Now, while the process worked in detecting the fraudulent ballots, the process that the returning officer was to follow wasn't as clear. So one of the changes being proposed in this bill is an amendment which will have a person appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs make a determination on those special ballots that were set aside by the returning officer, and this will help close the gap in that process.

Mr. Chairman, the Leader of the Official Opposition also expressed concern that the bill allows too much discretion to local municipalities. Again, I've heard in this Assembly the Leader of the Opposition criticize the government for treating municipalities like children, and now he says we shouldn't give those municipalities the discretion to customize their own voting process. What works in a municipality of 1 million people is a lot different than what works in a village of several hundred, and our committee heard this request time and time again during the hearings throughout the province.

Finally, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had concerns during second reading around the process of special ballots and whether direct contact is made by the returning officer with the person requesting the special ballot. The process in this legislation regarding special ballots will mirror what is currently in the provincial Election Act. Therefore, special ballots could be requested by e-mail, and there would not be direct contact. However, the important thing for the member to remember is that the special ballot only has importance when it is returned. He should be aware that when a person requests a special ballot and returns it, he or she must also sign a declaration similar to what is signed when voting in person. That declaration is a legal document, and if it is determined to be fraudulent, then appropriate court action will occur, as in fact it did in ward 10.

All of these changes are designed to enable as many people as possible to participate in municipal elections. Both members that I referred to this evening mentioned in their remarks the concern about the low voter turnout. Our committee was also concerned about that and cognizant of the fact of that when it recommended many of the changes in the proposed bill.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to discussion in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 28
Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise tonight in Committee of the Whole on Bill 28, the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2006. I just want to take a few minutes to respond to some comments made by members of the opposition during second reading. The Leader of the Official Opposition stated during second reading:

> For democracy to have legitimacy and for elected members to have legitimacy themselves, the citizens [and] the voters in any society need to have confidence that their election processes and mechanics are working properly. Unfortunately, those election processes and mechanics broke down pretty badly in the last municipal election in Calgary.

Well, as so often is the case in this House, the Leader of the Official Opposition is wrong.

The election processes in Calgary absolutely worked in the 2004 municipal election. The current process in place caught the attempted fraudulent voting, and there was not one special ballot that was in dispute that made it into the system. The process was caught, and the people have been charged with voter fraud.