

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 17, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/03/17

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: The Committee of Supply is now going to divide into two parts, C and D. Committee D may go up to room 512; C will remain here.

[The committee met as subcommittees C and D from 8:02 p.m. to 10:12 p.m.]

THE CHAIRMAN: I would call the committee to order.
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee D of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Energy, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: So ordered.
The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Labour, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Labour and the Department of Energy, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

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

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.
Bill 19

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1999

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm looking forward to making a few remarks this evening in committee on Bill 19. Yes, indeed. Last evening in this Assembly I listened with a great deal of interest to what many hon. members had to say regarding this significant sum of money. This is not money that can be spent in any cavalier fashion. We must have a good look at this sum. This total amount of interim supply that we're going to look at is \$3.5 billion, and we just can't stand up and dismiss this as an insignificant sum that has been provided to us at the whim of the taxpayer of this province. That is so far from the truth.

We are looking at the legislative authority for the granting of money for many expenses. I heard someone say last evening that we had to have the money, and we had to have it now or people weren't going to get paid. But I go through this, and there is a lot more than just payment of wages to the public service here. The \$3.5 billion can be broken down as follows. We are going to have over \$12 million for operating expense and capital investment for the Legislative Assembly. We're going to have \$3.3 billion in operating expense and capital investment for various government ministries, and there is the \$50 million in nonbudgetary disbursements, and of course we have payments through the lottery fund. We have over \$180 million. I was astonished to learn last evening that some hon. members dismiss any notion of having any debate on this sum.

Now, we cannot support this interim supply bill without some explanation, and those explanations would be on the initial stages of planning of what we are going to do with this money. How is it going to reduce health care waiting lists? How are we going to use it to open up hospital beds? How are we going to use it to reduce ambulance transfers that are unnecessarily putting the lives of Albertans at risk? How is all this going to be done?

We look at education. How is it going to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio, and how is it going to improve the lives of the people who unfortunately have been falling through the cracks in the Alberta advantage? I know that we don't want to talk about this, but there are people who have fallen behind, and they need our help.

10:20

There are things that we need to recognize. We need to recognize -- and we can't casually dismiss them -- that when we decided to have cutbacks, everyone in the province, it appears, except the government knew that the cutbacks were excessive. I look at the total budget, and I look at the initiatives that have gone forward in

health care and in education, and it is clearly an admittance that you were wrong and we were right. We proposed a more moderate approach, not this draconian slash. We can't use Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism economics. We look at privatization, and we look at deregulation, and we look at what happened there, and we see that things didn't work out as they were planned. We look at what happened in this province, and finally you've seen the light. You cannot abandon health care and you cannot abandon education.

People in my constituency, I see them at the Safeway at Capilano, and they say: "Hughie, Mr. MacDonald, I'm really glad that the government has finally listened to you. I'm really happy. We see this increase in education. They're finally listening to you. We see the increase in health care funding. They're finally listening. We don't understand what took them so long, but we're grateful that they listened."

Now, the health care funding that we desperately needed and should not have been cut in such a drastic way in the first place -- we made mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes, and I'm glad to see the government recognizes their mistakes. But we also have to look at the areas of municipal infrastructure. The Municipal Affairs department is going to get close to \$90 million. A lot of my hon. colleagues have grave concerns about municipal funding. We have to recognize that not only are there problems there, but there are problems that we have to look at with this whole budgeting process. The lack of budget management has already been illustrated. That's been clearly illustrated, Mr. Chairman, to us. It has been illustrated by the amount of unbudgeted spending brought in through supplementary supply over the past two years.

Now, if the Treasurer doesn't have reasonable controls over the amount of unbudgeted spending, how can we trust this government when it states that it needs \$3.6 billion to operate over the next two months? We have to approach this with caution, Mr. Chairman.

This, I understand from the Provincial Treasurer, is the fifth supplementary supply. He has introduced or brought forward five supplementary supply bills during his tenure as Provincial Treasurer, and that is less than two years. The amount of unbudgeted spending brought in in that period is \$1.4 billion.

We always hear the government -- they're buttoning their jackets, they're removing their hands from their pockets, and they're talking about how they can manage money. But this is not an indication of sound financial management. This clearly demonstrates to me the fact that they're going from one side of the road to the other side of the road, and they're not in the middle of the road where Albertans want them to be.

I think this is unfortunate, and I believe it's a fact that they themselves don't recognize. We have to have sound financial management, and we have to look at our financial management. We've got to look well into the future. We just can't look at the next poll. We can't look at the next year. In order to have sound financial management, we've got to look at the next generation of Albertans. We've got to look at what they're going to find necessary to become educated and skilled in the workforce. We're also going to have to find out what's necessary to enable the people who are leaving the workforce to be well looked after and comfortable and secure in knowing that their needs can be met, and one of those needs of course is health care.

Now, one of the main problems with this government's approach has been improper management because we're looking at, as I said earlier, the next poll. We have to look at this province over the next 30-year period, the next generation. I realize that whenever you've been in power for a long time, you can forget, and it's quite easy to forget. This government has been in power since 1971, and it can slip into old habits. We are forgetting about what we're here for,

and that is to be stewards of the resources today so that those resources are there for the benefit of the future. We have to always remind ourselves. We can't get caught up in a capitalism or a system that is designed for the fortunate few, for the friends. We must think of everyone, everyone in the province. Everyone in the province must have equal access to a government that cares.

We look at this budgeting process, and we look at the management. We could divide this into years. We could divide it into five-year plans. We could divide it up into three-year plans. When I look at the plans that come forward with this government, I almost think that I'm going to look up into the gallery sometime, Mr. Chairman, and see Andrey Gromyko up there, and he's going to have a binder, and he's going to have one of the Soviet style five-year plans. In this, it's the three-year plan. We know that some of the five-year plans that have been started have been a failure. We look at some of the grand industrial schemes that have been promoted by this government, and there is no other word to describe them but "failure."

Now, this bill is not a failure in that sense, but it's a failure in that it demonstrates that there is a management problem. We knew long in advance what we would need to operate this period.

10:30

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. NELSON: *Beauchesne* 459, relevance and repetition. The hon. member keeps talking about a problem. If he could identify what the problem with the bill is, it would be helpful. In his debate he keeps saying that, but he doesn't say what the problem is, and I don't see how it's relevant to debating this bill. So far he's just talking in riddles, and I would really like you to have him be specific so that he doesn't keep repeating the same thing.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, on the point of order.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, on the point of order, Mr. Chairman. I had just mentioned poor management. If that isn't an answer, I don't know what is. I mean, I'm talking about poor financial management in this bill. If the hon. member would keenly listen to my remarks and allow me to finish, then perhaps she would understand my remarks.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the debates on the estimates have a very wide range. Relevance is more difficult to determine, but hon. members are invited, by the fact that we are talking about an interim supply bill, to deal with the issues that are there or what ought to be there if they wish to do that. If they wish to reflect that some of this is not good management or bad management, then they make that relevant to the bill. But, hon. members, it is a wide-ranging debate when you're into debates on supply.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was talking about the three-year business plans and industrial strategies. We can discuss them in the performance measures. If we were to discuss all these programs and the funds that are associated with them, they are, as I understand, results driven. Albertans need to receive value for

their tax dollars. How will the government be accountable with this plan, with this style of management? How are you planning on being accountable to all Albertans on how their money is being spent? Whenever we want to talk, we want to introduce this legislation; we don't want anybody to talk about it. We just want to spend the money. Now, what clear objectives have been set?

We can talk about good management, good fiscal management, but I have doubts whether this is reflected accurately in Bill 19. There are five pages listed in this bill, and we can go through it department by department. What's going to be spent here? What's going to be spent there? People have to wonder: if you're so anxious to have no debate on this, what is there to hide? We have to be accountable for the money that we are spending or the money that we are willing to spend. There have to be effective strategies set. There have to be benchmarks; there have to be targets. Now, a little earlier I talked about performance measures. Where are they? I don't see them.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all members of this House, Mr. Chairman, that we have to be prudent with the tax dollars of this province. We can't be cavalier. We must learn from our mistakes. Those mistakes have cost us much instability in our health care system and a great deal of concern for Albertans, not only with our public school system but also with our advanced education system.

With those remarks on Bill 19, Mr. Chairman, I shall take my seat, and I would thank all members of the Assembly for listening to me keenly. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just had to take the opportunity to speak briefly on Bill 19 and actually to respond to the hon. member opposite with some of the comments. [interjection] Are you going to chip, chip, chip all night?

MS LEIBOVICI: I'm just saying that you don't have to be brief. You can go for 20 minutes; right?

MRS. NELSON: Are you going to chip, chip? Pay attention; you might learn something.

It was interesting to hear him say -- and I wrote this down as he said it, Mr. Chairman: "everyone in the province . . . except the government knew that the cutbacks were excessive." Well, you know, there was an election in 1997 that gave the Klein government a larger majority than in the 1993 election, and that was based on a plan that had been laid out very clearly to deal with how we were going to not only continue to have our fiscal house in order but how we were going to eliminate the debt of this province so our children -- our children; pay attention -- would not have to bear the burden of the past, so that we would give them a clean slate so that they could start their adult life without bearing the burden of the past, and hopefully they would be able to make clear choices without being encumbered by the past. All of us, every one of us ran on that campaign, I hope. I know I did. So my child clearly will have a future that is free from encumbrances.

When we talk about our future and our children, the budget that came down last week from our Provincial Treasurer -- I guess the only problem we have in this Legislature is that these are the only people in this entire country that are not applauding the budget. They're the only ones that realize that their future in politics is basically over. Good-bye. I'll say good-bye to you right now. It's been a slice. But you won't be back. You won't be back because documents like *Striking the Right Balance*, like the Speech from the Throne clearly addressed the issues of Albertans. We did strike the right balance. That's what this whole process is all about.

Now, let's get on to Bill 19, specifically, the appropriation bill. The interesting part about this whole process is that there's a budget debate process in place right now, Committee of Supply, that is going to take, according to our Standing Orders, a number of days of debate. We're coming to the fiscal year end in a week and a half, and as a result we have to pass this appropriation bill so that we can continue on, whether the opposition likes it or not.

I guess what they're saying is that they want to study things. When you look at expenditures that go to support the Legislative Assembly, I hope they realize that their constituency offices will have to close if they don't pass this. The Legislative Assembly pays for your constituency offices.

10:40

We can look at the Auditor General. He won't be able to do his work.

Oh, here's a good one, the one that they love so much, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. They won't be able to do their FOIPs anymore because that office won't be operating. So the countless hours of exercise, that is quite frankly somewhat questionable, that they put the Ethics Commissioner through and the Privacy Commissioner through on their FOIP requests won't be there. So maybe, you know, they've got a point there. They won't have to bother him so much.

Then let's get into some of the operations of governing. We've got advanced education. Surely the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would not want to see that programming stopped. They whine about it enough in question period.

Then we can go through and look at Education. There's \$488 million there, so I guess we could go to the schools and the teachers -- and they've been using that in question period quite regularly: they need support for schools and education. There's \$488 million that the opposition don't want to see paid out. That's the bottom line. They want to study it, Mr. Chairman. They want to study it until they're comfortable with all of the elements that might be there at sending children to school. We want to pay teachers and support staff in the schools and we want to pay them as of April 1, but this group over here doesn't want to pay them. They want to hold back the money.

Let's go through Family and Social Services: \$442 million there. So on April 1 we'll go to the people that receive support through Family and Social Services and say: gee, sorry; you folks won't be receiving your cheques because the opposition hasn't had time enough to study whether in fact those cheques are necessary, whether there's good management in our social programs.

Then we look at Health. Over \$1 billion to go to Health. We've heard about having additional funds into health. We've heard what people said. They said: reinvest in these areas. So we've done that. Now the opposition -- this is why they'll stay in opposition -- are saying: we want to study whether those health dollars are going to the appropriate area. We want to study that and see if that's necessary, if that's good management to put extra dollars into health, extra dollars into education, the two things that people in Alberta said were very important.

Then we want to look at support of our municipalities. They want to cut off all of the support to Municipal Affairs and municipalities. So, you know, we can go back to every community in this province and say: this group over here doesn't want to support your programs.

Then we can go to Transportation and Utilities. Well, we can hold off on that and miss the entire paving program for this summer, hold off until it's impossible to get the road system . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, not 794.

MRS. NELSON: Your 794 won't get done because you don't want to pass the money through. That will look good. Go back and tell your folks that you've held on and said: we're not going to move forward on this because we want to study it again. In question period every day they ask the question. Well, here's the bill that gets things moving forward. Here's the bill that deals with that.

And then we can get into areas -- let's look at another one. Oh, lottery funds. I don't know how many have phoned me and said: what are we going to do with these CFEP programs? Is there going to be a CFEP 4 program? Well, I guess not. I guess not, folks. So go and tell the playground people that we're not going to have those this year because you want to study that. So we'll just hold off on that sort of programming and support for your communities. That's no problem.

You know, we can send letters out and say: the opposition doesn't want the government to continue helping communities, helping people, caring for people, educating our children. They want to play a little game, Mr. Chairman, of cat and mouse: well, let's stay here until a quarter to 12 tonight to vote on the inevitable, but the government is going to continue on. You know why? Because they didn't get elected as government. We did. We're the government. They lost. We won. They don't understand that. We have a responsibility to be here to govern, to make sure that these programs are delivered to the people. Not them. Their job is just to destroy, to distract, to criticize, to antagonize, and to delay. That's all they do. Because they're called opposition, they oppose everything, even things like schools, health, universities, colleges.

MRS. SOETAERT: Point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on a point of order?

**Point of Order
Allegations against Members**

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you have a citation?

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Chairman, 23(h) and (i).

AN HON. MEMBER: And (j), (k).

MRS. SOETAERT: No, not (j) or (k), just (h) and (i).

MS LEIBOVICI: It's misleading the Assembly.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is misleading the Assembly too. Mr. Chairman, you know what? I know the minister is a little tired and possibly cranky, but I am elected as an Official Opposition. You know what?

THE CHAIRMAN: We don't need a debate. You're able to get up and debate the issue. Just make the point.

MRS. SOETAERT: On the point of order. She may be able to stick to the bill instead of getting tied in knots about the very fine job we do on this side keeping them accountable, because they haven't been for a lot of years, and now that we're in here, their feet are to the fire, and they don't really appreciate that. So the point of order is that she's making false accusations. We're not just negative. In fact, we often give hopeful, good suggestions. Why just the other day our leader sent a letter helping them with their deliberations for tomorrow.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, hon. member.

MRS. SOETAERT: So on the point of order, Mr. Chairman, the minister is going off . . .

MRS. NELSON: On the point of order.

THE CHAIRMAN: In time. We're just trying to get to the point of order and finish with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah. Let me finish. Would you quit chirping so I could finish?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think you've had enough time to make your point. You've made it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, I'm not quite done.

THE CHAIRMAN: But I am.

MRS. SOETAERT: I think the minister is kind of, you know, going off topic and not on the bill and really slamming the fine job of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. She really should watch what she says.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order. If I can determine all that was said, we're talking about Standing Order 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member."

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Chairman, clearly I didn't do that to another member. I clearly said that was the role of the opposition, so it was all of them. It clearly was not pointed to one member. It was explaining the role of the opposition, and clearly that's what they do. So I don't believe there is a point of order.

AN HON. MEMBER: All six of them.

MRS. NELSON: Yes, all six of them. Oh, no, seven. Another's come in.

She referred to (h), "allegations against another member." I didn't make an allegation against any one member. I simply explained the roles of the opposition, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe that the citation offered by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member". To the extent that some of the characterizations may not have been as accurate as the hon. member would like, it was not laid on a specific member.

I think though, hon. minister, there is the use of language that might create disorder. Obviously some of the things being said were being interpreted in such a way that it invoked a considerable amount of collateral noise, and we would hope you could craft your speech in such a way that you wouldn't engender those. Also, the hon. members who may like to engage in that would give the minister a little leeway.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, I will take your advice, and I certainly wouldn't want to offend anyone in the opposition. I would not want to insult anyone or cause any disruption in the House, Mr. Chairman, so I will be careful with my choice of words when I explain my thoughts about the Official Opposition and their contribution to their Assembly and the province.

10:50

Debate Continued

MRS. NELSON: I think back to the platform that had come from the opposition party that was at one point slash and burn and then went into spending modes with really very little consideration for the fiscal reality that was faced within this province and is faced today. We are at a point now, because of the prudence of the Klein government, where we were able to actually clear off what I call the net debt -- I've referred to it as the second mortgage on the province -- and with a scheduled plan, Mr. Chairman, to clear off the first mortgage. Quite frankly, if you look around Canada, we are the only province that has had the determination again to do this for the next generation, not because it's fun to do or it's nice to do, but because it's necessary.

This is the only group that quite frankly talks about being stewards when they are in opposition. They're not really stewards of anything. The government is charged with the responsibility to govern, and they are charged with the responsibility of course to oppose.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I'll get back to some of the issues that I think are important on this bill. This is a straightforward bill that is presented every year. It's not new. I didn't stand, Mr. Chairman, when the member opposite referred to us using capitalism within our tactics of poor management. I don't know if he really has a clear understanding of what capitalism is.

He also talked about us bringing in supplementary supply bills. Well, that's true. In the olden days things were done by special warrants, and as you know, budgets are your best guess for the year as to what the reality will be. That's why this government does quarterly forecasts. It sends them out to people throughout the province so they can in fact see a fiscal update on a quarterly basis. In fact there is a variance analysis that is attached with that, from estimate to actual on forecast and budget, that goes out every quarter. It identifies for the people of Alberta what the fiscal position of the province is on a quarterly basis. I don't believe there's any other government in Canada that does that.

Yes, he charged us with putting forward three-year business plans. That's true. We do. I know that if you look at the business plan for Economic Development, you will see asterisks beside a number of the actions that are being taken. Those are a direct result of the growth summit that took place. So you can see where those recommendations from the people, the very people that he claims we have no contact with, asked us to focus our attention. Those have been identified in the three-year business plan as recommendations from the growth summit. If he would read the business plans, he could see them asterisked as to how those 243 recommendations from the growth summit have been identified within the business planning process of this government. So when he talks about the people haven't had access to this government, I don't believe he has a clear understanding about the processes of consultation that we have gone through.

You know, about a week ago they complained that we had too many summits. Now he's talking about the people haven't had access to the government. Well, quite frankly we have done so much consultation and partnerships with people in this province that there isn't a government in this country that could say they have had input into a budgeting process more so than what this government has had.

Just because we haven't accepted or maybe even seen the proposals from the opposition, because they've yet to file their plan with us or send it over, which I'd love to see -- quite frankly, I

don't know that they have one. Everyone else in the province has come forward and given us their input into the budgeting process. Quite frankly, all I can assume from this is they do not want to see the people that are serviced by government serviced as of March 31 of this year. They want to have a delay, so that implies that they do not want funds in our education program. They do not want funds in our health program. They do not want funds in our social service program. They do not want funds to go into our communities through our infrastructure program. They do not want funds to go into their own individual communities through the CFEPs. They do not want their local lottery boards financed. They do not want any of these things to carry on because they're not happy. They want to analyze and assess. Quite frankly, I don't know what they were doing since last year, because they've had a lot of time off.

Anyway, I guess my only comment is that it's unfortunate that they did not reread the Speech from the Throne, they did not reread the summary of the budget, the budget document that we'd all left Committee of Supply on just now. They did not reread the business plans so that they would have a comfort level as to where the billion dollars in health is going to go. They haven't had that program.

So I guess what I would say is that I feel sad that they have not had good research or good background, and possibly what they need to do is spend a little more time reading the documents and digesting them. In fact what I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, is that if there's any area they have difficulty comprehending, clearly they can ask those questions directly to any of the ministers here or our SPC chairman, because all these plans have been vetted through our SPC process and . . .

MR. DICKSON: Well, that gives us a lot of comfort.

MRS. NELSON: Well, I'm sure it does, because you've never asked a question, Calgary-Buffalo. If you'd phone me, I would tell you the answers from my department. You've never made a call, have you?

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I think this is posturing to try and make some points or delay something that is going to happen. And I have news for them. They are not the government. We are the government. So this bill will go forward whether they support it or not. They can keep us here until a quarter to 12, because that's what our little Standing Orders book says. The bottom line is that this bill is going forward.

I will take my seat and listen to, again, the concerns from the opposition, but I would suggest that they come out to committee. Today it was pretty short with opposition members. They might actually be able to ask direct questions and get some answers.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I was waiting for the Minister of Economic Development to sheathe her flamethrower, and after those incendiary remarks I was moved to rush ahead of other speakers to address Bill 19 at committee stage.

My observation was going to be this, Mr. Chairman: I'm astonished that it took the Minister of Economic Development until the last minute of her speech to acknowledge the reality that I thought was abundantly clear to every single member in the Assembly. You know, I remind the member -- if she was here for the tutorial offered by the Speaker the other day about the Standing Orders, if you remember, the Speaker said that Standing Orders represent the will of the Legislature. What the Standing Orders say about the appropriation bill procedure is that they give the government one of those things that's pretty rare, but it's a guarantee that every year when they bring in a bill, whether it's supplementary supply, whether it's interim supply, whether it's regular budget and appro-

priation bill, they need look no further than Standing Order 61, which guarantees the government that 15 minutes before the normal adjournment hour there will be a vote at the committee stage on the appropriation bill, on Bill 19.

So all of those Albertans that the Minister of Economic Development would like to alarm and send into a panic thinking they're not going to get their paycheques . . .

MRS. NELSON: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

**Point of Order
Allegations against Members**

MRS. NELSON: Twenty-three (h). The hon. member has said that I'm trying to alarm a number of Albertans, and quite clearly I'm not trying to alarm a number of Albertans. I'm trying to explain the facts of life to the opposition. We are the government; we have a responsibility to people. They are the opposition, so they are opposed to everything.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: On the point of order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Well, as I understand it, her authority is 23(h). That was the authority I heard her cite: "makes allegations against another member." Well, I'd suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, that there's nothing I've said that is not accurate. There's nothing I've said that unfairly characterizes the comments made by the member herself. Her words speak for themselves. They're a matter of record. They're in *Hansard*. On the point of order I'd simply say that she's showing an excessive degree of thin-skinness. Any allegation she thinks has been made is one that she has imagined, because it certainly wasn't intended, and I think there's no inaccuracy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

11:00

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The chair has been listening to this debate quite intently. I'd have to look at the Blues, but the chair recalls the hon. Minister of Economic Development making reference to the statement that the job of the opposition is to oppose. I remember that quite correctly. The chair also recalls the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo making a remark or something to the effect that it is raising alarms for Albertans.

In the absence of the Blues, it's difficult to make a judgment. However, I hope this has helped clarify the positions for both of them. I request the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I must say that it's a real delight here at 11 o'clock to see such animated participation from the Minister of Economic Development. I say this with a grudging admiration. Although I may have disagreed with virtually everything the minister said, how welcome it is to have a member of the government caucus stand up and take her best shot. Whether she missed the mark or not is less important than that her effort ought to be applauded. I think every member in this Assembly should appreciate the fact that we had a member of the government caucus stand up to defend the government's position.

In any event, the point I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman, is this. I would have thought it would be so evident to every member of this Assembly that the government once again has all the power. The government will get their appropriation bill through tonight like they

got second reading last night, and they'll get committee stage tonight. They're guaranteed it. So there was never any risk of anybody not getting a paycheque. There was never any risk, unless the minister does different math than I do. I count 64, 17 . . .

MRS. NELSON: Yeah, we won. You lost.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, her memory is better than her math, Mr. Chairman. The point is that unless most of her caucus plan on going home early, she's got it in the bag. She's got the appropriation bill.

The point that's being made here, Mr. Chairman, is that with all the collective power this government has, with all the advantages that accrue from the Standing Orders, why is it that government can't do the counting on the days of the calendar? You know, it's not the opposition that decides when we're going to have a spring session and what day it's going to start. It's certainly not the opposition that decides when the budget comes in. There's only one gang in this Assembly that makes those determinations, so surely it's not unreasonable to ask. The government knows from the Standing Orders how long the assessment of spending and the debate on the estimates continues. We've already identified they have the hammer when it comes to voting on the appropriation bill. So they have all those kinds of controls and powers. Why is it, then, that they can't do a better job of organizing time?

MRS. NELSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Relevance**

MRS. NELSON: *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I didn't know we were debating the Standing Orders, Mr. Chairman. I thought we were debating Bill 19, and the hon. member seems to be debating the Standing Orders that are agreed to by both sides of the House. So I'd ask him to focus on the bill instead of the Standing Orders debate.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, the short answer to that is that unless somebody can show me the Blues said otherwise, I was sure I heard the hon. minister refer to the Standing Orders. I'm sure she referred to the Standing Orders, and I thought what was appropriate material for the minister to refer to in the course of her debate would be equally relevant for a member of the opposition to say in response. So I'm simply responding to an issue raised by the hon. minister.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The chair has been listening quite intently to tonight's debate, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did initially in his earlier remarks make reference to Standing Order 61(1) when the hon. member was making reference to government members having the last 15 minutes for debate. The debate has progressed since then, and I hope that what has been articulated so far will clarify the two positions that were put forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The point

I was attempting to make is: what does this tell us about the state of readiness of this government? What does it tell us about their ability to organize? What does it tell us about their ability to be able to read a calendar? Why is it that government cannot do the math, figure out the day they need the final appropriation bill through to be able to spend the I guess \$15 billion in terms of spending, work backwards, decide when we're going to have the throne speech and when the Legislature is going to start, and map it out? They have control over doing that. What happens is that we see a kind of laziness creep into government planning, and this may be endemic to every long-term government.

I'm part of a party that's been in opposition for about 77 years, so it's not so bad, Mr. Chairman. It's not so bad, really, being in opposition. The point is this. I can only have daydreams about what it's like to be part of a government that has such enormous . . .

MRS. NELSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. NELSON: A point of order on, again, relevancy: 459. True confessions from the opposite member about his party's life and his life of being in opposition really are not relevant to Bill 19. I admire his admission that he will be staying in opposition, but I really think he should be focusing on the appropriation bill. I don't think it's relevant to Bill 19, the history of the Liberal Party being in opposition.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order. I'd make the respectful suggestion that the speaker before me by her comments established a frame of reference in terms of what was relevant material for debate. All I'm doing is responding within the same frame of reference, and I would expect, Mr. Chairman, that with your customary fairness you would do no less than allow me the equivalent latitude that the last speaker has been afforded by the chair in the interests of a full and vigorous debate. I appreciated the latitude you gave the Minister of Economic Development, and I expect only that you would extend to me a similar kind of latitude.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Economic Development does have a point here. While we have a broad latitude, I encourage members to try and stick to the debate, and we are debating here Bill 19. It's before the committee, and I encourage everyone who speaks in this debate to please speak to Bill 19 as it's presented before this House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What I was attempting to develop, however clumsily and however slowly, was the proposition that when we deal with an appropriation bill, there's a process element to it and there's a substance element to it. The substance element is the fact that we're dealing with \$3.6 billion. Now, that's the process part. When you look at the bill, it's not very long and it identifies a number of specific cost items, but the other key with Bill 19 is that this is interim supply. It's not just an amount

of money; it's an amount of money to be requisitioned, to be appropriated for a time-sensitive purpose which is in advance of the budget, the main estimates, and so on.

11:10

What I'm hoping to do in the next number of minutes, Mr. Chairman, is this: to talk a little bit about the numbers themselves, but because this is an interim supply bill, an appropriation bill, to also talk about why we have this interim nature and to put it in a sort of time context. What I'm going to do over the next few minutes is try and develop those two themes.

Now, in terms of the process part in terms of why we're dealing with an interim bill and just to develop that somewhat further. What we've heard I think from every speaker on second reading of this bill were explanations offered in terms of why this had to be done on an interim basis and then contrary arguments offered in terms of why it should not be done on an interim basis. That's what I hope to address in the next while.

I'd suggest, Mr. Chairman, that what we have is a bit of a theme being developed. We've seen this early in the spring session of the Legislature, and I think the theme is this. We've effectively got executive government. What we've got is a situation where the Legislative Assembly in the eyes of the provincial government probably has a little less stature and not significantly more clout than, say, a Conservative standing policy committee or a Conservative caucus meeting. Sometimes I think we might as well have great big plant pots on our desks, because maybe we're just sort of part of the scenery. In fact, there may be members who would sooner look at a big rubber plant here or some kind of tree on our desks rather than at the faces of pesky opposition members.

Mr. Chairman, if the government respected the role of the Legislative Assembly -- and I'm not referring to a specific minister; I'm referring to the government collectively -- one would think they would have convened the Legislature at a sufficiently early point in 1999 that we could have brought the budget in, not delayed it until the latest point I can ever remember for the budget to come in. We'd have the debate, the government relying on the process and the well-defined time rules, and we'd get the budget through and get the funding with no difficulty.

MRS. NELSON: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Point of Order Repetition

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, I have to really get in on this, because this Legislature had the Speech from the Throne on February 16 of this year, and that is our normal reconvening time in this Assembly and has been for quite some time. With what the hon. member is suggesting, I think it would be very difficult for a number of their members to have been back from vacations to be here any earlier, and this side of the House actually has to do the work to prepare.

I'm quoting again *Beauchesne* 459, on repetition. He continually goes back to the process of convening the House under the Standing Orders and the process of presenting the Speech from the Throne and then the budget document. I'd ask the hon. member to please focus on the elements of the bill as opposed to when the government reconvenes the House, the earliest possible reconvening time, and the earliest possible time to bring down the budget for the next fiscal year.

This is all, I believe, an attempt to provide smoke and mirrors to the issue that really they are opposed to supporting the programs that are in the budget. Again I will say, Mr. Chairman, that they are probably the only group in this entire country that is opposed to the budget that was presented in this House last week by our Provincial Treasurer.

So if he can't speak to the bill, I think he should be asked to take his seat and let another member speak to the bill, because we've heard this repetition continually from this hon. member.

MR. DICKSON: Well, let me be as concise as I can, Mr. Chairman, on the point of order. I think that the hon. minister forgets this is committee stage. She can join debate at any time. She's welcome to stand after I've sat and attempt to refute the points that I'm making.

I thought I tried quite carefully a few moments ago to explain to members at the time that this is an interim supply bill. That means that we can deal with both the supply part and we can deal with the interim part. There's a time element, and there's the fiscal element. I'm simply suggesting -- I thought I'd made that point earlier, Mr. Chairman, and I'm happy to do it again. There's an issue in terms of why we are dealing with this as interim supply. That's what I'm attempting to explore, and I'm asking some questions.

I can understand that the Minister of Economic Development as a senior minister of the cabinet may be embarrassed by what's happened this year in terms of the late presentation of the budget. I can understand that if we have to wait for the Premier to do his television address . . .

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: There can't be a point of order on a point of order. So we'll let the hon. member finish.

Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, are you done?

MR. DICKSON: I beg your pardon?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are you finished?

MR. DICKSON: I was finished on the point of order. I'm prepared to resume my speech anytime.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, the Minister of Economic Development.

MR. DICKSON: Well, she's already spoken. She raised it.

MRS. NELSON: I can't speak now. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the latitude of being . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'll make a ruling on the first point of order. Did you raise a second one?

MRS. NELSON: Then I'll raise another point of order.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: You know, for a debate to progress from stage to stage, there may be repetition in the same material being brought forward by the same member. However, in the context in which this is being debated I encourage all members to really reflect on what they would like to say and what they say and try to be as concise as they can, because repetition will not change the content of what they're trying to say. So with that I strongly

urge everyone to please stick to the point and stay on Bill 19, which is before us.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: On a point of order, the Minister of Economic Development.

Point of Order Insulting Language

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman, 23(j) "uses abusive or insulting language." When the hon. member was debating the point of order, he indicated that I may be embarrassed by the processes of this government as the Minister of Economic Development and a senior cabinet minister in this government. Mr. Chairman, I believe that is insulting and actually is inciting disorder in the debate, and I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* to withdraw it.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'm advised by the table officers that you cannot have a point of order on a point of order that had already been debated, so we will have to proceed with the debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to find the other note I'd been looking for.

When we're talking about interim supply, it's interesting, because I went back to the debate at second reading, which occurred just last evening, on March 16, because I was trying to find some clear explanation from the government in terms of why we're dealing with this bill at this stage in terms of interim supply. I went back, and there appeared to be little by way of argument from government, little submission in terms of defending this before we heard the hon. minister today. We had a presentation from the Government House Leader, and he said:

As we undergo our deliberations over the course of the next month with respect to reviewing the estimates of supply for the year 1999-2000, it's absolutely necessary that the government have the wherewithal to pay the bills and to keep our staff employed. Interim supply provides that opportunity, and it really needs no further discussion than that.

What this also does is provides the opportunity for members to be able to question why it is that the government wants to use this particular tool, this particular procedure. I'm going to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that when we look at the bill that's in front of us now, the interim supply bill, we see in many respects part of a bigger process. I mean, we can go through, and it's easy to be distracted by looking at the \$343 million going into advanced education, into education.

11:20

MRS. NELSON: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MRS. NELSON: *Beauchesne* 482. I was wondering, Mr. Chairman, if the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* would answer a question. I feel it's a very important question.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, will you entertain a question?

MR. DICKSON: Sure. It's irregular during committee, but I'd never discourage any member from posing a question, Mr. Chairman.

Debate Continued

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo -- and he just needs to answer yes or no. Do you support funding going into the health care system now and into education now? Do you actually support the elements of this bill? I know I'll rest easier knowing that you as a duly elected member from the city of Calgary would be supportive of these funds moving forward into our regional health authority and into our Calgary school board and our Calgary Catholic board so that they can in fact look after our families while we are here in Edmonton listening to debate. Could you answer? Do you support this funding going forward? Yes or no.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, the minister is certainly entitled to ask a question. She's not entitled to dictate how I respond. My response is going to be this. I trust you're not going to rein me in in terms of relevance or whatever, because I've been asked a question, so now I'm going to have to respond as best I can within the context of the debate.

Mr. Chairman, what I support is a government that identifies what the needs are of Albertans in the province of Alberta. What I support is a government that plans. Once they determine what the need is, they then determine what resources are required. What I support is a government that doesn't ignore the Calgary regional health authority, that's been running for most of the year a deficit of between \$17 and \$25 million and then a maintenance deficit of another \$40 million.

What I don't support is saying to the Calgary board of education: you have a \$35 million deficit, and you have to retire that over 5 years: \$7 million a year. What I do not support is saying to the Calgary board of education: you're going to have to take \$5 million a year off your deficit.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, there are many, many other things I can say. What I support is a government that can count, a government that can look at a calendar and determine when they have to convene the Legislature and when it has to resume sitting to be able to pass a budget. What I support, Madam Minister, through the chair, is a government that ensures that we have an excellent education system, not a system, as the Minister of Education likes to say, that's adequate and in some cases excellent. What I support is a health care system that ensures we value nurses, doctors, and frontline workers. What I support is an infrastructure system that works. What I support is support for our municipalities so that we have transportation facilities.

**Chairman's Ruling
Decorum**

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. minister, this is an opportunity for you to speak once the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo finishes speaking. In the meantime, it would be pleasant if we could just hear one speaker at a time.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, if you would address your remarks in the usual way, to the Chairman, that would be appreciated.

MR. DICKSON: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I thought I was addressing them to you. I just happened to be looking at the minister that had engaged me before. I think there's no rule that says I can't look at the provocateur on the opposite side.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: In any event, Mr. Chairman, the point I was trying to make is this. There are needs in this province that have to be met, and I am absolutely astonished that another Calgary MLA has not been hearing the cry from Calgary's city council for adequate infrastructure spending.

MRS. NELSON: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. I would quote . . .

**Chairman's Ruling
Points of Order**

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no, hon. member. It seems to me that you rose on a point of order which was really a question, which is perfectly legitimate. The hon. member is answering it. To my understanding he has not finished his answer. So you would have, then, again a point of order on a point of order, and that would be unparliamentary.

Just to clarify, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, have you finished answering the question?

MR. DICKSON: No. In fact, Mr. Chairman, so we're perfectly clear, I'm still responding to the very straightforward question put by the Minister of Economic Development. She asked in terms of what I supported.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: One of the other things that I support -- and I'm proud as a Calgary MLA -- is adequate support for SAIT and Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary. I'm ashamed that we've allowed the University of Calgary to deteriorate. We've lost some of our most experienced instructors. We've seen class sizes increase. Go to SAIT, go to Mount Royal, hon. member, through the chair, and look at the number of people trying to get access to one of those programs.

I look at the inadequate funding for special-needs students, Madam Minister, through the chair. I look at the inadequate support for in-service training in terms of our education system. [interjections] I'm still answering the minister's question, Mr. Chairman. I'm still answering the question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, in the hon. member's response I simply wanted to find out, just so I can rest this evening: does he agree with the \$77 million being transferred to the Calgary regional health authority to deal with their issues? Yes or no.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the floor, hon. minister. He is attempting to answer the question that you yourself asked.

Could you conclude your answer and then continue on with the remaining time that you have left?

MR. DICKSON: You bet. Well, the question that was asked is a fair one. It wasn't the question the minister revised a moment ago. I'm still answering the original question. She's just come back and offered a different version, and I'll answer that too. But first I want to complete my response to the first question.

What I support, Mr. Chairman, is ensuring that Calgary Laboratory Services are not operating out of two trailers behind their building on 10th Avenue and that they can be properly accredited at the international level. What I support is ensuring not only that the

Calgary board of education, the Calgary regional health authority, the University of Calgary, SAIT, Mount Royal have adequate funding to be able to provide the kind of services; what I support is the Calgary Rockyview children's authority having adequate money to make sure that there are properly trained social workers to be able to deal with children in care in this province.

DR. TAYLOR: Answer the question.

MR. DICKSON: I'm doing it. Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to amplify the question.

MR. BRODA: It's a one-word answer.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister of science and information technology and the hon. Member for Redwater, we have only one speaker speaking right now, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, what I support is ensuring that we have the 300 long-term care beds that the city of Calgary and the Calgary health region need so that we don't have those seniors taking up acute care beds at the Rockyview and the Foothills and the Bow Valley hospitals. What I support is providing convalescent care. [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired]

I'm going to complete my answer my next time up, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been following this debate with great interest and enthusiasm. I always enjoy listening to the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. I've grown accustomed to his very polished form of eloquence in this Assembly, and I appreciate him attempting to answer that question, albeit a somewhat a long-winded response. Nonetheless, it was a good attempt.

11:30

Mr. Chairman, to get us back on track here, we're really here to discuss Bill 19, that being the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1999, which is really stage 1 of an excellent three-year budget plan that was announced in this House on March 11 by the hon. Provincial Treasurer. All that's being requested here is that we be able to start that excellent plan, which has been endorsed and embraced not only provincewide but I should say right across the entire nation. It's somewhat disappointing to have to sit and listen in this House to debate that goes on under the veil of serious debate when it sometimes lapses into that quagmire of simply extending the time, and some would call it nonsense.

All the details that so far have been requested are in fact available in the three-year business plans and/or in the budget itself. So anyone wanting any specific details with respect to anything that's in Bill 19 simply has to refer to the budget plan. This is something that has been discussed and debated in this House before, and I know that hon. members on the opposition side know that as well and that they're simply chiding us along here.

There are ongoing debates right now with respect to committees of supply, where some of these details are also being discussed. There are questions during question period, where all of these issues are being discussed. There are all kinds of other opportunities through other bills and other privileges of the House where many of the answers being sought could easily be accessed, and we needn't

take up too much more valuable time of this Assembly to address them and readdress them.

The danger in not approving Bill 19 is to risk shutting virtually everything down. Now, all members in this House know that. This is not anything new. It's a standard procedure that goes through this House every year. We can stand and talk about the government's need to flesh out some of the details. I myself have done that on occasion. But the fact is, Mr. Chairman, in all sincerity and in all honesty those answers do exist, and we haven't heard anything particularly fresh tonight. Let me just tell you that we can't risk sounding as if we're against anything in Bill 19, which is before us, because this is simply a statement of some projections to get on with the governance.

I have to tell you that anyone who stands in this House and is opposed to Bill 19 is really opposed to the fundamentals that run this society, that run this government, and that Albertans out there expect to be continued. If you're planning to vote against Bill 19, then you're really saying that you're planning to vote against the \$600 million injection that is going into education over the next three years, the first provision of which is provided for in Bill 19: \$488 million here, nonbudgetary disbursements of \$8 million so that the schools can keep operating, so that the school teachers can get paid, so that our kids can be educated. It's important that we get on with that.

We shouldn't delay this, because if we don't pass this within the next very short time, Mr. Chairman, then what happens? What are the consequences of that? That's what the hon. members of the opposition should keep in mind when they're rallying against this.

To simply suggest that we're going to try and defeat Bill 19 is to suggest, too, that we might be voting against \$950 million more that is being targeted at this stage for the area of health care. What would happen if we don't approve this right now? Well, I don't know. Should we start closing hospitals? Should we start closing clinics? Should we tell doctors not to show up for work? Should we cancel nursing homes and all the other excellent programs that we have, ambulance services and other good health care services like that? Of course not.

Let's keep this in perspective. Bill 19 is very simple, straightforward, probably the most innocuous bill that ever comes before any Legislature or any House of Commons, and everyone in this House knows that. It's unfortunate that we would have this extended debate that sometimes gets into arguing over something as straightforward as that.

I take a look at another very important area here that comes out of this very progressive budget. By the way, I think it's the most progressive budget that I've seen in the six years I've been here, Mr. Chairman, because it provides a perfect balance. As I look at one item in the budget here -- let me just comment on Bill 19 specifically with respect to the expenditures projected for Treasury.

It's very critical that this department along with all the other departments gets these allocations now so that they can continue on with the excellent plans that were enunciated last Thursday. For example, there are revolutionary tax changes that the . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Minister of Labour, your silence would be appreciated.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, it's important to pass Bill 19 if for no other reason than to keep all the departments going but in particular to keep the Treasury Department going, because they've got something so hot going on right now with this excellent plan to reduce taxes, to eliminate other taxes, to cut our net debt down to zero within a year, to bring in a

structured, well-developed, well-researched plan to eliminate our secured debt over a period of 25 years or sooner if we can find reason to hit the accelerator, as the Treasurer says. Who would want to slow that up?

Well, if you vote against Bill 19, there's a danger of slowing that up. So you're really saying that you're voting against cutting those taxes. You're saying that you're against allowing 78,000 low-income earners to separate themselves from taxes that they can't afford to pay. You're really saying that you don't want the government to look at eliminating the half percent deficit elimination surtax. You're really saying that you don't want the government to get on with cutting in half and then eliminating the high-income surtax of 8 percent. That's what you're really saying. So it's critical that we give the Treasury Department the mandate through Bill 19 to proceed and get started with these extremely exciting, revolutionary changes.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I've had calls from Vancouver, from Winnipeg, and from Toronto in the last few days. I even had one from Newfoundland.

DR. TAYLOR: They want to be your constituents. They want to move to your constituency.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That's almost exactly true.

Do you know what they're telling me? And these are very, very important people in the business and investment areas who happen to be friends, but they're also good counselors and advisers. They're asking me: how can you guys be doing what you're doing to taxes in Alberta, and how can we do that in B.C.? Others are phoning up and saying: how do we get the northeast part of B.C. annexed to Alberta, because you guys are doing so many great things. Others want to rent the Premier. This is true. Some people want to rent the Premier and have him move over there and help set their agenda straight. The point there is that they wouldn't be calling if there wasn't something tremendously exciting and positive happening, and that's what's starting with Bill 19. It's extremely important, therefore, that we support this.

I want to just comment on this issue of taxes and the important work that Treasury is going to do with their \$32,900,000 in capital investment dollars that Bill 19 provides for and with their nonbudgetary disbursements of \$25,500,000.

Mr. Chairman, as you and a number of others know, perhaps not all here, Canada is the highest taxed nation of all the G-7 countries. It's absolutely unbelievable that we have that particular yoke. Here in Alberta through Bill 19 we're attempting to move us away from that in a small way. I'll bet you within a year to two to three to four you'll have other provinces following suit. So why would we want to interfere with that exciting process? I don't think we want to interfere with that.

Let me just look at Transportation and Utilities. Mr. Chairman, in developing the budget -- and all the government MLAs had a hand in this -- we talked long and hard about issues related to Transportation and Utilities, as an example, which are reflected right here in Bill 19.

11:40

Operating expense and capital investment, \$240 million. You know what, Mr. Chairman? Out of that money we're going to see in the Edmonton area a continuation and completion of the Anthony Henday Drive area. We're going to see further work done on the Canamex highway that connects us to other countries such as the United States, Mexico, and so on, and more specific to the Edmonton capital region we're going to see 29 million plus dollars going

directly into the Edmonton capital region, and that will affect all of us in this area.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How much?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It's \$29 million more than they've ever gotten going right here into Edmonton, where we drive every day. Of course, Calgary is getting \$31 million, but that's the closest parity we've had in those allocations in a long time. So who would want to get in the way of that, perhaps potentially interfering with the city councils of Calgary and Edmonton getting on with the work they have to do? It's so important to do that.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we seem to have a debate between two ministers who are on opposite sides of the House. I wonder if those two members would cease their debate while we already have a member speaking who happens to be on the same side of the House. Could they remove themselves and go out of the Chamber or listen to the hon. member. He doesn't have a lot of time, and it would be important that he not be further interrupted.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. You know, Mr. Chairman, I was struck by an article in one of the Edmonton papers that ties in with what's going on here in Bill 19. That article had a headline -- I can't remember it verbatim -- but it said something like MLAs work hard but not always efficiently. I was struck by that article, which I read through twice. As I was reading through it, I thought to myself: now what would propel a columnist to write an article like that about this Assembly? That particular writer has seen this House. He's been in this House for many, many years. One of the things he commented on was an evening such as tonight, where philosophically and fundamentally all the MLAs know that this legislation has to go through. Everybody here knows that. You can't stop the proceedings of the Assembly. You can't stop the proceedings of government. You can't shut down schools or hospitals or roadways or the Justice department or anything else like that.

The columnist went on to say that MLAs don't use their time all that efficiently, because they will take a bill like 19, which theoretically we all support, and waste all kinds of time talking about it and debating it and extending the debate to gain something. I'm not sure what. It's one of the frustrations of being in opposition. I know it, Mr. Chairman, and I'm not criticizing them for this because I know how frustrating it is. But never let common sense get in the way of progress. That's the point. We shouldn't do that. No, we shouldn't. Because if we do . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Common sense always prevails.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yup. Common sense. Exactly.

The excellent article by this columnist also touched on another thing that's central to what's going on in relation to Bill 19 at this moment, and that's this. Every day we get school groups here. I've had them, you've had them, and she's had them. Everyone has had them. And do you know that at the end of all of that, we frequently get notes from our Speaker of the House commenting on the behaviour of MLAs in the House, decorum as we call it. Most of them come to the opposition, because that's the job opposition has. [interjection] No. Government members have to realize this too,

that that's their job to oppose. But I'll tell you; you gain a lot more cachet and you gain a lot more credibility when you oppose on substance and on principle and on specifics, and at the same time with the other hand you propose. So if you've got a sensible suggestion, if there's something really irking you about \$140 million going into Public Works, Supply and Services, then I'm open to that. Tell me what it is, and I'll guarantee you that it'll get discussed. But that's not what the game is all about.

So the columnist who talks about what is going on here with relation to Bill 19 makes an excellent point that there is a time when opposition has to gum up the motors a little bit, when opposition has to do its thing, but there's a time when the opposition doesn't need to do that. I would suggest, with relation to Bill 19, that this is a time to support this. I'm sorry; did the bell go, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, it has, hon. member. I regret to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, but under Standing Order 61(4) I must put the question proposing the approval of the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for consideration by the Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Chairman, I don't remember the committee voting to report the bill. Did we do that?

THE CHAIRMAN: You're quite right. We did not do that. Normally we go through the three different questions, but the Standing Orders supercede that and say that we must have one question, so we'll need you to move that we rise and report progress.

MR. RENNER: That would be wonderful. As long as we don't have to go through this one more night, I'd be more than happy to do so. I will move, then, that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The Committee reports the following: Bill 19.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 11:47 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]