

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 14, 2003**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 2003/04/14

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

Would the Assembly agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mrs. O'Neill: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce on behalf of the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and myself 37 air cadets who are in the members' gallery. They are here this evening accompanied by Major German, Captain Barr, Officer Cadet Novakowski, and Warrant Officer First Class Breen. I am pleased to introduce them to you and through you to members of this Assembly, and I would ask everyone to please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Provincial Education Savings Plan

506. Ms Graham moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore new means of helping students finance their postsecondary education including the establishment of a provincial education savings plan to supplement Canada's registered education savings plan.

[Debate adjourned April 7]

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to be able to rise today and speak to Motion 506, exploring new means to help students finance their postsecondary education. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing forward this motion. I think it's timely, and I think it's the right thing we should be discussing today, and I was quite excited when I saw it.

As I looked at this, I kind of cast my mind back really quickly on the last three generations of my own family. I looked at my father, who was technically brilliant but came out of high school during the Depression. He didn't have a father and food was really important, so he never got a postsecondary education. In fact, he didn't go to get a postsecondary education until he turned 65, and then he got his first degree and his master's degree after he retired.

He raised six children. He taught us that education was very, very important and that we should all have one. It was one thing he was very good at doing. He had six children, and unfortunately it never even occurred to us that we would have any help getting that postsecondary degree. It was really up to us. In fact, I remember the day that he dropped me off at university. He turned to me and he said: do you have any money? And I said: no. And I remember he gave me \$20.

I cast that with my own son, whom I took to university five years ago. I mean, I never asked him if he had any money and gave him \$20. I registered him in school, I bought his books, I got his housing

taken care of, and I saw it really as a primary responsibility of our family.

So as I look at the generations of time as they've progressed, as people have tried to get their postsecondary, we have kind of progressed quite a ways. But also in that time period I've often heard that they say that we've learned more in the last 10 years than we have in the history of this earth. I think we do live in a knowledge economy, and the day has come when kids have to have postsecondary degrees today just like they used to have to have a high school diploma. It's important for them to go into almost any line of work, and because work has become so technical, it's become even more important.

So as I look at this motion and I look at how we can help students, I think back to the way that I got through school. I worked 20 hours a week on campus. I worked full-time in the summer. I competed on a speech team because it paid tuition. I mean, I did a myriad of things in order to get through, and I didn't always just look to government or to a student loan. I think that I learned some of the most important things in school by working my way through school. So I first of all think it's important for kids to participate.

But the hon. member brings up an important point. She talks about the provincial educational savings plan or an RESP to complement the federal one. Now, we wouldn't see the results of that for 20 years, but it's a beginning. It does help parents prepare to help their children when that day does come, and it does come. I have three children in postsecondary today, and it is a big responsibility for our family as we look at that.

The other thing that I thought of when I saw the member's motion was also this idea that kids can participate, and I think they should. I had a student in my office last week, and she was complaining that she had five roommates, and I thought: well, I had nine roommates, you know, and we ate macaroni and cheese for three years. I thought you could die of that, but I lived on.

I think that sometimes my own children think that life should be exactly the same as it was when they were home. I always say that going to school is a rite of passage, and you should suffer, and economically it squeezes you, but that's not all bad at that time in life. But that being said, kids need a way to get through school financially. I'm encouraged by our student loan program which asks kids to participate.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm having a difficult time. There seems to be a number of people on the front bench who are bent on discussing the affairs of the day, and I would invite them to go outside and carry on their important debate or discussion. Meanwhile, let us have one person at one time speaking in the House. For those hon. members the invitation is clear.

Sorry, hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. I was saying that students need a way to manage this. One of the things that concerns me is sometimes our student loans are based on parental participation. Now, in my constituency sometimes parents help a lot. I help my kids a lot. Parents don't always help, though, and these kids do encounter difficulties if their parents' incomes are too high. They might have to go out and work for a few years before they go to school, so I'd like us to seek other ways as well to open the doors for learning so that kids have access to education.

It says in the Council of Alberta University Students' book that 85

percent of Alberta parents expect their students will attend postsecondary education, but only 25 percent of them actually save for it. That tells me there's a big gap going on there and that if we want to encourage parents to help their kids prepare for the day when they are in postsecondary, this would be a good start. We could actually see parents begin to contribute when their kids are little and have the means to help their children when that day does come.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion. I think it's very timely, and I will be supporting it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close debate then.

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the sponsor of this motion, which urges government to explore other means of helping students finance their postsecondary education, I am pleased to make some concluding remarks to close debate on the motion this evening, but before doing so, I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Egmont, who graciously agreed to move the motion on my behalf last Monday. I know that the hon. member has done some considerable work of his own on the subject matter of the motion and was certainly supportive of the general intent of the motion. In addition, I'd like to thank other members of the Assembly both from the government side and the opposition side who have spoken in general support of the motion, all of whom I know share my belief in the importance of higher education and the need to help students achieve postsecondary education by removing barriers of cost and institutional capacity.

Simply, Mr. Speaker, my reason for bringing forward the motion was that I wanted to ensure that Alberta students faced with unmanageable financial burdens will not pass on a postsecondary education. Why is higher education so important right now? Well, more than at any other time in the past education is fundamental to our ability in Alberta to compete in the global marketplace. As was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Egmont, 70 percent of all jobs in Canada nowadays require postsecondary education. The economy of the new order is such that it is fueled by knowledge, and this requires a highly educated workforce. Accordingly, we cannot allow the high costs of postsecondary education to be a barrier to entry.

I would also like it to be noted that while I believe that the benefits of higher education are important to economic considerations, I certainly believe they go much beyond that and provide other societal benefits including social, cultural, and health benefits as well as personal benefits to the individual.

I think it is readily acknowledged, Mr. Speaker, that the cost of postsecondary education has been trending up for a number of years, and I am aware of a report by the Canadian Association of University Teachers which shows that the average costs of an arts program in 2002 in Canada at about \$3,561 is 67 percent higher than a decade ago when you take inflation into account. This is due to a number of reasons, among them, changes to tuition fee policy, which has caused tuition rates to increase steadily as operating budgets of institutions have increased steadily. When you combine rising tuition costs with rising costs of living, the cost of textbooks and supplies, then the total cost of postsecondary education has become increasingly difficult to manage for many students.

8:10

In my own city of Calgary, just to give you an example, Mr. Speaker, operating costs for the upcoming year are viewed at being an increase of at least 7 percent while funding under the current

budget is only going to rise by 2 percent. To deal with these higher operating costs, the board of governors at the U of C recently passed a 6.3 percent increase in tuition across the board in all programs. They have also adopted a differential tuition fee model for medicine, law, and MBA programs, which will see fees more than double over the next two years, and this is happening in institutions all across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 gives government the opportunity to explore new ways of funding postsecondary institutions as well as finding new ways of helping students finance their education, which could entail a review of student loans, scholarships and grants, tax credits, and tuition policy in general to make sure that these programs are serving students' needs, as we would like to see them served. One of my preferred options, which has been mentioned by other members in their comments, would be to establish a provincial RESP coupled with a matching grant much like the federal one.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's future depends on good access to postsecondary education for our students. I urge all members to support Motion 506. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

Disposal of Public Lands

507. Mr. Broda moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to sell or dispose of public lands that do not possess any economic potential for the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Mr. Broda: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to rise today and introduce Motion 507, which calls for the disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands. The purpose of Motion 507 is to urge this government to sell off or dispose of any public lands which the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development deems could be better utilized by the private sector. The reason I brought this motion forward is because even though this government has gone to great lengths to sell or dispose of surplus public lands, I believe that we should commit ourselves to furthering our efforts in this area. There are still thousands of acres of publicly owned land that would be put to far better use if they were in the hands of private entrepreneurs.

Before I begin to discuss the reasons why we should be actively pursuing this policy, I would like to make it clear what I mean by surplus public lands. Surplus public lands are parcels of grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, and lands that are currently not being utilized to their full economic potential. Therefore, when I'm talking about disposal of such lands, Mr. Speaker, I'm not referring to valuable forest lands, areas with historic natural grasslands where they're situated, or lands which have been reserved for conservation.

With regards to the status of public lands, Mr. Speaker, this government's policy has been to lease lands rather than sell them to private operators, which in some cases has created certain problems related to effective land utilization, lack of land development incentives, and overextended government ownership of lands. However, the Department of Sustainable Resource Development has pursued the policy of public land sales in certain cases in order to promote agricultural expansion and particular types of commercial, industrial, and recreational uses; provide the necessary land for various essential services, including public works projects, which would benefit Alberta's communities; and free the government of commitments associated with upkeep and management of surplus Crown lands. This policy, Mr. Speaker, has resulted in consolida-

tion of various privately run farms, increased industrial development of land, and increased tax revenue associated with private ownership of previously publicly owned land.

Presently the Department of SRD uses two types of sales methods in order to dispose of Crown lands. One is that public land sales are administered by a public auction which takes place when a particular parcel of public land is considered vacant or has been released from a lease-holding agreement. In other words, this means that the leaseholder has agreed to end the lease-holding agreement. The other one is the public land sales process allowing individuals and companies to place their bids on any piece of public land that has been up for auction. As a result of this process, land is sold to the highest bidder. The other type of sales method that the Department of SRD uses in order to dispose of Crown lands is the private and priority land sale method which is administered through public competition. This type of sale, Mr. Speaker, allows the leaseholders the option to purchase the land that they lease at a fair market price.

The public lands that are generally sold to leaseholders and other private buyers and industrial operators are found in what is referred to as the white area, or the settled portions of the province. More specifically, the white area is made up of populated central, southern, and Peace River regions. The lands in the white area are mainly used for agricultural purposes. As a result, of the 10 million acres of public lands found within the white area, almost 6 million acres are used for agriculture. In turn, Mr. Speaker, these 6 million acres of agricultural land are divided into 7,769 agricultural leases, licences, and permits of various types. Of these 7,000 or so leases, 5,400 consist of grazing leases and 547 consist of grazing permits.

When all the grazing leases and grazing permits are added together, they correspond to almost 5.1 million acres of agricultural public land. This figure represents about 85 percent of all white area land that is used for agricultural purposes. This is a huge land area, and there is no reason why the province needs to hold onto so much of it. The costs associated with administration and management of such a large area of land are undoubtedly very high. If some of this land were sold to private operators, the money that is being spent to administer all this land could be directed towards more important areas of concern such as health and education.

I think that all of us in this House are aware of the fact that privately owned lands have always been more productive than publicly owned lands. Farmers who own their own land have a vested interest in making it as productive as possible and as a result are willing to invest more time, more effort, and more money than a farmer who is only leasing the land. The private or priority land sales method, which I mentioned earlier, is an ideal way of facilitating land sales to those leaseholders who are in a position to purchase the land that they are leasing. In other cases where leaseholders are not maintaining the bare minimum standard of land development or where parcels of land have become vacant, the public land sale method can be used to sell the land to the highest bidder, be it to an individual farmer or to a larger industry operator. In both cases, Mr. Speaker, the end result is that the land will be better utilized and the government will have less land mass to administer.

Motion 507, Mr. Speaker, will help facilitate this process by urging the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to utilize the tools that are available to him in order to dispose of a large number of publicly owned grazing lands, vacant lands, and lands that are currently not being used to their fullest economic potential. Disposal of some of this surplus land will undoubtedly boost land productivity, help stimulate the Alberta advantage, increase the government's tax revenue, and free up some of the government's valuable resources which could be used for other more important

purposes. With this in mind, I urge all my colleagues here today to vote in favour of Motion 507.

Thank you very much.

8:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join in the debate on Motion 507 regarding the disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands, sponsored by the hon. Member for Redwater. Listening to the hon. member with regard to this motion thus far, I would like to put forward an amendment to the wording of the motion which would help clarify the intended purpose and the rationale behind this piece of legislation. I have with me 85 copies of the amendment, and I would like the opportunity to share it with all my colleagues. Would you like me to just continue, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: You might read it out. That would be helpful.

Mr. Horner: If I may, Motion 507 is amended by striking out "public lands that do not possess any economic potential for the province" and substituting "lands that are declared surplus to the needs of the province." With your permission, Mr. Speaker, proceed?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Horner: Presently, Mr. Speaker, Motion 507 urges this government "to sell or dispose of public lands that do not possess any economic potential." The amended wording of the motion would in turn urge the government to go to a declared surplus to the needs of the province. It's my belief that this amendment would serve to clarify the purpose and the principles behind the motion. The amended wording would make it clear that any surplus public land would be sold or disposed of only after the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has approved its sale or disposal. Currently the motion is open to more than one interpretation, which makes it very awkward to understand. I believe that the proposed amendment would make it clear that the motion is not calling on the government to sell or dispose of any public lands that are not economically viable to the province but only those lands that the Minister of SRD deems could be better utilized by the private sector. As my colleague from Redwater already mentioned, such lands include grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, or lands that are currently not being utilized to their full economic potential.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend our government on their commitment to the goal of ensuring good stewardship of public lands, a valuable resource to Albertans. Over the years farmers and ranchers with lease agreements on these lands have provided excellent stewardship, taking care to ensure that these lands are kept in good condition. There are 32 provincial grazing reserves located throughout Alberta. Some of the reserves are community pastures or natural grassland while others have been partially cleared and seeded to forage. They range in size from 6,602 acres to 76,681 acres, and the overall average is close to 22,500 acres. The main purpose of these reserves is to provide summer pasture for Alberta's farmers and ranchers on public land, enabling them to use their own land for crop and hay production.

In keeping with the government's multiple-use policy for public lands, the reserves also offer a variety of recreational opportunities including hunting, hiking, trail riding, cross-country skiing, snow-

mobiling, camping, and sightseeing. Others who use grazing land are oil and gas well operators, pipeline companies, gravel haulers, seismic crews, and firewood cutters. Large portions of the reserves also provide excellent habitat for wildlife.

Through the grazing reserve program the province has pioneered the development of tame pasture from tree-covered areas on a large scale. The reserves are on generally poor-quality soils that are not suitable for annual cropping. If these areas are developed properly, they can yield high-quality pasture. Part of the pioneering process has included establishing ways and means to retain good-quality, developed pastures even though nature continues to try its best to re-establish the tree growth that originally existed on these lands.

The multi-use nature of our public lands has raised some concerns between members of the public and leaseholders. Mr. Speaker, there have been many disputes over the years on public land access. Many of the disputes have left many unsure of their rights and responsibilities when it comes to public land that is leased for grazing. The main groups of concerned individuals are recreational users such as hunters and snowmobilers. Bill 16, the Agricultural Dispositions Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, deals with clarifying any uncertainty surrounding the issue of the rights and responsibilities of Albertans on public lands. I think Bill 16 ties in nicely with Motion 507 in that all the issues in Bill 16 could be solved if government were to adopt legislation such as is urged in Motion 507. There would no longer need to be clarification of any uncertainty surrounding this issue. The landowner would have control over access to his or her land. If there is public land that is used for grazing and a recreational user would like to access that land, he or she must be granted permission by the leaseholder and the leaseholder must provide reasonable recreation access to the public leased land.

Not all leaseholders feel that they should have to grant permission to anyone who asks to use the public land or even provide reasonable access. They have cattle or other livestock that use that land for grazing and are not always able to supervise the recreational users to ensure that the actions they take are not harming the land or the livestock. If the leaseholder were able to purchase the public land, these issues would be solved. The only recreational users that could use the private land would be those that the landowner approved of. There would no longer be any recreational users that would be uncertain of their rights. It would be as simple as: if you want access to the land, the landowner has the final say, not the government. After all, it's the leaseholder that knows the land. It should be his or her decision on who gets access to the land, not the government. Selling the land and legally making it the property of the land user will accomplish this task and remove any uncertainty when it comes to access.

Another group that may require access to public lands are oil and gas well operators, pipeline companies, and seismic crews. Farmers and ranchers could benefit from these actions through agreements and contracts between the landowner and company seeking to use the land. Again, Mr. Speaker, there is uncertainty concerning access rights, and again these uncertainties could be resolved by clearly distinguishing a landowner through the sale of public lands to private owners. It would seem to me that with all of the uncertainty and disputes surrounding access to public lands, there is a lot of time spent on the issue, time that could be saved, as well as money, by clearly distinguishing who has the rights to the final say on access to the grazing lands. Motion 507 urges the government to do just that by giving a leaseholder the opportunity to purchase grazing land. It will then be the landowner's decision on land access, thus saving time and money trying to solve disputes caused through the vague access regulations that are presently in place.

Ranchers use their grazing land for the purpose of providing feed

for the livestock that they have spent their life and quite often generations acquiring and expanding. This is their investment, their livelihood. I think it's the rancher's right to know who goes on his or her land, and it would be prudent for them to have the final say on those actions. After all, I don't think many members would look highly upon subjecting their lifelong investments to uncertainties when those uncertainties could easily be dissolved.

Motion 507 urges the sale or disposal of public lands that are declared surplus to the needs of the province. I have to agree with that statement, Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned earlier. If this government is able to sell public lands that are currently causing uncertainty and are tying up valuable government resources, they should be sold if only for the reason to solve disputes and release public lands that are not of any economic benefit but are also surplus.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support the amendment and Motion 507 as amended. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater on amendment A1.

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert for the amendment. I would agree with it. Basically, when the first words came out, economic potential to the province – I think there's a lot of economic potential in agriculture. So declaring it as being surplus lands for the needs of the province makes for more clarity to the motion, and with that I would encourage people to accept the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: On the amendment, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Knight: I've got a couple of comments, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the amendment and substituting for "public lands that do not possess any economic potential for the province" to "lands that are declared surplus to the needs of the province." My question would be with respect to that. I'm not exactly sure who it is that does the declaring, and at what point in time that is going to happen. What's the time frame that we'd be talking about? If we would suggest that any given piece of real estate in the province of Alberta today isn't something that is necessary for the province of Alberta and could be considered to be surplus, we might be a little short-sighted. When we're looking at future situations like the possibility of requiring carbon sinks – the Kyoto accord comes to mind – to meet our international requirements with respect to that sort of thing, it's difficult to tell what piece of real estate it is that would be surplus to our needs. Certainly, in light of that, if we're talking about larger tracts of rural real estate, the possible future value of real estate may be much higher than anything that we could garner for the province of Alberta in the near term.

8:30

I had another comment with respect to leases and the fact that leaseholders now have a bit of difficulty controlling their land or being sure that there isn't any detrimental action that takes place on the land with respect to their livestock or that type of thing. With the new legislation that will come forward, I believe there wouldn't be any difference in an agricultural person using his own titled land or a piece of public leased land with respect to his livestock for grazing purposes, because one of the exemptions that allows the leaseholder

to withhold access is the fact that if he has livestock on the real estate, he can reasonably withhold access. So I don't really see that there's, you know, a difference with respect to whether the land is leased or owned in that particular case.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the amendment that would be my problem with it. I have some trouble trying to decide who determines when the declaration is made that this real estate is surplus to the province. If we were talking about commercial buildings and that sort of thing, then I think that's a little bit easier to define, but when we start moving away to larger tracts of public land that are held by the province for other purposes, I guess I have some reservations with the idea.

I'll leave my comments at that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne on the amendment.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to have the opportunity to join in the debate on Motion 507, sponsored by the hon. Member from Redwater. Motion 507 deals with a subject that is also of considerable importance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we're going to run into this problem. Perhaps you might move that we vote on the amendment, and then you can get on with your speech.

Mr. VanderBurg: I move that we vote on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Whitecourt-St. Anne, thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: No problem.

I'll speak on Motion 507 as amended. Motion 507 deals with a subject that's also of importance to many of my rural constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne, and the motion has been brought forward to urge the government "to sell or dispose of public lands" which might be better utilized by private landowners. These lands for potential sale include grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, or lands that are currently not being utilized, and I would guess that maybe even recreation leases may come into it. I know that for one of my counties that is an issue.

Mr. Speaker, it's widely accepted in the business world that private ownership maximizes economic potential, and giving a person the right to use the land but not to improve it only results in the minimum amount of production for that land. So give that same person the option of purchasing the land for their own to improve upon or to add value to, then that land begins to realize its full economic potential. This is one of the basic prefaces behind capitalism. There are some that are opposed to such a motion and are under the belief that in the hands of private landowners the land will suffer. Well, this rationale is unfounded and false. It's been shown throughout history, especially the history of capitalism, that when individuals have a vested interest in a piece of property, whether it be land or any other tangible asset, it is to the benefit of that individual to improve and to add value to that asset. On the other side of this argument, when individuals are given access and use of the land or any other tangible asset, there is no incentive for that individual to add value to that asset. So it's kind of the basic language in the business world.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 507 will also face critics who believe that all public land should be treated equally. Well, this is not entirely a reasonable argument. While it's true that we need to hold our land

very dear and near to our hearts, we need to differentiate between land that could be used in a more productive fashion and public land that should be held in conservation for us. As has been mentioned earlier by my fellow colleagues, there are currently public lands situated in the middle of land that is being cultivated for agricultural purposes. Well, for situations such as this, there is no reason to keep its status as public land.

For example, some Albertans would oppose the sale of natural grasslands in regions in southern Alberta, you know, because they're considered to be part of Alberta's western heritage. I'm sure that when immigrants came to this region of western Canada, they came with dreams and aspirations of improving their lives in the process, improving the land. Maintaining our western heritage would be truly exemplified if we acknowledged the hard work that our forefathers put into the land to build a life for themselves. This tradition carries on today in our agricultural community, a community that we all look to as a reminder of where we started from as a province and as people here in Alberta. If we truly wanted to maintain that sense of heritage, we would move to sell this public land to people who continue to have the goals of building the economy and, of course, this province.

Mr. Speaker, the selling of public lands that are deemed to be of more beneficial use in private hands makes sense not only from an economic perspective but also from the standpoint of protecting the integrity of this historical piece of property. The sale or disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands would lead to an amalgamation of existing private farming operations, increase the development of public land for the benefit of all Albertans, and increase tax value.

I guess if there's any weakness in this motion, it's that it only deals with land. Albertans own white elephants like the federal building right beside us, you know, just one block from here. I'm hoping that the Minister of Infrastructure is listening.

An Hon. Member: Turn it into a school and give it to Calgary.

Mr. VanderBurg: Yeah. Exactly. Let's move to get rid of that white elephant. It costs us lots everyday to heat. This is something else that could be included in this motion.

Back on the subject, it's worth while to note that the idea raised in this motion coincides with the viewpoint of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. The department's mission statement is to "ensure the sustained contribution of benefits to Albertans from Alberta's public land and wildlife resources."

For the reasons I've outlined above, I urge my colleagues to back Motion 507 and support the disposal of Alberta's surplus public lands. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion as amended is very important as it touches on the issues of land usage and private property rights here in Alberta. I believe in private property rights. From gun ownership to land ownership, private property rights are important. The principle I would like to advocate today is that both a democracy and an economy work better when they are underscored by a strong private property system. I believe that this assertion withstands both the weight of philosophical reasoning as well as the weight of evidence, and I'd like to discuss some of the reasons that I make this assertion, and at the same time I'd also like to discuss cases from other parts of the world where, once public lands were transferred to private owners, the economy of the country took off.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, as has been stated already, the underlying principle of private property is that when a person owns something, he is more likely to take care of it because in taking care of his property, he is taking care of his interests and contributing to his own success and prosperity. I'm sure that every member in this Assembly can think of an example from their own lives where this has been the case. Remember your first car? Well, I see a lot of young guys around my constituency, and when they get their first car, they are so proud. They polish it, they keep it clean, they maintain it, and they paint it. Essentially, they do all the things that their mother always tried to get them to do around the house, things that they wouldn't do or would only do once their mom or dad got on their case. Now, a quick observation becomes very clear: they care about their car because they own it. It is in many respects an extension of them. They care about it because they put work into it; they invested their time. And they care about it because when somebody owns something, it is a symbol of their own self-reliance, which raises their self-esteem.

I'm sure that everyone here has heard the problem of the free rider, or the freeloader, as some call them. A free rider is someone who obtains the benefits of something held in common but does not put in his share of the work needed to maintain it. There are historical situations which highlight this problem. For example, in the 1800s and 1900s a lot of bigger cities in Europe and North America went out of their way to create free public spaces for citizens to congregate, either to go for a walk or to play a pickup game of basketball, baseball, or soccer, whatever, or just to sit out on a bench or on the grass. Now, initially it sounded like a great idea. As cities became more congested, it seemed appropriate to make space for citizens.

But then something happened. Everyone was using the commons for their own interest. Everyone took, but no one gave back. No one took the time to clean up the litter and the waste, or if in a game of soccer a divot of grass was taken out, the players didn't stop to replace it. People just bucked their responsibilities to the land they used. The inevitable end was that the common free spaces turned ugly and unimpressive as people did not take the time to manage them properly. In the end people stopped using these free spaces, and the only way the cities brought people back to the free spaces was to refurbish them and to hire city maintenance workers to constantly provide upkeep. Now, Mr. Speaker, guess who had to pay the expense? That's right; it came at the taxpayers' expense, even those who had never even used the free spaces and had no intention of ever using them.

Now, if I could bring this back to the example of a car, could you imagine if four guys bought a car instead of the one guy in my constituency? The car would probably be run into the ground because each of them would assume that the other would take it to the car wash or change its oil or fill it with gas or maintain it. As well, each would likely assume that the others were not putting in their fair share, so they would either attempt to force the others to put in more or, more likely, they would minimize the amount of money and work that he had put into the car thereby caring for it less, and in the end the car would be less well off due to its common ownership.

Now, it's one thing, however, to own something and be proud of it and another to own something for the purposes of reaping an economic benefit. If you own land that you want to sell for a profit, then you'll consider different ideas of how to improve the land thereby increasing your profit margin. You'll also consider what sorts of groups may be able to make the best use of the land and

market it to those groups, hoping that they'll see its potential and offer you more money for the land. Finally, you will consider ways that you may be able to use the land for your own business or personal interests, and in doing so, you will be able to find a way to make good use of the land.

The basic point is this. When you put land in the hands of private interests, you put land in the hands of people who have a greater stake in its ability to be used successfully and for a profit. If you leave land in the hands of government, the thought of it making a profit is put to the back burner.

Now, I would guess that for some members across the way it's better that we leave this land to government. I respectfully disagree. Study after study shows that the more land is held by private interests, the more successful an economy is. This is because the land is taken away from the reach of political concerns and is open to the ingenuity and creativity of a person trying to either care for the land or to make it economically viable.

A few cases in point ought to be mentioned here. In his study of the history of economic growth in the U.S. economist Hernando de Soto noted that it was not until squatters were given title to the land they were squatting on and it was not until other lands were put up for auction that their economy began to take off. As well, de Soto has argued that if private property laws were instituted in countries such as the Philippines, Peru, Haiti, and Egypt, their economies would be poised to grow as well. Now, this is not to suggest that selling land is the only step involved in economic growth. Of course, it's only one step. But the point that de Soto makes is that when this land is owned by the government, it is effectively dead capital. There is no profit to be made by it. In fact, in the four countries I just mentioned, de Soto has charged that there is more than \$450 billion in dead capital, most of it being land operated under antiquated property laws.

Now, Alberta doesn't need to follow those countries. Our government has made the commitment to get out of the business of business. Part and parcel of that is getting out of the business of owning land. Let's pass this motion, and let's get our government working on selling this land to private interests, and then let's let Albertans turn that land into economic and personal success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would take a slightly different approach than the previous speaker. I don't think that there is any great economic boom in this. I don't think it's going to drive the economy of Alberta a lot, but what it's going to do is it's going to use a little bit of common sense in the money that we spend on administering many parcels of land that simply doesn't need to be done. The old school properties, for example, in many, many cases have been broken up and added into farmland. In lots of cases all that's left are the trees that surrounded it. It's basically nonproductive land that grows weeds. It's a pretty handy place for the local farm kids to party, so maybe we should leave some of it.

I think we have to look at it as: what would be the best for the land, for its neighbours? Simply adding in some cases three or four acres or 10 acres into a farmland is not an economic boom. It's just something that we only have to do once, and then we don't need to keep a couple of hundred people busy writing up these leases. It makes it difficult if you have some of the leased land and you want to improve it. If you want to do dugouts or you want to do fences or however you want to work it, then you need to get into the SRD department, and the parade of people that have to come and

investigate this stuff is really astounding. Quite honestly, what they should send out is a real estate agent and determine a fair market value and sell it to you.

Some of the people say: well, the public will lose access to lands. We're not talking about a great deal of land here. I don't think anyone is suggesting we sell the eastern slopes, but there are many, many quarters of land within even 10 miles of the community I live in that are part of a farming operation now where no one could tell the difference between titled land or the government land. It just simply doesn't make sense to keep leasing it year after year after year. The idea that this land might not be used appropriately or that they may be overgrazing just doesn't reflect what the farm community does with its land. They're probably better stewards of land than all the well-meaning do-gooders that we have hired.

I think we can go about it in a very orderly manner too. We don't have to rush out and look for these parcels of land. In the term of their lease, if it's a 10-year term, if we're eight years into it or if we're one year into it, when the lease comes due, give the owner adequate notice that you intend to sell the land and provide the options to him so that it doesn't come as a big surprise to anybody in the chain of command, so to speak, so that they know what's going to happen. They also know, then, if they have the intention to buy it, that they can do improvements, and we can address that. If they've fenced it and cross-fenced it or put in water improvements, dugouts or wells of any kind, they can be treated fairly, and part of the sale would recognize that they have done improvements to it.

I think that in summing up, Mr. Speaker, it's simply time now to move these parcels off our plate, to take the money that we would gain from it and use it to the greater advantage of the rest of Alberta. There's really no cost to the province in getting rid of it. The cost savings come in administrative savings. Certainly, the economic boon to the people buying it is that the stability is there in knowing they have ownership. I think that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne's example of the federal building down the road would be a perfect example of where we may include things besides farmland in getting rid of things that are virtually useless. I just wanted to make sure that we got the point across that there are some things that should be sold quicker than others.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, I would just encourage everyone to support this motion and support the minister in his efforts to get rid of the land that's not environmentally sensitive or doesn't fit into the long-term needs or requirements of the government of Alberta. Thank you.

8:50

Mr. Klapstein: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted this evening to have the opportunity to join in the debate on Motion 507 as amended and sponsored by the hon. Member for Redwater. Motion 507 as amended deals with a subject that is of great importance to many constituents in the province. Public land that is held under control of the Crown accounts for a large percentage of the land used for agriculture within our province.

To reiterate, Motion 507 is designed to urge the government to sell off or dispose of lands that are declared surplus to the needs of the province. Some of these lands that are deemed for potential sale include grazing lands under lease, vacant lands, lands that are currently not being utilized to their full economic potential, and perhaps the federal building, that's been mentioned a couple of times already. It has been shown time and again in many examples across the province that leaseholders often do not hold the long-term interests of the land in their decision-making. Why would an individual who does not know if he or she will be farming or ranching this parcel of land the following year do anything beyond

the minimum to ensure that it was taken care of or improve it in any way, shape, or form for future use.

It is reasonable to believe that if a piece of land is suitable for lease purposes, then it is suitable for sale for private means. The government of Alberta need not hold such land under the authority of the Crown just because it has the power to do so. It has been the mandate of this government to remove bureaucracy from where it has proved inefficient. Controlling land held under lease by the government that is of suitable quality for private purposes is an inefficient use of that land. At the present time over 60 percent of Alberta's land falls under the category of public land. This land is divided into two categories or zones: the green area, consisting of the forested portions of the foothills of the province, and the white area, which is made up mostly of agricultural land in the populated central and southern parts of the province as well as the Peace River region.

Currently the following criteria are used in order to determine whether a parcel of public land is deemed suitable for sale. First, does the sale impact important resource values such as conservation or recreation? Second, does the proposed use of the land conform to provincial and municipal land use policies? Third, what is the availability of private land for uses of economic or social importance?

Public land sales are held in two different fashions: through a public auction or via a private or priority land sale. Public land sales are administered by a public auction that takes place when the particular parcel of public land is vacant or has been released from a disposition by a disposition holder. Individuals and companies are permitted to place their bids on any piece of public land that has been put up for auction. When land is sold via a tender or auction, an appraisal process is used to determine the price. Private or priority land sales take place without public competition and are administered when the leaseholders hold a recreational lease for the purpose of a commercial or recreational development or when the land under lease has already been developed by the leaseholder. When land is sold by a private land sale, the price is based on its actual market value.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted for any of my colleagues here who are not familiar with leases and their structure that the makeup of one lease is not necessarily the same as the next. In Peace River, for example, lease parcels are generally smaller than leases in the southern portions of the province. It is not unusual to have 160-acre parcels of lease land or less in any given northern county or municipal district. This is compared to lease parcels in southern Alberta, where these tracts of land can be the size of a township or, to put it in equal terms, approximately 20,000 acres. Parcels of lease land in northern Alberta are dotted throughout a county map or a municipal district. An individual landowner may hold rights to a parcel of lease land that is situated in the middle of his privately held land. This individual may be interested in bidding for this public land and not necessarily be keen on having another party gain control through a public auction. A first right of refusal option should be given to existing lease owners on the basis of providing them with an avenue to keep adjoining parcels of land intact. This, in essence, would qualify as a priority land sale.

Farmers and ranchers are constantly moving machinery, livestock, or vehicles from one piece of land to another. If at all possible, farmers and ranchers generally prefer to have all of their land as close together as possible for these reasons. It simplifies things. Any of my rural colleagues with an agricultural background can surely relate to this concern. Anyone who has had the responsibility of moving machinery across the countryside or moving cattle from one pasture to another pasture appreciates the work involved in this process. Accordingly, allowing these individuals the ability to

purchase that lease land that adjoins their own not only allows for easier access but also speaks to increasing safety within the community as both machinery and/or livestock are not being moved as often on shared roads and pathways.

For these reasons which I have outlined, I urge my colleagues to back Motion 507 and support the disposal of Alberta surplus public lands. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I stand tonight to speak on Motion 507. With the amendment that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert made, I think it makes it really thought provoking on this for the real reason, as you realize, that a number of years ago there was a grazing lease review done. When you go around the province and you see the small leases that are embedded in owned land and the confusion that it causes, especially in the white zone, for people that want to get access — they don't know who to get a hold of. I think that if we work with a system where there is land that's embedded in deeded land and remove it, it's like one of my colleagues, Vermilion-Lloydminster, said: then you're cutting back on the aspects of the handling of this land and everything else.

It also gives the owner of the existing land around a chance to look at his crop in a different way. If he wants to do more improvements, at least he can. Then it gives a better understanding if there are people that want to go out hiking or may want to look at the aspect of bird watching and that. At least they know where they can go rather than looking at one of the county maps and seeing all the different land descriptions, and then you don't know who you have to speak to to get on this land.

I think it'll make it a lot easier for the different counties or municipalities that have the land, where they garner taxes on this land. They can just send it to one rather than having to send a whole bunch of different bills out to the landowner all individually because they'll be under all individual titles. In this way, you can do amalgamation and move it along so that it works a lot better. I think that with the understanding like that, it works a lot better within the whole community. I know that in northern Alberta it's quite a bit different because with a lot of leased land that we have in that area, they're able to . . .

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business on this day has concluded.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

13. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to section 11(1) of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendations of the final report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission, entitled the Proposed Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names for Alberta, tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday, February 19, 2003.

[Adjourned debate April 9: Mr. Herard]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening we are charged with the final discussions regarding Motion 13, where we choose as

an Assembly to accept or reject the Electoral Boundaries Commission proposed report, which determines the boundaries for the next election. After having heard the debate in this Assembly, which has been, for reasons known mostly to the government, not allowed to occur until after 9 o'clock at night on several evenings, it becomes quite apparent that we did not give very good direction to this particular boundaries commission in terms of setting out their mandate and having some rules with regard to how we could establish boundaries that best serve the needs of all Albertans.

I'll start my remarks off this evening with a quote that states: "There is no issue that is more sensitive to politicians of all colors and ideological persuasions than [redistributing]. It will determine who wins and loses for eight years." That quote was made by Ted Harrington, the political science chair of the UNC, Charlotte. This was quoted during the Shaw versus Hunt trial in March 1994 in the States, Mr. Speaker. It's very well said in terms of what the ramifications are for all of us in boundary redistribution, and we see those exact consequences occurring here: Edmonton-Norwood is gone, we see one riding gone from the main growth corridor of Alberta between Calgary and Edmonton, and we see the riding gone from Athabasca, the area where we have more than a third of the land mass, but a small amount of population. We've seen accusations in this Assembly of gerrymandering. We've seen heartfelt comments by members on what happened during redistribution and how little pieces were plucked out of their constituency and dumped into another one without any apparent rhyme or reason.

So what should this commission have done and what could they have done if they had had some good direction from us and if we had had some debate to begin with about what the rules could have been around what happens with redistribution? We were negligent, I believe, in this Assembly by not giving the commission more decision-making power. We have the ability here to say to them that you can choose more or less than 83 constituencies. You're not bound by that.

We could have made a stronger point to them about going with natural boundaries. I take a look at what happens with Morinville. They are now cherry-picked out of the area where they have been and put into Barrhead-Westlock as a riding, an area that they have got absolutely no natural kinds of boundaries with. We could have asked the committee to go whenever possible with municipal boundaries so that in rural areas there was an alignment between what happens provincially and municipally, vastly simplifying the municipal politicians' roles and increasing the understanding of the electorate and making the MLAs' job easier. We certainly could have used different cutoff figures for population bases and percentages, but we didn't do that, and that was very shortsighted, I believe.

What the commission did do was decide their mandates based on some ideas that I think very few people in this Assembly agree with. As outlined in their report on page 3, they used pragmatism as a key filter for making their decisions rather than scribing for any kind of philosophical ideal, whether it was one we could agree with or not. Using this filter, the committee decided to eliminate a Conservative Edmonton riding. Why? It stated in the record: because it was a Conservative riding. Just looking at the very shortsightedness and, I think, very shallow reasoning. That to me, when you choose something because it is of any political stripe regardless of whose it is, is not only erroneous, but it is gerrymandering, Mr. Speaker, so I have a real problem with that.

They could have had lots of choices on how to make that decision, but stating openly that the two ridings that are gone are because they don't expect the members to run in the next election in the rural areas and the one in Edmonton to be gone because it's a Conservative riding should nullify this report. We shouldn't even have to

vote on it. And yet, what happens? [some applause] Yes, I see some support for that, and I think that that's the debate that we should have. It's our job and our responsibility to make some of these tough comments and decisions, and we have a choice tonight to not accept this report and to reconstruct a new committee, to have some serious debate in here about how the decisions should be made, and to have them go out and do it. There's enough time to do it before the next election, Mr. Speaker.

Sure, it is going to cost more money, and I know you guys say, "All you Liberals want to do is spend," but there are some times when a dollar spent now is a saved dollar down the road. If it means that people have better representation and we have fairer boundaries, then I think we should spend that dollar.

But what do we see happen here? We see a government now managing this process, and we've seen that unfold as the debate occurs. What happened with the introductions in this Assembly were that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, who is also the Government House Leader, was the very first person to speak. So when he stands up to open debate on an issue, it's a signal to all the members of his caucus on how to vote and how to frame their decisions. He talked at that time about him having an obligation to vote as he particularly didn't like the report. And then, in his comments, he initiates a drive-by smear of Liberal MLAs by saying who was there and who wasn't there, erroneously, as it happens, because he missed a lot of people who actually did make presentations. Then he talked about his concern about Edmonton losing a seat, and the commission's lack of recognition of growth in the area.

But then, Mr. Speaker – this is the part that pulls it all together – he encourages members of the Assembly to accept the report with all of its warts. So the typical example of what people hate about politicians: when you talk out of both sides of your mouth, and then you vote in the most expedient way possible. I find that quite reprehensible, and it's what happened here.

What we have is really an alarming decay in civic and political involvement: the lack of people who go to vote, the apathy we see, the uninformedness of citizens and their uninterestedness on current issues and all of the adults who don't participate regularly in electoral policies. My question to the Assembly here is not why they don't come, but why would they when they see these kinds of decisions being made by their politicians? When we as a Legislative Assembly don't have the courage to help define boundaries in a fair and representative way, let alone talk about a representative voting system, then how can we expect voters to engage?

We've seen exactly that happen with this particular situation. We see MLAs from the Official Opposition and from the other opposition bring up the concerns and talk about not voting. From the government's side, we've seen so far four government MLAs come out in strong opposition to this motion. But we also see the Conservative machine move into place showing MLAs how to keep the party discipline: by complaining if you want to, but hold your nose in voting. Whips are on. As the Premier admitted this afternoon, he would expect this particular motion to be defeated if the whips were not on in their caucus.

So once we get the overview and the direction from the Government House Leader and how all of his caucus members are to vote here, what happens? The very outraged MLAs who support the government position speak and speak well, Mr. Speaker. We hear first from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who takes a very courageous stand against her caucus and for her constituents, and that's exactly the leadership that Albertans expect in this province and the kind of leadership that people respect. So I thank her for making those comments even though I know for her that there was some cost to that.

9:10

We then heard from the leader of the New Democrats, who was against and made a very good argument about that. Then the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, who loses his seat, made some very telling comments. It started out as a rather low-key speech, but then he was the first person to name gerrymandering in the appearance of how things happen and how, in the elimination of his particular constituency, it violated all of the rules that this particular committee had said it was making its decisions by.

Then we heard from the Member for Rocky Mountain House, the Minister of Infrastructure. He got up and said that he, too, was against this motion, and he had actually given the committee a solution to solving the problems, which was a very reasonable solution, but then the party machine rolls in. It starts out with the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. He rolls out the party line, and "we don't want to lose a seat, but we really don't have the political will to rock the boat in this particular case," and that was our conclusion of the Tuesday night comments.

Wednesday night. Now the government line's strongly in place. Wetaskiwin-Camrose expresses his constituents' concerns and introduces the concept that minor boundary adjustments will be possible, so he's going to vote for the motion. So what does "minor boundary adjustments" mean? When I talk about, for example, Morinville with about 5,000 votes being involved, that didn't seem minor, but maybe a street here or a street there. So members have got a way out to their constituents: "Oh, minor involvements. Don't get too upset about this motion because the bill's coming."

Then we see Edmonton-Riverview. He is against the motion based on principles of fairness and democracy, but he's going to vote for it. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster agrees that lots of the boundaries look illogical but will vote for it. The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills accepts the guidelines, doesn't want to spend time to look at recommendations, and supports the motion. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs states that the "process was . . . objective and unpolitical" and supports the motion in spite of what his own colleagues have stated. The Member for Calgary-Currie sadly disappointed but supports the motion. The Member for St. Albert dismayed but supports the motion. The Member for Calgary-Egmont describes the need to define . . .

Mrs. O'Neill: I did not say "dismayed."

Ms Carlson: Well, in fact, hon. member, you did, and I challenge you to read *Hansard* and see what exactly you did say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there isn't a back and forth. There's only one person speaking at a time.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And that would be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: The Member for Calgary-Egmont describes the need to define "what is effective representation in the 21st century" and supports the motion. That would have been a good kind of discussion for us to have prior to going into this particular debate and one I wish we would have.

I, Mr. Speaker, will be opposing this motion. I strongly support the minority report. I think that some very, very good decisions and comments were made there, and I would leave this particular debate

with one more quote, and that's from John Adams. His thoughts on government dated 1776 which still appear to be very, very appropriate to today's discussion and decision-making. He states that:

The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed, in constituting this representative assembly. It should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. That it may be the interest of this assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or, in other words, equal interests among the people should have equal interests in it. Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections.

We had a chance to do that at the beginning of this process, and we lost that chance. We didn't take it. We have a chance now to do it again by rejecting this motion, and I urge every member in this Assembly to stand up and vote against this motion when it comes up for a vote at the end of this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: I wonder if we might have the Assembly's permission to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House several guests seated in the public gallery. Eight of them represent eight different Edmonton constituencies. They're New Democratic activists in those constituencies, and one is from Calgary-Fort, very active in the constituency there. They are John Kolkman, Edmonton-Highlands; David Eggen, Edmonton-Calder; Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung; Erica Bullwinkle, Edmonton-Riverview; Dave Malka, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; Alex McEachem, Edmonton-Glenora; Chantelle Hughes, Calgary-Fort; Larry Zima, Edmonton-Rutherford; Jette Badre, Edmonton-Whitemud. They're all here to observe the debate taking place on Motion 13. They're concerned that as the motion is passed, Edmonton is likely to lose one of its 19 seats, and they were unhappy about it. I'd ask them to all rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission
(*continued*)

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: No. We have a number of people that have yet to speak.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding the proposed provincial boundaries motion, Motion 13, I rise to speak against the acceptance of the electoral boundaries motion. I'm speaking against the motion because of concerns with the boundaries of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and also because I support the city of Edmonton, its bid to retain 19 seats in the Alberta Legislature. Today when the population growth in this province is unprecedented, it is folly to rely solely on 2000-2001 census data. To do so will result in Edmonton being underrepresented in the Legislature after the next election.

If we want to talk about 2000-2001 census figures, I understand

that the average of any current Edmonton constituency is 35,058, or only 2.4 percent less than the provincial average of 35,951. However, in the commission report it is indicated that commission members never inquired with the city of Edmonton planning department to determine the community growth and population projections for the 48 developing Edmonton communities. A glaring example which I know personally is occurring in the constituency that I am honoured to represent, the constituency of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the neighbouring constituency of Edmonton-Manning. The constituency that I represent was turned on its side to take in the communities of Delwood, Balwin, and Belvedere, that were hived off from the disappearing constituency of Edmonton-Norwood. The situation that the commission created here is that all growth areas are being given to Edmonton-Manning, and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is being locked in so that it will never experience any significant growth.

On the other hand, Edmonton-Manning has grown by approximately 4,000 or 5,000, maybe even more residents in the Miller subdivision since the 2000-2001 census. Another huge subdivision area to the north of the Miller subdivision, where construction is in progress as we speak, will bring approximately another 5,000 or 6,000 residents by the next election and probably 12,000 to 15,000 more by the next boundaries review. Given the amount of good farmland that is being stripped, these are probably conservative estimates. To top it off, the commission in its wisdom or lack thereof is also splitting the community of Clareview, now in my constituency, and giving north Clareview to Edmonton-Manning. This is another huge development area, which will see probably 4,000 residents by the next election and 6,000 or 7,000 by the next boundaries review in 2013 or so. In total, given the present growth patterns, Edmonton-Manning will grow by about 14,000 or 15,000 residents by the next election and by 25,000 or more by the next boundaries review.

Something is very wrong with this picture. Edmonton-Manning was given three large growth areas, yet the commission seems to have gone out of its way to split a community in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency, which contains a large growth area, and gave it to Edmonton-Manning, which is already growing out of control. Now Edmonton-Manning will have three growth areas, which will very quickly make it an underrepresented constituency because of the number of residents over the mean average that will be living there. If common sense had prevailed, Beverly-Clareview should have at least been left with the growth area of north Clareview, which would have allowed more or less even growth in the three northeast Edmonton constituencies. This was brought forward to the commission appeal hearings, but they chose to ignore common sense, even though they seemed to be hearing and agreeing with the arguments that were presented by the constituency association at the appeal hearing.

9:20

Should Edmonton lose a seat in the Legislature, there is no assurance that in 10 years, when the next boundaries review occurs, Edmonton would regain the lost seat. Edmonton is and has been Canada's fastest growing city for some years now, yet the commission seems to be totally ignoring this fact in the way that they have drawn the boundaries.

In drawing up the new boundaries, the commission broke or ignored many of the legislated guidelines as outlined in section 14 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. This section states that certain parameters "shall" be taken into consideration by the commission when drafting new boundaries. Section 14(c) says that common community interests and organizations shall be taken into

account. Section 14(d) states that “wherever possible, the existing [municipal] boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary shall be considered.” Section 14(g) says that “geographical features, including existing road systems” shall be considered, and section 14(h) states that “the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries” shall be considered.

Clearly, when the commission split the community of Clareview or attached the communities of Delwood, Belvedere, and Balwin to Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, they did not follow guideline 14(c), which says that communities should be kept intact, along with section 14(g), which talks about natural boundary lines. The communities of Belvedere, Delwood, and Balwin have no commonality whatsoever with Clareview. In fact, they are separated by about two kilometres of the Kennedale stockyard, light industrial area, and a railroad. These communities border Edmonton-Glengarry and Edmonton-Manning and should have been parceled out to those constituencies.

These communities split off from the disappearing constituency of Edmonton-Norwood in fact took up a petition with some 395 names saying that they have no commonality with Clareview and don’t want to be included in the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency. This was presented to the boundaries commission, which chose to ignore the request. In fact, 600 residents had signed the petition, but only 395 names were accepted; the rest were rejected because of some technicalities. How many other constituencies have been redrawn in this manner yet are not speaking out?

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that Edmonton as Canada’s fastest growing city deserves a review of the loss of a seat and the configuration of specific constituency boundaries. If it means striking a new boundaries commission and going through the exercise again, so be it. The commission that drew the boundaries we have before us did not listen to reason not only in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview’s and Edmonton-Manning’s cases but, I’m sure, many other constituencies. One member of the commission seemed to be saying just that, and you can read her arguments in appendix B of the boundaries commission final report.

If the commission ended their job on a divided note, then there is something wrong, which I think calls for a review of at least some of the recommendations of the boundaries commission. To totally ignore calls coming not only from individual MLAs but complete city councils, as in the case of the city of Edmonton, or counties and town councils, as we heard from other speakers, is wrong. It’s not about trying to gerrymander something; it’s about achieving the best representation for constituents and common sense.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: We’re a long way from being ready for the question, thank you. I have a long, long list.

Hon. members, I wonder if we might again revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mrs. O’Neill: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I’d like to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly an individual who was seated in the visitors’ gallery earlier this evening, Mr. David Despins, who is from Edmonton-Norwood. I would ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission (*continued*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is recognized next.

Point of Order
Question and Comment Period

Mr. Mason: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are we not able to ask questions of the speaker on this motion?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. If you wish to ask questions, you may do so.

An Hon. Member: On a motion?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. This is not a private member’s motion, hon. member. This is a public motion. So, yes, you are. Comments and questions, yes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Just a comment and then a question. I appreciate the courageous position that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has taken on this report, and I would like to ask him: specifically, what process does he believe we should now follow in order to deal with this deeply flawed report?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Yankowsky: Yes. Thank you for that comment and question, Edmonton-Highlands. As for the process to follow, well, I guess we’ll know what the vote will be tonight. If the motion passes, well, I guess there’s not much process that we can follow after that except to move on. If it should fail, then I guess it would go back to the boundaries commission for a review. But there is also a process in place where we can ask for small changes to our constituencies by applying to the Justice minister. So I guess at least we can do that: apply for small changes.

The Deputy Speaker: Further comments or questions?
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess what I’d like to say is a couple things about where we’re at. The most important thing, I think, is that we’ve gone through a whole process here that has taken a long time. Our constituents have gone through a process where they have gathered information. I can talk about my own particular constituency where we brought people in to inform them about how the commission works, what the commission guidelines were, and informed the people about what was going to happen. They also had an opportunity to go in front of this commission not once but twice.

From that perspective I really believe that what we need to do is go ahead with the recommendations from the commission at this time. We can talk a lot about some of the inadequacies that the commission has brought forward. All of us have those inadequacies. All of us have probably seen some of those inadequacies, each one of us. But, overall, if we vote against this motion, inevitably what is

going to happen is that we will have to bring forward another commission and really go through this process again for another year. I really don't believe that our people are ready for this. I don't believe that it is necessary, and I think it's very important that we go ahead with the present recommendations maybe with some alterations that individuals may have. I don't know if that'll take place or not, but presently I think it's very important to go ahead with the report from the commission.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

9:30

The Deputy Speaker: I wonder if we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise this evening and introduce to the members a constituent of Edmonton-Glengarry, Kina Schoendorfer. Kina is a student at a St. Joe's high school, and it's my understanding that she's here this evening to view the proceedings of the House and also to observe one of our pages as he goes about his business. So I'll now ask Kina to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House. Thank you, Kina.

head: **Government Motions**

Final Report of Electoral Boundaries Commission

(*continued*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is next, hon. Minister of Community Development, and then you're following that.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Government Motion 13. I want to say at the outset that I recognize the hard work that the Electoral Boundaries Commission undertook, their travels around the province, and the many, many hearings that they had, and I certainly acknowledge the difficult job that they had. I had the pleasure of appearing before them on two occasions, and the first time they held their hearings in Edmonton prior to the presentation of their preliminary report, I warned, I think probably for the first time, that according to the matrix that the commission was using, Edmonton stood to lose at least one seat and potentially even two seats. I argued at that time that the matrix was unjustified, that it, in fact, discriminated against urban ridings in a significant way. Now, since that time more and more people have expressed their concern about the recommendations that the commission has made. Following their preliminary report I again attended their public hearing in Edmonton and argued again that the recommendation of eliminating a seat from Edmonton was both unfair and significantly unnecessary.

Now, in our democracy, Mr. Speaker, representation by population is a fundamental principle. In provinces like Saskatchewan and Manitoba the variance in population from one riding to another cannot exceed 10 percent, so once they establish an average, a provincial constituency can be either 10 percent larger or 10 percent less but no more. However, within the recommendations contained by the commission, there's a range of 32 percent below the average in the case of Dunvegan and 19 percent above in the case of Wood

Buffalo. The argument has been made, of course, that since these are primarily rural ridings and northern ridings that have significant differences in their population, these rural ridings are more difficult to represent, but I would contend and I did contend at the time that there are many challenges faced by urban MLAs, including linguistic and cultural diversity, poverty, and unemployment. There's difficulty with high-rise apartments. Sometimes they're very difficult to get access to, particularly during elections. There's illiteracy, and there are significant numbers of constituents with physical and mental disabilities. None of these challenges should override the principle of representation by population.

The matrix used by the commission overstates the difficulty of representing a rural riding by including variables of area, population density, rural/urban ratios, and the number of elected bodies within the riding. As the area increases, density will fall, the rural/urban ratio will rise, and there will be more elected bodies. The correlation is demonstrated in appendix E of the report. Twelve of the proposed recommendations have three or all four of these variables. Twenty-seven have less than three of all four of these variables. At the same time, the demographic variables were not included even though the data is collected by Alberta Finance.

Now, if we take Edmonton, according to the 2001 census if we divided it equally, Edmonton should have 18.53 seats. That, obviously, Mr. Speaker, is impossible. I was taught in arithmetic class in grade 3 – and I remember it well – that when you round a number up or down, if it's higher than .5, you round up. If it's .5, you round up. Otherwise, you round it down. So that means that if they had rounded the number of seats for Edmonton up to 19, where it is now, we would have been closer to the provincial average than we are with 18. So the question then is: why did they round down and eliminate a seat for Edmonton? According to the simple rules of arithmetic Edmonton should have 19 seats, but obviously there are other factors that override that.

Rev. Abbott: A point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is rising on a point of order. Can you cite a citation for us?

Point of Order Exhibits

Rev. Abbott: Yes. *Beauchesne's* 501 to 504 talks about exhibits, and I notice that while the Member for Edmonton-Highlands was talking about Edmonton keeping a seat, he's wearing a political button, quite a large one. I see that his colleague is also wearing one. I notice that 504 says that political buttons are not included as exhibits. However, those ones are quite large, and I'd just like your ruling, Mr. Speaker, if those are acceptable or not.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on the point of order.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar never ceases to annoy. This is clearly just an attempt to disrupt my speech, and obviously he's even given you the quotation in *Beauchesne* that says that buttons are allowed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has raised a point of order on whether or not a political button might be worn in the Chamber. The chair would view that if you have a very small pin that can hardly be seen, then we get into measuring it as to how big and then how big the letters might be. I think that for the moment, not to take any further time away from this important

debate, the chair will defer that and see if we can come up with something that's a little more discernible as a rule than he thinks or he doesn't think it is offensive to the House rules.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I assume that my time will not be docked for that frivolous point of order.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, you know, I want to talk about some of the concerns that have been expressed. The very day that I first appeared before the Electoral Boundaries Commission to argue that their matrix would result in the loss of one or more seats from Edmonton, I also took a copy of our submission to Edmonton city council and handed it personally to the mayor. The mayor was shocked, quite frankly, to learn that Edmonton could potentially lose a seat. In fact, the city council has taken a very strong position that Edmonton is a growing urban area that has been discriminated against in the criteria used by the commission and that, in fact, by the time the boundaries are again drawn, Edmonton will be seriously deficient and another correction will need to be taken.

9:40

We have also seen, Mr. Speaker, the school board make representations. They expressed a great deal of concern. Mr. Fleming of Edmonton public schools says that

Edmonton is enjoying unprecedented growth and a reduction in the number of MLAs representing our city strikes us as a step in the wrong direction . . . This proposed reduction will diminish Edmonton MLAs' ability to adequately and effectively represent the needs of the people they serve.

Similarly, a number of people, including prominent businesspeople in the community and community representatives, have all expressed a great deal of concern.

The next point I'd like to make is that the riding that was chosen for elimination is perhaps one of the poorest inner-city communities in the entire province. So why was this constituency selected as the seat that needs to be eliminated, which of course it doesn't need to be, from Edmonton? But once you proceed on that assumption, then where do you go to eliminate a riding? Well, the commission has taken the poorest constituency with perhaps more dependence on some provincial programs than others, and it is a constituency that, as much as any other, deserves a voice in this Assembly. So it is a shame, I think, that the weakest communities are selected or targeted for the elimination of their riding.

Now, if I am to be re-elected in the new riding if this motion passes, then I will certainly seek to represent those people from Norwood that fall within the expanded Highlands-Norwood riding that's proposed to the best of my ability and to give them a voice, but it is in my view wrong to take the most vulnerable communities and divide them among a variety of ridings. It disenfranchises those people, it takes away their voice, and I think that it's a completely wrong direction for the commission to go.

Here's what Ewen Nelson of the Boyle Street Community League has to say:

We have grave concerns about the proposed changes. Edmonton's inner city communities are a complex mixture of people of widely varying needs, and the residents of those communities often have great difficulties getting those needs met. One source of assistance has always been the Member of the Legislative Assembly for the area. By reducing the number of Edmonton ridings, the MLAs for those ridings will be less able to assist citizens in need.

Now, the next thing that happened, Mr. Speaker, is that because they eliminated an inner-city Edmonton riding, it meant that there

was a vacuum created. All of the other ridings had to be compressed into that area, and the boundary redistribution was predicated on a vacuum where Edmonton-Norwood used to be. Edmonton-Highlands is drawn into it, but it also then brings Edmonton-Gold Bar across the river. You have Edmonton-Gold Bar, which is an older, ex-suburban area including Capilano, Forest Heights, Ottewell, and so on, now being brought across the river into Boyle Street and McCauley and Riverdale, inner-city communities that have long been a part of Edmonton-Highlands. So we now have not just one transriver constituency in Edmonton; we have two. I think, quite frankly, that the new boundaries of Edmonton-Gold Bar don't make any sense at all. You have people that have no community of interest at all. You have this major geographic boundary that bisects that riding, and I think it's entirely an artificial creation. It doesn't really make any natural sense. So I think there are many reasons why we should reject this.

I think that the motion made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, that would have corrected this problem, was an excellent one. A most wise member, the leader of the third party, I think put forward a way out. It's unfortunate that so many members voted against it, Mr. Speaker, because I think it would have provided us with a solution. You know, you have members of the Edmonton caucus of the government, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, saying things like this: "I don't want to lose a seat in Edmonton. I would like to keep things the way they were, but that would be selfish, self-serving, and subjective, Mr. Speaker."

Ms Blakeman: To whom?

Mr. Mason: To whom is exactly the question that needs to be asked. To whom is that selfish, self-serving, and subjective? To the people that that hon. member represents? To the people that we represent? I can't fathom this kind of reasoning, Mr. Speaker, at all. It really seems to me that a number of members of the government side who represent constituencies in Edmonton need to stand up like some of their colleagues have done and fight for Edmonton. That is in fact what I'm calling on them to do tonight: stand up for Edmonton. It's not hard, it's good politics even, and I highly recommend it. What a concept to actually stand in this place and represent the people who sent you here. It's an amazing concept, and I think some hon. members ought to give it a try.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would ask all members, particularly those of all parties who represent the city of Edmonton as well as those who also feel that there are problems with the commission's report in other parts of the province, to stand tonight with us and vote against this report. There is time for the commission to re-examine the question and deliver another report. I want to make it clear just for the record that we in the New Democrat opposition believe that can be done. We do not support the addition of more seats to this Assembly. That fallacious argument that it really meant that we wanted to have a bigger Assembly was made when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona moved the motion. Well, that's the easy way out. We're not proposing that. We believe that Alberta has more than enough politicians as it is, and we don't support an expansion of this Assembly, but we do believe that this report is seriously flawed. The questions need to be re-examined, and the commission or a new commission needs to be struck. There is time. The issues at stake are so great that it is a step that we should take, and I hope that the Assembly will take it and vote down this motion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments? Questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands – he quoted a couple of municipal politicians that indicated that if Edmonton were to go to 18 seats and if the seats became correspondingly larger, the members would have trouble representing a larger number of constituents. My question is: how many constituents did the member have when he was a councillor for ward 3 in the city of Edmonton, and did he have a difficult time representing over 100,000 constituents?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. The wards in the city of Edmonton are, in fact, very large and considerably larger than provincial constituencies, and I was always an advocate of increasing the number of wards in the city of Edmonton because from time to time it is difficult. There's an additional problem in the system used in the city of Edmonton, and that is that although there are six large wards, there are two councillors elected from each one, and this creates a lot of difficulty, a lot of duplication and overlap. It does tend to share the load to a considerable degree, but it creates its own set of problems. So while I was there, I certainly advocated that we should increase the number of municipal wards, and I still think that that's a good direction to go.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, you indicated that you wished to comment.

9:50

Mrs. Gordon: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the Member for Edmonton-Highlands – I'm seeking clarification. I'm sorry, hon. member. I don't have the Blues in front of me, but you were talking about the difference between urban and rural constituencies. You talked about that you have language differences, a difficulty with accessing high-rise apartments, dealing with unemployment and poverty. Do you not think those things exist in rural Alberta as well?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yes, I do, but I am trying to portray some of the specific issues that I know that I have in representing my constituency in a fairly high-density inner-city riding. I believe that those problems are perhaps a little bit more concentrated in inner-city constituencies. I certainly would not ever argue that rural ridings don't have some of the same problems, and I thank the hon. member for the opportunity to correct that.

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions? The hon. Minister of Community Development, followed by Edmonton-Glengarry when that's finished.

Mr. Zwodsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a lot of mixed emotion tonight to speak to Government Motion 13, as it's called, even though this is not a government report. Nonetheless, I use the term "mixed emotion" because I do understand the dilemma that faced the commission as it was preparing its recommendations for this Assembly. On the one hand, I'm well aware that they must redraw the provincial electoral boundaries, but in doing so they must not exceed the population formula specifications of plus or minus a certain target figure, nor can the commission exceed the current number of 83 constituencies, and so on. On the other hand, they are dealing with the very difficult issue of having to increase the number

of seats in some parts of the province as a consequence. In order to do that, they know and we've now learned that they will have to reduce the number of seats somewhere either outrightly by demising some constituencies or by collapsing two into one or whatever. The choices, I'm sure, as we've been hearing for the past several days of debate on this motion, were very difficult, and I also believe that drawing and discussing these new boundaries must have been at times an absolute nightmare for this commission, albeit an independent commission.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I know they had to consider a lot of factors such as physical size of a constituency, the population density, Indian reserves and Métis settlements, rural/urban ratios, municipal boundaries, and the list goes on and on. Still, the fact is that we were required to have this done, so we now have before us their committee recommendations.

I should add, Mr. Speaker, that I am not pleased at all to see Edmonton losing a seat in the process, nor am I happy to see rural Alberta, where I grew up, losing a couple of seats either. However, in fairness to the commission's impossible task of its assignment, I know they probably feel that they did their best, and I know that they did consult Albertans quite thoroughly by hosting provincewide forums or perhaps through correspondence or in personal conversation or whatever.

In the end, having been through this boundary redesign process at least twice personally now, I believe we only have two choices. One would be to accept their recommendations, albeit with some minor amendments at the bill discussion stage perhaps, and proceed onward. The other would be to kill the motion at this stage and start the process all over again. Going with the latter of these two difficult options would of course delay the inevitable. It would likely result in a highly similar set of recommendations. It would frustrate even more Albertans than already are frustrated. It would cost thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars all over again. It would lengthen the process for another year or more, and in the end – you know what? – it would bring us right back here to this very moment in this very Legislature to experience what we are experiencing right now. Do I like the recommendations of the commission, Mr. Speaker? No, quite frankly, I do not, nor do I know many others in this Assembly who do. But it is the process that all Members of this Assembly agreed to establish, that being in part to have an all-party, independent commission established to handle this issue.

I know that when the president of my constituency and I discussed this very early on in the process, we had many concerns. Some of them were specific to Edmonton-Mill Creek, which is the riding I'm privileged to represent, some of them were specific to Edmonton's total number of seats, and others pertained to Alberta in general. In fact, my president attended the commission's hearings in Edmonton and expressed these concerns on my behalf and on his own behalf last year. I do not believe that Albertans want more than 83 seats in the Legislature at this time, but I do believe that Alberta's phenomenal population increase, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton – and I know that there are other centres throughout the province – should be addressed from the perspective of having as effective a representation as possible. Perhaps it is the number 83 that should be addressed at some point.

Nonetheless, having said that, Mr. Speaker, several of my constituents continually ask me why it is that in the city of Edmonton we have 19 elected officials to represent us provincially, 12 plus 1 elected officials to represent us municipally, and only six elected officials to represent us federally. It's a good question, and it's a

very difficult one that's not easy to answer. Each level of government has different responsibilities, slightly different issues, and some in fact are vastly different issues. However, at some point it must also be understood that the quantity of representatives is not the sole deciding factor in getting important work done for a particular area. Surely the quality of representation is an equally important factor, and every member of this Assembly has amply demonstrated his or her quality of representation capabilities in one positive way or another.

Another important aspect of all of this is the teamwork that happens in the so-called party system, which we have at the federal and provincial levels, and working with all of your colleagues at all levels to get things done for the benefit of your community and for the broader community of the province or the country you represent. Things like the proximity to the Legislature in Edmonton, for example, were referenced in one of the commission's statements. I'm reminded of the work motto of triple S, that being sweat plus sacrifice equals success. I know we all strive to do that for the constituents that we serve regardless of how many of them we have, and there's really no substitute for that triple S motto when it comes to effective representation. We all know and understand sweat and sacrifice, and we all know what success is about.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, when it comes right down to it, redrawing electoral boundaries is a very messy business, and it never pleases everyone. Sometimes it does displease everyone, but we have to face the realities that I outlined earlier. I've heard from a few constituents on this matter and I've heard from some other Edmontonians on this matter, as well, who are very concerned about the commission's recommendations, just like we were when the boundaries were redrawn for the 1997 election and just like we were when we saw the boundaries redrawn for the 1993 election and just like we will be, sure as I'm standing here, concerned about what happens in five or six years in lead-up to the election of that time frame. But that's the democratic process that has been established, and that's what we have to keep foremost in mind. It is what it is. I don't like having one seat removed from Edmonton, just like some objected to having one seat added to Edmonton in 1993, but it is all part of the ebb and flow of the democratic process.

So having expressed my concerns and frustrations about that, Mr. Speaker, but also being very aware of the rather difficult options before us, I find myself having to support the advancement of this process or, alternatively, watching it start all over again only to wind up right back where we are tonight, having the very same debate, probably with the same concerns almost word for word being expressed. There is no win/win option in this matter, and many of us here regret that.

In conclusion, I just want to emphasize that the recommendations of the commission are not government recommendations, but the legislative process does require us as a government to carry them forward. I was struck by several of the comments which the report made and how they made them, and I did note that they were not unanimous in their particular presentation either. I would hope that the next time we go through this process, we could perhaps require a commission to be unanimous in their redrawings before they bring this kind of recommendation forward and put us through this kind of frustration.

Thank you.

10:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Questions? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, please.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was interested in the comments of the hon. minister with regard to teamwork and the various levels of government. I know that in this debate there's been some discussion of the differences between Calgary and Edmonton, and being a member representing two communities who are very, very close in proximity to the city of Edmonton, I know that I am involved in a number of issues that involve close ties with Edmonton because our infrastructure is integrated, our community development issues are integrated in large part. I was wondering if the minister might comment a little bit about the workings of the capital region as compared with the Calgary region and how the teamwork works there.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'd be happy to, hon. member. Thank you for that question. I have always tried to market, if you will, and promote the capital city region as such, and I'm very grateful that we have the close proximity to communities like Leduc and Fort Saskatchewan and Redwater and St. Albert and Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, and when we make a pitch, we're talking about teamwork that comes from good representation from all of those members regardless of the parties that they're with. There are many things which the public probably doesn't realize that we as members representing this area agree on, but those things seldom make it into the press.

Equally important is the relationship of teamwork that we have with our federal counterparts. I think that we have some representatives there today on both sides of the political fence so to speak who work very hard with us and with our municipal leaders to ensure that we do things like attract international sporting events. I just happened to be at an event tonight welcoming over 30 sports organizations that aren't all just from Edmonton. They're from the surrounding area, and they reflect maybe 60 different sports that we are all proud to share in as we do with our facilities. So those are some of the examples, Mr. Speaker, of the kind of teamwork that I'm talking about.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. minister, who indicated in his comments that the commission was independent and of an all-party nature. I would remind the hon. minister that it was not an all-party committee. The structure calls for an independent chair – in this case, Mr. Clark, an excellent choice and someone we think is very independent – but then two members nominated by the government and two members by the Official Opposition. So we had a situation where we had an independent chair, but two Conservatives, two Liberals sitting on the commission. My question to the minister is this: does he believe that in the future we could find a better way to indeed make the commission more independent and less partisan – for example, by making use of retired judges or community representatives from business, labour, farm communities and so on – and get away from the partisan balance between the two parties but not the third party that's built into the current system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I think that's a pretty interesting question. I personally wouldn't see any reason why we wouldn't be able to have that discussion. When it comes to something that is not a government recommendation nor is it an Official Opposition recommendation nor is it a third party recommendation such as this boundary review, I'd certainly be willing to support looking into whether that's possible to do.

The bottom line here is that we're trying to get as good and as

thorough a report on probably the messiest part of the whole electoral process, and that is this boundary issue. I think that as part of that, too, we should get the independent commission to take a look at more closely aligning municipal boundaries with electoral provincial boundaries because they've made a bit of a – well, I hate to say hodgepodge, but that's certainly what it looks like to me. So it's causing a lot of frustration in and amongst municipal level councillors as well. Some of those as retired individuals could probably serve very well and provide some very good advice to an independent commission down the line.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

No further questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is pleasure to rise this evening and speak to Government Motion 13 regarding the Electoral Boundaries Commission. At the outset I must say that it was a very difficult task that they had trying to satisfy 83 constituencies and that they certainly did do their very best to complete this task. They did it through a lot of travel, a lot of consultations and certainly submissions, either in person or written.

I had the opportunity to make a written submission on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry in the first round, and I had hand delivered it to the designated authority that we were suppose to. Somehow this did not get passed on to the commission, but they did retrieve this and certainly included it in the second round of written submissions.

Now, the first recommendation that Edmonton-Glengarry had in their report was that Edmonton retain the 19 seats that it currently holds. The second main thrust of the report from Edmonton-Glengarry recommended that Edmonton-Glengarry retain its present boundaries and that if our numbers were to increase, one of the communities to the west of Edmonton-Glengarry be added to our constituency. Now, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, neither of these recommendations was accepted, and in fact the boundaries of Edmonton-Glengarry will change.

Edmonton-Glengarry is one of those constituencies that represent what Alberta is all about. We have a wide range of people that are separated by age, education, income, and ethnic background. Unfortunately, in the redistribution Edmonton-Glengarry will lose the older communities of Rosslyn and Lauderdale and the area that houses the military at Griesbach, all on the west side of the constituency. On the other hand, we will gain an area to the east of the constituency known as Cherry Grove. In looking at the recommendations of the commission, these changes will not significantly alter the makeup of Edmonton-Glengarry. The new areas will fit in very well with the northern portion of the constituency, which tends to be a newer portion of the constituency, as is Cherry Grove.

Now, then, another change that was recommended by the commission and a change that I certainly commend them for was to change the name of Edmonton-Glengarry to Edmonton-Decore, and this recommendation, Mr. Speaker, will honour an outstanding Albertan, Laurence Decore, who gave so much to this province and city while serving in public office for many years. So I feel very strongly that in terms of Edmonton-Glengarry, the recommendations of the commission will work.

But in terms of the city of Edmonton losing a seat, this is a serious mistake. It is also interesting to note that for federal ridings if you get a situation like Edmonton with a number such as 18.5 seats, then by the Constitution you must round up. Now, I'd also like to quote Bauni Mackay in her minority position: "The concept of representation by population (one person, one vote) is fundamental to a

democratic society. Voter parity should be the first consideration" I certainly think that when we look at the situation in Edmonton, we have to pay particular attention to this comment.

Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Boundaries Commission has a huge mandate. In my estimation the final report fulfills that mandate with one exception. The work of the commission must not only appear to be fair, it must be fair. An article in the *Edmonton Sun* on December 18, 2002, indicates that the report was not fair, that the chairman of the Electoral Boundaries Commission compromised the fairness of the report when he indicated to the Member for Edmonton-Norwood that his seat was picked for elimination partly because it was a Tory seat. How can we consider this report to be fair and unbiased after these comments? If we pass this legislation, are we just looking for a court challenge?

10:10

We also have to consider, Mr. Speaker, what price we put on the protection of democracy. How can we accept a report that compromises Edmontonians' right to democratic representation? This report does not reflect the tremendous growth experienced by Edmonton since the 2001 census was completed. Statistics show that single-family and multiple housing starts continue at a staggering rate. Considering the next commission will not be appointed for approximately eight years, Edmonton's representation would be less than the figures in the report indicate it should be.

Edmonton-Norwood is certainly one of the poorest constituencies in the city. This constituency would have a disproportionate number of low-income wage earners, high poverty rates, greater unemployment, a greater number of new Canadians, and many other social issues. These are the very constituents that require a consistent voice in the Assembly, and they should not be separated between other constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with other MLAs that the commission has done its work and we must now accept their report. There is plenty of time to appoint a new commission, and we have the power to do so. We had the example last week of how quickly this government can respond and change plans in Infrastructure announcements. The price of a new commission is far less than adding one extra school. The cost of a new commission would be much cheaper than a court challenge to correct a bias. The cost of a new commission is small compared to my city's interest in fair representation.

It is for these reasons that I will be opposing Motion 13, and I urge all members to defeat this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Questions, at all, of the member?

Then I would call for debate the hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak to Motion 13. I would like to speak on behalf of the town of Turner Valley and the town of Black Diamond, and I wish to raise their objections to the final report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Both of these Highwood communities objected to the interim report of the commission and wrote directly to the commission to request that their respective communities be allowed to remain in the Highwood constituency. I'll just read from a copy they sent to me of that letter, a number of paragraphs, but

in conclusion it is with great humility and respect that we request that the Town of Turner Valley be excluded from the proposed Electoral Division of Rocky View and that we remain with the Electoral Division of Highwood.

This is signed by the mayor and all six councillors.

Now, the mayor and council's worst fears did materialize in the

final report, so again I would refer to the two town councils and their letters directly to me requesting that I raise this objection. The first one, from the town of Turner Valley:

Please take this issue to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The Council of the Town of Turner Valley is deeply concerned with the new Electoral Division Boundaries as suggested which would put us in the Rockyview Constituency.

And from the town of Black Diamond, also signed by the mayor, as the first letter was:

Re: Electoral Boundaries

The Black Diamond Town Council is requesting that the Town of Black Diamond be retained within the boundaries of the Highwood riding.

And speaking to me:

We are hopeful that you will be successful in helping us with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, before you ask me to table them, I did table five copies of each of those two letters several weeks ago in preparation for raising their issues here. I've also acted in response to their wishes and have formally requested on their behalf that the hon. Minister of Justice consider an appropriate amendment to have Turner Valley and Black Diamond remain in Highwood.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there's an old, medieval form of public execution called being drawn and quartered, and in the case of Highwood it's had its boundaries redrawn and in quarters. Just to kind of explain that, Highwood is being divided into four parts. The first part would be about 25 percent of the land area in the south, not 25 percent of the population but 25 percent of the land area in the south, including the MD of Ranchland, the MD of Willow Creek, the towns of Nanton and Stavely. These will all go into the Livingstone-Macleod riding.

The far west portion of Highwood, approximately 10 percent, give or take, the southeast end of Kananaskis Country, and the northern part of the Bow-Crow forest or the Rocky Mountain forest will go to Banff-Cochrane. That's an interesting move, Mr. Speaker, because to my knowledge no one lives there on a year-round basis. Not even the forest rangers live there anymore. They are only temporary residents. Anyway, that land is now part of Banff-Cochrane.

About 15 percent, give or take, in the northwest area, particularly the north and the northwest of Highwood, will go into the new constituency of Foothills-Rockyview, and that includes the towns of Turner Valley and Black Diamond, who objected to being placed there. Approximately 50 percent of Highwood, two-quarters, will be the MD of Foothills or part of it remaining and the towns of Okotoks and High River, the village of Longview, and Eden Valley reserve. A few hamlets are also in there as well.

Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Boundaries Commission had a difficult task, and they conducted themselves without undue favour to any one of the 83 constituencies. Inasmuch as Highwood's population is the 10th highest of the 83 constituencies, about 46,000 according to the 2001 census, changes had to be made that would allow it to come close to the provincial average. The task of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, then, required tough decisions. This is an arm's-length commission. They did their best to be fair to all, but they could not please all, so one understands the decisions they made. You don't have to agree with them, but you understand them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Questions of the speaker?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in debate.

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, here it is some many hours since this debate began, and many of the areas that I wanted to touch on have already been covered, but I feel that it's

important for the record, representing a seat in Edmonton and having had some discussion in the media concerning this, to put my interests, my consideration on the public record as regards the redistribution.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'd like to start with a consideration of just who I happen to represent here in the Legislature of Alberta. I represent Edmonton-Rutherford and the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford, as each of us do our own constituencies, and I represent all of the people, whether they voted for me or not. I represent all of the people of Edmonton-Rutherford, and I'm privileged to do so. I represent those constituents in the Legislature of Alberta. I don't represent people in the Legislature of Edmonton. I don't represent people in the Legislature of the capital region or even in the Legislature of Rutherford. I represent the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford in the Legislature of Alberta. As such, I have a responsibility to consider the overall interests of Alberta in context of my responsibility of representing Edmonton-Rutherford, so I can't legitimately speak only of the self-interest of myself as a representative of Edmonton-Rutherford.

10:20

So, then, let's look at redistribution and its checkered history since last summer. I think it's fair to say that most of us really didn't pay a whole lot of attention to the redistribution until midsummer. I know that certainly I didn't. I understood redistribution to be something that happens every once in a while and that we would find out in due course what was to happen. I learned later that not everyone had such a detached attitude.

Our constituency determined that we would make representation to the boundaries commission via the area president, with whom we worked. Three or four constituencies came together. Representation was made. I've since learned – I learned later – that some of the other constituencies, particularly the rural constituencies, made direct personal representation to the commission, as was their right and perhaps even their responsibility. The net result was that we had some members representing their constituencies' interests directly and some indirectly, and I think that was the case pretty much with all of the parties represented here.

They made representations to an electoral commission that was appointed by the Speaker. Two of the representatives were appointed on the recommendation of the government, two by the Official Opposition. The commission was headed by the Ethics Commissioner. At the conclusion of their work there was a minority report, which then indicates that the two government and one of the Liberal appointees concurred in the report and one did not. When the dissonance started with regard to this report, the very first indications that I was aware of in the media were that somehow Edmonton had been hard done by because Calgary was picking up these extra seats at the expense of Edmonton. Initially even the editorial writers of the *Journal* here in Edmonton didn't seem to twig on to the fact that we were not increasing the number of seats, that the number of seats was going to remain constant, and that by its very nature indicated that someone's ox was going to be gored. That was the nature of the redistribution, that it wasn't going to be painless.

Subsequently the debate began to take on a different tack. When people started to understand that even after redistribution Calgary was going to be in strict number terms underrepresented, then the debate became: well, rural is overrepresented, and urban is underrepresented. That's where the debate went. So then we're faced with the situation under redistribution: what's equitable

representation? It's been clearly indicated by the Supreme Court that representation is to be equitable. It doesn't have to be one person, one vote. That's the optimum, but that's not the way it is. At least in Canada that's not the way it is.

So we have a situation where sparsity and density of population is one of the major defining characteristics of redistribution. If we were to, then, consider sparsity and density of representation, we would find that after redistribution Calgary will be represented by one MLA per 38,211 persons, Edmonton at 37,005 persons, urbanized – those are places like Grande Prairie with the urban/rural mix – at 35,622, rural at 33,213, and one special rural, Dunvegan, at 24,202. So by any standard the test of fairness has been met except in the case of Calgary.

Now, the case has been made that Edmonton is the fastest growing city in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Is that true?

Mr. McClelland: Well, it may be, and it may not be, but 10 years hence will it be? We don't know. The mandate of the commission is to make a decision based on the information at hand, not what might be in some future years. Why would we assume that Calgary was going to stop growing? What we're really talking about here is the urbanization of Alberta and how we as legislators are going to come to grips with the fact that the rural areas of our province feel quite rightly that their way of life is gone or that their voice is less resonant within the urbanized population. That's why the Supreme Court has said that fair representation need not be exact, one person, one vote.

In any event this all led up to the publication of the interim report. The city of Edmonton then became quite exercised over this, and the city council and the mayor decided that they were going to budget \$50,000 to raise awareness within the city, and this ground swell of umbrage and outrage was going to cause the Legislature to revisit this question. The advertisements came and went. At one stage, after a full month of advertising, 500 and some-odd people had called to complain. I understand that at two months plus, something like 2,000 people had called with comment after all of this publicity. And to what end? I understand that when the cat bylaw was being changed, 500 people called in one day, just to put this into perspective. So this umbrage is really the mouse that roared.

I think that there is quite a bit of, if you'll forgive me, Mr. Speaker, political gamesmanship going on here, particularly with the Liberal and the New Democrat opposition. I have no doubt that at the next election I'll be reading these very words published by my political opponents and being asked to defend them, and I will. I will do it with great ease because the average severely ordinary Albertan understands intuitively that fairness is fairness. If after the next redistribution Edmonton needs another seat, Edmonton will get another seat.

So, Mr. Speaker, because it's late in the evening, because most everyone has heard these words before, I am about to accept the invitation to take my seat, and I do so urging all members to vote in the interest of all of Alberta, to accept some of the arrows that we must accept in this legislative, in this political life and get on with it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments and questions? The first one is by Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but I would ask him why at the outset he said that he represents everybody

in his constituency and that that's his primary duty and he closes by saying that we have to swallow our misfortunes and do what's best in the interest of Alberta as a whole. Surely there are many, many representatives of other parts of the province, including the city of Calgary, that can do that. I guess I would say that he's accused us of being the mouse that roared. Perhaps the Tory caucus is the lion that squeaked.

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, if in some way I have conveyed the image that I felt that we were hard done by, I certainly didn't mean that. There are others here who have made that case and felt that we've been hard done by. I have not taken that tack. I do not think that we have been hard done by. I happen to think that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has done the best job that they could possibly do with a very difficult situation. I think that the opposition has been very cagey in putting the cat among the pigeons, metaphorically speaking, so to speak, just to try to make life a little uncomfortable for some of us on this side of the aisle, and I think that the opposition will once again be disappointed in the effect.

Thank you.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we all know in this Assembly, Edmonton will be celebrating its centennial next year, and unfortunately we will be losing a seat. I think that for this Legislative Assembly to wish Edmonton well next year after this year removing one of the seats from the Edmonton electoral map will to say the least not make for a very happy birthday.

My question for the hon. member: as chair of the Edmonton government caucus, as I understand it, what is the role of the chair if it is not to represent the political interests of this city, and how as the chair of the Edmonton government caucus can you stand by and see this city lose one seat from this Assembly when it was only in the last redistribution, in 1997, that we did go up to 19 seats?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for that question. I guess the test of character is to do what's right even if it hurts. In the case of Edmonton losing a seat, well, Edmonton-Rutherford is not my seat. None of the seats in this Legislature belong to the individual that happens to be representing that particular seat. The seat belongs to the people. The 83 seats in this Legislature belong to the people of Alberta. We hold them in trust for the future and future generations, and they will ebb and flow and change as Alberta ebbs and flows and changes. We are not being hard done by. We are merely accepting the fact of life, doing the best we can, putting it behind us, and moving on because that's how democracy works.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has an opportunity to close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 13 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:			Bonner	Mason	Pannu
Abbott	Hlady	Melchin	Carlson	Massey	Taft
Ady	Horner	Oberg	Gordon		
Amery	Jacobs	O'Neill			
Boutilier	Johnson	Rathgeber	Totals:	For – 33	Against – 10
Broda	Klapstein	Snelgrove			
Calahasen	Knight	Stelmach	[Government Motion 13 carried]		
Cenaiko	Kryczka	Stevens			
Danyluk	Lougheed	Strang	The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.		
Doerksen	Lund	Taylor			
Ducharme	Magnus	Vanderburg	Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the		
Dunford	McClelland	Zwozdesky	House now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.		
Against the motion:			[Motion carried; at 10:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday		
Blakeman	MacDonald	Masyk	at 1:30 p.m.]		

