

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 11, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/04/11

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Second Reading**

Bill 1

Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act

[Debate adjourned April 4]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise speaking to the amendment on Bill 1, the Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act. What the amendment does is permit the Bill to live up to its name, because this Bill, when initially introduced, was missing a significant portion. The only thing it had to say was that before any sales tax could be introduced, a referendum would have to be held. Well, that's like taking some of the cookies out of the cookie jar . . .

Speaker's Ruling

Speaking Twice in a Debate

THE SPEAKER: Order please.

There must be some misunderstanding on the hon. member's part. The Chair has no record of an amendment. The hon. member has already participated. [interjections]

Order. The rule is that when the hon. members have spoken at a stage, they can't speak again.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this might be an appropriate time to move an amendment to Bill 1. Always ready, I think that's the motto.

While it's being passed out, I'll let everybody have a read at it, and then we'll speak to it.

Speaker's Ruling

Amendments

THE SPEAKER: Order. There appears to be a little confusion in the backfield. This amendment that has reached the Chair is for committee stage and not for second reading. The Chair is unable to accept this amendment.

Is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert prepared to continue the second reading debate?

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize for that little glitch, so unlike the Liberals on this side. [interjection] I said it's so unlike us to have a glitch, but we do admit if there has been one. However. So before we get to that amendment, which we will have during committee, this actually will give people a chance to look at it. I'm certain that they will vote for it at the appropriate time.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Basically, in principle, the Liberals are in favour of this Bill. We have some concerns, and I think it's often been said that on this side of the House we are opposed to sales tax. The fact that it's even mentioned in this Bill scares us a little

bit. We've always said that you can't introduce a tax, certainly a sales tax in Alberta; it's one of the few things that Alberta is famous for, that is good about Alberta. However, that's not to say that user fees, in a way, aren't sales taxes.

So we will be making some friendly and very constructive amendments when the time comes, probably things that will require that all personal income tax increases would be subject to approval by Albertans in a provincewide referendum before anything like that happened and the requirement that all fee licence and premium increases should be debated and justified before Albertans in the Legislative Assembly. Nothing should be hidden behind doors; no sales tax even talked about. People should have an opportunity at all times to know what is going on, what money is being spent, and what sales taxes this present government may plan on introducing. So I'm sure that when the time comes and because everybody has the sheet in front of them before they should, they'll have a chance to look at it before committee, and when we get to committee, everyone will, I'm sure, accept it in the positive light that it is given.

So with those few wise words I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of concerns, and since we're at second reading on this Bill, I wanted to speak to the principle. I think that the first principles are where we should move from before we get bogged down in the detail. I think the concern I have is that the government is still engaged in trying to make Albertans believe that this government is going to be so responsible and provide a kind of fiscal leadership that people won't look at the record. I often think that if the government were to focus more of its considerable talent – and I say this very deliberately – on attempting to simply provide sound fiscal management now, instead of trying to bind the hands of governments in the future, we'd be much further off. I always have difficulty with the proposition, Mr. Speaker, that by legislation now we somehow pretend that we're going to elevate this to a level of some kind of a constitutional constraint. I think it is dishonest to Albertans to bring forward a Bill like this and suggest to Albertans that in some fashion this binds the hands of future governments.

I've heard the Premier say repeatedly that the only referendum that counts is at election time. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to let Albertans determine in any given provincial general election the program of legislation they want to see brought in, the list of commitments from the party that's running and ultimately secures the majority of votes. I think this business of trying to stake out a position and then for the government to sort of puff itself up with self-importance and say that we're going to do something to protect Albertans way down the road in the future is simply mischievous. [interjection] Well, you know, when we've seen this government refuse to deal with a host of things that require immediate attention, we wonder why all of this preoccupation with what's going to happen down the road.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to start off by saying that I have that concern. I had the same concern in the spring of 1993 when the government brought in the Deficit Elimination Act. I remember at that point feeling a level of discomfort with legislation that purports to be something it cannot be, to be something it is not.

I think the Provincial Treasurer recalls very well that in the last provincial election Albertans responded I think very positively to

the suggestion from this party that no sales tax would be introduced without a referendum being held on the proposition of a sales tax first. It's interesting what tortuous paths good ideas take, but now we see it resurrected in Bill 1, Mr. Speaker. A couple of years later it was put forward.

Frankly, I take issue with some of my colleagues, and I don't share the view completely of many of the members on this side. I don't have occasion to say that very often, Mr. Speaker, because I have such enormous respect for my colleagues in opposition. But I must say that I think my constituents and I think other Albertans simply want to see the government recognize that they've got some enormous immediate challenges and focus on those – focus on those – and recognize that times and circumstances change. It's preposterous to try and remove the flexibility of a sovereign body, and that's what this Legislature is post every election.

8:10

I think the other concern I have, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has talked much about transparency and greater openness, and when we look through Bill 1, what we find is that there still isn't the requisite kind of openness we'd like to see. There still isn't the same kind of transparency the government had promised earlier, and when we sort of match the two up, we find it wanting.

Mr. Speaker, I think that in terms of this provincewide referendum, it's interesting to me how selective the government is in utilizing it. In Bill 1 the government comes forward and says that a referendum is an excellent proposition. What we see is that when it comes to hospital closures, when it comes to enormous changes and massive restructuring of our health care system, the government takes a very different position, and they say, "No, no, referendums aren't appropriate; it's too expensive," or whatever. Now we see in Bill 1 the government comes forward and is championing the cause of a referendum.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague has put me in mind of some startling news I heard this afternoon, that it may be that the provincial government – although this isn't at all clear yet – despite all of the rhetoric and all of the bombast about no open-ended guarantees, may have made some kind of commitment in terms of the bid by the city of Calgary for the world's fair. One would think that as much as Calgaryans look forward to this major event and as much as Albertans can think of no better way of celebrating our 100th anniversary, surely that's the sort of thing we should be addressing in this Chamber. We shouldn't have to rely on what the Premier is alleged to have said at a meeting to the national bid committee that was weighing the Calgary bid and the Quebec City bid. So I think that kind of transparency and openness the government talks about – that's the sort of situation where we want to see it.

While we wait for this fascinating story to unravel in terms of who promised what to whom, Albertans are sitting back. Yes, they very much want to see the world's fair in the city of Calgary, but they're certainly concerned in terms of whether there's some hidden cost here. One would think, Mr. Speaker, that would be the sort of thing the government should be focusing on instead of creating a straw man and then attempting to bash the thing down.

Mr. Speaker, I can see that the Provincial Treasurer, despite this long and arduous session, still is able to enjoy himself in the Chamber while we're talking about one of his key pieces of legislation, and that's encouraging. That's encouraging because it's important that the Provincial Treasurer retain his good humour, particularly when he's trying to defend legislation that,

for the most part, doesn't address the real issues, doesn't address the real needs.

MR. DINNING: It's what Albertans want.

MR. DICKSON: The Provincial Treasurer suggests that Bill 1 is what Albertans want. Well, I'll bet I've knocked on as many doors as the Provincial Treasurer has, and I say with respect that this is not what Albertans are calling for. What Albertans simply want is a health care system that works, that's fiscally responsible. They want a social service system that works. They want an educational system that works. Those are their priorities. This sort of thing may be a way of capturing a headline now and again in at least some daily newspapers, but I think that over the long haul Albertans are not well served by this kind of exercise. I think that, for the most part, it's largely a waste of the time of this Legislature and of these MLAs, and I just have that kind of basic fundamental problem with this sort of a Bill.

At what point, Mr. Speaker, do we say the emperor has no clothes? At what point do we say that Bill 1 is here for all kinds of reasons? It may have all kinds of purposes, but it's not the objective that's set out in the face of it. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that I hear another interjection. It's a little early. It usually doesn't happen until about 8:30 or 8:40, an interjection from our friend the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. With any luck, he'll stand up and want to challenge me and ask a question and then in question period a day later misrepresent what was said. It's a good thing we have *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully the hon. minister will focus . . .

MRS. BLACK: A point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 459. So far I don't know what the hon. member's door-knocking experience, his life expectancy rates, and all this sort of stuff has to do with Bill 1. Could you please pick up Bill 1 and start to talk about Bill 1 and the content of the Bill?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, despite the protestations of the hon. Minister of Energy, I've been talking about Bill 1. I've referenced Bill 1. I've talked about the principles of Bill 1. Isn't that what second reading is for? I'll be happy tomorrow to send a copy of *Hansard* to the hon. minister, because it's clear she wasn't listening to what's been said in the last few minutes. Now that she is paying attention, I'll be happy to make sure that I send her a copy tomorrow so that she can see what's been said then.

MRS. BLACK: *Beauchesne* 459 again, relevance. Mr. Speaker, I don't know what this has to do with Bill 1. So far all he's talked about is holding up the Bill. "I've been talking about Bill 1." I don't know whether you're in favour of Bill 1 or against Bill 1.

THE SPEAKER: Perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* can enlighten the hon. Deputy Government House Leader as to his position on the Bill.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, how long do we have? How much more time do I have?

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, in terms of Bill 1, I'll be very, very specific so that the Minister of Energy may find I'm being responsive. The point is this: why do we single out an alleged sales tax? Of all of the taxes this provincial government imposed, of all the user fees, in terms of all of the taxes the government has brought in since 1993, why is it they single out the one particular tax and then sort of puff that up and create that straw man that they like to slay?

Mr. Speaker, I'd say, with respect, that Albertans are going to be able to see through this. It is transparent. In this case it's not the emperor has no clothes; it's the Provincial Treasurer has no clothes. Bill 1 is simply fluff. It's transparent. I hope that Albertans can see how empty and how vacuous this legislative initiative is. I hope that the Provincial Treasurer and his colleagues will be too embarrassed to go to Albertans and try and trumpet this Bill, if it's successful in terms of being passed, as some means of protecting the taxpayer, some means of responding to the ratepayers' concern.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I've stressed the difficulty I have with the principles, and I'm hopeful that there will be other members that share the sentiment I've expressed. Thanks very much.

8:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't get up very often to speak about anything, but I really just . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: It's about time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has been recognized.

MRS. FORSYTH: Somehow we've inherited Chip and Dale on the other side, the chipmunks or whatever they are.

I really want to be very brief, Mr. Speaker, but I feel compelled to get up and speak. I have really great difficulty understanding why the opposition have a problem with this Bill. It's very clearly put in the Bill: "Whereas the people of Alberta want to maintain the Alberta Advantage." It doesn't say anywhere: whereas the Liberals want to maintain. It says, "the people of Alberta." It also says: "Whereas Alberta is the only province in Canada that does not have a general provincial sales tax." For the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo so he understands what Bill we're on: "Whereas a general provincial sales tax is not a desirable tax." Not. "Whereas the opinion of the people of Alberta should be obtained directly before any legislation that levies a general provincial sales tax is introduced." It clearly goes on to say that if the people of Alberta want a sales tax, it has to go before a referendum, with the Chief Electoral Officer announcing the results. I don't see anything wrong. The people of Alberta do not want a sales tax. They want protection, and it's beyond my comprehension how anybody cannot agree with this Bill.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to spend a few minutes addressing some of the issues that I see in connection with basically the format of Bill 1. I think the idea behind Bill 1 is great: the idea that we're going to go out and ask the people of Alberta what their opinions are before we change the structure of our tax system.

In response to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek when she asked: what are the issues about this Bill that really bring about some concerns? I've already said that this is the right approach, but when we have to start talking about a sales tax and going to the people of Alberta to ask them whether or not a sales tax is going to be a desirable option that they would like to implement, we have to start looking at basically the approach that's taken by governments, whether it be the government of Alberta or any other government, in terms of raising the revenues that they need to support the activities that are undertaken by the government. The main focus has to be based on either the focus of an income tax, which is a tax on the revenue side of the population, a tax on the purchase side – in other words, a sales tax that puts a tax on the goods that are purchased by the economy – or we can deal with specific taxes that look at the aspects of user fees.

Well, in many contexts, user fees take on the structure of a real, specific, or partial format of a sales tax, because what we're ending up saying is that with a user fee, we're identifying either particular goods or particular services that have to be identified or are going to be used as a basis for generating revenue for the government. So what we see now basically under Bill 1 is the government saying that if they want to impose a general sales tax, then they will go to the people of Alberta in the form of a plebiscite. What we've got also is a government that is looking at sector sales taxes, product sales taxes, service sales taxes, on an item-by-item, form-by-form basis so that as the products are identified – we have taxes now that are levied against fuels. We have them against liquor and cigarettes. We have them now against many of the services that are provided in the form of government health care in terms of the changes in our focuses.

MRS. SOETAERT: Tire tax. Hotel tax.

DR. NICOL: Yes, the tire tax that was put in place.

We have service area taxes that have been brought in, which are also another form of a sales tax. These are things like the hotel tax, like the taxes that are being now imposed on people. When they go to registries to get their licences for different functions or when they go to get a search of a record from the registries, they're now being asked to pay an access fee or a user fee.

Well, Mr. Speaker, individually and collectively, when you put them together, these all are another mechanism to look at revenue generation, but they're product specific and they're not general. So the concern I have in terms of looking at Bill 1 is that I would like see the approach taken here that when we're going to deal with purchase taxes of any kind, whether they be in the general context that we can call them a general sales tax or when we need to deal with them in the context of product or sector-type taxes when we're looking at them, we call them other things, like hospitality taxes – we call them user fees, we call them access fees, we call them all kinds of different names, but in total the approach they take in terms of generating revenue from the market activity of the economy is the same. They are taxes that are put on services, that are put on goods, and they're used to generate revenue.

So I would suggest that really the approach of the government here now is to put together a Bill that looks at kind of appeasing the public by saying: we're not going to put in place a sales tax

unless we get your permission. But what we then have is a government that's acting on a piecemeal basis to in essence create a revenue generation from every transaction that occurs in the province in the form of the user fees that we've been seeing.

Now, the Bill itself is very short, very brief, and to the point. A mild preamble brings in the possibility of using the mechanisms that already exist within legislation to implement a referendum. The main interesting point is when you look at section 1. After going down through, they say that

before the introduction of the Bill, the Chief Electoral Officer announces the result of a referendum conducted under this Act on a question that relates to the imposition of the tax.

It doesn't even say in the Bill that we have to have a positive result of that referendum. So in essence what we could have is the people of Alberta turning it down and then have the government still go ahead and bring forth a Bill that would impose a tax. Now, the obvious result to that is: gee, that's political suicide. But, you know, maybe time is there that people will let it go and get on to other issues. We saw what happened to the federal Conservatives when they were talking about dealing with it. So we have to look at whether or not the Bill really has any meat to it, whether it really has any focus to it.

DR. WEST: Do you agree with it? That's the point.

DR. NICOL: Well, the point is, member opposite, that it's not done properly. It's not done to the point that it really specifies what the issues are. It doesn't get into the real focus of the aspects that could cause any kind of public debate and a commitment by the people of Alberta to follow through.

Mr. Speaker, those are the concerns that I've got. They're very brief, but it's the kind of issue that we need to have to basically bring forth some of the concerns that I have. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

8:30

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second reading, as my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo pointed out, is in order to fully expose in debate the principles of the Bill and speak to the Bill in principle as opposed to line by line. Line by line would be darned difficult in any event because it's such a frivolously short piece of legislation, that is truly a sham. Starting from the very first line, in the whereas it speaks of the Alberta advantage. Well, the Alberta advantage is not defined herein. The Alberta public certainly does not know what the Alberta advantage is or have any idea of what it is supposed to be. Yes, they're continually told by that side what they think it is, but it's just this ideal. Well, that is hardly a place to start with in proposing a Bill, particularly Bill 1.

This Bill 1 says to an awful lot of people who are doing some thinking about what government should be, what this government is about. It's optics. It's what appears. It's not what it actually is. It's totally and completely out of place in any piece of legislation. The same thing cannot be said for a number of other pieces of legislation that this government is enacting, a great deal of which this side in fact agrees with. This one is just an utter and complete sham, and it doesn't really deserve a great deal of debate except that it should be debated and should be debated in the House to show what it actually is. This side will say a great deal about it because that side will say nothing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

DR. L. TAYLOR: I wonder if the member opposite would consider a question.

MR. WHITE: Absolutely not, no, not from that quarter at all. It would surely be a frivolous, frivolous question. If it came from a quarter that would give a considerate, positive response to this Bill or that would rise in the House and deliver some kind of positive statement for why this Bill exists, then take his place. I only have 20 minutes in this House to speak. Surely the member opposite can rise to his feet and tell the entire world on the record why this piece of legislation should be passed in its present form.

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Speaking to this item is a sham. There's isn't anything to prevent this government from enacting any legislation beyond this. If there's a will in the Legislature, there's a way certainly. If you can pass this piece of legislation, surely another piece of legislation can supersede this, or it can be rendered null and void because of some kind of other legal manoeuvre. This is just such a farce that it's pathetic.

When you look at the fundamentals of this democracy, it is representational democracy. That means that we in this House were elected to make some decisions. This is a pretty fundamental decision. If the government needs this arm twisting of some kind of frivolous piece of legislation so as to prevent them from doing something disastrous in their minds, a dreaded sales tax, to keep from making these errors, heaven forbid. What other errors can be made when there is not legislative protection? There are so many things that could have been done. This time could have been spent in so much better fashion by debating the fundamentals of medical delivery and how that is done. I mean, there are so many things that could be done beyond this one.

You look at the costs of this. Now, if you ask the average Joe – if you went to my barber and said, "Ed, should we decide this question, should in fact the Legislature decide this question, and should we save this money?" I'll tell you every single time what his decision would be. "Why would you want to be elected if you're not going to make these fundamental decisions?" There doesn't seem to be any answer to it.

If you're talking about some advice this government has received, the Alberta Tax Reform Commission clearly said that there isn't any reason whatsoever to bring forward anything that would resemble a referendum on a tax policy unless you're going to discuss the entire breadth of taxes. Recognizing that we've heard from that side and this side – you hear it from every side. There is only one taxpayer in this province, and it's the same one over and over and over again. The municipalities certainly would like to be in on the debate, because there's the average soul out there trying to make a living in a small business who's paying all of this municipal tax before they even make a penny.

Now, if you want to discuss all of the tax – and you have to. If you're going to ask someone out there to decide how they wish to be taxed, how they wish to pay for their government, you're going to get a negative response in the first instance in any case until they understand that we'll set aside the amount of money that government costs and say, "Okay, let's fix that," and try to work on how we're going to pay for it. Well, if you start carrying those arguments, you very quickly get to a study of macroeconomics, which at best cannot be explained through one, two, three, or four haircuts no matter how short one's hair is or how

much there is or isn't. So you have to go to the alternatives. This level of government has some hold on income tax and has shown that they can vary the municipal tax a great deal. That tax was originally envisaged to tax property for services delivered to that property independent of its earning capacity or independent of its utility. Of course, that's gone by the boards, and it's simply a matter of raising revenues for one level of government.

Now, there is many a theory in macroeconomics that'll say that the only proper tax – aside from a property tax that is directly and only related to those services that are delivered to the property: police and fire, the protective services, and water and sewer and those kinds of things that are directly related to that – should be related to the generation of income from that property or from the generation of income for the persons owning those properties; i.e., either tax the generation of income. The third alternative is to tax and only tax those areas when someone spends the money. You tell the little person there in simple terms: "Look; we'll minimize your property tax, but what we're going to do is make sure that every time you buy something, it's going to cost you money. But we're not going to charge you anything for making your money. Therefore you earn your income. Let it stay in your jeans until you want to make a decision as to how to spend it." Now, a young person starting out might say: "Well, look. I'm going to minimize my expenditures. I certainly don't want to spend a lot. I'm going to try and save that money and spend it where I see fit." Therefore he's not attracting a lot of sales tax. Well, the arguments could be made. If you're going to get into those kinds of arguments, you have to expose the people to all of those arguments.

When you're talking about costs of a referendum, this is simply not counting heads and deciding who is 18 and who is eligible to vote in this province. There is a responsibility to allow the public to exercise its right of being educated on the matter. That certainly isn't considered in this less than complete bit of fluffy legislation.

This Bill does not bind anyone. There's a law that was actually passed by this Legislature – and it's going to be modified very soon by a Bill – the Municipal Government Act, which specifically says that a referendum has a limited life span for that level of government. If it's good for the goose, it certainly must be good for the gander. That same piece of legislation says that one elected body after an election can in fact not bind the next, and for a very good reason. I mean, it's a reasonable piece of legislation. Municipalities live by it very well, because times do a-change. Political philosophies change. One government doesn't bind all governments thereafter. I expect this province to be here for another millennium or longer. This piece of legislation: do you expect it to stand up all that time? Balderdash. It's absolutely ludicrous. It's presumptuous of any member of this Legislature to think that they can bind those people to that extent.

We should take the words of the esteemed leader of that party and Premier of this province now. In answer to some relatively simple questions prior to the last election, he said – I'd like to quote . . .

8:40

AN HON. MEMBER: To his leadership.

MR. WHITE: To his leadership. Yes, prior to that.

Would you harmonize such a tax with G.S.T.? Mr. Klein answered: at some point a full review is needed which compares long-term costs of meeting expectations for government services and Alberta's fiscal capacity to generate additional revenues. That

really sounds like our Ralph Klein. Yes, it certainly does. The point is that what he's talking about here, to summarize it in a much more colloquial term, is, "Yes, we'll have to examine that when the time comes." Well, that was then and this is now. All of a sudden through this piece of legislation sales tax is enemy number one. Talk about a poor sales job. I mean, you're not fooling a whole lot of people except my son in grade 8. He might believe that you actually mean what you say and that you're trying to bind all future legislators.

MR. CHADI: My daughter's in grade 7. She wouldn't be fooled.

MR. WHITE: It might not fool her. Well, perhaps she's a little more advanced than my son. I'll try not to tell him.

Now, talk about a sham. There's already a sales tax in this province. There's an insidious one called the room tax, that primarily taxes Albertans for moving about the province and spending money and generating income. Nobody wants to live away from home. You're living from home why? You're out there generating income. You're hustling. You're trying to make a business go. And what does this government do? On one hand, it says, "Oh, no, no sales tax; it's the worst possible thing." They go to speech after speech after speech and deliver the same old balderdash. Yet there it is: income generation. In all our hometowns, around every corner, there it is. It's another specific sales tax.

There's another, too, that perhaps is not solely and completely a sales tax, but it's applied in exactly the same manner.

MR. WICKMAN: The tire tax.

MR. WHITE: Absolutely. The tire tax. Now, that is a sales tax. It's directly related to the price, the sale price. It says so. There's no question about it: it's a sales tax, a special purpose sales tax flowered up for this purpose. Well, the revenues of the province of Alberta are the revenues of the province of Alberta. They can go into one pot or they can go into 10 pots; it doesn't matter. They are all revenues. How they're spent is the key. That particular income source cannot be spent. I mean, they're having a great deal of difficulty finding how to spend it in the manner it was. Perhaps they will, and I'll give the minister this: they are working very hard trying to do it. Perhaps the end justifies having some income of the province of Alberta going to that end, but it's still a dreaded sales tax.

You want to talk about liquor? Liquor's not a sales tax? It's now a flat tax. It's still a tax, and it's still a sales tax because it doesn't trigger until that item is sold at the retail level. That's where it is. Cigarettes are exactly the same. It is a sales tax. There's no question about it.

Now, I am having difficulty with this one. The Alberta Tax Reform Commission certainly said that they don't recommend a sales tax at this time. At this time. They're saying: "Look; you have to examine this. You legislators have to understand that sometimes the money in the jeans – if there's no sales tax and it gets to that purchaser, perhaps that person is the best one to decide on how to spend the money. Tax it then." They know what the ultimate sale price of that good or service is. They say, "Now I, with cash in my jeans, do the deciding." If that isn't the ultra right-wing position of saying, "Yes, the person that makes the money keeps it and then spends it as they want, and the money moves around." That's exactly what it is.

DR. WEST: It's a tax on tax. When you tax disposable income that's already been taxed, it's a tax on tax. That's a ridiculous argument.

MR. WHITE: There's a strange, taxing noise echoing in here, a strange, strange noise that probably has no utility whatsoever.

The last thing I'd like to say about this Bill – and I visited it earlier – is that it fundamentally offends something that we should all hold dear to our hearts, and that is: the reason we are here. We're here to make decisions on behalf of those who cannot be here. We can hear these debates. We understand what is being said. We are to read the Bills as they come to understand what arguments are put by both sides. We offend those that we represent by this Bill.

There is only one reason to support this Bill, and that is because it looks good. If we want to simply look good and not act well, then I guess we'll have to support the Bill. Otherwise, we'll be painted in the position of favouring a sales tax. Now, isn't that the worst kind of sham you'd ever want to see?

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE SPEAKER: The motion before the Assembly is for second reading of Bill 1, Alberta Taxpayer Protection Act. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

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| Ady | Forsyth | Oberg |
| Amery | Friedel | Paszkowski |
| Black | Gordon | Percy |
| Brassard | Herard | Pham |
| Burgener | Hierath | Sekulic |
| Calahasen | Hlady | Severtson |
| Chadi | Kirkland | Soetaert |
| Clegg | Laing | Stelmach |
| Coutts | Langevin | Taylor, L. |
| Day | Lund | West |
| Dinning | Magnus | White |
| Doerksen | McFarland | Wickman |
| Dunford | Mirosh | Woloshyn |
| Evans | Nicol | Yankowsky |
| Totals: | For – 42 | Against – 0 |

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 5
Public Health Amendment Act, 1995

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 5, the Public Health Amendment Act. This Bill provides legal authority for qualified registered nurses to provide extended services based on community needs. These nurses will have the training required to enable them to deliver comprehensive primary health care services as part of the primary health care team. This initiative has been carefully planned over several years, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

9:00

AN HON. MEMBER: What's so funny?

DR. L. TAYLOR: You don't want to know.

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MS CALAHASEN: These guys are just so lovable.

It has been developed in order to meet a clearly identified need.

MR. DUNFORD: What are the two points you're trying to make, Pearl?

MS CALAHASEN: Honey, you couldn't handle it. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

Perhaps those who find something extremely amusing could maybe absent themselves to consider this matter so the Assembly could get on with the work of the evening.

Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the points. It has been developed in order to meet a clearly identified need, and it has had the support and co-operation of the full range of health care professionals concerned. Planning for the project began in 1992 when the alternate health services delivery initiative was established to examine new approaches to providing health care to underserved communities. From its inception the initiative has focused on five communities in northern Alberta: Rainbow Lake, Peerless Lake, Loon Lake, Trout Lake, and Red Earth Creek. Bill 5 will support two projects to enhance access to health services in those communities by allowing the Keeweenaw Lakes and Northwestern regional health authorities to engage the first registered nurses in this enhanced role. The need for a new initiative to enhance access to primary health care in these communities is very clear.

Historically, health services have been provided on a sporadic basis by agencies and providers located outside the communities. Even community health service providers have been available in only two of the communities. Rainbow Lake, as an example, has a health centre staffed by two community health nurses with limited and irregular access to physicians' services. The communities and all the service providers involved agreed that the key provider under the new approach would be a registered nurse with an expanded role. In that new role nurses would be trained to provide comprehensive primary health care services according to community needs. Those services would include health promotion and protection, disease and injury prevention, assessment, diagnosis and treatment, emergency services, drug therapy, and referral to other professionals as necessary. In accordance with that view, Bill 5 builds on the role that qualified nurses already fulfill in many communities in Alberta, a role whose value to those communities is well established. The concept of the community nurse practitioner expands the role of the community

health nurse to include diagnosis and prescribing drugs, and most importantly, it clarifies the basis for that role and removes administrative barriers to nurses' serving effectively.

Some of the services to be provided by these nurses do overlap with the functions of physicians and pharmacists, Mr. Speaker. I want to make two points in relation to the other professions which will interact with nurses in their new role. First, an initiative to enhance access to primary health care services has had the support of the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Alberta Pharmaceutical Association. Second, the role of the community nurse practitioner has been set out very clearly. Nurses in advanced practice will deliver entry level ambulatory care only, and they will be required to have 24-hour access to a consulting physician and pharmacist. Like all practitioners, they will refer any case beyond their training and competence to whatever professional has the training necessary to deal with it.

The details of advanced practice for nurses have not yet been finalized in regulations. However, the guidelines for the services they will deliver were set out last year in a paper developed by an interdisciplinary working group. The paper was distributed to stakeholders in October 1994, and their responses are reflected in the Bill that I am bringing forward today.

As to the way the new initiative will be implemented, Bill 5 enables regional health authorities, provincial health boards, and Alberta itself to employ registered nurses to provide extended health services with the approval of the Minister of Health. No community health nurses in the communities targeted by the first two projects will be displaced to make room for community nurse practitioners. In fact, one of the nurses in those communities is currently receiving the training required to deliver extended health services. For the future Alberta Health has already received a proposal from Athabasca University for a formal post-RN training program.

On April 5 I believe Bill 5 was a clear step forward in enhancing access to quality health services in this province. I think a closer look at the way this initiative has been planned and developed will confirm that, and I look forward to discussing it with all my colleagues.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude my comments. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After listening to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, certainly I would stand in support of the Bill. Then I have to throw in my "however, to some degree" and suggest that in fact when we look at the Bill – and I draw some comfort from the delineation and also the definition that she brings to it in her debate and discussion, but in examining the Bill, it really is a very hollow shell of a Bill. I don't misunderstand the intention of it, and I certainly have a good feel for the nurse practitioners in the northern communities and know what a valuable asset they are.

The Member for Lesser Slave Lake had indicated, even down to the degree, what services would be provided in what areas. I would challenge those members to look in that Bill and find out where that information is contained. I used the term "it's a hollow shell of a Bill" because it doesn't define those particular areas of concern. Bill 5 doesn't tell us what medical procedures could be performed by registered nurses. It doesn't tell us which geographical areas nurses could perform the procedures in, and it doesn't expound upon the training that would be required.

Now, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake did that in her presentation, but the Bill itself, Mr. Speaker, I would term somewhat of a "trust me, trust me" Bill. Unfortunately, we have been asked to "Trust me, trust me," and I would suggest that Albertans have been let down by this government once too often to actually embrace that "Trust me, trust me," particularly when you are from the side opposite, as they call us, and we watch it on a daily basis.

Now, if this Bill and some of the gaps in it were to be less driven by the regulations – and we see legislation come before us in the last session and also this session that really is driven by regulation, Mr. Speaker. If those Bills and the associated regulations were brought before the Law and Regulations Committee, I'm sure everyone in this House would draw a larger level of comfort from it. Wholeheartedly I would support this Bill without any reservations if in fact those regulations had been shared.

I commend the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, but she did point out, as I say, in her presentation some of the areas that are to be addressed with this Bill and some of the procedures even that would be addressed and alluded to some of the training. I think that's desirable. I see no reason why, if this Bill is as well researched as it should be, we can't have some of those specifics without tying it down very clearly to a point of not being workable in the Bill. I think it would give the Bill a better heart, and it would give those that are chatting to the Bill a better feel for exactly what's expected here.

She indicated that it went to many health experts throughout the province of Alberta for consultation. I think that's desirable. It is a step forward in a formal sense. I'm aware that nurses in many communities have conducted a lot of what is already being asked in this Bill, and as I indicated in an earlier comment, I realize how important they are to some of the northern communities that have great difficulty attracting medical practitioners to their particular area. Nurses have fulfilled the role very nicely in that aspect, and if this Bill facilitates more of that, then, of course I wholeheartedly support it.

9:10

There is, in my view, Mr. Speaker, a concern – and I would belabour the point – that it is driven by regulation. The Bill does not tell us exactly what we can expect in totality or its entirety. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake does, because I trust her, bring some level of comfort because she's speaking, of course, from experience and knowledge of her very dear loyalty to the northern communities and certainly probably from the experience firsthand of knowing full well how important nurse practitioners are. If this facilitates better health care to the northern communities in the province of Alberta and some of the remoter areas of this province, then certainly I would suggest it's a very good Bill.

I would just issue one deficiency, and that deficiency is indicated, Mr. Speaker, in the fact that the Bill really leaves too many gaps and leaves too much wide open to the imagination when we are dealing with these sort of matters.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few brief comments about this Bill, and I commend the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing it forward. Direct access and nursing practitioners have been an issue for a long

time, and I think it's long overdue that this is addressed in the House. In fact, when the member was talking about Rainbow Lake, one of my sisters once worked there as a nurse and while there did a job that was far beyond the scope of a regular nurse and quite enjoyed her stint in Rainbow Lake. Of course, you can well imagine that if I have a sister who is a nurse, in fact two sisters who are nurses, I get my ear filled regularly about direct access. So it is with pleasure that I support this Bill and partly for family survival as well.

I do want to express just some concerns about the regulations that we'll be following or that we haven't seen yet, and maybe the Member for Lesser Slave Lake knows more about those and will be able to show us some of those. I heard her refer to – good, she's got a pamphlet there; I'd love to see it – the advanced nurse service that's going to be offered through Athabasca University. I'd love to hear about that. Some things that I question about the regulations not being present yet would be which medical procedures could be performed by registered nurses. I think that has to be more specific in the regulations. In which geographic areas nurses could perform their procedures: I know there was an issue that I believe happened in Fort McMurray. Too bad the member isn't here, but . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: For shame, for shame.

MRS. SOETAERT: I didn't say that. I take that back.

The nurse had practised up north and then come down, believe it, down south to Fort McMurray. There was quite a dilemma there over what the scope of her practice could be. So I'd like to know the geographic areas that this will pertain to.

The other thing is, and I referenced it: what level of training will be required for nurses who are allowed to perform these procedures? I know that nurses are constantly upgrading and taking different courses. I just have nothing but respect for the nursing profession, and I'm sure they're interested in what details will be in this.

I know, too, that the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, would like to know a few more details about this Bill so that they can express their concerns and support to certain parts of it. I think it's just a matter of being able to fully support the Bill. I would love to see the regulations. In fact, I'd probably bounce these regulations off my sisters, and I know the Member for Lesser Slave Lake would love to have their input. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, good thing *Hansard* can't get all of this.

So in principle I will be supporting the Bill, but I truly have concerns about supporting something that I don't know all the details of, and since this is near and dear to me, I would love to know all the regulations that will be included in this Bill. Hopefully, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake can get some of those to us before we're in committee so that we can look at them and possibly make amendments or additions as the case may be.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my usual short style, I'll make a few comments on Bill 5. I'll first commend the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing the Bill forward. Unfortunately, it is very familiar with other government Bills in that it tends to provide a framework, it tends to provide a shell, or it tends to provide an umbrella where then the regulations will follow. Unfortunately, we don't have the opportunity, the public

doesn't always have the opportunity for the same type of input in developing or debating the regulations as we may have in debating the actual piece of legislation itself. So it is unfortunate that there is a lack of regulations. I can understand that at times it is difficult to put those regulations in the Bill, because there may be in some cases consultation with professional people and so on. But with this government it does tend to happen on a very regular basis, so I tend to see it as a style that the government has adopted. Legislation by framework, I would call it.

The Bill itself, the principles of the Bill, certainly have to be supported. I believe we all recognize the difficulties some of the rural areas have in attracting medical personnel, in attracting doctors. Nurses do go through a great deal of training, and nurses are very, very qualified personnel, very qualified individuals. There is certainly no reason, absolutely no reason at all, why the area of health care that they practise can't be expanded upon with that additional training I would assume will be part of the regulations when the regulations come down.

There are a couple of other questions which of course the Bill itself doesn't spell out that regulations will. That refers to the specifics as to what types of medical procedures these registered nurses will be allowed to perform, what geographic areas of the province these particular highly trained nurses will be allowed to perform these procedures in, and then again that additional level of training or the level of training that will be required by these nurses. Those are the types of questions that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, possibly with the assistance of the Minister of Health, is going to have to address at the committee level.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, I do support the Bill, the principles of the Bill. I think it can assist in filling some of that void that is there in the rural areas in terms of a higher skill of health care, of medical practice, and this is certainly supported from that particular point of view.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was impressed by my colleague who said he was going to speak briefly, so I'll try and do so as well to Bill 5.

I join the other speakers in congratulating the sponsor of this Bill. I think the principle is sound. I think it addresses a need, particularly in a province that has remote areas that are far from acute care facilities and where we want to make the best use of people in those areas that we possibly can. But I have to raise again a concern that I think I've raised probably at least a dozen times in the last number of months, Mr. Speaker, and it has to do with excessive reliance on regulation. This has been raised by other speakers, but it's a point that has to be reinforced and has to be reinforced every time the government comes forward with a Bill with objectives that perhaps are laudable, that are positive, with some appropriate elements to it, but then leaves everything else to regulations. Now, that wouldn't be nearly so awkward and so problematic were it not for the fact that there is no oversight function exercised by this Legislature or an arm of the Legislature.

9:20

The Zander committee reported, back in the early '70s, how important it is that there be an all-party committee of the Legislature to review statutory instruments, including regulations. Although the government adopted many of those regulations, they refused to empower the committee, so we go through this process every session of electing members to it. We have a chairman of it, the Member for Calgary-Shaw. We go through this process of

appointing other members to the committee, and then the committee proceeds, session after session, to be moribund, inactive. It doesn't do anything.

So when we look at a Bill like Bill 5, our responsibility as legislators, I'd respectfully suggest, goes beyond just saying that the principles are fine. There's a mischief there, there's a problem that needs being addressed. A member has come forward and has attempted to address it, but what happens is that legislators are deprived of the opportunity to see whether the regulations are excessive. To me the ultimate irony, Mr. Speaker, is that a government that continually talks about wanting to be more efficient and reducing the size of government would allow the bureaucrats *carte blanche* to write regulations.

I think we've seen before, in the instance of other kinds of Bills that have come forward, that we – the opposition, that is – have been able to identify some defects in those Bills. In some cases we've been able to make some weak Bills stronger and some ineffective Bills somewhat more effective. Think what we'd be able to do, Mr. Speaker, if we had the opportunity to review regulations on a routine basis. I don't know how long this province will go with wanting to leave the ultimate power in the hands of bureaucrats. That, to me, speaks of big government, and I thought that's what this government was adverse to.

DR. WEST: You bet. You've got it right.

MR. DICKSON: My friend the Minister of Transportation and Utilities advises me, Mr. Speaker, that I've got it right. Well, I think that's the case. But why doesn't that minister, then, persuade his colleagues that when we take a good Bill like this, let's provide that those regulations are dealt with in what I submit is the appropriate fashion, in the way the Zander committee recommended? If nothing else, the government could assure that my speaking time would be reduced by about a third, if regulations were handled in that fashion.

So I have difficulty, Mr. Speaker, with the Bill just for that single reason, that the power to make regulations is extensive. There's no accountability. I just fundamentally believe that we're the ones that got elected, not the anonymous bureaucrats in government departments. Until we accept responsibility – now, some misguided souls may say that if regulations were referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, they'd get bogged down because there are thousands and thousands of them. Well, my response to that is twofold.

Presumably, when the government appointed my friend from Calgary-Shaw to be chairman of that committee, they did so because of his proficiency at being able to run meetings in a crisp and efficient fashion. The second reason, Mr. Speaker, is that I defy any MLA to survive in this job without an ability to delegate and task and rank in terms of priorities. You know, this committee would mean that now the government committee, which spends, I expect, huge amounts of time going through these regulations, would have the benefit of some of the efficiencies that members on this side would be able to bring to the committee, and I expect we could free up some of the time that members on the government side currently spend wrestling with regulations.

It's a tough job, Mr. Speaker, and I just can't bear the thought of Conservative MLAs sitting down without any support and having to review those regulations. I'd like to spell them off. My colleagues would like to spell them off. I hope that before we finish at second reading, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake will be able to stand up and say proudly on behalf of the government

that this is the Bill that will not only show leadership in terms of the substantive portion of the Bill, but this will be the Bill where we make the Member for Calgary-Shaw and the other members on our committee do some work and do the work that they've been elected to do by being on that committee.

So with those concerns, I hope the Member for Lesser Slave Lake is going to embrace that challenge with as much enthusiasm as she had in sponsoring what otherwise is a very sound Bill with some very important objectives. I hope she's going to do that so that I can enthusiastically support this Bill at each of the other readings.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's 9:30. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Bill. I'll be brief, as other members have, certainly.

This Bill has been a long time coming, and if this were the best that one could do, this shell, I'd say it is long, long, long overdue. Hopefully, there'll be regulations that will make some sense and will be able to be debated publicly somewhere. It doesn't appear that they'll be debated in this Legislature, and it does not appear from history that they'll be debated or even discussed or feedback invited from those that are directly involved in the professions from a committee of this House. If in fact that was done, then I would say wholeheartedly that this Bill should be enacted as presented. But that will not be the case, and it's unfortunate that we as elected representatives in this House are put here to review these things, to take these concerns back to our constituents, and to understand that which is happening here. Well, this is not occurring, and it is truly a shame.

Direct access to patients by some of these caregivers is certainly due. The regulations as to how that is delivered should be known by a great number of people, particularly those people in those ridings that are in the outlying regions where there are not the dollars to provide medical care as we do in the cities, to have a doctor close at hand, where you have to have some practitioner who is hands-on, who is right there to deal with the problem.

Now, I would think that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake would want those regulations to be tabled and to be understood in this House. Earlier I saw her waving presumably the regulations as to how this would work. Certainly in her speech earlier she outlined at great length the extent to which this piece of legislation has been studied and to what limits a nurse practitioner will be allowed to practise. It didn't cover the geographic considerations, which I think probably will shape some part of the regulations, but it covered a lot of it.

I would challenge the member opposite, if she really, truly believes that this is a good piece of legislation, to table that document in the House. I would not use the rules of order to challenge it, but certainly she quoted from it and she waved it, and I think one could demand that that be tabled if it was read from, but I will not do that. To show a courtesy to the members of this House and through us to those that we represent, who all have relatives and some connection with this particular piece of legislation, we would ask that she do the right thing and table those documents. Should she not, however, I can still see no other reason not to support this legislation in this reading, because this is second reading. It's speaking to the principle, and the principle of the Bill certainly does a number of things, not the least of which is to save some unnecessary paperwork, some

unnecessary phone calls, and some unnecessary signatures on documents that do not help the patient and, in doing so, directly save some well-needed cash for the delivery of medical services. It also saves some anguish that one would feel should one be found at the extremities of the outward end of the road to know that there is someone there that can in fact deal with something.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for your time, and I'd like to thank the members opposite for bringing this legislation forward. We'd appreciate the consideration of the regulations.

9:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake to close debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Actually, Mr. Speaker, just very briefly, if I can – there are some questions that did come forward – and then we'll deal with them in Committee of the Whole.

Regarding the regulations, we are working with a working group to be able to come forward with a more comprehensive scope of practice. Those regulations will be drawn from the guidelines and the registered nurses that worked through the working document, which will be provided.

Also, in terms of the definition of geographical area, we are looking, as I said in my opening statement, to two different regions: regional health authority 15, which deals with the Peerless Lake, Loon Lake, Trout Lake, and Red Earth areas; the other one is in region 17, and that deals with the Rainbow Lake area. I think those are the two important issues presently, and I'll definitely get more information relative to them in Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Third Reading**
Bill 29
Appropriation Act, 1995

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DINNING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I humbly move third reading of Bill 29, the Appropriation Act, 1995.

THE SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 29 represents the end of the budget cycle for this year. Again, I want to make clear for the record that the Liberal opposition has supported the government in terms of its thrust for an orderly elimination of the deficit. We have quarreled at times with the rapidity with which it's been done and the fact that it's been faster and deeper than set out under the Deficit Elimination Act. So the issue has not been the direction of fiscal policy.

Now, with this Bill, the appropriations Bill, it's interesting that as we've debated the Bill – and I'll just focus on health for a moment. Many of the issues that have come up over the last two months have dealt with policy issues in health. How do you ensure universality? Does universality mean equity? I mean, is it the Canadian system that you in fact must stand in line? Is that the definition of universality? Those are questions that have been asked, but none have been answered. I think it's less of a comment on the hon. Minister of Health, who has been very

forthcoming during estimates debates in the subcommittees. It is I think more a comment on the process, that we often don't talk about issues like the Oregon model, how in fact you go about redesigning health care. In part I was wondering: why is that the case, that we're not dealing in a substantive fashion with those types of issues? It's partly I think the process here, but it's partly the process by which the government has shifted downward to regional health authorities the responsibility for providing health care. It's in a sense balkanized the decision-making.

The reality is that those types of broad policy issues have to be discussed at this forum and the rules of the game have to be set out in this forum so that there's a common standard across all of the regional health authorities. I don't think we have talked about the models that are out there to try and allocate scarce resources among competing ends, such as what has been done in Oregon and some other American states. We really haven't debated that in the House. We see an appropriations Bill with health care getting a significant portion, but we haven't talked about the process by which those funds are allocated. We know that they're going to the regional health authorities, but again we haven't talked about what that implies in an economy where the median age is rising very rapidly. We know that if we were concerned about health care expenditures five years ago, five years from now we're going to be scared silly, given the rapidly aging population and the increasing demands on the health care system.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

So there are concerns that we have as a Liberal opposition that when we look at the big-ticket departments – in the time that I have I'm only going to focus on those – the process by which the government, then, has shifted responsibility to regional boards actually precludes much of the discussion one would like to see in this House in terms of fundamental restructuring, whether it's in health care, education, advanced education, or social services. That's, as I say, a combination both of the way it's been shifted downward but also the process in the House.

Now, with regards to the specific appropriations, two points we want to make with regards to the process we've reached now. You know, we spent 20 days on the main estimates. We spent a couple of days on lotteries, a couple of days on the heritage savings trust fund. Many questions were posed, and from some departments and some ministers we received answers. Now it's in a sense a question of faith that this Bill will go forward – we will vote within a few minutes on it – in the absence of having received answers to many of the questions that we posed. Again, this is an issue of process, but it's a very important issue of process. It's really an issue that possibly the appropriations Bill should be brought later in the session, once all of the questions that have been posed in the House have been answered. It would make more sense then because all of our concerns that we raised in the estimates and the subcommittees would have been addressed. We might not agree with the answers, but at least we would have seen the rationale by the government for the particular set of expenditures that they've undertaken. So again that is a concern we have.

Another issue – and I've raised this in second reading, and I've raised it in Committee of the Whole – is that far too much of the budget and certainly the appropriations process tells us what we're going to spend, where we're going to spend, but not exactly what we're going to get. As a separate parcel to the budget we have A Better Way 2, which are the business plans, but these business

plans themselves primarily tell you what's going to be cut and how the expenditures are going to be managed through time. It doesn't give you specific outcomes. We have on this side of the House really asked for much greater clarity in the business plans and a specific link in the appropriations Bill to specific outcomes. So when you vote on 10 and a half billion dollars, you're also voting on outcome so that Albertans will know what they're getting for their money. We are still in a regime, I think, where Albertans are skeptical of government, skeptical of the ability of government to provide services.

Now, with regards to the specific elements of the Bill – and again this is an issue that I and a number of my colleagues raised in a general sense with the appropriations Bill in stage 2 – it's this issue that we now vote on a gross amount of operating and of capital for a department, but there's not that specific link between the vote and how that money is spent. I mean, *ex post* we'll see what has happened in public accounts, but it's almost notional where you see the dollar figures next to a particular vote in a department. That's like: well, this is what we think may happen, but it's certainly not a guarantee. It almost reduces, we think, the requirement that government think out very carefully its expenditure plan, because they know they can always recontract without having to come forward to the Legislature, without having to rationalize why funds have been reallocated among various votes or programs, and we think that is an issue of concern.

The other issue that we've raised – and since we're in third reading, we're speaking of principle, not the details of the Bill, because again, Mr. Speaker, we've spoken at length about the details of the estimates during the estimates process, so we restrict our comments at this stage to general concerns – is the role that dedicated expenditure plays. Again, dedicated expenditures may provide some set of signals for departments to increase their revenues by increasing user fees on Albertans, which may be good, but government departments have a very difficult time determining the cost of providing a service. How much is too much? For many of these services provided by government there is no competition in the marketplace because the government is the sole provider. So you have the problem that you don't have competitive forces out there restraining the excesses of government in terms of the user fees charged; it's a monopolist.

9:40

The second point is that those funds stay in the department which generated them. Again, that doesn't make very much sense because funds accrue to the provincial government and should be allocated across departments on the basis of need, not on the basis of where they're generated. If it was simply on the basis of where they were generated, the Department of Energy would be a very, very wealthy department and other departments would be very much strapped for cash. So there are a number of issues here. This is going to show up down the road in terms of an administrative bloat and a much greater superstructure than we would otherwise need.

In terms of the budget process itself, on one hand I would commend the Provincial Treasurer, but this budget, more than most, sets out very clearly the macroeconomic assumptions underlying the budget. It sets out the sensitivities of the budget estimates to changes in the price of oil, the price of natural gas, interest rates, et cetera, and that's a very welcome step forward. However, what the budget also does is set out a number of these cushions, and although we're talking about the appropriations Bill, we're actually talking about the budget process itself. We see that a variety of cushions have now been set up in the budget. Why

have these been set up? Well, we're going to see very shortly why, because as we come to debate on Bill 6, we see the rationale for why the budget is as it is.

So with those comments I'll just say that the government has made significant progress in terms of the clarity of its financial accounts and certainly setting out the macroeconomic context for the budget. We have thought and continue to think that the process by which the government has imposed the cuts leaves a lot to be desired, even though we agree with the general tendency of an orderly elimination of the deficit, because we supported the Deficit Elimination Act. We have specific concerns, then, about the appropriations process, the failure to link the appropriations to specific outcomes. We have concerns about the process of earmarking your dedicated revenues.

With those comments, I will take my place.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak to Bill 29, the Appropriation Act, 1995. I rise to speak because I don't want Albertans to have the improper perception based on what the hon. Treasurer said on April 6, 1995, page 1115 of *Hansard*, where he went on to say: "Stay the course. Stay out of our pockets. Do what needs to be done. Get it done, and get it done fast, and don't blink." You know, that creates this improper perception out there, for someone who is not in this Assembly may actually believe some of that. Although the Treasurer has stated these words, he hasn't given any evidence to Albertans or to this Assembly that in fact they are getting value for the money that he is expending on their behalf.

Additionally, he's stating that there's no new money, that there are no new taxes. Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, when I take a look at a long listing here of the many new fees, in fact, new moneys which the Treasurer has taken from Albertans, from hardworking Albertans' pockets, I take a look for those families that want to go on a Sunday outing to one of our parks. The Provincial Parks Act fees have been amended a number of times. We've seen the rates, for example, for firewood increase from \$25 to \$35, the fee for a group to camp in an unimproved site with firewood increase from \$60 to \$80. The list just goes on and on.

Then we go over to the Health Insurance Premiums Act, and that's something that affects all Albertans. No new money? No, Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. Yes, there's lots of new money that the Treasurer is taking out of Albertans' pockets. I see here that the single premium increased from \$30 to \$32 per month. Family premiums – yes, those hardworking Alberta families that are already contributing much of their income by way of tax to the Provincial Treasurer. Now they're going to be giving four additional dollars per month to the Treasurer to cover these programs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make a few points in those areas. When the Treasurer stands up and states that Albertans told him specifically and his government, "Stay out of our pockets," he in fact didn't listen, because there's a very, very long list of new fees, new moneys coming into the Treasurer's pockets. Additionally, there's an increased, a heightened dependence by this government for funding core programs using the earnings of video slot machines. So, yes, the Treasurer is quite correct when he says that times are changing and change isn't pleasant, but he's not correct when he says that there's no

new money, and he certainly hasn't produced any evidence to indicate that we are getting the best possible value for our money.

Mr. Speaker, with those few comments, I'll take my place.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 30
Appropriation (Lottery Fund) Act, 1995

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 30, Appropriation (Lottery Fund) Act, 1995.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, just briefly. This side of the House believes the appropriation of these funds should in fact be as put and grandfathered. Yes, these expenditures are in order. We agree with the expenditures. However, we differ with the method of collection of the funds: through lotteries. Now that it is made, we also disagree with the fact that these funds are generated from the province of Alberta and should be put into the common basket called the general revenue fund and should be disseminated from there for worthy causes regardless of where they're generated.

We do have a great deal of questions to deal with on the moral issues of collecting funds from gambling and taxing on citizens, as we do in this manner. Of course, we've said that many, many times and would not want to hold up the appropriation of these moneys at this time.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

9:50 **Bill 6**
Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 6, the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you. I rise to speak to Bill 6 in third reading. I want to cover some of the issues of principle embodied in the Bill. First and foremost, I want to say that the Liberal opposition fully endorses a debt management plan. We have in fact debated the issue of how much net debt. We think the net debt should be higher, but that is a disagreement about degree, not the intent. We still think front-ending the debt makes more sense than putting it to the back end simply because you free up money faster for use in core programs. We brought forward amendments in that regard, and they were defeated. We also argued that with the unfunded pension liabilities, if one were to raise the amount of net debt, one would want the government's share of unfunded pension liabilities as part of the net debt pay-down, because why would you put external bondholders to an advantage over Albertans who've invested their blood, sweat, and toil in the province? However, we lost those battles and debates in committee. Notwithstanding that, we will support the debt component of the Bill.

The other issue that we have debated extensively in the House is the issue of the balanced budget, and again let me go on record as stating that we support the principle of a balanced budget. In fact, I would point out that there were no amendments brought in in that regard to the House. So the issue, though, really is: we tried to be constructive and point out some of the problems that

the hon. Provincial Treasurer might have overlooked because he doesn't have experience in local politics. He hasn't been a councillor. He hasn't been a mayor. He hasn't been an alderman. Little does he realize that given the intent of this Bill, to balance the budget within a year, that should the hon. Provincial Treasurer find in the second quarter, as the deputy minister comes and says, "You know, the cushion's gone; we've got problems," this Bill then requires the hon. Provincial Treasurer in the third and fourth quarters of that year, within that year, to cut transfers to hospitals, regional health authorities. It requires cuts to local government, municipalities, cuts to police, cuts to firemen, cuts to every type of health care worker, and cuts to teachers. It requires just a massive downloading of any revenue shortfall that comes about, not because of any imprudence by the Provincial Treasurer but because of a shortfall in revenues coming in. That shortfall now is downloaded completely to local government with no cushion and within the fiscal year.

That's the issue that we tried bringing to the Provincial Treasurer's notice, that there is no planning horizon in this Bill. If the worst case scenario occurs, this Bill requires the Provincial Treasurer to basically put the boots to local government. We certainly, having a wealth of experience on this side of the House in local government, viewed this as being an issue that should be brought to the attention of the hon. Provincial Treasurer. We have done so, but he has not chosen to introduce any amendments.

Again who can argue with the notion of a balanced budget? But the issue, the principle is: how do you do it in a way that you don't devastate local government, school boards, and hospitals? We think that in fact there perhaps has not been adequate thought given to this. Yet it's clear, given the temper of the times, that Albertans feel that they want in a sense a tight rein on government as opposed to any discretion. I certainly can tell you from talking to various groups that they feel, given that this is a government that had voted for nine successive deficits, that they wanted no discretion allowed government with regards to any slack on a balanced budget. So we, listening to Albertans, wholeheartedly endorse the notion set out in this Bill and certainly will support both the debt retirement component of it and the balanced budget component of it.

With those comments, I will take my seat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Edmonton-Roper.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, no.

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard comments of "oh, no" as soon as I stood up. I'm certain that they're all terrified now. They're shaking in their boots, and they're wondering what it is that I'm going to say that they could digest. Now, I'm not sure that that's entirely possible, but I'm going to give it my best shot here today.

I know in speaking to Bill 6 earlier, either in second reading or in committee stage, that I made it perfectly clear that I supported the principle of a balanced budget and a debt retirement Act. In terms of supporting a balanced budget, there wasn't anyone in Alberta that came up to any one of us that has been elected to this Legislature over the past couple of years and said: "You know what you've got to do? You've got to run deficit budgets." There isn't anybody that's ever said that, and nobody ever will, not only in Alberta but anywhere across this country. As a matter of fact, I believe we have five provinces that have balanced their budgets, ahead of Alberta I might add, because we still do not

have a balanced budget yet in this province. We've got five provinces across the land that have already done exactly that: they've balanced their budgets. I might add, they weren't the Dick Johnston type with balancing budgets. That balancing act does not exist anymore. It happened once in this province, and of course it was a good thing there was an opposition at that time, those watchdogs, those pit bulls, those bulldogs that were ready, willing, and able to attack the movement that wasn't appropriate by this government.

No one will argue the idea of a balanced budget. In fact, there isn't anyone on this side of the House that did not support the Deficit Elimination Act when that came into debate. No one will argue that we are headed towards a balanced budget in Alberta. Mind you, we're still a ways away from it. We've got \$500 million more to pare off next year, and that's going to be a feat that the Provincial Treasurer's going to have to deal with. I'm certain that with the help of the opposition, he's going to be coming out of that looking quite well.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the debt retirement part of this Bill, I had some real difficulty with the amount of debt that we would consider retiring. What the title of this Bill suggests is that we will retire our debt. So when you talk about a balanced budget and a debt retirement Act – you know, if I said that to any of my constituents, they'd say, "Chadi, you'd be a fool not to support that," and they're right. They're absolutely right. But if I opened the Bill up and I showed them that all we're after here is the reduction of our \$32 billion debt, that we're only considering reducing it by \$8 billion – in other words, somewhere in the range of about 25 percent is all that we're really doing here, that we're trying to eliminate, and we're going to do that over a number of years. We're talking about, I believe, 25 years. It's absolutely ridiculous. Eight billion dollars over 25 years still leaves us with a huge debt in this province.

I've argued time and time again that our net debt as described by the Provincial Treasurer is probably not the \$8 billion that he talks about, and I think that when we talk about building cushions, we ought to be building cushions into this. Otherwise, it's not worth our while to only reduce our debt as the Bill describes in section 5(1): "not less than \$100 000 000 in each fiscal year to reduce Crown debt until the Crown debt is \$0." That will take us forever. My grandchildren still wouldn't be out of debt in this province if this were the case.

We need to have a more aggressive debt reduction, and we need to do it now. It is not possible to suggest that \$100 million in each year will reduce the debt to zero within 25 years, as talked about in the debt retirement schedule. It is not possible to do it in 50 years. It's not possible to do it in 100 years, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] If members on the opposite side of the House who are chirping to one another, talking about whether or not I'm right – stand up and tell me that I'm wrong. Stand up and tell that I'm wrong.

There is a dispute with respect to what is the net debt. The net debt, \$8 billion, Mr. Speaker, is not correct in my view. We need to be looking at something a bit more appropriate than that, and I think that I would support the idea in a second if we were to talk about a net debt being in the range of about \$15 billion to \$16 billion. But even if we were talking about a net debt here, to reduce the net debt, we will have assets that cannot be reduced or liquidated that quickly. They cannot be sold either, perhaps, to consider reducing our debt load. We have a \$32 billion debt in this province, and the minister responsible for economic development for some reason doesn't acknowledge that. He hasn't gotten up and spoken in debate at all. I haven't heard him, anyway, talk about the total debt, talk about this Bill. Never once. All we talk

about is the net debt and not the overall total debt of \$32 billion. That's what we have to deal with.

10:00

Then, the area that concerns me greatly, Mr. Speaker, is loans that are considered receivables. Now, I have a great deal of difficulty believing that there are funds here that were considered receivables which were applied in calculating the net debt. Those loans that you have that are receivables are only as good as the people that are holding them. Some of them we know already we aren't going to collect. So we've got to be able to come clean now and say: "These are the ones that we know we can't collect. We feel we're not going to collect them." We got to build cushions in these receivables that we've got. That's one thing that we haven't done. We've created cushions on the revenue side, but we certainly haven't even looked at cushions on the liability side. That has to be looked at. That has to be considered when we start talking about a net debt.

That is where my concern lies. It doesn't lie with the principle of the Bill of debt retirement, not one iota. But I believe that, as I would imagine most Members in this Legislative Assembly tonight believe, third reading will go ahead on Bill 6 whether the arguments are listened to or not. I guess maybe down the road these comments that I make today, I'll be able to pull out the *Hansard* and say, "You know, it was April 11, 1995, when I said that the net debt is a ridiculous figure embedded in this Bill, and it's going to create problems for us down the road, and no one, and especially the government side, was listening to that."

Now where would we go wrong, Mr. Speaker, if we were to eliminate our debt or consider eliminating our debt a lot quicker than we plan for in Bill 6? How could we go wrong? How could we go wrong when we take assets that we've got and start to liquidate the assets and apply them towards the debt? I talk about things like the Vencap loan. I talk about things like the amount of funds that go towards the Alberta Opportunity Company that has served its purpose and is now being duplicated by another part of government, particularly our federal government, with regard to FBDB. No consideration at all in that respect. I talk about things like the Alberta corporate income tax collection where the Provincial Treasurer tried to make a deal with the federal government and did not succeed.

So we have a great number of people that are legislators in this Assembly today, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps never really had to sweat it out and cut those cheques to Alberta corporate income tax and cut those cheques to the federal income tax department. It's awfully hard, for me anyway, to sit back and accept that there are a great deal of Albertans that work so hard and pay their money in many different ways to the province. With little regard those funds go and are being spent. When you offer ways that you could save some money, save some money so those funds could go towards paying off the debt, it's not listened to, like it doesn't matter. That is really disturbing to me.

I'm going to close off by saying that the principle of the Bill is right. The amount that the Provincial Treasurer suggests in the Bill in terms of net debt is totally wrong. I think that in the future he'll begin to realize that.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to just get up and make a few brief comments in light of the fact that the

member opposite spoke. I come from a background very similar to his. Unfortunately, I assume, from all I've heard about his great wealth, that I have not been quite as successful as he has, but I do have to pay my taxes like he does. I am just in the process of, unfortunately, paying Alberta corporate income tax. I'd pay less tax if I lived in Newfoundland or Saskatchewan, but it is a situation that I am familiar with. I also pay federal tax, which I'm just in the process of paying. So I know what it's like to pay tax.

Unfortunately, I have to disagree with the member opposite in regards to the way we look at our debt. I look at it, quite frankly, as seriously as he does because it affects me as it affects him. I think we are going about it the right way. I honestly and truly believe that. One of the reasons I got involved in politics was that I was concerned about a fiscal agenda and a concern that I didn't see was happening in past governments. So I'm very concerned about it. I only see my children, my four girls, having a future in Alberta if we control this debt and this so-called net debt. Fundamentally, we have to do that. We have to control it. I've looked at our plan. I've looked carefully at their plan, and speaking honestly, Mr. Speaker, I think our plan will work. I know it will work, I think it's the best way to go, and we must stay the course.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, must rise to speak at third reading of Bill 6, the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act, and I can only say congratulations to the Treasurer. It's about time. He's been through it nine deficit budgets and finally – it only took nine years. Some people skip one year of school and repeat it. No, the Treasurer did it nine times, but finally, I have to say, he's got it right.

The unfortunate part here, Mr. Speaker, as my colleague alluded to, is that at the end of this debt retirement – in fact, it's not at all retired, because there's plenty there to still play around, to the tune of \$25 billion, and that's really disappointing. So once again it's an illusion that we're retiring all of our debt when we're really not. However, the principle and the direction is a hundred percent correct, and I will be supporting this Bill.

MR. DINNING: I can't help but rise and respond to the magnanimity from the other side of the House and from my learned colleague, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I do want to make three points, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Hold your questions to yourselves, and I will do my best to be brief.

I loved the comment of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud saying that the Treasurer may not have municipal experience. But I look around this side of the Chamber, and I see the Member for Rocky Mountain House, and I see the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I see the Member for Peace River, the Member for Olds-Didsbury, the Member for Calgary-Currie, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, Mr. Speaker, and they all have municipal experience. They know what people are saying. Here is a member across the way who's been at the university all of his life and never been in touch with what people are thinking in the community. I would suggest to him that he is woefully out of touch when he suggests that taxpayers in municipalities or taxpayers at the school board level are willing to tolerate governments that live beyond their means. So when he says downloading, I say "hooley" to him, that there is no such thing as

downloading and that those municipal governments are just as capable of living within their means as this government now says that we will live within our means. Those taxpayers, those municipal councillors, those school trustees are very capable, and they will live within their means, as this government will, Mr. Speaker. We will cut our cloth to live within the taxpayers' means.

The member spoke of vision. I can think of a most visionary document of late. It is called the 2020 Vision, Mr. Speaker. When I went to New York they had received this by a little facsimile copier delivery, and they said not that it was a vision. They made suggestions that this was not a vision; it was an hallucination. It was something that they thought: "Well, it's interesting that the Liberals know how to count. They've probably got 10 toes and 11 fingers, but it doesn't add up," is what they suggested.

10:10

I would suggest to the hon. member that it's very clear in policy statement 9 what the Liberal agenda is really all about. He said: we don't agree with deficits. But then on March 24, he issued a press release that said: not necessarily deficits but deficits if necessary. Here it is, Mr. Speaker. It was tabled in this Assembly, so I'll read it, the Liberal agenda: a Liberal government would transfer all liquid cash and marketable securities of the heritage fund to the debt retirement and fiscal stabilization fund. In British Columbia it's called a budget stabilization fund, quite appropriately named the BS fund, and this is another BS fund, Mr. Speaker. They would go on to ensure that there are sufficient liquid assets available to cover any increase in annual debt servicing costs, allowing the annual accelerated payment of debt principal in the early years of the debt elimination plan and to provide for fiscal stabilization and reinvestment within the Alberta economy as needed. He's saying he would use the heritage fund to invest in the Alberta economy, the very stuff that he's criticizing us for when the government did it.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, what's his agenda? He said: we'll run deficits, and we'll drain the heritage fund tank to pay for that overspending. We know what overspending he's going to do. He said on throne speech day, when they did their speech to the throne, that they were going to spend \$1.9 billion more this year than we take in, and next year they would run another deficit not of \$1, not of a million dollars but \$1.5 billion, Mr. Speaker.

MR. LUND: How much?

MR. DINNING: "How much?" did you say? I thought you said that, Rocky Mountain House. Their fiscal plan for '96-97 is \$1.5 billion. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans have expressed their attitude towards it.

The member across the way says it's not aggressive enough.

MR. CHADI: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Point of order by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. Would you share with us the citation?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. CHADI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's *Beauchesne* 482. Would the member entertain a question?

MR. DINNING: No, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said I was not aggressive enough, that Bill 6 was not aggressive enough. Here we are. After four years we will have reduced our spending by 20 percent, \$2.7 billion. What the hon. member is saying is that that's not enough. He's saying it's not enough, that we have to cut more than \$2.7 billion. That's what he's saying. He's saying that we have to cut more than \$2.7 billion so we can accelerate payment on the debt. I would say that this is a perfect case, typical Liberal line of sucking and blowing at the very same time. There they are tonight, saying it's not enough; this afternoon they said it was too much. Tomorrow night they'll say it's too much, and tomorrow afternoon they'll say it's too little. It's like the Premier said: it's a military party across the way. They're a marching party. Left, right, left, right, left, right, but we don't know where they are on any given day.

As we vote on Bill 6 – and the government side I know will vote for it; I hope the boys across the way will as well – I would ask the members, having made the points they have made tonight, as the Premier said: just stay the course, gents; stay the course, and you'll arrive at the Armageddon that your party leader has designed for you.

Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 10 Alberta Heritage Scholarship Amendment Act, 1995

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 10, Alberta Heritage Scholarship Amendment Act, 1995.

MR. DICKSON: The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek I see, Mr. Speaker, is concerned that I was going to speak to Bill 10, but I can give her some assurance that it'll be particularly brief.

I think the concern is this, Mr. Speaker. The principle's been raised before by other speakers and certainly by the advanced education critic for the opposition. There's a concern that at a time we want to encourage more money being made available to our students in terms of graduate studies, university studies, and postsecondary studies generally, what we find is an element of Bill 10 which may be a disincentive, the element being, of course, the potential that donors are going to be charged fees for the privilege of being able to contribute to a scholarship fund. It just seems to be so illogical. It seems to be so counterproductive that at a time we want more Alberta corporations and societies and wealthy Albertans to make money available for postsecondary education, here in Bill 10 what we would do is take a step backwards and create an obstacle, an impediment, to those people contributing money to foundations for postsecondary education. That's a concern that's been raised before. We continue to feel that that's a problem, particularly in the area of private donors.

There are some positive elements to Bill 10, but I hope that the government, if not in this session in a future session, will come back and revisit this, because we think it is problematic, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much.

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, let me respond to that concern briefly, and then perhaps we'd be ready to move the question. Let me be clear that inasmuch as funding flows directly into this scholarship fund, if there are no conditions, there are no fees. If the contributor insists that there be particular conditions that have to be carried out, then it seems only fair that they should pay those fees. If they don't pay for them, the taxpayers of Alberta must pay for them, and they would find themselves having to pay those fees wherever they might set up a scholarship fund.

So we believe that what we've done here is quite fair, and with those closing comments I move third reading of Bill 10.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 11 Students Finance Amendment Act, 1995

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a productive debate in second reading and Committee of the Whole, and I'll be responding in writing directly to the hon. members on the questions they've asked. Therefore, I move third reading of Bill 11.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be very brief with the comments to Bill 11, Students Finance Amendment Act, 1995.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing is that if we receive answers to some of our questions after the Bills are passed into law, I have a bit of a problem with that, because that certainly is far from democratic. I would, however, point out one particular area that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has requested for a commitment: that the regulations that will be amended by Bill 11 will in fact be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I would anticipate that either the mover of the Bill or in fact the minister would make that commitment prior to closing debate and calling for the question.

10:20

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

[At 10:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

