence fees. The list goes on and on and on; it's a very taxing government. My question to the Premier is this. He was very careful this time to talk about income taxes. Will he now take this opportunity to indicate whether there will be increases in other taxes in the next year?

10:10

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, there's a responsibility to bring a budget to the House and to have all the details then. But I would like to confirm what I said yesterday, because Albertans are very proud of this fact. We have such a dynamic economy going in this province, the best economy in Canada. We have the people of Alberta with the dollars in their hands because we have the lowest taxes in Canada and no sales tax. We're not going to allow those taxes to go up. As a matter of fact, the last move in income taxes in Alberta was a cut. No other government matches that.

MR. MARTIN: What about the \$4 billion in taxes since you've come in here, Mr. Premier? Why don't you tell the truth to the people about that? That's the reality.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at the income tax hikes. He's promised not to increase taxes, and he now means personal income taxes. Well, corporations also pay income taxes in this province; at least they're supposed to. We know that of the taxes collected, only 7 percent came from the corporate sector. Ninety-three percent came right out of the pockets of ordinary Albertans: totally unfair and hypocritical of this government. And he can say about the budget; he raised the budget item. I want to ask the Premier this question: is he also saying that corporations are not going to pay an increased share of taxes? Is he also saying that?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into further budget details except to point out to the hon. member that we raised corporation taxes last year. I want to say one other thing: while Albertans enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada by far and no sales tax, we've also removed 500,000 Albertans from the tax rolls or reduced their taxes at the same time. That's perfor-

mance in taxes. That's why Alberta's got the best economy in Canada.

MR. MARTIN: Those nasty, cranky Albertans, they just don't appreciate what a great fellow this Premier is, Mr. Speaker. Isn't that terrible? They know that the \$4 billion came out of their pockets and not the nonsense that the Premier is giving us.

Let me show you how hypocritical they are. We notice that in 1988 another one hundred rich Albertans did not pay a single tax. At the same time, people making \$15,000 were taxed over \$50 million. How does the Premier justify this hypocritical situation, where the working poor are paying taxes and his rich friends aren't?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member doesn't like it when we're able to point out that we've got the best economy in Canada, we've got the lowest taxes in Canada, we've got no sales tax, and we're determined to have jobs for Albertans. We're determined to keep taxes down, and there won't be an increase.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

##### Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. MARTIN: Keeping taxes down all right: down to Houston, down to Toledo, down to all the places in the United States, Mr. Speaker.

My second question is also to the Premier, following up, since he opened up the budget debate, Mr. Speaker. Governments collect taxes. The question is: are they fair? In this province they're not. But governments also spend taxes. The question then has to be asked: are their priorities straight? Of course, with the waste and mismanagement of this government, we know that isn't true also. Besides worrying about the economic deficit, we have a human deficit also in this province, and we have to balance it off. The Premier said yesterday there'd be no personal income tax hikes, although he's not going to tax the corporations – that's obvious – and he says he's going to balance the budget. That's after we find out that the Treasurer, whoops, just made a mistake of \$800 million in '89-90. I want to ask: would the Premier confirm that to do what he said yesterday, there will have to be significant cuts in people services?

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, of course, is going to have to wait for the budget. But let's be clear about the government's priorities. They have been education of our children, health for Albertans, care for those who can't care for themselves, and the best seniors' programs in Canada, as well as making sure we have the best economy in Canada. That's performance.

MR. MARTIN: That, Mr. Speaker, is absolute and total nonsense, and he knows it.

Let me give an example, then, about health care. At the Royal Alex, where people are waiting for days for emergency admission, we have the case where a 64-year-old woman waited in the holding area, out in the halls, for seven days for admission to a bed. Is that what he's calling performance in the health care field?

MR. GETTY: As the hon. Minister of Health has pointed out several times in the Legislature this short session, the govern-

ment increased funding for health by over some \$243 million this year, over 8 percent, Mr. Speaker, because we consider the health care system so important to the future of Albertans. She also pointed out that it isn't just the answer to do as the NDP and the Liberals say, which is spend, spend, spend, throw more money at everything. No. What you have to do is make sure it's the best health care system Albertans can possibly afford and the most efficient health care system in Canada. That's what we're working towards.

MR. MARTIN: Talk about spend, spend, spend. Your budget got a 30 percent increase last year: \$250 million wasted on handing out money to the Pocklington of the world. That's spending, Mr. Speaker, that's spending. [interjections] People want to spend it on health care, not...

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Let's have the question. We're down to the final supplementary of the second set.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier, because he raised the budget. People want to know – they're nervous right now, they've already been calling – how is it that they're going to balance the budget and have no increase in taxes? Tell us right now: is it not true that there are going to be massive cuts in the people services like health care, education, and dealing with the poor? Isn't that...

MR. SPEAKER: Repetition, hon. member. Thank you.

MR. GETTY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand the hon. leader is agitated. He's agitated because he doesn't like good stories. That's been clear. He doesn't like the fact that Albertans have the lowest taxes in Canada, that there is no sales tax, that they have the highest per capita retail sales in Canada. Why? Because we've got the best economy and the people have the dollars in their hands. That's why this is the best place in Canada to live, and they're getting the best government in Canada too.

### Right to Strike

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, a strong market-driven economy is usually one that respects the principle that a strike should be a strike and a lockout a lockout. It's only those strong economies that exempt protective services. Now, in Alberta we don't have the right to strike. Laws are skewed against employees. But some members of the government have been singing a little different tune lately, most notably the Minister of Health. There seems to be a softening of the position on the right to strike. My first question, then, to the Minister of Labour is this: given that there is a change developing, a softening in the government's position, is the minister prepared to state, after reviewing this area, that the government is in fact about to change this legislation?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, I take it that the member opposite is talking about legislation that affects the public service of Alberta, because of course we do have the right to strike here in Alberta but not for our civil servants. I can say this: I noted with great interest what might be called a ground swell in Edmonton and other parts of Alberta, people who are interested in advocating a right to strike for our civil servants. I have for some time been waiting for a brief from the Alberta union of public employees, and some months ago had a conversation with

their president, Pat Wocknitz. I'm still waiting for that brief, because I would also like to have their views on the subject. I was speaking to her again on the subject, if not yesterday, the day before, and she tells me she is developing it, that she herself wants to take that process through her membership and have full consultation with the members in the union, which is a process that I would very much encourage.

10:20

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier was burned on the nurses' strike and singled on the social workers' strike, I'm wondering if the Premier is prepared to commit personally to influencing, to talking to his government members and convincing them that the right to strike should be legislated back for public employees.

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the government of Alberta conducts itself as a full government, a full caucus, an extended caucus where we work out these items. We don't dictate them from the top, as I gather they do in the Liberal Party. I should say this to the hon. leader of the Liberal Party. I know he's told all of his party that he's wasted two years in the Legislature. Please don't waste ours as well.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I can see that the Premier was waiting with his script on that one, and he didn't miss a word.

My last question to the Premier is this. This government refuses to change the legislation to allow public employees the right to strike. I want to know from the Premier, who isn't prepared to state that he's prepared to influence his colleagues to change that legislation, and given the fact that people living in Edmonton-Strathcona have a high number of people who are involved in the public service, why his candidate is running around misleading constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona, talking about the right to strike.

MR. GETTY: Do I understand the hon. leader correctly? That he now wants to restrict what people say outside of the Legislature as well, when they are campaigning? Surely we appreciate the fact that he is promoting the Progressive Conservative candidate. If he wants to talk about Edmonton-Strathcona, I'm sure we should also note that the member who is representing the PC Party is telling them that they should pay attention that they have the best economy in Canada as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Clover Bar.

### Employment Statistics

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is addressed to the Minister of Career Development and Employment. With the recession in Canada, Albertans are understandably concerned about their future. Are they going to have jobs? Ontario is making some statements about rampant Canadian unemployment. In terms of the Canadian unemployment situation, how does Alberta compare? Do Albertans have jobs in these tough economic times? [interjections]

MR. WEISS: Well, Mr. Speaker, if all hon. members would like to listen, I can deal with some facts and not some misleading information.

Certainly in actual terms Alberta is now second lowest at 73 percent, and only second behind Saskatchewan at 6.7 percent. On a seasonal basis Alberta ranks fourth, behind Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Alberta's seasonally adjusted rate is

some 7.6 percent, only .1 percent behind Ontario, and Ontario is certainly climbing, having gone up by some 23 percent since this time last year. Alberta has only increased by .8 percent, truly an indication proving that there are jobs for Albertans, with more Albertans working at this time than any time in the history of the province.

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my supplementary I'd like to zero in a little bit closer to home. In Clover Bar we are fortunate; we have some employment opportunities, the Dow expansion. But I'm concerned about my neighbour to the west, the people of the city of Edmonton. I'm wondering: what is the unemployment situation in the city of Edmonton? What can Edmontonians look forward to?

MR. WEISS: Well, the hon. Member for Clover Bar is very accurate in his assessment with regards to Edmonton, because there certainly is an increase. Alberta is doing very well overall, though, compared to the rest of Canada. In fact, people across Canada recognize, I believe, the strong economic situation in Alberta, and we have figures to prove that people are migrating to Alberta in increasing numbers. For example, in the last month Alberta's working force population has increased by some 4,000 people. It's truly a significant increase, and despite this large increase in our labour force, employment has increased this month as well. The seasonally adjusted employment rate has increased by some 10,000 persons. I'm specifically pleased to note that Edmonton's employment level has increased by some 3,800 people working last month over the previous month. The unemployment rate fell by 1.1 percentage points as well, to 7.8 percent. Mr. Speaker, I'd conclude by emphasizing that the good news can only be attributed to the economic diversification strategy that's been outlaid by our Premier in this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Mountain View.

### Churchill Corporation

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring of 1987 the Churchill Corporation acquired a major share in Alberta Investments Ltd., a company in which the Alberta government at the time also had a 28 percent share. Churchill then proposed that AIL's portfolio be liquidated and be amalgamated into the Churchill Corporation. To make this deal fly, Churchill asked for and got the support of the Alberta government. They then presented the proposal to the remaining shareholders as a done deal, a fait accompli, in early June of 1987. Would the Premier inform the Assembly who in his government attended the meetings and carried on the negotiations with Churchill and then authorized the approval of this deal?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I think even this member would know that the Premier doesn't get involved in the Alberta Pension Fund, but I did mention to him yesterday that I'd ask the Provincial Treasurer to give him some facts, rather than innuendoes, to help the House on this issue.

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely right. The Premier, along with the government, would like to have the facts on the table and not the kinds of suggestions that something is taking place that's untoward.

Clearly, if you review the facts, I would expect that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View would certainly correct some of the messages he left in *Hansard*, in particular suggesting

that the province was encouraging Churchill or that Churchill, along with the government, was doing something with respect to a takeover of a company called AIL. Let me point out that AIL was formed by an Alberta-based merchant banking company to provide assistance to public companies in Alberta. Using a small amount of money from the pension funds, we thought it was appropriate to assist them. I can say that the reason Churchill got involved with AIL was not at all directed by the government; it was in fact a takeover of the company by Churchill, and independent. The province's position in AIL was simply a rollover into the Churchill Corporation.

I have asked my officials specifically today: was there any political direction or any political influence in this? The very clear answer, categorically, was no. No, Mr. Speaker. So the member should get his facts right. He should not try to generate some kind of specious argument, specious position, as he has lent his name to historically, unfortunately, and just deal with the facts. Now the province does have a position in the company. I've explained how it got there. It was done in normal market transactions, and contrary to what they've said before, we're trying to help the small public businessman through the Pension Fund, similar to what has happened in Quebec and similar to some of the arguments I've heard from the Member for Edmonton-Norwood in particular.

10:30

MR. HAWKESWORTH: The circular, Mr. Speaker, provided to the shareholders of AIL clearly indicates that Churchill and the Treasurer, on behalf of the Pension Fund, intended to do this, had already committed themselves to the issue or bid. The Provincial Treasurer must be aware that the policy of his department is very clear on these matters, and it is that staff shall not get into direct negotiations with the management of private-sector corporations. Given that this policy was clearly breached by this government in order to help Churchill do this deal, would the Provincial Treasurer now admit to the Assembly that the person who gave government approval had to be someone in a very senior position, someone within the commanding heights within this government?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, this member is absolutely misleading the House. I have said here already that this decision was done in the normal management of pension funds . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order. Order. Order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. JOHNSTON: There was no government . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The Chair is so pleased to discover there are about 16 or more members who are sharing the Chair with him.

MR. TAYLOR: We try to be helpful.

MR. SPEAKER: "We try to be helpful": that's a nice new change. The Chair appreciates that very much.

### Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair appreciates the fact that the Provincial Treasurer feels vehement in terms of expressing himself on this issue. To say that another member "is absolutely

misleading" does require retraction, and I'm sure, given the extensive vocabulary of the Provincial Treasurer, he can find other creative ways.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, of course, I would not leave the Member for Calgary-Mountain View worrying in his milk over the weekend, so I will simply retract it. I know the member would not intentionally mislead the House.

#### **Churchill Corporation** (continued)

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I see the Member for Calgary-Mountain View reading his prepared script. I would hope that some more thorough investigation takes place into this matter. I would be glad to provide the information. I've tried to do it before. But the member reminds me of Milli Vanilli: his lips are moving, but the words aren't his. And, boy, that's true.

MR. MARTIN: Answer the question.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question. Here are the facts: the government was not involved in providing any kind of direction. I've confirmed that already in this House. The process was a normal rollover whereby Churchill Corporation without any consultation with the government acquired another company, AIL, at a discounted value, because it was a good investment. It was strengthening the economy in terms of investment in other public companies, and the province's position at AIL in a normal-course transaction was rolled over to Churchill Corporation. That's how we got our position: without any influence, without any government direction. It was a normal investment portfolio decision made by those people who manage quite effectively our investment portfolio.

#### **Disabled Persons Programs**

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, months and months continue to slip by since the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities released its report. It was an excellent report, called the Action Plan, and we all sat here and loudly applauded when that report was released. But where is the action that was promised? I ask: where is that action? One of the major recommendations calls for community support services so that persons with disabilities can mainstream within the community, can stay in the community. To the Minister of Health: when will the minister announce long-awaited home care reforms so strongly advocated by all, including the Premier's council?

MS BETKOWSKI: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't listening to the question. Could he please repeat it?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, do I have to start from the beginning?

MR. SPEAKER: Much as we hang on every golden word, the answer is no. Just the last question, please.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health. When will the minister announce long-awaited home care reform so strongly advocated by all, including the Premier's council on the status of Albertans with disabilities?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, while I am one of the several ministers that's part of the team reviewing the report, I'm not the lead minister on it, and I think it's appropriate to wait for the Minister of Education to respond to the specifics on the question. I will certainly refer it to him as the acting minister.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, last year the minister of culture was not prepared to advance the cause of infrasound systems in the auditoriums in Edmonton and Calgary. To the minister: how long will those with hearing impairments continue to be denied the full enjoyment of these public facilities because of a lack of commitment on the part of this government to those with disabilities?

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, the work we've done in the Jubilee auditoriums over the last number of years to accommodate individuals with disabilities of one form or another has been extensive. The item that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud refers to is one that is currently under review; it is part of an overall plan for Jubilee Auditorium redevelopment in both Edmonton and Calgary. As funds become available, we will implement that.

#### **National Energy Board**

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the Minister of Energy. The National Energy Board estimates that about 90 percent of its operating costs are recovered from the oil and gas industry, not from taxation revenues but from the industry that it regulates. I'm sure most of the members are aware that virtually all of the NEB-regulated pipelines and producers are located in western Canada, principally in Calgary. In view of these facts of regulatory life and in view of the substantial travel cost resulting from the NEB's location in Ottawa, far from the industry it regulates, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce has proposed to the NEB that it consider relocation to Calgary. I'm wondering: would the Minister of Energy be prepared to add the weight of his office to the Calgary chamber's proposal?

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, it's an excellent suggestion. I should point out to the members of the Assembly that the National Energy Board is responsible to recover 100 percent of its operating costs through its hearing processes. It is added into the tolls on the natural gas and oil side, into the pipelines. So of the \$25 million that it costs to run the National Energy Board, about \$21 million is attributable to activities here in the province. I think the hon. member's suggestion is an extremely good one, firstly because the Alberta government through its royalty share is paying a substantial cost of the hearing process. Additionally, the most important point the member makes is that through the hearings in Ottawa on pipeline expansion, the industry's here in Calgary and it's almost the mountain having to go to Mohammed. So I think it would be a tremendous cost saving not only to the industry, but it would be a very efficient way of running government.

MR. PAYNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly heartened by the implication, the suggestion that the minister is prepared to lend the weight of his office. I presume that would be through some formal expression such as an official letter, but I am concerned that this initiative on the part of the Calgary chamber and on the part of the minister might be more effective if it were co-ordinated. To that end, would the minister be prepared

to meet with chamber representatives so that their initiative in fact could be co-ordinated and more impactful on the NEB?

MR. ORMAN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to do that. I should indicate to the hon. member that we gave consideration to a formal request to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources earlier in the year, but because of our hearing GH5-89, which is the TransCanada expansion, we thought it would be inappropriate to make that representation at that particular time.

I should say, Mr. Speaker, that the relocation of TransCanada Pipelines really came through the efforts of our government and the agreement by our Premier that for the TransCanada move to Alberta, the cost of the move would be able to be included in the rate base of TransCanada. Without that concession I don't believe TransCanada would have moved to the province of Alberta. I have had a discussion with the hon. member's MP, Lee Richardson, the MP for Calgary Southeast, who has been working from within Ottawa to try and effect this move. I certainly believe the time is right for this government to send a formal letter requesting this move to Calgary, and I appreciate the member bringing it to my attention, and I will undertake to do that.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Centre.

#### 10:40 English as a Second Language Funding

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Often in this Legislature we have guests in the gallery who, like this morning, are students in programs called English as a Second Language, students who represent thousands of refugees and immigrants who are coming to Canada under increased federal immigration quotas and who desperately need English-language training before they can get decent paying jobs. Yet ESL programs in the province are in need of a complete overhaul. There needs to be far greater curriculum review. There are long waiting lists and huge gaps between the five different departments over there who are supposed to be delivering this essential service. To the Minister of Career Development and Employment: given that the government currently is spending over \$30 million a year in social assistance benefits to refugees and immigrants in Alberta, would the minister not agree that it would be far better to spend these \$6 million that would be necessary to fully fund quality ESL training programs in the province to get these people working and reduce the need for them to be stuck on social assistance?

MR. WEISS: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again we hear a case, I would say, of an attempt to misrepresent some figures. I found very interesting the stats and the figures that the hon. member referred to, but I wonder if he's aware that the Department of Career Development and Employment alone – alone, because he has mentioned the other departments as well – spends in excess of \$9 million on the English as a Second Language program, which we feel very committed to. I would also advise all hon. members of the Assembly that I have just recently approved an additional \$3.9 million incremental funding to see the programs take place through to the end of the fiscal year, when it is anticipated those funds then would be forthcoming from the federal government. I think this government has proven it's not only committed but is showing its commitment in putting the dollars where they should be, in the high-priority program of English as a Second Language.

REV. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, the figures do speak for themselves, and recent research demonstrates clearly that there are over 8,000 Albertans who have come to this province and still need ESL programs – 8,000 – some of whom are young students, young children, young adults in this province, over 3,000 students in the education system alone right now who are not receiving ESL training. I want to ask this minister if he will not endeavour to work with the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of Education to follow up on the recommendation of the Rhodes report, which recommended a mere \$2 million for those students in those programs in schools, which would ensure that these young people would have the healthy future they deserve in this province.

MR. WEISS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. Minister of Advanced Education would like to supplement that as far as the education of students goes. We deal primarily with the adult programs. But once again I want to indicate that it wasn't just \$2 million that was necessary to be added to the program. As I've indicated, we've added \$3.9 million. We work very closely with the immigration settlement services and all agencies to ensure that the programs are being delivered. I wish to assure all hon. members of the Assembly that that is exactly what is being done.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### Disabled Persons Programs

(continued)

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government study and report on policy direction for persons with disabilities has left many people in the province very anxious and almost desperate over the list of recommendations included in the Claiming My Future report. The main premise of deinstitutionalization may seem to be a very welcome move in a Utopian world of caring and thinking and with a Liberal government, but we know the history behind this Conservative government, where the consequences of these kinds of decisions are frequently not well thought out. My questions are about the move to slowly close down the Michener Centre, a facility that has served the acutely disabled and their families since 1923, and the motives behind this. We know what the recommendations in the report are for phasing it out; we also know and have heard from hundreds of families and their concerns. What we need to know, and my question to either the Minister of Family and Social Services or the associate minister, whoever wants to take a run at this: what are the government's now definite plans for Michener Centre, and what's the time line?

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let me assure the member that there is absolutely no consideration being given to closing Michener Centre. I would have to say also, though, that there are some very viable alternatives for housing individuals, particularly with mental disabilities, and these are being looked at. Contrary to what is being implied, they truly are a success story.

Thank you.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful for the firm answer on Michener, and I hope that the minister will tell that to the many parents.

My next question, then, is related to his answer, Mr. Speaker. There's an assumption here that group homes in our com-

munities have standards, and we know they don't. The standards are essentially nonexistent for staff training and qualifications. Does the minister, therefore, with this move intend to revamp the standards and impose stringent staff qualifications, guidelines, and requirements for group homes?

MR. BRASSARD: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the member in that there are standards, very high standards, in this province. That doesn't mean to say that we're not reviewing them, because we are. We're constantly looking into them, and we have a report under way right at the moment.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.  
Cypress-Redcliff, followed by Vegreville.

#### **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade**

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Associate Minister of Agriculture, and it's in line with a question I asked in the House last Friday related to the GATT negotiations. Watching the coverage this morning on GATT, I'm sure we're all disturbed in the failure to come to an agreement in those negotiations. I wonder if the minister can share with us any information that she has from talking to her officials and others over there about the future of GATT and what the delay is going to do to the tough problems that face agriculture today.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly in discussions with our Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs from the Brussels meeting, we are very disappointed in the adjournment of the Brussels meeting of the Uruguay round of MTN. We're very disappointed in the very inflexible position the European community has chosen. We're concerned as to whether we can effect some meaningful discussions between now and the proposed time of reopening discussions in January or early February, and we will be working very hard with our Canadian ministers to try and effect some meaningful discussion in the interim so that we can come back to the table in Geneva in January and resume the talks.

These are very critical, as I indicated earlier in the week, to Alberta, particularly to our agricultural sector. We export approximately 80 percent of what we produce, and it's very important and imperative to our producers that they have the opportunity to trade in a fair environment. The EEC seems to not have the political will to address this problem. Our concern is certainly from our standpoint as an industry, but we also have a great concern for the developing countries that are affected by this.

MR. TAYLOR: Shirley, you gave away all your cards early.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Redcliff.

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Ignore the second member from Bow Island.

MR. HYLAND: Too bad it isn't debate, Mr. Speaker; I could say something else, but I've got to stick to the question.

Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. She outlined that discussions would be taking place to effect how we will negotiate in the next time period. A two-part question: when will those discussions start, and secondly, are we looking at alternatives?

Are we looking at the future beyond January, February, when the negotiations cease?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs has contacted the Prime Minister of Canada and asked him to call his economic summit counterparts together and to try and secure some direction for the talks in January. We look forward to his response to that. Our ministers of agriculture for Canada and the provinces are meeting in Brussels, I guess as we speak here, to talk about future direction. We have been involved with the discussions, we have our Trade Policy Secretariat in Brussels, and we are attending those meetings and will be addressing those issues at that time.

MR. SPEAKER: Vegreville.

**10:50**

#### **Tuberculosis in Elk**

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture Canada has confirmed that at least one elk on the McAllister game ranch near Kitscoty tested positive for TB on a skin test and after slaughter was found to have TB-like lesions. Now, last June when I raised concerns about the several elk escaping from the McAllister game ranch, the minister pooh-poohed it and referred to the fact that they all had vasectomies, saying that they posed no risk. But this clearly shows that escapes can and will occur and that the government has neither put up the money nor developed the procedures to deal with this threat. I'd like to ask the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife: given that there has never been a documented case of TB in wild elk in North America and given that wild elk are now clearly put at risk, how can the minister responsible for wildlife stand idly by and allow the Minister of Agriculture to play Russian roulette with the future of wildlife in this province?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, it's truly unfortunate that there has been an outbreak of TB on game farms in the province. But I must say that I believe the Department of Agriculture through their excellent veterinary inspection branch have everything very much under control. Alluding to the animals that escaped, yes, there are animals that escape from game farms just like all animals that have the opportunity to escape through fences. However, I would say that it's my information from my department that there's no risk to our wildlife stocks from any elk that may have escaped to this point because the ones that have not been exposed to TB, it's my understanding, are the ones that have escaped, and most of the them have either been collected or destroyed.

MR. FOX: Well, Mr. Speaker, Agriculture Canada is doing its job. It's this government that isn't doing their job. Another outbreak of TB in elk was confirmed on a ranch near Drayton Valley in a herd unrelated to the Cliff Begg herd, and this news is especially worrisome because it means a second front has to be opened in this battle against the highly contagious disease tuberculosis, meaning more testing, perhaps more quarantining, to find out how extensive the infestation is. Agriculture Canada has confirmed that stress is a contributing factor in tuberculosis and that elk experience stress due to confinement on game ranches. Given the escalation of the elk TB problem and given the threat not only to wild populations but to the domestic cattle industry, wouldn't the minister agree that it's totally irresponsible for the government to encourage further development in this

industry, by proclaiming Bill 31, until there's been a thorough public review of the impact of this industry?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 31, Bill 31 has been passed by this Legislature but not yet proclaimed, and it would take a recommendation from the Minister of Agriculture to cabinet to proclaim that Bill.

In any event, the hon. member should feel very sure that Agriculture Canada, working with Alberta Agriculture as well as working very closely with my department and following the paper trail that takes place with these animals, is making absolutely sure of two things: number one, that there is no risk to our domestic livestock industry, and secondly, that there's no risk to our wildlife stocks in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

#### **Buffalo Lake Stabilization Project**

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years the position of Alberta Environment was that the Buffalo Lake stabilization project is environmentally harmful and makes little or no sense economically. Within months of the Premier becoming the MLA for that constituency, the tune began to change. We now have a study commissioned by the government that recommends and supports the \$15 million project to stabilize Buffalo Lake. Since that time the Premier has acquired additional property on the shores of Buffalo Lake.

MR. SPEAKER: What is the question?

MR. McINNIS: I would like to ask a question of the Minister of the Environment. Will he undertake to ensure that this project will go to the natural resources conservation board before it's ever licensed by the government for funding?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this project will be subjected to a full environmental impact assessment, and if for some reason or another the EIA process is ready and the natural resources conservation board is not in place, then there will be a panel struck and we will conduct a formalized public hearing to adjudicate the environmental worthiness of this particular project. To say that this has all of a sudden come about is absolutely false. I won't say it's misleading, because that might be an inappropriate use of words, but I can't really think of anything else because this project has been under study for years and years. Indeed, there is an opportunity and a possibility to stabilize that lake for future generations of Albertans, but we're going to make sure that if and when it's done, it's done under the auspices of a proper environmental impact assessment process.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, I recognize we have a long history, it's just a history that's changed rather suddenly. Following his purchase of property . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The question, hon. member.

MR. McINNIS: . . . the Premier stated to the local media that he is committed to the project, that there's political will to support it, that it's absolutely key, and that he's speeding up the process. Now my question is a specific one. The government said in the debate on NRCB that projects with less than 200 cubic feet per second would not be reviewed. Now, it turns out that this project pumps 73.5 cubic feet per second.

MR. SPEAKER: Question.

MR. McINNIS: So if he can speak for the government, will he . . .

#### **Speaker's Ruling Brevity in Oral Question Period**

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'm sorry to interrupt, but question period has now been extended by two minutes. You are in your second supplementary. Let's have the question instead of a further statement.

MR. McINNIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't then criticize me for not quoting . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. Question period is over.

#### **Orders of the Day**

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Thank you.  
Clover Bar, followed by Edmonton-Jasper Place.

#### **head: Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)**

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier *in* the House I committed a faux pas, and I now seek your permission to introduce some guests who are in the gallery. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly 106 guests from the Ardrossan elementary school. There are four grade 6 classes that are here today with us. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Klym, Mrs. Clayton, Mme Gerard, and Mr. Schell, and their parents Mr. Osbaldeston, Mrs. McLure, Mrs. Tompkins, Mr. Dutchek, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Green, and their driver Mr. DeBruin. I would ask all of our guests who are seated in the members' and public galleries to rise, and I would ask the members of the Assembly to extend their warm and cordial welcome.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to introduce a group of 37 students from Our Lady of Peace school in the constituency of Edmonton-Jasper Place. They are in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by their teachers Linus Feist and Bert Facciotti and by a parent Mrs. Scammell. I'd like them to rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

[On motion, the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of the Whole]

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

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would the committee come to order, please.



11:00

## Bill 57

## Electoral Boundaries Commission Act

MR. CHAIRMAN: When the committee rose last evening, it was studying the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. Are there any further comments in regard to that amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

MR. McEACHERN: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Oh. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway. [interjection]

MR. McEACHERN: Well, I was waiting for things to come to order.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to add a few comments to the debate on the amendment by the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. As there's been a fair amount of discussion on it, I don't need to give the details of the amendment itself, but I would like to just point out that the passing of this amendment would free up the commission that's going to be set up to get on with the job of fulfilling some of the expectations one has for an electoral boundaries change. Those expectations are that this Assembly should tell that commission how many seats they expect them to come up with. Everybody is agreed on the number 83, that we should stay as we are. I think also that everybody is agreed that there are a couple of basic principles that need to be incorporated. I guess that we disagree on the extent and the importance of each one is probably the way to indicate the present discussion.

My colleagues have been saying, basically, that the first and primary consideration in redistributing the boundaries of the electoral divisions of Alberta should be that the commission should take the principle of equality of size – that is, by population – as being the basic and most important concern. Then, of course, we have recognized that there may well be some allowance for the fact that some of the constituencies are more remote from the capital and the people in those constituencies more scattered than in the capital city, or in Calgary, for that matter, or some of the other cities of this province.

So the question really is one of: where do you put the emphasis, on which one of those two principles? The Charter of Rights, of course, would make it clear that the emphasis should be put on equality of size by population of each constituency so that each member of this Assembly represents approximately the same number of people. Many things have been said about the McLachlin decision in B.C. saying that a 25 percent variance from the average could be allowed, but I don't think that McLachlin intended – and my colleague from Edmonton-Belmont read the passage last night, so I won't repeat it in detail, but just to say that she didn't suggest that the variance was a good idea in the sense that it should become the norm for large blocs of voters in this province. She said that the variance should be allowed under special and difficult circumstances in some remote areas of the province. Of course, she was talking about B.C., but the same idea could be applied to Alberta.

So for this government to put together a plan that would tie the hands of the commission to including a huge variance for the basic size of constituencies in the cities of Edmonton and

Calgary compared to the average size in the rural areas is a misuse of what she was suggesting. It would seem to me that the overriding principle should be the size by number, the population of each constituency, and we should leave that commission free to figure out for themselves how to come as close as possible in a reasonable manner to having average-size constituencies throughout the province with some variation allowed when special circumstances require it.

Now, the Member for Taber-Warner spent some time last night talking about the Congress and the Senate in the United States and how the Senate is a regional representation organization and suggested that we should do something similar here in Alberta, and that's partly what prompted me to jump into the debate. Once you start raising ideas of that sort, there are a number of varieties of things you could do, not just the suggestion that he made. He talked a bit about the situation in Canada as a sort of comparison, so let's talk for just a minute about what we might do in a country like Canada to get better regional representation in the Assembly for the people of this country.

Canada is a huge territory, and certainly nobody would deny that every part of this country should be represented in the House of Commons and that that representation should be somewhat based on population. Okay? So the Peace River constituency has a certain number of people and obviously has to be represented, and Dauphin, Manitoba, also has to be represented and so on. So all the regions of this country, the geographic regions, constituencies based approximately on the same size of population, with some allowance for rural and remote areas, need representation in the House of Commons.

Now, the Member for Taber-Warner suggested then that we have a second House so we could have a triple E Senate. Yes, that is one possible solution, but there are others. For example, it was suggested when the 1981 constitutional talks were going on that another way to see to it – you see, the problem was that we didn't want to end up with a situation like the Trudeau government, where we had a Liberal government of this country and they didn't have anybody in their government west of Manitoba. So that left the western provinces totally unrepresented in cabinet. Later Joe Clark had a turn at government and he didn't have anybody from Quebec. He had to go to the Senate to find somebody from Quebec to sit in his cabinet.

Another way to address that problem would be to overlay the 295 seats – at that time it was 282 seats; I think it's now something like 295 seats – in the House of Commons, which represent geographic areas and hence the people in those geographic areas, with, say, another hundred seats based on 10 per province regardless of size of province. Those seats could be elected on a preferential basis. By the way, the idea of a preferential ballot is not such a bad one. Many European countries use it, and in fact Alberta used it at one time, but Ernest Manning changed it. The idea of a preferential ballot has some merit and might be considered as a way to improve the democratic representation in the Assembly.

So I would say to the Member for Taber-Warner that the triple E Senate is only one of several different kinds of solutions to the problem of seeing that you get regional representation. I might also add that Grant Notley put forward an idea in those same 1980-81 constitutional talks of a House of the provinces, where the provincial governments would actually appoint six representatives or 10 representatives, whichever number they considered adequate, to a House of the provinces rather than to the Senate and abolish the present Senate. It's just full of patronage appointments anyway, by Liberals and Conservatives.

Each provincial government would appoint some people to a House of the provinces who would have the right to participate in debates about joint jurisdiction problems like agriculture, for example, which is handled jointly by the federal and provincial governments. They would have a right to have a say in how that legislation was handled and whether to pass it or not. Joint legislation would require passage by both Houses. Other legislation that is strictly federal, like aviation or foreign affairs, would just have to pass the Commons by itself; it would not have to go through the House of the provinces.

Now, there's some advantage to that, Mr. Chairman, in that the people in the House of the provinces would be speaking on behalf of the elected governments in the provinces and would have to put their name on the line on issues directly affecting the provinces that were joint jurisdiction and part of their responsibility. It would be a lot better than what we've got now, where we have 10 Premiers and the Prime Minister getting together either behind closed doors under a pressure cooker like we've seen recently or getting together in a public forum where they grandstand before the cameras and really are not solving the problems of this country very much. I would point out that the Premiers and the Prime Minister have no constitutional recognition for such a gathering. It's just something that's evolved through the years because Premiers and Prime Ministers like to think that they, 11 people, can control this nation and set directions for this nation in a way that the Constitution does not anticipate, quite frankly, and that I don't think is a heck of a good idea. I mean, we've all decided that we don't want our Constitution changed by 11 men under pressure cooker circumstances; we all know that. We need something much more representative of all the people and some dialogue with all the people involved. In fact, some kind of constituent assembly is something I've always advocated.

**11:10**

So I didn't want the Member for Taber-Warner to think that his idea of a bicameral Legislature with a triple E Senate was the only kind of constitutional arrangement that you could make to take care of regional differences. In fact, if you take those same three different ideas that I've now mentioned and try to apply them to Alberta, it becomes a little more difficult. Certainly I don't like the proposal that the Member for Taber-Warner made, that you would have a representative from each of the municipalities. Therefore, a municipality like Edmonton would get one representative, the same as some other smaller municipality, and they would elect them separately to this Assembly to make up half the seats of the Assembly, the other half of course being elected in the normal constituency manner.

The idea doesn't really make a lot of sense. If you want somebody to represent a municipality in this Assembly, then it seems to me that you would have to do like Grant Notley did with his proposal at the federal level. You would have to have the municipality, once elected, decide who they want to represent them in this Assembly, not another direct election in that region to come to this Assembly. What you'd be asking a municipality to do is to elect a government for their local municipality and then elect another person to come down here as well. Suppose they sent a Conservative group to the municipal council level and then sent a New Democrat to the Assembly here. Let's say we had a different government – well, like we have now, we have a Conservative government – it would not give that person coming from that constituency a lot of in with the government in order to facilitate what goes on there. So what you would expect, then, if you must have this kind of

system – I think the whole idea is nonsense, and this helps to show that it's nonsense – is once the municipality is elected, they would send somebody directly representing them as a council, just in the same way as in Grant's system the province would send somebody to Ottawa to sit in the House of the provinces that they wanted to go, not somebody else that was elected on some other kind of basis.

The province of Alberta is not so big now, in the modern day and age of transportation and communication systems we have, that we need the kind of regional representation that the Member for Taber-Warner was talking about. If we were to go to another system of trying to elect sort of two groups of people to this Assembly – and I don't think that makes much sense. If you're going to have two different groups of people representing different kinds of things, then you'd have to have a bicameral Legislature and that would require much bigger changes than he seems to be prepared to make. But suppose you were going to have two different kinds of people elected and set up a bicameral Legislature. I don't think the triple E model for the federal situation in Canada makes a lot of sense, and I think it makes even less sense here in Alberta. It would be much simpler, if we really wanted to see that all ideas were represented in a reasonable and democratic manner. . . . I think you would have to admit that these splits in people's opinions are based far more on party in this province than along rural/urban lines.

It might be a good point for me to tell the Member for Taber-Warner and other members of the House from rural Alberta that during the year and a half that I door knocked before the 1986 election, the most important issue that was talked about at the door on a regular basis, at almost every door I went to, was agriculture. The people in the city of Edmonton are either just off the farm or half a generation off the farm, and they know a lot about and understand and have a lot sympathy for rural Alberta. They know that this government has not been doing a very good job in rural Alberta. They know that they're presently wrecking their telecommunications system by privatizing it. They know that they are going to allow with the free trade deal the wrecking of their marketing boards.

AN HON. MEMBER: How about back on the topic?

MR. McINNIS: Pay attention; listen.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, what I'm trying to tell the people of Alberta and the rural people and the rural MLAs here through you: it isn't so much the number of seats that you have; it's the quality of the representation you're getting. I'm suggesting that the differences in this province are more often based on party line and party differences and party attitudes than they are on rural/urban splits. So if we are going to have two different kinds of people represented in this Assembly, as the Member for Taber-Warner was talking about yesterday, then perhaps he should consider some kind of overlay of preferential members in this Assembly out of the three parties. If you want to go back just a few years, for example, to 1982, when only four opposition members were elected out of 79, a preferential ballot type of approach would have mitigated that to some extent anyway, and you would have had a slightly bigger opposition. All parties would have been represented more fully in the Assembly.

So if you want to democratize the system – I know that's not the agenda of the Tory government at this stage; the agenda of the Tory government is to hang on to their rural seats, every one of them, because they're hoping that they're going to hang on to

them again next election. Quite frankly, I think they should forget it. They're going to lose a heck of a pile of them to New Democrats and to Reform Party members and maybe even to an odd Liberal. So I think the Tories are a dying breed in this province, and I don't think this rearguard action they're doing will go over so well with rural Albertans that they'll all vote Tory in the next election. But I know that is your only hope, and I don't really blame you for fighting for it with all you can, but I've got to say you sure twist yourselves around in a lot of directions to try to make it sound like it's a reasonable proposal.

The only instruction this commission that we are about to set up needs to be given is that they should come back with 83 seats, that they should be based as near as possible on rep by pop, and that they should to some extent take into account remote distances from the capital and the scattered nature of the population of the rural areas but that that should not lead to any discrepancies greater than 25 percent in even the most extreme cases. In fact, you don't even really need to say that to the commission. That's just a sort of guideline. It doesn't need to be in the legislation. Their job should be to try to come up with 83 fairly equal, by those two criteria, constituencies.

So, Mr. Chairman, I rest my case. I think these amendments should be passed. A lot of thought and care have gone into them and they do make a certain amount of sense, so I would suggest all members accept these amendments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Innisfail.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak against the amendment. It puzzles me when I see an amendment like this that strikes out pretty well every rule that the Bill has for redistribution. We had a standing committee that raised the recommendations. They went around to 39 hearings throughout the province. They met with five different associations and came up with a set of rules for redistribution. Then we hear hon. members speak in favour of this amendment which strikes out every rule except, I think, numbers 16 and 17. In reference to 17, every member that speaks for this amendment suggests that we should stay with an average as close as possible. Section 17 says that we should allow a variance of plus or minus 25 percent. Well, if we have to take an average throughout the province, why have that rule in? Take the total population and divide it. Consider that in the province of Alberta the majority of the people agree with the triple E Senate, which doesn't take into account dividing an area and dividing the number of people and dividing it into equal areas.

MR. WOLOSHYN: The Senate's in Ottawa. We're here.

11:20

MR. SEVERTSON: Yeah, members would like to see the small geographic area of the province control the whole area of the province, much like the Ottawa situation.

With reference to Ontario, they have a variance far greater. I think 15 out of 130 seats can vary as much as 50 percent. I can see that in years to come section 17 should be expanded from 5 percent to represent our rural numbers as the population concentrates more in the centres. That number in 17 should be amended to increase to 10 to 15 percent if the demographics continue the way they have been in this province and all through Canada.

I would be quite surprised if any of the opposition came out to the country and talked to the members of their own party if they feel we're being unjust and it's just a political matter. I

have had members from all political parties approach me and they are very concerned that the redistribution should be fair and equitable, not just by population. I'd like to commend the committee that went around and listened to the people and came up with a good report so the Bill could be drafted, and I strongly recommend that the Assembly oppose this amendment.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The amendment fails.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung]

[Eight minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

11:30

For the motion:

Barrett	Hewes	Mjolsness
Bruseker	Laing, M.	Roberts
Doyle	McEachern	Sigurdson
Ewasjuk	McInnis	Taylor
Fox	Mitchell	Woloshyn
Gibeault		

Against the motion:

Adair	Gesell	Oldring
Betkowski	Gogo	Osterman
Bogle	Hyland	Paszkowski
Bradley	Klein	Payne
Brassard	Kowalski	Severtson
Cardinal	Laing, B.	Shrake
Cherry	Lund	Sparrow
Clegg	Main	Tannas
Elliott	Mirosh	Thurber
Evans	Moore	Weiss
Fischer	Musgrove	West
Fjordbotten	Nelson	Zarusky

Totals:	Ayes – 16	Noes – 36
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[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of days ago in committee I circulated an amendment that I declared at that time I would propose, and I'd ask members to have a look at that amendment. If you open your Bill and go to section 17, that is a section of the Bill that says that

the population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above nor more than 25% below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions, a concept with which I agree, Mr. Chairman, but only under extraordinary circumstances. I propose to add to that section 17(i) ", but, where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions."

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to point out that in the vote that just occurred, one did not see a split occurring along the lines that have been suggested countless times in debate. In fact, what happened was this: all the members of the New Democrat caucus present and the members of the Liberal caucus present voted in favour of the amendment, and all the members of the Conservative caucus present voted against the amendment. This proves my point. Issues do not fall or split on rural/urban lines. Now, I'd like to just point out in sponsoring this amendment that this is not a tight, hard and fast rule. The wording was carefully deliberated: be near the average population where the commission deems it possible and reasonable. In other words, it says to the commission: "Where you can, try to target for voter equality. Where you think it's unreasonable, then go ahead and move up to that 25 percent margin on the plus or minus side of the average population." This is the kind of instruction that a commission can deal with. It gives them discretion, and at the same time it tells them that there is a principle of voter equality to be adhered to whenever possible. I can't see what is unreasonable about this amendment. I said earlier that with this one amendment I would vote for the Bill even if it had no other amendments. This one and only amendment would be enough to fix this Bill.

Now, I'd like to make the case for voter equality and contrast it to some of the arguments I've heard about how sympathetic we need to be to those who represent ridings which are remote from the capital city. I'd like to state very clearly that I am sympathetic to the traveling requirements of a member representing an area in the far south or far north of this province or in areas that get close to any of the borders, Mr. Chairman. But I'm also cognizant of some remedies which are available through other standing committees of this Assembly, such as one on which I sit, the Members' Services Committee. On an almost annual basis we have had a request to allow a member for a remote riding to be entitled to charter flights within that riding, and in every instance of that request – every single instance – I have voted in the affirmative. I have never voted against such a motion. I recognize that it is difficult to get to some parts of this province. Sometimes it is an issue of sheer distance, sometimes it is an issue of topography, and sometimes it is an issue of convenience when it comes to other modes of transportation. In all instances I recognize the importance of members being able to meet in person with their constituents.

I also recognize that given our duties as members we also spend an awful lot of time in this Assembly, which is where decisions are made, so we don't have the time to meet with every constituent. I know that I have never been able to meet every single constituent in my riding, and if I were to represent this riding for 20 years, it might be the case that I wouldn't meet every single constituent. I would not say the same for the Member for Little Bow, but he's been here for 27 years and has had a chance to know not only everybody in his riding but practically everybody in the province. Most of us will not be here for 27 years. The Member for Little Bow is an exception. But you know, even considering that, he's got a riding that is somewhat remote from the capital . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Will you keep the background noise a little lower in the committee, please?

MS BARRETT: . . . and he can't get on an airplane from his riding. He would have to go to Calgary to do that. But as far as I know, the Member for Little Bow does not have the right to have charter flights into his riding – a request has never been put to the Members' Services Committee – and somehow or other the Hon. Ray Speaker still knows a lot of his constituents and can meet with them whenever they want or whenever he wants according to his schedule.

Let me make it absolutely clear that I am not arguing that members representing ridings which are remote from the capital should not have access to their constituents or vice versa. I am suggesting, however, that there are mechanisms that are available, including the charter flight mechanism and also modern technology, not just the telephone, with which we've been blessed for more than a century, but also the modern machines called fax machines, the ability to go into a number of communities and conduct two-way reception and communication between satellite stations, and a number of other features, including electronic mail. We have the ability to communicate in a number of ways, including the mail. So no one is saying that we don't want you to be able to get to your riding or communicate with the people in your riding.

Now, I want to contrast that with an issue related to principle, which is voter equality, which is what I'm asking for in this amendment in a very reasonable and workable way. If you have – and I'm not going to go with the division of urban/rural or single or multimunicipality – a system whereby a majority of people are not entitled to elect the majority of members in the Assembly, what you have as a logical consequence is that the minority in fact are able to control the sheer numbers elected to that Assembly. That is the flaw which is inherent in our current legislation and which can be maintained, although would not necessarily be maintained, under the provision of this Bill and this particular section.

11:40

Now, if we had voted in favour of the amendment sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, this would be less of a problem because we would have told the commission, "You decide where the ridings should be on the basis of the plus or minus 25 percent rule." That amendment has failed. The only other way we can basically save this Bill from being but a mere rewriting in a slightly altered language of the old Act or the Act which is currently in force is to support the amendment in front of us, Mr. Chairman. I ask members to remember this: on the last amendment the vote did not split on urban/rural lines; it split on caucus lines. This is an opportunity for members to demonstrate their commitment to equality, not equity – equity is sort of like a weasel word, in my opinion – not equality of opportunity but equality, unconditional equality wherever the commission, that shall soon be struck, deems it possible and reasonable.

In thinking about possible and reasonable, the sky is the limit to those parameters. It would be up to individuals in certain constituencies to make their case for a riding that is heavily underrepresented compared to the provincial average or heavily overrepresented. The commission would have the discretion to analyze their arguments in light of this amendment, which directs them in principle to pursue voter equality where possible and reasonable. I urge members to support this amendment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar.

MR. GESELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to get into the debate on this particular Bill and this specific amendment. There are about five items I want to deal with. I've been listening very closely to the debate that's been going on, and the first item I want to address is that I see some different development of personality types that we have on this particular Bill and these amendments that are being proposed. It's the old story of the half-full glass of water. With permission of Gary Larson from *The Far Side* – I adapted his cartoon somewhat – I see that the Conservatives in the House here keep an open mind and most of them are very positive. When they look at the glass of water they say, "Well, we're very positive; the glass is half full." We've got some that may be negative and they say, "Well, it's half empty, it's unfortunate." Then we've got the Liberals. They say: "Well, half full; half empty. Well, maybe half . . . Oh, just a minute. What was the question?" That's sort of the general attitude. And then we've got the NDPs. They miss the question altogether. They say, "Hey, I ordered a cheeseburger." Now, the parallel I wanted to make here is that they're not even with the principles of this Bill when they're talking about some of these amendments that are being produced.

The second point I want to clarify, Mr. Chairman, is that there were some references in the talks by Edmonton-Belmont. He ascribed in his reference some specific remark to me, and I want to quote from *Hansard*. He's discussing multimunicipal constituencies, and he says that when I look at it, "Do you know what a multimunicipality constituency is?" He says, "It's a rural constituency." Then he goes on and incorporates some remarks that I've made to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. What I was telling him was the same thing and he incorporated them. Well, they were completely out of context, and I want Albertans to know that those are completely out of context, because that argument that is being made here, that a rural constituency is a multimunicipal constituency, just isn't right.

I will develop this argument in what I call the urban/rural situation, and that needs to be clarified to the hon. member that has introduced this amendment. In earlier discussions she encouraged members to ask some questions of her, and I asked her the question whether she could clarify the terms urban and rural. Well, she admitted that there was a problem with those terms, but she didn't really develop any argument. She continues to . . .

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

MR. SIGURDSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Belmont is rising on a point of order.

MR. SIGURDSON: So the Member for Clover Bar doesn't get too excited, I'll cite *Beauchesne* 459, Mr. Chairman. We're dealing with the amendment that was just introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, which is to amend section 17 by adding to the end of it", but, where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all proposed electoral divisions." This has nothing to do with multimunicipality constituencies, nothing to do with single-municipality constituencies. Mr. Chairman, I would hope you'd draw that to the attention of the member speaking.

MR. GESELL: Mr. Chairman, I believe the member, when introducing the amendment, referred to urban/rural, and once that was introduced, I think it's fair for me to address those particular questions that have been raised in the same fashion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, the Chair would say that the hon. member certainly has the right to respond to remarks made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, but he should then focus his attention on the amendment before the House.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me go on to the next point. I'll develop the urban/rural situation in respect to this particular amendment a little more clearly later on.

I'm beginning to understand the fear and the trembling that exist here in the NDP ranks and the Liberal ranks with respect to this total Bill. That's what prompts some of these amendments. That fear and trembling, that wailing and complaining I'm hearing here, Mr. Chairman, is related to the fear they have of losing their seats. Now, I may lose my seat in the next election. That's possible. But fine; so be it. That's the system we have in place; that's the democratic system. It would bother me to lose. However, I can fall back to a profession I could practise that I enjoy. I'm not so sure that the hon. members here from the NDP and Liberals have that fallback position. That's why we've got this fear and trembling going on about some of these changes: because they feel they might be politically affected.

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

MR. SIGURDSON: A point of order again, Mr. Chairman. I'll cite *Beauchesne*, the same section. Perhaps he can fall back to the amendment that's before the Assembly. We are dealing with a specific amendment that deals with average population. Now, I would hope that the Chair would raise that and bring it to the member's attention once again.

MR. WOLOSHYN: The member has to have . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. The Chair would say, in listening to the committee proceedings so far, that the remarks have been fairly general. There seems to be a new interest in some members keeping the discussion more confined, but the Chair would say that the tone of debate on the amendment so far has been rather general. I guess we all must bear in mind that this amendment before us may be crafted in a narrower way than the previous amendments.

Anyway, the hon. Member for Clover Bar.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. GESELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the point I was trying to make is a valid one, because the argument I was presenting is that I'm trying to figure out why these members are producing all these amendments. The reasoning for that, and if I'm incorrect, I would ask the members to stand up and say so: all I perceive here is that there's . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Chairman, I would like to stand up and say that he is incorrect. The reason for the amendments is to improve the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. GESELL: Well, if I may continue, I would appeal to you, Mr. Chairman. We've had a number of interruptions here. Some of them may be reasonable and valid points of order, and some of them are just straight interruptions. Under *Beauchesne* 334, I would ask for your assistance when that occurs.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to continue. [interjections] The wailing and the complaining carries on on my left, but let me carry on with discussion on this particular Bill and this amendment. It's introduced by the mover of this amendment when she talks about the delineation of urban and rural. I need to present to the members here some clear facts about urban and rural. The Member for Drayton Valley tried to do that some time ago, but there's still a great misunderstanding about what those terms mean. I think that misunderstanding is presented to all Albertans, and I need to clarify that. So in order to do that, Mr. Chairman, I want to first of all define the term urban. Here's where we've got a problem right off the bat. Let me just define from the *Oxford Dictionary*. Urban: an adjective; of, relating to, belonging or characteristic of a city or town or of people living in a city or town.

11:50

Now, we've heard a lot of arguments in this House, and the hon. members that talk about urban feel urban only applies to Edmonton and Calgary. Well, Mr. Chairman, we've got 16 cities and 108 towns. According to this definition, they should be incorporated in that particular concern. So when the member talks about does this House fall on particular questions in urban and rural categories, she doesn't really know what she's talking about. It's a bunch of nonsense. Because if I incorporate the urban populations of the cities and the towns in the numbers that are presented in the electoral report, then I find to my amazement that those constituencies that are now considered to be rural are in fact not rural. The Member for Vegreville, for instance, yesterday talked on this matter, but his constituency, Vegreville, contains 72 percent urban members. Now, should he be considered to be a rural constituency, or is he an urban one? According to the population that he represents he should be an urban one.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's a good one.

MR. GESELL: I'm not making any value judgment about whether he's good or not. He might represent his constituents very effectively. I'm discussing the definition of urban and rural. This is where we're losing some of the members here in the NDP, because they don't have a clear appreciation of what it means. Now, the Member for West Yellowhead . . . [interjection] I lost you days ago, hon. member. The Member for West Yellowhead's constituency contains 85 percent urban people. Should he be considered a rural member in this House, or is he urban? According to the definition of urban, I think it would be more appropriate to say that he represents more urban people than he does rural.

So the argument, then, that the urban population in all of Alberta is not adequately represented is just an argument basically advanced by the members in the New Democratic Party, where they're saying: "Well, we only look at Edmonton and Calgary. We forget about all the other 14 cities that exist and we forget about all the towns." I wonder if they would want to make that argument to the AUMA, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. They, in their membership, . . . That's an urban association recognized in Alberta. I'm not sure if the members over here in opposition recognize that associa-

tion, but they include all the cities, all the towns, all the villages, all the summer villages, and so on. They're even tempted to recognize Sherwood Park, which is a hamlet and not incorporated. What these members are basically saying is that they're snubbing their noses at all these residents, and I want Albertans to know that. They're snubbing their noses at all those people that live in the towns and the villages. They're saying: "Well, you guys are not urban. You're just a bunch of rural hicks. You don't count. It's only those people that live in Edmonton and Calgary that are the important ones; they're urbane."

Well, Mr. Chairman, let me just say to these members that they are completely confused. This is a bunch of nonsense. This particular Electoral Boundaries Commission Act is there to represent all Albertans fairly, not just Edmonton and Calgary. Those urban people living in the towns and other cities in Alberta need to be represented in the same fashion as those in Edmonton and Calgary, but when I add up this list of urban people that are incorporated in the so-called rural constituencies, there are 20 of them that have urban populations over 50 percent. It's a generally accepted mathematical fact that to define certain terms – if they're over 50 percent, well, you might as well call them urban rather than rural. Then in that case, with the representation we've got, 41 rural and 42 urban, we've got 42 urban ones right now. If you add the other 20 that are over 50 percent urban populations, you've got 62 MLAs in this House that are representing urban people. Now, tell me where the preponderance is, where the rural people, the rural MLAs have the power in this Assembly. It's not true.

In my particular example, Mr. Chairman, my constituency incorporates the city of Fort Saskatchewan, a city. It's ignored by these members over here. I include a large area that is what I would consider semiurban. It's called by the county of Strathcona 'rurban,' a new term they've coined, and I represent some rural people. But, Mr. Chairman, the truly rural people I represent only constitute . . .

MR. McINNIS: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

MR. GESELL: . . . about 15 percent.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place is rising on a point of order.

MR. McINNIS: The member was gracious enough to read from the dictionary the definition of urban and rural, but I wonder if he would read the definition of 'rurban' for the edification of the members.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Clover Bar.

MR. GESELL: There isn't presently a definition of 'rurban.' It comes from the county of Strathcona which . . . [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I want to explain to the hon. member. He's asked me a question. I'm gracious enough to let him do that, number one. I would appreciate it if he were gracious enough to listen to the answer.

Now, Mr. Chairman, 'rurban' is a new term that was coined by the county of Strathcona because of their particular circumstance. It's not incorporated in the dictionary right now. I assume that it probably will be in a year or two. I want to discuss that particular circumstance to explain it to the hon. member who asked the question.

In the county of Strathcona we have the largest hamlet, Sherwood Park. There are some 35,000 people living there.

Now, if that is not an urban area, I don't know what is, even though it is not incorporated. Now, surrounding the metropolitan area of Edmonton and particularly in the county of Strathcona we've got a large percentage of acreages. These people have perhaps moved from the city or from the rural area into these areas and they expect urban services, but they're in a rural setting. That's where the term basically comes from.

But, Mr. Chairman, the point I was making really was this: the representation in this House. I want Albertans to know that when I look at the urban people that are actively represented – and I count myself as one of the MLAs that represents an urban area – it is overwhelming compared to the truly rural MLAs that are in this House if you look at the very tight definition of it. Now, I want to make an argument with respect to the cities as well, because you have to look at, say, the new areas annexed in the city of Edmonton in 1981. They've annexed some extensive farmland areas. If there's a farmer that has a farmstead there and farms and he was in an urban constituency – say in the MD of Sturgeon previously – he's now part of the city of Edmonton. Because there has been an artificial boundary drawn that says this is part of the city of Edmonton, even though he has not changed his life-style – he's still in farming there – all of a sudden he is an urban person.

12:00

Well, the definition of urban and rural is not that concise. You've got these gray areas in between there, and that needs to be recognized. Even the hon. member over here on my far left represents some rural people in this House, and that's appropriate, Mr. Chairman. We all should represent the people of Alberta. It doesn't matter whether they're urban or rural. Those definitions that were used are no longer appropriate. I think the new definition that's being proposed, to define it on the basis of whether you are in one municipality or two or more, is much more appropriate than those terms of urban and rural. They do not make sense in this context. So I want to ask hon. members to consider that very seriously.

MR. SIGURDSON: How about the amendment?

MR. GESELL: How about the amendment. Yes, indeed. Let me get to the amendment particularly. [some applause] Thank you. Thank you very much.

Now, I want to get at this amendment from a different point of view than what has been provided here. I've already made the argument that I represent the city of Fort Saskatchewan, but it is conceivable that with the restructuring – and I don't know where those lines are going to be drawn – I may represent a small portion of the city of Edmonton that might be part of the rural area. It's possible.

MR. FOX: You have to win an election to do that.

MR. GESELL: Well, that's true too. I have to win the election, as the Member for Vegreville indicates, but so does he. [interjection] Well I'm not quite ready to give up the ship here. I want to talk some more, Mr. Chairman.

I want to talk about the environmental consideration. You might say, "How does this relate to this particular amendment?" Let me make the point. When you argue urban/rural and so on, you're also talking about the environment that people live in. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place lives in an urban environment, but it's still an environment, Mr. Chairman. It's an important consideration. I live on an acreage. It's the

particular environment that I live in. So you can't really separate, to the degree these hon. members want, the environment from the people. The member basically indicated at one point here that these . . . [interjection] Hello over there.

Now, the problem I'm having with the discussion that's carrying on here is that they're talking about one person, one vote, but they're forgetting about the other aspect that really should be considered, and that's the environment. We all live in that environment. It's not just people that are important; that environment is a very important consideration, whether it's the city environment, the 'rurban' environment, or the rural environment. All of Alberta is important. I find it really, really interesting, Mr. Chairman, that particularly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place would want to ignore that environment completely in this legislation we're proposing.

I want to flash back to the Brundtland commission. When they proposed certain things related to the environment, they quite clearly stated sustainable development as very critical, very important. That has been picked up by these hon. members, and they're broadcasting that everywhere. But more important, Mr. Chairman, was a principle that Brundtland came forward with, and that principle was that in any legislation that anyone is considering, there should be recognition of our environment. That's the point that sadly they have missed. So in this fundamental legislation we've got here, we should not be counting just people; we should be giving some recognition to our environment. That's what this Bill proposes to do. It serves as a basis to talk about people, a fundamental, basic premise, but then it also talks on about other considerations: the geography, the distances. Those are all environmental considerations.

It strikes me as extremely strange, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. member professes a deep regard for the environment and has told the people of Alberta that the environment is critical and important and should be considered in everything that we do, yet all of a sudden, when it comes down to electoral boundaries, it's not important anymore. Well, I think it's more important there than it is anywhere else. It's more important in our fundamental legislation that sets up our political systems. So if he's serious and committed about the environment, I would want him to jump up and speak on behalf of it.

I would mention this, Mr. Chairman: he has duped me to some degree in that I trusted that he was concerned about the environment. Well, it's not true. I want Albertans to know that this particular member and others in that party, in their principles that they're bringing forward in this House, are leading Albertans around by the nose. They're professing to be concerned about the environment, but when it really comes down to incorporating that in some of the basic, fundamental principles of legislation, of how we set up our political system, all of a sudden they just want to do away with it. Well, Mr. Chairman, that is ludicrous. That's a bunch of nonsense.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: With great reluctance I must rise on a point of order. I'm not certain whether to cite our Standing Order 23(i) or *Beauchesne* 484 or *Beauchesne* 69. Clearly, this member has gone off on a tangent, attacking the motives of another member in an argument which is bogus on the face of it. In fact, I'm

afraid, Mr. Chairman, that I feel a speech coming on. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. The Chair would suggest to the hon. member that he should now, at this point of his time, make some reference to the amendment in a clear way that will connect it.

MR. GESELL: Well, Mr. Chairman, I think I've been talking generally. I appreciate your caution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair would agree with the hon. member that you've been talking generally. Now the Chair would suggest that you get more specific towards the amendment.

### Debate Continued

MR. GESELL: All right. On the amendment: "but, where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions."

Well, Mr. Chairman these words sound fine, but they are related to the argument I was presenting, with all due respect. This is a people argument here, an amendment that wants to bring us back to the population. It talks about average population. My argument was that there are other considerations. I accept that people should form the basis of our system, but there are other considerations that are important, and that's the argument I was trying to present. Maybe that was missed by the hon. member over here. I'm sure it was missed, but it is in fact related. I was speaking generally, I agree, but it is related to the amendment, because there are other considerations that need to be worked in. It's not just a simple system of average population.

Now, the other thing that I need to stress: when we're talking about average population, the plus/minus 25 percent formula on the basis of one person, one vote is acceptable. Only up to a maximum of 5 percent may be outside of that, so the average population basically is being dealt with in the majority of cases, maybe even 100 percent. I don't know; it's up to the commission to determine. But the Bill as proposed also provides a little bit of flexibility. It provides up to 5 percent that might be outside of that. Whether you call it average or the plus or minus 25 percent, to me they're both pretty much the same, as far as I can understand the arguments from the ND Party.

12:10

One has to be realistic, and that's where the environment argument that I was presenting comes in. That relates to that additional 5 percent, up to a maximum of 5 percent. If the hon. members feel that that should be eliminated, and that's the way I read this particular amendment, then I have some grave difficulties. [interjection] Well, Mr. Chairman, if my interpretation of the remarks here are correct, that we should just count people, period, and count them on an average and forget about everything else, forget about the environment, then I want to let Albertans know what these people that profess such regard for the environment are really doing.

I'll sum up here, Mr. Chairman. I have some grave difficulties with this amendment. I want to sum up with some of the remarks that were made by the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place, who professes to love Alberta: his words. He said he loves Alberta much like one loves a woman. I think those were his words. I'm paraphrasing to some degree. Now, he also talked about his ancestry. His homestead was in Bruce, Alberta, a community well known to me. They have a heck of a stam-

pede down there, as a matter of fact. But when we go back, all of us, no matter where we live, have that same ancestry. We've come from the rural areas. I would venture a guess that there may be just a few in this House that have come from a truly urban environment, were born there and lived all of their life there. He says that urban and rural should not be treated differently. I agree. And he said: not more MLAs – and he was talking about the urban/rural – and that there's no truth in the urban members running over the rural. Well, that's definitely true, and I've made that argument.

I also want to refer to what I think is important, and that is the consideration of urban and rural and that respect, that fairness. The members have thrown the words around about fair and equal and all the rest of these good things. Those arguments have been addressed. Let me talk about the mind, the heart, and the soul that we as MLAs should have in order to represent all Albertans. Let me draw the argument that the member brought forward about having these rural roots in Bruce. Well, a good example of that might be Aaron Copland, a very excellent composer who is just recently deceased. He was born in Brooklyn – not Manhattan; in Brooklyn – and he composed some very interesting music: *Rodeo* was one and *Appalachian Spring* was another. Now, for a person that was born in an urban area and raised there, he had a heart, a soul, a mind for the rural area. He represented it in music, and he represented it well. It's very important. I would hope that all members in this House would have that same appreciation for the urban and rural people in this great province of Alberta.

I think I would want to close on that note, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to follow the Member for Clover Bar. I appreciate the analogy that he used at the start of his diatribe, when he talked about a vessel being half full and half empty and how you look at it is a matter of perspective. Well, you know, after those sagacious remarks I can only tell you that, being as positive as I possibly can be, it has shown that that member is certainly full of it.

Let me speak to the role of the commission and directly to the amendment. For those who have happened to let it slip by after those long and wandering strolls we've just had with the Member for Clover Bar, the amendment deals with the role of the commission. It adds to the end of section 17(1), "but, where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions." What that means is that we should attempt to achieve relative equality. We should have relative equality; not absolute equality, as we've said before, but relative equality.

What this amendment allows is for the commission to go out and look at communities – where do they fall? – not split them up, as the government would have us do with its specific direction to the commission, where it says that there shall be X number of constituencies in Edmonton and X number of constituencies in Calgary and others spread throughout the province. This would give provision to the commission to draw, where reasonable and possible, constituencies of approximately the same size in terms of population. It would leave all communities intact, without division. You wouldn't have to run down to try and find where to scratch off a line or two in Edmonton or Calgary to get those 17 or 19 constituencies. It would allow you to have that variance. It would allow you to implement the variance of plus or minus 25 percent in trying to bring it closer to the mean.



It doesn't give any regard for whether one is from an urban area, a rural area, or, as the Member for Clover Bar suggests, a 'rurban' area. What it says is that you're an Albertan and your vote has equal weight and you will be able to reside in a constituency regardless of its makeup, generally or specifically, you'll be able to reside in a constituency and have an MLA represent you, and when that member of the Legislature goes to the Assembly to represent your concerns, that voice has approximately equal weight in the Legislature. That's the provision. It's a rather simple amendment.

What we're talking about is getting close to an average, not an absolute average. Nobody's talking about an absolute 28,504 Albertans in every single constituency. There is the plus or minus variance: down to 21,000, up to 35,000 in terms of total population. That allows, as I said, all communities to be whole and not divided.

In my constituency of Edmonton-Belmont I currently have seven existing community leagues. What's interesting is that we've got a lot of development going north of 153rd Avenue. At 153rd Avenue there's a real division. We've got new development, a lot of brand new homes in there, and no existing community league, so what they've done is joined with the existing community leagues until they get sufficient population to support a community base. People between 82nd Street and 66 Street on the north side of 153rd Avenue have joined with Kilkenny. Between 66th Street and 50 Street north of 153rd Avenue, they've joined with the McLeod community league. Now, goodness knows how long it's going to take for those communities that are developing and building to have sufficient population to form their own community league to provide the kinds of services that they require for their families and their community.

What we propose through this legislation is most unfortunate, because we're saying, "Well, we can divide that." If we want to carve part of that away to give more representation out to Westlock-Sturgeon or out to Redwater-Andrew, we can take that and divide it right down the middle of the community at the moment and throw those people into Redwater-Andrew or into Westlock-Sturgeon. What about the division there? Do we have any due regard for those people in those communities? How would it be if, in the constituency of Highwood, we were to run down the line and say: "Half of the people in Longview get to go into another constituency. Let's take Main Street and divide it in half because of the system of voter population. Maybe that's what we should do."

12:20

Well, that's not the intent of the amendment, which hopes to correct what is probably going to happen with the intent of the Act. The intent of the amendment is to give the commission allowance to go out and draw some reasonable and sensible lines where possible. You can go along the communities, and if it's above the average by 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000 people, so be it. That's anywhere from 3 to 6 to 9 percent. And if it's under by a thousand or two, that's fine as well; no problem. There is no problem with doing that.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment again tries to correct a built-in bias and a built-in inequality that's contained inside Bill 57. I hope members would realize that what we're trying to do is make sure that people, Albertans, in their communities, regardless of where they live, will be able to know that because this community is whole and intact, they share the same member and they have the same representation inside the Legislature. Let's not go and divide the communities. It wouldn't be fair.

Any member that represents a rural community knows full well that you wouldn't go down Main Street or Railway Avenue and throw an electoral line down there for the sake of voter population. Why would you do it in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton? That's a question that this government should be answering. Why would you go down the middle of a community in Edmonton and throw up an electoral boundary line, arbitrarily place it there? For what reason? For what reason would you do it? It doesn't make any sense at all.

So, Mr. Chairman, I hope that when we have some reflection today and over the course of the weekend, members will give a lot of consideration to the amendment that was proposed by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands and deal with this and hopefully adopt it, because it makes more sense to allow the commission to go out and draw those lines without restriction and find that which is possible and reasonable to make up what we call a constituency.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Well, Mr. Chairman, I was not going to speak in this debate until the relentless and vicious attack by the Member for Clover Bar, but I should say that I will address my remarks to the amendment and not to some of the other very interesting comments that are floating about this Chamber this morning.

Mr. Chairman, the amendment is clearly designed to give some realistic and appropriate guidance to the commission which is to draw up these boundaries. The point has been made several times by members of the government that there has to be guidance given to the commission, and they have attempted in I think a fairly feeble fashion to justify the whole list of criteria and the whole program that they're foisting upon this commission and the province under the rubric of providing guidance, instruction, direction, and this type of thing to a commission. What it says is that we here in this Assembly recognize that there are population differences; we recognize that there are difficulties in representation, that there are economic factors, that there are all kinds of things that go into the mix, but that what the commission is supposed to do is to try to recognize that a voter is a voter. Now, that's not an American concept; that's not a foreign concept. That's a commonsense concept, and what we're trying to do is get some common-sense into the heads of the government before they send a commission off to do this particular job.

I realize that when it comes to members like the Member for Clover Bar, common sense doesn't come very easily. For example, when he criticizes me for my advocacy for the environment and says that I should be supporting a maldistribution of seats because that's somehow good for the environment, I think he has to do a little bit of thinking because, you know, the . . .

MR. MARTIN: Tories think? That's a contradiction in terms.

MR. McINNIS: The member says that talking sense into a Tory is a contradiction in terms. I realize I've set out for myself a difficult task this morning, but I'm going to try my best to do it, because even though the member has since left the Chamber, having delivered his shot, I think when he reads and reviews *Hansard*, as I know he does, he will perhaps try to understand . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. The Chair would just like to remind the hon. member that it's improper to reflect on the presence or absence of members in the Chamber.

MR. McINNIS: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for drawing attention to the fact that the member delivered his shot and then crept away before he could hear . . . Oh, he's back. All right, hon. member.

Now, when he says that the environment is very important, I'm with him. When he says that every member of this Assembly should have respect for the value and the importance of functioning ecosystems, I'm with him. But when he goes to the next step and suggests that the more environment you have, the fewer actual voters you should have, then I part company with him, because it turns out that it really doesn't matter fundamentally if you're from an area which has a lot of the environment whether or not you'll be strong as an advocate in favour of the environment. In fact, we have members in this House whose virtual constituencies have been given away to the international pulp industry for clear-cut logging, some of those lands even being subject to dispute as to who owns them. I'm referring to the Lubicon in particular. Where are those members in speaking out against that abuse of the environment? Where are those members in stating a defense of ecosystems? Where are they in relation to the practice of new forestry, where we try to say, "Well, harvesting trees is one thing, but you have to build in the respect not just for the ecosystem but for the people who live there"? This is a very important concept, and the member has come along and said that there's something bogus about support for the environment that doesn't give more votes to people who have more of the environment in their district than others.

I have to come back to the point that fundamentally what we represent in this Assembly is citizens, and that's recognized in the legislation. The criteria put down here is population. Read section 12. Population is the factor that's involved here. We're not in a situation of one mountain, one vote; one lake, one vote; one square kilometre, one vote. That's not what we represent. We represent constituents, people, citizens of the province. On their behalf we take care of the interests of the environment. On their behalf we take care of the interests of animal species and all the rest of it. So, you know, with respect to that argument I have to think that the member missed the boat somewhere. Somewhere along the line he just slipped a notch in terms of his thinking, and hopefully that will put him back. I'm not counting on it, but hope springs eternal, and that's the most I will say about it.

In respect to the amendment I think what we're saying to the commission is that there is an underlying principle and a philosophy here; that is, people have the right to be treated as equals under the law. To produce an electoral map which gives members of one electoral district two or three times the voting strength of another district in this province is contrary to that principle. What we're saying is that the 25 percent factor is there, and it's there to take account of all of the things that the members of the government pretend to be concerned about. You know, they come here and say, "We reject the American model of one person, one vote for a whole bunch of reasons." That's what the 25 percent is there for. The 50 percent is another kettle of fish altogether. That's when you get into the massive distortion of voting power and of representation on the great debates over public policy in this province.

I make the point again: a different majority in this Assembly would have a different forestry policy. You would not have the

type of mindless giveaway of our forests in support of the pulp industry if you had a different majority in this Assembly, and we may have a different majority some day or we may not. The distribution of seats is one and only one factor in that process, but it's a significant one.

12:30

We're getting into an area where what we need to do is give to independent people, independently minded people, fair-minded people some latitude in which they can use that discretion, in which they can present that. The type of direction which is appropriate is contained in the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. It states, "Where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions." Now, let's examine this; let's examine it carefully. It says, "Where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable." Well, I don't hear anybody in the government saying there's anything wrong with the commission doing things that are possible and reasonable. I don't hear any argument against that.

So what's the rest of it? It says that the ridings shall "be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions." Well, all that says is that a citizen of this province residing in this province has equal value to any other person where it's possible and reasonable to do that. Otherwise, what you have in here is an institutional distortion which recognizes at the very outset, before the commission even begins any aspect of their discretion, that they have to do a whole list of things which, on the face of it, do not treat people equally.

Now, you know, I've heard all kinds of loosey-goosey interpretations of the term "fairness" thrown around in this debate. I've heard a lot of other things as well. But what could be fairer than recognizing the fundamental dignity and worth of each person? What could be fairer than saying to this commission: well, if it's possible and reasonable, having regard for the distance, the sparsity of population, the community of interest, all of the criteria and factors that this government is concerned about and we are concerned about too? Why shouldn't they have the authority to treat people equally beyond that? Why shouldn't they?

I could not imagine a more elegant and a more reasonable amendment to put in this Bill than the one put forward by my colleague representing Edmonton-Highlands. It says that all of the factors notwithstanding, once you've gone down the list and made the adjustments that are necessary in order to achieve these things that we say are in the public interest, then you should look at equality. What could be more reasonable than that? But the government doesn't approach it that way. No. They go and create a whole bunch of essentially arbitrary quotas. These are political decisions made by political people for political reasons. They say that . . .

MR. GESELL: I've been listening to this, but it doesn't make sense.

MR. McINNIS: Well, perhaps if you listen with greater intensity it will start to make sense to you, hon. member.

They say, and I'm quoting from section 14 of the Bill now, if you've got it front of you: "19 electoral divisions entirely within The City of Calgary." Wherefore cometh that, hon. member? I mean, this is out of a hat somewhere. This is out of a computer that projects election results in a certain way. It says: "17 . . . within the City of Edmonton." To respond directly to the member, it refers to Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer,

St. Albert, Fort McMurray, Sherwood Park: these are all communities that are assigned arbitrary quotas in the legislation. It goes on to make special provisions in Red Deer, special provisions in Medicine Hat, on and on and on and on. What it doesn't say is that when you take all of the legitimate public policy initiatives that are in this Bill, above and beyond that, a person is a person. In this Assembly we represent people.

We may have concerns. We may advocate moose and deer and bear, but I guarantee you that as long as I live, you'll never have a bear or a moose or any other of God's creatures sitting in this Assembly. It just isn't going to happen. [interjections] Okay, okay, okay. I agree that some days perhaps we'd be better off in respect of some hon. members if we did have friends from our animal kingdom here, but we don't because we are a species-specific body. So when the member states one wildlife species, one vote, he's kind of perhaps gilding the lily a little, if that's not an unparliamentary term. He's perhaps stretching a point beyond recognition.

We have plenty of provision in this legislation to take care of the problems of representation that stem from large territories and great distances from the city, and we on this side are prepared to recognize that, not just in the distribution of seats but also in the provision of resources to members. Rural members have benefits and entitlements that urban members don't, and I support that as a member of the Members' Services Committee. My late colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona supported it; my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands has supported it in the Members' Services Committee as well. We recognize those things. We want to assist where assistance is required.

This Bill goes way beyond that. My colleague, my House leader, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, has brought it back to basics, has said that we have to somewhere put in here the principle that where the commission deems it reasonable and possible, we get near that average so that as nearly as we can, we treat like cases alike, we treat people as people, and we make the distribution of seats closer to a model of fairness which is appropriate to our context.

I want to come back to an earlier point that I think has escaped the notice of many hon. members, especially the Member for Clover Bar. We're treading in dangerous territory when we start in this Assembly drawing lines on a map and handcuffing a commission in a way that they have to draw lines in a certain way. I recognize and I understand the political factors that went into it. I can see the horse-trading that's behind all of these provisions that are in here, but I think we have to come back to a basic principle. When it comes to drawing the boundaries of the districts that we run in as MLAs and would-be MLAs, we're into an area which is just as dangerous for us as the setting of our pay and benefits. I feel the same way about it. I think the less we have to do with drawing those lines the better: the better in terms of the actual outcome, the actual fairness, the better in terms of people's perceptions of it.

If we send out a commission that's so thoroughly bound and gagged by a set of political criteria voted through the committee on partisan lines and, I daresay, likely to be voted through this Assembly on partisan lines, we discolour those boundaries. To the extent we do that, we make people believe that within this distribution there is some degree of political bias. I suggest that members would be well advised to back away from that a little, just a little.

Now, the member makes these ad hominem arguments, you know, as if somehow his perception of the worth of other hon.

members should influence the outcome of this debate. Well, Mr. Member, you're entitled to your opinion about the worth of another hon. member, but I really don't think you're going to influence anybody's vote here or anybody else by suggesting that some of the members are worthless or can't get by in the world or what have you. We'll take our chances in the election the same as you, and we will abide by the outcome, as you will as well, hon. member. I really think that's ad hominem, it's below the belt, and it's subterfuge. I don't think we need that kind of thing here. I don't refer to that member and the way he makes his living in this debate, and I don't think he should either. I think that's an unacceptable form of debate. If I were in the Chair, I'd admonish him.

So here we are, dealing with the amendment to section 17(1) of the Bill, where we're asking the commission to consider all of the factors that are needed to improve representation, to make it effective, but beyond that, where it's possible and reasonable, to treat like cases alike and move us towards a fair average.

I rest my case.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to address a few comments to this amendment proposed to section 17(1) that we are discussing this morning, at least some members are trying to discuss and some members are talking God knows what. I would like to talk a little bit about it. I support the intent behind the motion. I think the concept as stated, "where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions," clearly says a direction and an intent that I believe the government should be espousing.

12:40

Quite frankly I'm puzzled by the opposition of the government members to this amendment, and the reason I suggest that, Mr. Chairman, is because this amendment is a very small amendment. It really doesn't deal with the heart of issue, which is actually contained in other sections of the Bill. Section 14 is proposed to be left untouched by this particular amendment. Section 15 is proposed to be left untouched by this particular amendment, as are sections 12 and 13, which really in all honesty form the heart and soul of the Bill in terms of redistribution. Section 17 simply says: where it's possible and reasonable, let's make all the constituencies equal.

Now, there are concerns that have been expressed, I think quite appropriately, by the Member for Edmonton-Belmont that we should not be splitting communities in half. I support that concept. I face that concern on a daily basis in my own constituency, Mr. Chairman. The Member for Calgary-Foothills and I, for example, share three communities, and I would argue that that has created difficulty on behalf of the constituents that live in those two constituencies. Clearly, that is not in the best interests of serving the individuals, the persons, that live in those two constituencies.

By proposing that boundaries be more or less equal where "possible and reasonable," as the amendment states, it allows the commission a certain amount of flexibility in creating those constituencies yet clearly gives direction to the commission as to what is supposed to be proposed. It still allows for, although I don't agree with them, the 43 proposed single-municipality constituencies; it still allows for, again, although I disagree with them, the 40 proposed multimunicipality constituencies. What

it does and what the intent of this does, Mr. Chairman, is suggest the background, the basic premise upon which boundaries should be proposed.

The proposed amendment to section 17 unfortunately doesn't go far enough, and we've seen the opposition by the government members to any kind of an amendment with respect to other sections, which unfortunately was voted down earlier this morning. This amendment, Mr. Chairman, would really not change the intent of the basic premise behind other sections of the Bill, specifically 14 and 15. Given the other parts of the Bill, it still will result in basically what I refer to as a bimodal distribution in which we will have primarily large single-municipality constituencies and substantially smaller multi-municipality constituencies, but I think it's a step. It's a small step albeit, and it doesn't go far enough, but I'm prepared to support this amendment because I think it gives some direction to the commission. I think it's an amendment that the government caucus should not fear, because it really doesn't change the net effect, I believe, of what's likely to happen. It simply gives a message to the commission which I think we should support.

So I would encourage all members regardless of whether they are single-municipality or multimunicipality members, whether they are government, Official Opposition, or Liberal opposition – I think all members can support this amendment, should support this amendment. It will still leave us with an improvement in our electoral boundary redistribution.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I did want to speak on this amendment, because I didn't want debate on Bill 57 to pass without my having at least some opportunity to share my thoughts with members of the Assembly.

My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands has proposed what I think is an excellent amendment to the Bill, one of many that the Official Opposition is proposing to try and correct this very deficient and manipulative piece of legislation, by proposing that at the end of section 17(1), which reads that

the population of a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25% above nor more than 25% below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions,

we add "but, where the Commission deems it possible and reasonable, be near the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions." In other words, this amendment is attempting to do what I suggested we needed to be doing in my debate last night on a previous amendment, and that is to give the Electoral Boundaries Commission that we're appointing through this Act the freedom to do what we want them to do: redraw the boundaries of the 83 electoral divisions in the province of Alberta in a fair and reasonable way, in a way that ensures all Albertans not only representation but ensures that their vote will count, that they will have a fair say, that they will be involved in determining the future of the province of Alberta. I think we need to be able to do that.

We have a number of things in our electoral process that do encourage participation. You know, I can contrast that with other jurisdictions. The government has turned their back on their American friends for the purposes of debate on Bill 57, but I should point out that a recent conference that I attended on behalf of the Legislative Offices Committee dealt with the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws. We had a number of sessions that provided a great deal of information and opportunity to discuss issues surrounding electoral reform, be it enumeration, election process, election finance, accountability,

disclosure, contribution, freedom of information, ethics related to the electoral process. It was a very good conference, and it gave me the opportunity as a member of the Alberta Legislature to compare notes with elected members from jurisdictions within the United States, either state legislators or state Senators.

I did have a good conversation with a fellow from the state of Florida who's on the ethics commission there, appointed by the government. He was talking about the frustration they have trying to get people involved in the electoral process in Florida. In that state, indeed in many states, voters have to make a conscious decision to register. They have to register themselves to vote in an election, whereas in Alberta, to contrast, we do things in our system here to encourage participation. We enumerate electors; we go around and we enumerate them. We encourage them to participate in the electoral process. If they're not enumerated, if they're missed at enumeration time, they still have the opportunity to put their names on the voters list and take part in the electoral process, whereas in the States they have to register.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

What they find in the state of Florida, as an example, is that only 50 percent of the people bother to register to vote, and at election time, of the 50 percent that registered to vote, only 20 percent bother to exercise their franchise on election day. So you have a very narrow segment of the population making decisions about what's going to happen in the future. You can multiply those figures, even the Member for Clover Bar could, and find out that if 50 percent of the voters register and 20 percent of them take part, that means 10 percent of the population is actually casting ballots on election day. In a relatively close race for state governor, for example, you could have 6 percent of the population deciding . . .

#### **Chairman's Ruling Relevance**

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, hon. member. It's interesting to know about our good neighbour to the south, but what does this have to do with the amendment? Please speak to the amendment.

MR. FOX: I'm trying to be illustrative, Mr. Chairman, not unlike the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications, who seemed not to be able to understand why they've wasted money and jeopardized service for Albertans by privatizing AGT and preferred to talk about . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. The Chair is interested in all hon. members addressing the amendment before the committee. Please proceed.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. FOX: Thank you. I'm talking about adding a clause to section 17(1) of the Bill that says that the commission would try in every possible way, which means that the commission would try to be fair and reasonable, to draw the electoral boundaries in a way that sees the ridings be as close as possible to the average. I'm contending, Mr. Chairman, that this amendment, if passed, would encourage participation in the democratic process, would provide Albertans with the assurance that their vote would count, that they would have relatively equal say with Albertans everywhere in the province about who is and who is not going to form the government. I'm saying that we need to

do what we can in these cynical times to encourage people to take part, because the best decisions are made when more people take part in making them. I think we can all agree with that, Mr. Chairman. I'm trying to contrast that; I'm trying to build an argument here that will convince members opposite that there are jurisdictions in North America that have a real problem encouraging participation and that we need to do what we can do to encourage participation.

12:50

When I told this fellow from Florida that we had a 75 percent voter turnout in Vegreville, he was astounded, Mr. Chairman. He thought that was really unusual and hard to believe and couldn't understand why. I said, "Well, because we do what we can to encourage participation." But that participation is being jeopardized, being jeopardized by a government that drafts Bills that are cynical and so manipulative, that tries to predetermine what the outcome of elections will be, that tries to make decisions about drafting electoral boundaries in a way that they believe will better their chances of forming the government after the next election. We're jeopardizing the very essence of our democratic system; that is, that people, wherever they live and whatever they do, should have a right to help determine their futures. That's what this amendment's all about, Mr. Chairman: it's empowering the people. That's why it's natural that such a resolution would come from the NDP under the leadership of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

No, I think the government has taken the McLachlin decision from the province of British Columbia and tried to massage and manipulate that decision in a way that suits their ultimate end, and that is to make sure that their rapidly eroding Tory power base in some of the less populous regions of the province is protected. I think that's a very narrow, parochial, and selfish way to make decisions about what's good for the province of Alberta. I've had hon. members say to me: "How can you as the Member for Vegreville, representing the riding that is the 11th smallest in the province by virtue of these population figures, advocate making ridings more fair, making them as close as possible to the average size so that Albertans have an equal say in who forms the government? How can you do that as a member representing this small riding? Don't you realize that means that you might lose your seat, hon. Member for Vegreville?" I really have to scratch my head. Again I remind hon. members that we're not here to make decisions for Albertans in the long term based on what we think is good for us or our political parties in the short term.

MR. McINNIS: You'd be a Tory if you did that.

MR. FOX: I'd be a Tory if I had that point of view; that's right, hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. But I'm a New Democrat, and I believe that people should have the opportunity to make decisions in a fair and responsible way, and I want to make sure that the commission we appoint has the opportunity to make fair and reasonable and responsible decisions about where the boundaries of electoral divisions are drawn. In order to do that, they need to have the strength of the words added to the end of section 17(1) by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, saying that the commission would try wherever possible and reasonable to make sure that the ridings are close to the average size.

I do want to make the point, Mr. Chairman, that riding size has not always been a deterrent to good representation. I'm looking across the way, and I see the Member for Peace River.

Now, if I were to suggest that that member has done a good job representing the people, it would come back to haunt me. I know he would photocopy that and send it all around his riding saying that he's got an endorsement from the Member for Vegreville. I want to tell you that I've never heard anyone complain about the representation they've had in the riding of Peace River. So if he wants to consider that a pat on the back, he's welcome to. Peace River is a riding that is larger than the average in terms of population.

I could refer also to the riding of Fort McMurray, and I won't make any comment about representation from the area other than to point out that they've got 37,935 people as of the 1986 . . .

MR. GESELL: And 90 percent of them are urban.

MR. FOX: Well, the hon. Member for Clover Bar shouldn't be so quick to cast aspersions on urban Albertans. He himself represents some in the city of Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Let's continue with the debate. Hon. Member for Clover Bar, please . . .

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just mean to point out that the riding of Fort McMurray is one of the largest in the province. In fact, I'd be willing to say that along with the riding of Peace River it contains a significant percentage of the land mass of the province of Alberta. Both have populations larger, and in the case of Fort McMurray significantly larger, than the average riding in the province of Alberta, and we haven't heard complaints about them being too large to represent. Certainly it's a challenge. I refer to my colleague from West Yellowhead, the most westerly and fourth largest riding in the province of Alberta, capably represented by the member, with a number of municipalities and school boards and hospital boards and recreation boards. It's a large riding.

The size of ridings can be a problem, Mr. Chairman, but it can be overcome by creative, diligent hard work. I think what we have to focus on is not how many miles each member would have to cover, how many boards each member would have to meet with. We don't even know who any of the hon. members will be after the next election. What we have to do is make sure that when the people of Alberta next go to the polls, they have the tools at their disposal to elect the government that they want to set policy and enact legislation and look after their finances over the next four to five years, and the only way to do that is to ensure that the commission draws those boundaries in a way that's fair and reasonable, as near as possible to the average population of proposed electoral divisions.

Given the time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to adjourn debate.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. GOGO: I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

MR. SPEAKER: Those who concur with the report, please say aye.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 57.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, it's been a good week.

[At 12:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 2:30 p.m.]