

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 14, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/02/14

[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
head: the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Moved by Mr. Brassard:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable Gordon Towers, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Debate adjourned]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MR. MITCHELL: My time hasn't started yet. They keep this up and I'm going for a full hour and a half. I'm going to speak slowly. I'm going to savour every minute. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MR. MITCHELL: I know it's been a long session, Mr. Speaker. They're already looking a little ragged.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the government's Speech from the Throne, and I must say that I cannot support the government in its effort. In fact, there was precious little in that Speech from the Throne to support, even if I were inclined to do so.

If anything defines that Speech from the Throne, it is, I think, two characteristics. One is that it is extremely light, that it is bereft of ideas, that at this juncture in the debate over restructuring government, over balancing the budget, over finding and securing fiscal responsibility at this juncture in that debate, the government seems to be absolutely at a loss for ideas on how to take the next step. It's very likely that they will balance the budget. Mr. Speaker, balancing the budget is not an end in itself. It is a step along the way to a better Alberta, and unless we define what that Alberta is and where we are going, it will be impossible for government, for leadership in this province ever to get us to that kind of place.

A second characteristic of this throne speech is captured in the government's reference to Albertans as "customers." It seems that they have taken this business model of the world and applied it to every last feature, every last aspect of what they do as a government and have reduced Albertans to customers, Mr. Speaker. Let me emphasize that a five-year-old child who cannot get kindergarten because their parents can't afford it is not a customer. An Albertan who needs health care when they need it is not a customer. A senior who is leaving his or her home because of restructuring of seniors' benefits is not a customer. That word captures exactly where this government is, and where they are is an awfully long way from where this government, the government of Alberta, in fact, should be.

The government of Alberta has always had a sense of providing service to Albertans, of working with Albertans to build our communities to make this place better. This government has long since forgotten that it is an extension of our community, that they are here to serve Albertans, that they are not here in some kind of thwarted business sense to exploit Albertans as customers or to make some kind of profit from Albertans.

When we assess where this province is, Mr. Speaker, where the government has brought us in the last two and a half years, it's not a particularly pretty sight. They are one-half of the way, if that, through their cuts. In fact, there is some question as to whether or not they're even one-half of the way through the cuts. They have announced about one-half of their cuts, about \$1.1 billion, but they have not even effected all of that \$1.1 billion, and there is another billion to go in cuts over the next year.

I talked this afternoon in the Legislature about the chaos that the Minister of Health has recognized in her own health care system as a result of her ill-conceived approach to cutting health care. And chaos, Mr. Speaker, becomes an operative word in describing what has already occurred within this province with what the government is doing to this province. A year from now we will have chaos compounded upon chaos, and it will not be the kind of province that most of us have appreciated, have grown up with, and have understood that we could be proud to live within.

We see a disturbing affront to democracy. We see a disturbing centralization of power. I used to say it was in downtown Edmonton, but in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is now going directly into the Premier's office. It started with the government trying to gut the power of school boards by taking away their power to tax. If school boards don't have the power to tax, they simply do not have power. Compounding that, of course, was the government's desire to take away their authority, for example, to appoint superintendents. So they don't want powerful school boards because that power can be ranged against this government and what it wants to do in some unfettered way.

Not only that. We found the former Municipal Affairs minister in a public forum twice in fact talking about reducing the number of elected municipal authorities from 2,300 to 400. We all know there needs to be some kind of amalgamation to achieve greater efficiency, but at some point between 2,300 elected officials and 400 we pass efficiency and get into this government's desire to have fewer and fewer elected municipal authorities who have their own political base, their own power so that they could resist the government and what the government wants to do.

Everywhere we go in this province people are telling us they want their regional health authorities elected, because regional health authorities spend a great deal of Albertan's money and in a very, very important area of service delivery for Albertans. This government has categorically resisted the desire of Albertans to have their regional health authorities elected. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Because if they're not elected, they don't have a political base. And if they don't have a political base, they cannot resist what this government wants to do without any resistance.

Compounding all that, Mr. Speaker, was the emergence, the passing of Bill 41 in the last session of the Legislature so that the government could privatize what it wants to privatize. We were anticipating Bill 57, which would further that initiative, taking away the right of the Legislature to debate important privatization initiatives and important levying of fees on Albertans. These are taxes, Mr. Speaker, these fees. We don't know yet what's worse: having Bill 57 or not having Bill 57. Either way, it represents a stronger centralization of power, a gutting of the role of the

Legislative Assembly, placing more power in the office of the Premier so that he can do what he wants to do without any kind of resistance to what it is that he wants to do. That is a very disturbing trend.

It wasn't the provincial government that built this province all by itself. It was local officials, school boards, and municipalities: people who gave up their time and their resources to their communities to build those communities. It's the government that didn't balance its budgets. It's the government, on the other hand, that is turning around and gutting the local authorities that have built our communities, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the Premier said some time ago in Vancouver when he was off accepting some kind of award that he had solved the budgeting problem on the cost side. Nothing, Mr. Speaker, could be further from the truth. Sixty percent of the deficit reduction has come from the revenue side. Four hundred million of that has come from tax increases: fees and premiums. By any other name, these are taxes, on the backs of children, in fact, on the backs of the sick, on the backs of seniors. What is particularly disturbing about this revenue side solution . . .

DR. WEST: Tax is universal whether you use it or not.

8:10

MR. MITCHELL: Well, health care premiums are like that, Mr. Minister. Health care premiums you have to pay, don't you, whether you use it or not.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another feature of the revenue side solution to the budget problem . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order please.

MR. MITCHELL: . . . is the reliance of this government on video lottery terminal gambling revenues. When the Premier took over, gambling revenues to government were about \$125 million. In just over two years those revenues have gone up to almost \$300 million, \$400 million now. Give me \$400 million. So in two years they have almost quadrupled under the direction of this Premier. That, Mr. Speaker, is an addiction. It is an addiction on the part of this government.

We are in the process of relying more and more upon video lottery terminal, video slot machine revenues, creating an erosion of our community, an affront to our children, an affront to our families. That is a very disturbing trend. What this amounts to is a government that in its headlong, thoughtless, and ill-conceived approach to balancing the budget has really forgotten people. They have forgotten community, they have forgotten social network, they have forgotten the very fabric and fibre of what it is to live in this province, of what has made this province as great a place as it is.

One hundred thousand children live in poverty in this province. Mr. Speaker, we could go home to our nice homes and our comfortable family relationships and all the advantages that people like us in places like this have, but we can never put aside the fact that there are a hundred thousand children in this province living in poverty, and it takes something out of every last one of us. It is in fact shameful, and it isn't enough for any government to say: "We have balanced the budget. Everything is better. The world will be better. To heck with the community, to heck with children, and to heck with the families and the people who live in this province." That was one of the things that we found particularly unsettling when we looked at that throne speech,

because none of this had been addressed. None of this had been addressed. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order.

MR. MITCHELL: In the process of balancing the budget, Mr. Speaker, they have forgotten that there is more to government, there is more to our society than simply a balanced budget. A balanced budget is a very important step along the way to a better place, but unless we define it, unless we begin to assess the nature of our communities, we will not be able to preserve them and build upon them.

A community, Mr. Speaker, is trust among neighbours, whether they're next door or whether they're across the province, whether they look like us, whether they think like us, whether they are different from us. It is a social network that we can rely upon and that in this province for much of the past until recently we have been able, in fact, to rely upon. The government has broken that network. Through a blind adherence to a political ideology, the social fabric of Alberta has literally been torn. They have abandoned the "we" and replaced it with the "I." Alberta has become rich versus poor, urban versus rural, employed versus unemployed. And it is not an implicit, it is an explicit philosophy that is emerging from this government, expressed among others by this member from Medicine Hat, that somehow Albertans would adhere to the idea of - he says every man - every person for himself or herself.

It has never been - it has never been - that this province and our society has been premised upon that kind of philosophy: every person for him or herself. He says every man for himself, of course, forgetting that over 50 percent of Albertans actually happen to be women. What we have always had in this province is a sense of community, where you give up something for the community so it's strong for people who need it when they need it and just perhaps it will be there for you when you need it. That's the nature of a social fabric and a social network that works to create a rich, rewarding, gratifying, dignified place to live. We are losing that, Mr. Speaker, and nothing in that throne speech - nothing in that throne speech - is designed to recover that or to build upon what we've had in our communities.

What makes the community flourish are healthy, deep roots, and ensuring that these roots remain that way is a responsibility of government. The Liberals believe this government has not been caring for the roots of our community, and in the process of cleaning up the fiscal mess that it created after eight consecutive deficit budgets, unrelenting as they are, after a Premier who's voted for five consecutive deficit budgets, 18 and a half billion dollars of deficit spending, they have severely disrupted the root system of Alberta. The roots that allow a community to flourish, Mr. Speaker, in a place like this are the basic responsibilities of government, and they are generally three things. They are a high-quality health care system that is available for everyone, an education system which will prepare our young people for the realities of the world at an increasingly harsh internationally competitive global economy, and a social safety net that those in need can use without losing their dignity and without losing their self-worth. A strong community comes with a strong sense of security.

You know, one of the most startling observations that people are making about our health care system is that more and more Albertans are feeling a sense of fear and uncertainty about that health care system: fear of whether or not the system will fail

when they need it the most, fear of a system so overwrought and potentially so underfunded that people become less important than numbers, fear of an expensive two-tiered private health care system inaccessible to most Albertans.

They can laugh, Mr. Speaker, but you know, as long as they're laughing, it proves that they're not listening. We have been across this province, I and my caucus colleagues, members of this party, and we are hearing very, very clearly that people are disturbed about the arrogance, this kind of arrogance, and that they are not being listened to by government. Seventy percent of Albertans are saying that they are concerned about the manner in which health care services are being provided and the manner in which the health care system is being cut.

Government must take steps to instill some confidence in a system that we had grown to have confidence in and in a system that we simply cannot allow to fail. We are committed to doing that, Mr. Speaker, and we have a series of initiatives, several of which I will mention this evening to draw them to the government's attention. We believe our health care system has to adhere strictly to the five principles of the Canada Health Act, and for the benefit of this government, which undoubtedly has forgotten what those might be, I will list them. They are: portability, comprehensiveness, publicly administered, accessibility, and universality. Our health care system has been premised upon those, and one of the reasons it is a leading value in this province and in this country, one of the reasons it is a beacon around the world for quality health care is because of its adherence to those five important principles. We are going to ask the government with my first Bill to vote to include those five principles in this government's health care legislation. It will be a very important test for these MLAs to see exactly where they stand on that particular initiative.

8:20

We will also push this government to ensure regional health authorities are accountable to the communities they serve. We must end the appointment of board members. These people must be elected. We will continue to demand this government establish a meaningful independent health care review committee that reports to the people of Alberta through their Legislature rather than through a closed-door meeting with the Minister of Health. We will ask government to stop simply talking about additional funding for home care support and community-based health care, and we will demand that they simply do it. We will ask government to stop talking about a work force adjustment strategy, and we will demand that they simply do it. It's time, Mr. Speaker, that the thousands of health care workers who have lost their jobs in this province get a chance to get back to work and build this province. We will be calling on this government to prepare, develop, and implement a safe ambulance and patient transfer system.

The Liberal opposition believes strongly that the most important legacy we can leave future generations is an education system which will enable them to compete in an increasingly harsh and challenging global marketplace. The people of Alberta agree with us, and they do not particularly agree with this government. In a recent poll 67 percent of Albertans indicated their dismay with what this government is doing to the education system.

We put an emphasis and a priority on early childhood education. Numerous studies both here in Canada and in other parts of the world all come to the same conclusion: kindergarten is the best way to prepare a child for the challenges that lie ahead. There are no studies to our knowledge that demonstrate the

opposite, but the government continuously and repeatedly claims that the opposite is in fact the case. The Liberal opposition will be introducing a Bill to require that 400 hours of kindergarten be offered to the five-year-old students of this province.

We're also very concerned that more and more the government is relying upon the property tax to fund education. There isn't particularly a philosophical relationship between property and education. In fact, Mr. Speaker, education is a much broader social good and should be tied more heavily to general revenue funding. Therefore, we are going to set as an objective and we are going to work towards a more appropriate split, where 80 percent of education will be funded out of general revenues, so that that can reflect the broader social importance of education to the people of this province, and 20 percent of education funding will rely upon the property tax so that school boards can tax and therefore have the power that comes with that taxation. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor, hon. members. [interjections] Order.

MR. MITCHELL: We believe, Mr. Speaker, that education doesn't stop at grade 12 but that postsecondary education is critically important for the future of our children, for the future of this province, for any competitive economic edge that we will ever have in the world. We are a population of 2 and a half million people in a world of 5 billion people. It's not as though we're going to have an easy time competing in that international marketplace. One of the huge advantages we have is education, one of the huge advantages we have is the entrepreneurial spirit of the people of this province which can be underlined and enhanced by education, and we will lose and our children will lose if we allow the erosion of our postsecondary institutions and programs to continue.

Education makes a difference, and despite the anti-intellectual sentiment coming from government benches, education makes a difference. Adults with a postsecondary education live healthier life-styles, are less often unemployed, make fewer demands on the criminal justice system, and are more likely to participate in activities which build the community. We are going to ask this government to vote for a motion to set a participation goal in postsecondary education, a goal that says clearly that we want all our high school graduates to gain the advantage of a postsecondary school program.

You can't build on the future, Mr. Speaker, if you forget the past, and there is nothing more insidious than turning on those people who built this province and built our communities. There is nothing more discouraging for them and nothing more insidious than changing the rules of the game after seniors in this province are no longer able to play the game and recover from the changes in the rules. We simply cannot sit by and watch this government change and erode the quality of life, create uncertainty and insecurity for seniors in this province who built this province.

I'd just like to highlight one particularly inconsiderate statement by a Minister of Municipal Affairs, former at that, who said in response to seniors who were concerned about having to leave their homes or their current places of residence because of changes to the cap in rental charges on seniors' housing: well, they can move if they can't afford it. I'd like to ask that minister to talk about how somebody 85 or 86 can simply move because they can't afford it. It's very callous. It's very inconsiderate government, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order Clarification

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities is rising on a point of order.

DR. WEST: A point of clarification. I would like to know who the former Minister of Municipal Affairs was that made the alleged statement that this individual just said. I want him to clarify who that was, and then I want a retraction, in the fact that it was never made.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, we are going to be asking this government to build . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities may wish to rise on a point of order, which is about the only basis on which the minister can rise, and state the point of order.

DR. WEST: Standing Order 23(i): another member imputes a false statement or a false motive. I would like the individual who made the statement that a former Minister of Municipal Affairs said that seniors should get out if they can't afford it to clarify that or retract it.

MR. MITCHELL: We'll check the Blues.
We, Mr. Speaker, are going to . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order please. The Chair believes the point of order really was a question as to whether or not the Leader of the Opposition was referring to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. That isn't the way the minister stated his point of order, but the Chair believes that's what the point of the hon. minister was.

MR. MITCHELL: I was referring to that minister, Mr. Speaker, and if he's forgotten what he said, I retract any reference to it.

8:30 Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: We are going to be demanding that this government reassess seniors' benefits programs and build them from the ground up after effectively consulting with seniors who are willing to play their part in reducing the deficit but who want to be treated fairly and who want to be listened to.

Communities aren't built with people who don't have work, Mr. Speaker. While this government claims it has created thousands more jobs, there is real question about the quality of those jobs and the numbers. What we keep learning is that jobs are being created but they are part-time, temporary, dead-end jobs. In a province where our children – many of us need long-term careers. Albertans need to have that security for the future, and that's not the kind of jobs being created.

There needs to be an emphasis on small business. We are proposing that the small business tax be reduced from 6 percent to 4 percent. There needs to be an emphasis on small business in tourism. We are proposing that the unfair hotel tax be removed. There needs to be an emphasis on support for small business through incubators, through a program that can assist small business in dealing with banks, a small business advocate if you will, not unlike the Farmers' Advocate, to duplicate the success for small business that the Farmers' Advocate has had in representing farmers' concerns over the years in this province. We

need to have a focus on research and development, on science and technology, on commercialization of those ideas that can take this province into a different future than the one that is being contemplated, inadvertently by the way, by this government.

Fairness. You can't have strong communities without fairness, and there are so many places, so much evidence, Mr. Speaker, where the government has simply turned its back on people who are less fortunate, less powerful, less influential in society than those with whom this government cares to relate.

Maintenance enforcement. We need to strengthen maintenance enforcement. We are going to be proposing in this Legislature an initiative that will see that maintenance payments are deducted at source immediately that the courts have decided that they should be.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Long overdue.

MR. MITCHELL: Long overdue. We need a Human Rights Commission that can operate to seek out, to reduce, to confront intolerance in our society, and we have seen attitudes, I think, Mr. Speaker, that approach intolerance from time to time on the part of this government. We need a strongly independent Human Rights Commission, a Human Rights Commission that isn't amalgamated with all kinds of other boards but which stands distinct, stands firm, and stands strong, to address issues of intolerance in our society. The Human Rights Commission needs to be supported by a strong Individual's Rights Protection Act that ensures in legislation that people will not be discriminated against in our society.

We need to have fairness created through child access enforcement regulation that will ensure that children cannot be used as pawns and be taken away from their extended families after a separation or divorce.

Underlying the strength of the community must be strong fiscal responsibility and strong fiscal management. It is not clear that that is the case on the part of this government. In fact, Mr. Speaker, while they will claim they are balancing the budget and while that is an achievement, they still, I believe and we believe, have not got a proper fix on how it is that the structural problems of this government need to be addressed, and they are still not cutting many of the costs that should be cut. They should be selling the heritage trust fund assets and picking up \$280 million in net interest rate differential – the difference between what they're earning on heritage trust fund assets and what they're paying on an equivalent amount of debt – and taking that money and putting it into deficit reduction, debt retirement, and support for those kinds of programs that will in the long term strengthen Albertans and Alberta for the future.

We had proposed our 2020 Vision to pay off the debt, to retire the debt, and that 2020 Vision says that starting January 1996 we will begin to pay off the debt, and it will take 24 years and be done by the year 2020. We will take the money now that is being paid in interest; we will add in the \$280 million found from other cuts as well. We will take the remainder of an annual payment of \$2.4 billion from the surplus which is being predicted by this government and pay off that debt in a maximum of 24 years. With windfall revenues we believe we may be able to pay it off even faster. That is a period of time that is responsible in its quickness, to get rid of this massive debt that's been created by this government responsibly and expeditiously. But it will be done in a long enough period of time that resources can be freed up to allow us to support education, health care, seniors, and

other essential services that must be provided by government in support of Albertans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and Alberta aren't very far from the frontiers that we as a province developed and confronted and grew up around. Today the frontier may be different than it was 50 or 60 years ago when rural Albertans assisted their neighbours in cultivating the land, clearing the land, helping sick and hurt neighbours to bring in their crops, but what emerged out of that was this sense of community, a sense of working together and making a contribution to your neighbour. It was never, ever this idea that the survival of the fittest was the premise upon which Alberta was built. It was never, ever that it was every person for himself or herself. Absolutely not. There was an ethos in this province that we worked together to build this province, to build our lives, to support our children, to build the future.

Well, the frontier may have changed, but it is no less harsh. The frontier that we face now is the frontier of the future. It is information highways and hugely difficult international competitiveness. It is a frontier that can only be confronted if we continue to work together as a community, as people who support and help one another. Now is no time for a government, a government that failed so miserably at what it should never have been doing, to turn around and begin to dismantle all those policies and programs that it should be doing. If government understands that it should do those things that governments should do – education, health care, support for people who need support, fairness, equality, and justice issues – then there are sufficient resources for us to work together as government in support of community, in support of people in this province to build a province and people within this province that can confront the 21st century successfully, with security for the future, with hope for the future, and with a sense that our lives and our children's lives can be productive, gratifying, and filled with value for the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta that the Leader of the Opposition speaks of is not an Alberta that I live in. It's not an Alberta that I recognize. When I speak of heavenly blue sky and when I speak of the hustle and the bustle of a vibrant, growing city and the bright yellow blooms of a canola flower in the gentle wind, the towns and the villages that reflect the images of Norman Rockwell paintings, and the snow-capped mountains on the horizon, the immense forests providing habitat for wildlife, the summer nesting areas of the majestic trumpeter swan, communities with never-ending spirit and the natural gift of sharing, people who are proud, who are compassionate, who treasure family values, and who continually demonstrate a work ethic second to none, those snapshots form a mosaic, and that mosaic is my constituency.

Regrettably, we have the mosaic of the opposition in dealing with the throne speech. We see the threads of this mosaic, and we can describe it as fear mongering. We can describe it as promoting division. We can call it the insatiable appetite for creating confusion, for the absolutely continuous destructive rhetoric. We can see the act of seeking out dissent, and we can see the constant preaching that the sky is falling.

The Leader of the Opposition speaks of chaos. Mr. Speaker, the only chaos is in the ranks of the opposition as they struggle to find out why Albertans don't buy into their agenda. They just don't get it. I lost track, I literally lost track of the number of times the Leader of the Opposition said: and we will demand of

this government. I would suggest that it would be more prudent and more helpful and certainly more beneficial to all Albertans if the Leader of the Opposition and his members worked with this government on productive issues to help Albertans.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, my constituents support this member in this Legislature, they support the Premier of our province, and they support this government. My constituents applaud the Speech from the Throne as delivered by the Hon. Gordon Towers yesterday: people, prosperity, preservation. They represent key values of my constituency, and they represent key values of our government.

Managers do things right, and leaders do the right thing. Our government is a leader, and it is doing the right thing: the right thing that resides in the hearts of all Albertans, the right thing that is the envy of every Canadian everywhere, the right thing that continually receives accolades from virtually every association that has credibility in the financial circles of North America, indeed, the right thing in the minds of many Members of Parliament in Canada, including the Liberals. Sadly, very sadly, as we have seen time and time again, there are members in this Assembly who will not support the right thing.

As witnessed by the leadership selection process, they can't even do things right. Today the Leader of the Opposition tabled – and I quote his words – the Liberal caucus' speech to the throne. It has been suggested it should have been titled Moans to the Big White Throne. In this light, Mr. Speaker, the 2020 Vision would be better called the 20/20 Hindsight and We Still Can't Get It Right.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon my colleague from Olds-Didsbury spoke of leadership and resolve. That is the essence of our government. That is the reason for our ability to institute meaningful change. People, prosperity, preservation, leadership, and resolve: collectively they represent doing the right thing. Albertans demand the right thing, they expect the right thing, and they deserve the right thing. We must do no less than the right thing.

The Speech from the Throne reflects our achievements of the past and sets the objectives for the near future: clear values, clear achievements, clear objectives, clear understanding. Mr. Speaker, my constituents support the throne speech, and hopefully all members of this Assembly will recognize the collective wisdom of my constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak in response to the throne speech. It was a good news/bad news throne speech. The good news: it was short. The bad news: there was nothing in it of value.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I travel around the province and meet with various groups – and I wish the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti would talk to his own constituents so he would know what's happening in his own constituency. Municipal councils, county councils, city and town councils, chambers, businesses, the clergy, liquor store and business owners, the FCSS groups: I met with them and discussed what's happening. The information I received is that we have a very rich province, rich in resources, oil, gas, agriculture, forestry, tourism. We have the best educated people in Canada and perhaps the world, a tremendous volunteer force – unbelievable – across the province. I thought

St. Albert was great, but every community I go to: tremendous volunteers, self-reliant people not wanting government handouts. And as I talk to the many people across the province, they're very upset because the government doesn't listen, doesn't consult with them. In fact, one senior in a Tory riding told me . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: That's why we're 60 percent in the polls and you're 28 percent.

MR. BRACKO: It's the other way: 70 percent against you. "Trying to get the Premier and the government to listen is like trying to teach a pig to sing. It's a waste of time, and it's irritating to the pig." This is a senior who said that.

MR. DUNFORD: Now, Len, that's not bad.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you.

The seniors around this province, 190,000 of the 225,000 that called the Premier, and he finally says: maybe we should start to listen. We told them after 150 calls that they should start listening, that things weren't going right. The Member for Calgary-Shaw was going to go around and listen to the seniors. He hasn't been around to the places I've been. Does every senior have to call before they start to listen? Some seniors don't mind paying their 5 percent to pay down the deficit, the debt, but when it becomes \$3,000 on a fixed income, they're very upset. It's time the government and the former Minister of Municipal Affairs did their research. A \$12 million research budget didn't do it.

Concerns about those on a fixed income. They retired with a plan; they had the information down; the government changes their plan. Solutions to this: time to start listening and get the true information; use the government research budget; use the experts, the Ken Fearnleys, the Brian Bechtels. The government committee fired them because they were the experts and didn't want to hear the truth. Instead of firing them, they should have been given the leadership to show the way.

I was in one senior citizens' lodge in a Tory member's riding, and one lady in her 90s started to cry in my arms. It was one of the saddest days of my life. She said: "God is punishing me. I have no money." [interjections] That's good. I'll send this out to the seniors.

Crying in my arms, Mr. Speaker. They can laugh at that. She had no money to go and see her children. Unfortunate. Her children, some of them unemployed because of the government cuts, couldn't come to her. She had no money to phone her children, no money to even send birthday cards. They've taken away this lady's dignity and many other seniors' around this province, a shameful situation, Mr. Speaker.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Seniors don't believe you, Len. I'm surprised you do.

MR. BRACKO: I know, coming from you, a lot of hot air. If hot air was manure, you'd have your own fertilizer factory.

Their solution, Mr. Speaker. The seniors' solution is to have the Premier and the cabinet live on \$265 a month and pay for extra medication, extra supplies, extra needs. They need to grandfather in a clause that would protect the seniors that have low income and help them out.

Another problem: the housing authorities. Social and senior housing were combined. Everyone is being forced to amalgamate. Halfway through they quit. The former minister must not

have known what he was doing. Now we have a mess, no solution left. Those that should not have been joined together were joined together. Those that did join should not have been joined. Now we have poor municipalities supporting richer ones in their social housing. That was well thought through, Mr. Speaker. Solution: move from an ideology that they use to a plan, and use the people with expertise.

8:50

Problem: again, the former Minister of Municipal Affairs said that it's a free market. He's telling the average aged senior at a lodge that they can shop around. I can see them getting out their walkers and going from lodge to lodge around the city. You know, it really makes a lot of sense. The other one: even for a senior, the average age 85, it takes them six or eight or nine months to move from a lodge to a long-term care facility. The hardship, the trauma of doing it, and so on: this wasn't taken into account. Anyway, in most of Alberta's towns or smaller centres there's only one lodge. Where are they going to shop around? There's no way there's going to be another one. So they should use some of their research money on a workable plan.

Another very serious problem for rural Alberta is the demise of rural Alberta. The government takes away jobs, maybe six or eight in one community. All of a sudden it not only takes away the income of that community, but other businesses go out of business. Then the house prices, maybe \$60,000, \$80,000, go down to \$20,000 or \$10,000 or \$15,000. You have people who have now lost the total investment of a lifetime. In fact, it goes down to \$8,000 or \$10,000 a house. Even in Saskatchewan it went down to \$1,000, and students bought it as a party house and they destroyed it. This is what's happening in rural Alberta without the planning and thought.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

It's time this government supported rural Alberta, started to look at the consequences. Nice to go around and get the information, even in your riding. Interesting.

DR. WEST: You can come on out when I'm home. [interjections]

MR. BRACKO: Anytime.

Anyway, we have the information on investment in Alberta over the years. Can you guess where Alberta is in foreign investment, what number out of 10? Number seven, tied with New Brunswick. Quebec's ahead of them, \$864 million. We have Saskatchewan, \$484 million, second. Even Nova Scotia and P.E.I. are ahead of Alberta in foreign investment. Alberta is seventh, with \$84 million over the last few years. So you can see that we need to redo the economics, to get people in there who can get a handle on what's happening and bring foreign investment into this province who understand business, not who do not understand and go by an ideology instead of a plan or an attack.

MR. HAVELOCK: Len, have you ever held a job in the private sector?

MR. BRACKO: You bet we have.

Even in the foreign offices, in Taiwan, they sent a Cantonese-speaking person to that office instead of Mandarin and the other dialects there. They can't build up the trust. What we need to do is clean house of all the patronage that is given from this govern-

ment, this Premier and former government, who don't understand what's happening. Get rid of them. Build up a trust again. What we need is information in several languages. Utilize the expertise we have in this great province instead of the patronage appointments that have brought only \$84 million to this province over the years. We need Albertans who can speak several languages. The language of commerce is changing from English to Japanese to Mandarin to Spanish. What is our school system doing? Where is the leadership from the departments, both in Education and advanced education?

The minister promised me there'd be exchange programs set up – I haven't seen or heard about them – with other cultures. We need to teach languages, use exchanges to other countries. In Australia 12,000 people study Japanese; in Canada, 300. I don't know how many Alberta has, but a lot less. Understanding the culture, going back home, getting business degrees, then going back to Japan to use the expertise to bring trade and commerce to their country . . .

DR. WEST: They're all learning English.

MR. BRACKO: No, they're not. If you get into the real world, you know that isn't true.

Secondly . . . [interjections] Yes. You came to make a difference? Five billion dollars more a year since you got in. You made a big difference.

Also, another problem. We don't have connections for Alberta companies in the other countries, developing countries. Other countries do that. They give out scholarships to students in developing countries so they have the ties when they want to develop business in those countries. They can go to these people who know the bureaucracy, know how to get through the loops and the steps that are needed to invest in that country and to do well.

The other problem. We have to work with businesses to increase the amount of training in a year. Most of the industrialized nations have 200 hours a year; Canada has eight hours a year average. How can we compete? We've got to get that. In education, at least, it's three or four days, 20 hours plus another five, 10 times that on their own time. What do they do? They've asked their teachers to do the professional development that they need to give leadership to this province.

You know, Churchill said – this was a long time ago, at the decline of the British Empire – that empires of the future will depend on ideas; education is essential. Our wealth of today and the future depends on the creation of ideas, the use of ideas, and there has to be a balance between the basics and developing creativity in our young people. We hear concerns. I've heard several people who have said: "Arts is useless at the university. Let's get rid of the arts department." Little do they realize – it hasn't been publicized – that many of the students who are in arts are taking business degrees because they can't get into commerce. The average to get in was 86 percent – that was a couple of years ago; I don't know what the updated one is – so they're taking business courses. Yet they want to get rid of the arts department, get rid of the students taking those courses, to the Alberta disadvantage again.

Again, a problem I heard across this province: the province is not working together. The north against the south, rural against urban, private against public. The government's policy is to divide and rule. We have to work together and restructure. We can do it. I have a former student who now has a business in

engineering – that is, working with a computer company building computer chips here in the city of Edmonton – who is competing and winning contracts from the Orient over companies from Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and so on. We can do it. We have the expertise. We just need the leadership from the government and other groups working together with the confidence that we can do it. We need to go forward in this area.

As Art Smith of the Economic Development Authority said, Alberta and Canada are light years behind in educating for international trade. Where have we been all these years? At least he's starting to get a handle on it. Hopefully, working with business, working with educators, working with the public, we can develop a school that will assist us in this area. Most important is to work together and to know what's happening out there, and that's not hard to find out.

Again, the lottery problems, a very sad case. As I travel across this province, in every community, whether it's a county, a village, a summer village, a city, or a town, we see the destruction of families. We see that there are people, from 7 to 10 percent, who become addicted, and several thousand spend their money who cannot afford it. Some go in with their Visa, spend \$2,000 a day, go home to the family broke. It has caused the breakdown of marriages and families. They saved money for a mortgage, and one spouse goes out and spends it. Now, the case again where we have families, single mothers going out and spending their total paycheque, \$1,200, on a slot machine. We see that again, the destruction, and we say this is a government that cares about the family. Maybe we should start caring and making the right decision. I believe the government knew what the income from lotteries were. They knew they had a deficit, they had to balance it, and they wanted to reduce it through gambling. When we get \$3.6 billion from gambling for provincial revenues, this is not the province that my grandparents and parents built. My mother wore the same coat for 20 years to put us through.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Point of order?

DR. WEST: No. Under *Beauchesne* 482 I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a question in debate.

MR. BRACKO: I thought you'd get a new trick for this session, but I guess not. No. I'll be glad to speak to you after at any time, be glad to meet with you and discuss this further and bring out the facts for your information and help you assist your researchers to do their job.

9:00 Debate Continued

MR. BRACKO: In many of the communities they're down to one-third of their revenue because of lottery machines. Here they are, the government is saying, "Do more on less," and then they take two-thirds of the revenue away. That is really a sad day for this province, the people who go out and fund-raise. It's their money that's been taken away by this government.

Again, it was very interesting: the freedom of information I'm unable to get. I had an investor who had a client from the Orient who wanted to look into purchasing social housing from the Department of Municipal Affairs. I phoned this department to get a name and a phone number, and I was told, "No, sorry." The

poor person who was answering the phone gave us, "Sorry, we can't do it unless you put it in writing, and it takes a month to six weeks." Finally I pleaded with her. I said: "Please give it to me. It's not information I can use against the government. It's just that the investor is going home in a couple of days." I believe she broke the rules and gave me the information. That's the type of freedom of information we have in this government. [interjection] Yes, maybe gone tomorrow, but that's a sad state when we can't even get basic information to make the government look good if they sell off these properties. You know, it would make them look more efficient, but they aren't even wise enough to take advantage of this.

Across the province in central Alberta the people are saying that government's moving too fast and too far to the right without a plan. That is the problem. They're saying that they're cutting the heart out of Alberta. Cutting the heart. This is central Alberta, the chamber of commerce, Mr. Speaker.

Again, they're not listening or taking input from the community. A community like Rimbey raised \$700,000 in two years for their arena, and they're not allowed input to the restructuring of the health care system. They have the knowledge, the expertise to save money, to make it more efficient, and they're not allowed to. They say, "Oh, it's the minister's fault." The ministers blame the health authorities. They pass the buck back and forth, and people don't even know who to go to.

Again, it pits one community against another. When you're downloading to municipalities extra cost, it isn't downloading. It's a redistribution of standards of living and giving people choices or even change. Even a dead man can keep up. All you have to do is throw him in the river. That's exciting, you know. Change. Anybody can do it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Is that a quote?

MR. BRACKO: Yeah, a direct quote.

The arrogance of the government. We have, Mr. Speaker, the Health Unit Association of Alberta's closing out convention, and the Minister of Health, because they hired a comedian who poked a couple of jokes at her, started to pout – I couldn't believe it – and then, not only that, would not . . . [Mr. Bracko's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Could we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Meanwhile back on this planet, I'd like to introduce someone from my constituency who is here visiting. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you Mr. Lloyd Rommens of the Rommens empire in Antelope Creek, Alberta. Could you please stand and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**
(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know it's interesting to listen to the Leader of the Opposition. I look across the way, and I see the number of people that showed up for his first address to the Speech from the Throne. It's interesting that if you look around and see all of the empty chairs and see the proportion of members that are here with respect to that, there are still more people here in these benches than there are out there to support what your leader is in fact trying to sell them.

Mr. Speaker, one of the first comments of the hon. Leader of the Opposition was that this government is treating people like "customers," and he said that we would be exploiting Albertans as customers. Well, let's see how people generally treat customers. Generally anybody that's in business will know the name of their customer. They'll know where they're from. They'll know what they do. They'll treat them well. They won't be just numbers. They'll listen to their customers, and they'll do what their customer wants them to do. Now, is that a bad way to treat Albertans? I just don't understand what the people from the other side of the room believe in, because we went from a leader that talked about doom and gloom to a leader that talks about chaos. Chaos upon chaos. That's the new style. That's the new message.

Now, it's interesting that he talks about "a disturbing affront to democracy." Well, Mr. Speaker, coming from a man who had the arrogance of using the building that the very first Legislature of this province used to deliver a speech to the throne, to me that's an insult to our Lieutenant Governor and to the British parliamentary system.

The hon. member goes on to talk about the fact that this government wants to gut the power of the people of Alberta, "gut the power of school boards." Well, doesn't he get it? Doesn't he understand that by putting decisions closer to the people, closer to the teachers, closer to the students – he calls that centralization. By putting decisions closer to the hospitals and closer to the patients, he calls that centralization. I mean, even the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood knows that that's not centralization. He also says that that puts more power in the hands of the Premier. How can decentralization put more power in the hands of the Premier?

The chaos and the doom and gloom goes on in his speech. He talks about, "on the backs of children" and "on the backs of the sick." Well, this government has not forgotten people. We've involved them every step of the way, and we have listened and implemented their good ideas.

The leader says that we're breaking the social network, breaking the fabric of this province. Urban versus rural. Rich versus poor. Well, there has never been in the history of any democracy so many people involved in reshaping and retooling government as what we've had in this province. The people of this province don't see the doom and gloom as the opposition does. They see the light at the end of the tunnel. They're strong, and they're positive about their future.

9:10

The hon. member goes on to talk about the fear and uncertainty in the health care system. That's really interesting, because you would think that if that were the case, as the chair of the Health Facilities Review Committee, which was mentioned in the throne speech, I would expect to see more complaints. Well, I'll be very happy to report, when we in fact produce our annual report for last year, that the complaints went down from 146 to 116. Folks, come down to reality where the people are.

Finally, I get to something that I can agree with. The hon. member talks about a legacy that we can leave for our children's

education, and I agree with that. I agree that postsecondary education is in fact very important. But there is no erosion of the postsecondary side. There is a lot of co-operation and a lot of good ideas that are currently being implemented. Colleges are now starting to look at: why should everybody be teaching the same courses? Why should there be all of this duplication? Why should they not open their agreements to be able to deal with things and problems like tenure? Those are all positive things, Mr. Speaker, not negative as we hear from the other side.

Then we hear the Leader of the Opposition's plan for post-secondary. He says that he will build a system where all high school graduates will go on to postsecondary education. Well, Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked, about 60 percent of our high school graduates don't want to go on to postsecondary education. So how is he going to pull that off? That is quite a plan.

He talks about the quality of jobs, and he talks about the fact that they're part-time jobs and meaningless jobs. Well, I beg your pardon. You ask those 80,000 people who now have jobs that didn't have them a year and a half ago, and they won't agree with you.

He talks about strong fiscal management, and in the next breath he says that we should sell the heritage savings trust fund; it doesn't matter what the people of Alberta say; we should sell it. At least we're listening to their good ideas and will do what they want us to do.

Mr. Speaker, we need only to read – and I would really recommend this to all members opposite – the speech of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury this afternoon to find out what this province, what this government is all about and where this province is going.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking you for the gracious way in which you received my colleague from St. Albert and myself at the Water Management Review Committee meeting in Grande Prairie. You made us feel at home. You even added that extra note of introducing us as Liberal members, and therefore many farmers in the area came to us and said how nice it was to see members from the opposition around.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the Speech from the Throne, but first I'd like to say a few things about the people who have commented on the speech to the throne. It's interesting to note what the Member for Calgary-Egmont said and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. Both evidently have taken a great deal of time to peruse the words of the Leader of the Opposition, and I think that's good. That indicates not only interest, but it indicates that perhaps they're willing to listen.

One thing, though, that puzzles me somewhat when I refer to what the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti said – and I'm not referring to the poetical part of his speech, which almost drove me to tears, so it must have been good: the magenta skies and the days of yore. I was transported to my youth there. No. What I'm referring to is what he said about the speech to the throne. I'd like to point out that this afternoon his very own leader, the Premier, in fact came out with the statement that of the two speeches, to and from the throne, the speech to the throne was the only important one. Now, that judgment, in my view, showed a surprising amount of intelligence and understanding of the issues, and I had clearly underestimated his capacity for sober thinking.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the issue at hand, which is the Speech from the Throne. I will assume that everybody knows by now the speech to the throne and have their own opinions on it and of course think it's excellent. The Speech from the Throne, though, I would like to start off, of course, as usual in the spirit of co-operation by coming up with some bouquets, one already mentioned by my colleague from St. Albert: the brevity of the speech. One might say that this sets a record. It is a new height of achievement. It is the essence of brevity. I think it's important that that be commended, and that ought to be proclaimed.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

Now, I'm afraid that here endeth the commendations. As to the clarity of the government's plans nothing really specific was enunciated in the Speech from the Throne, although I thought His Honour did an excellent job in reading a speech with so little substance, little substance I think primarily because the Premier should have pre-empted his own speech from the throne by going on his fireside chat early on in January. Remember the one with the inflated cost: first \$40,000 then it zoomed all the way up to \$115,000. So much for belt tightening and retrenchment, Mr. Speaker.

Allow me to deal with what I call the pseudosubstance of the speech and comment on it sometimes positively, although of course not much, and sometimes, unfortunately, maybe not negatively but somewhat critically, in the spirit of constructive criticism, of course. Let's not forget that. What struck me was the mandate from change and the mandate that was given to this government by the people of Alberta in 1993 to improve and streamline government. I think it's fair to say that that is indeed true, but that does not mean that this was a mandate for dismantling government and privatizing all kinds of unspecified services. That's an entirely different thing. That goes well beyond the mandate, I would suggest.

Then another item here: "to continue to listen to Albertans." I totally concur with that. That is an excellent message that came from Albertans. I would just suggest that the government had better start listening, particularly in matters of health and education and seniors and so on. What was it? Sixty or 70 percent of Albertans apparently are dissatisfied with the dizzying speed of all these changes. So perhaps the government should pay heed to that, if indeed they're willing to listen.

On we go and we're asked to "join in the journey to a secure and debt-free future." I wonder how many Albertans at this moment feel secure about the future, say, as compared to five years ago. I have a sneaking hunch that the number has actually gone down.

9:20

This afternoon I think the Premier very proudly took credit for his government, as he put it, having fostered prosperity in Fort McMurray. Now, considering that that was really organized and set up in the '70s and '80s, if I'm not mistaken, then I'm still waiting for him also to take credit for NovAtel and the other calamities and the racking up of debt and so on. I mean, you can't just pick and choose. You've got to realize that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm getting to one of those points where I can hand out another bouquet, and I would like everybody to take note of this because it is a rare occasion.

This is welcome, but Albertans know that [these windfalls that we've been getting are] no reason to release the reins of restraint on government overspending.

I totally agree with that, and I hope the Minister of Energy takes note of that. I'm in full concurrence with that.

Then we go on. It says: "There is more to government than streamlining and cutting costs." Again, I'm in full agreement. There is far more to it. Then we shift the focus from the institutions to the people who use them. I think that should be: we shift the fees from the institutions to the people who use them. That's a slight difference.

On we go to the three Ps, that alliterative notion. I really liked that in the speech: "people, prosperity, and preservation." That is a nice touch. The emphasis on people I think was well placed, and all we can say is that it has a very nice ring to it. We hope that we see evidence of it. We can appreciate that and concur with it.

"Albertans want high-quality health care and education." Absolutely true. The question is, of course, as always: are they getting it? At this particular moment I think the jury has returned and has come up with a negative judgment.

"In the area of health the government will emphasize regional decision-making." That's very interesting, these 17 health authorities boards that are supposed to make all the decisions, including the tough ones of closing down hospitals and so on. On the other hand, every time the government hits a snag in the field of health care, they come up with the creation of yet another council. It is rather obtuse as to where the jurisdiction of one starts and the other ends, and of course all four will impinge upon the jurisdiction of those poor 17 regional health authorities boards. They really don't know where to go to, what to do. I think one example is the poor administrator who ended up double-dipping, sort of, and immediately the regional authorities board got raked over the coals because they weren't supposed to do that. Well, as one of the members pointed out, they had had precious little direction.

On we go, Mr. Speaker. The government pledges "to allow for more involvement by parents and the community" into education. Of course, if you don't include the parents who want a full ECS program, yes, probably they are listening, but they leave out quite a sizable segment there. Then the roles and responsibilities that are foisted on the unsuspecting parent councils is something else again. As I've said privately, I think, and publicly to the Minister of Education, I have yet to meet a member of an existing parent council who in fact wants that kind of clout.

Mr. Speaker, I might deviate a little here from when I ventured forth into the realm of the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I think it was in the town of Wembley where I consulted with members of the school council – this was about a year ago – and I said: what do you think of this added power that the minister envisages you getting, the roles and responsibilities? One lady said: "I think that's great. Then we can fire that . . . of a principal." Fill in the blanks; it's a family show. Immediately her colleagues jumped up and said, "That's exactly the reason why we should not have that power." There has to be some sort of detachment here. Otherwise, we get too closely involved. I think that's particularly important. I've yet to find in my travels someone else who wants that kind of clout.

Mr. Speaker, I have just a few more comments. One has to do with advanced ed where the government indicates that there will be a greater focus on accessibility and affordability. I'll have the minister of advanced education know, in case he doesn't know it, that at the moment he has been very busy in making it far less accessible and far more costly. So I don't think he's on the right trend yet.

The area of tourism, Mr. Speaker, is dear to my heart, I might say. It's the third most profitable sector of industry in Alberta, yet it rates one word. Nothing is said about the cabinet finally coming to a conclusion on the matter of the Alberta tourist corporation. For some reason they keep waiting, and the tourist sectors don't know what's up now. They can't even make up a budget.

Every provincial regulation, vouches the Speech from the Throne, will undergo a complete review. That's very interesting. I only suggest to the government that they start using that regulations committee of which the member for Calgary in the corner is the chairman. I suggest that he start calling that particular committee so that these regulations can all be taken under a magnifying glass.

Mr. Speaker, I think . . .

Point of Order Imputing Motives

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member for Calgary-Shaw is rising on a point of order. Would you care to share the citation?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'd be delighted to share the citation, Mr. Speaker. It's 23(i), imputing motives. I'm sure the member is well aware, as I've explained in this House on previous occasions, that the chairman of that committee does not have the authority or the right to simply call a meeting of the committee. Rather, something must be referred to the committee by this Legislature before we can speak. Now, it may well be that the hon. member happens to be a member of that committee and he simply wishes to collect the honorarium should I call a meeting.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, do I have to dignify his point of order with a reply?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Only if you wish to challenge it.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Let me just state, Mr. Speaker, that it seems to me that this member knows very well – I'm sorry, by the way. I didn't realize that the Legislature would have to set this particular committee in motion. I would have thought that this member by himself was vociferous enough to take care of the matter.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair would take from that comment that you would withdraw that part that the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw found offensive or unfair. Is that so? Then you may continue with this.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: I didn't realize that he found it offensive, Mr. Speaker, but if it is offensive in his mind, if he's that sensitive in his skin, I will take it back.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw rising on yet another point.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, simply to clarify, those who know me have never accused me of being a loving, caring, sensitive person. I think that should be clarified.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order, hon. member?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple point is that he stated something that's inaccurate. I think he's withdrawn it, although it's not entirely clear to me.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All right. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw has a point. I thought the hon. Member for West Yellowhead had clarified that he had not intended to impute a motive when he didn't realize that the Assembly was the one that called the committee. I took it that you withdrew that. Is that not so? So the matter rests there, and the hon. member is invited to continue his speech.

9:30

Debate Continued

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going on undauntedly in spite of these interruptions. The government here says that "Albertans are entitled to the free flow of information," and I find that again a commendable statement. My question of course is: why do we have to wait so cockeyed long until the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Bill 18, passed last spring, is going to be implemented, promulgated, proclaimed?

The government is also – in fact, it's a third core of concern – for preservation. I'm a bit puzzled there. I would have thought the word "conservation" would be more apt here, but somehow they want to preserve certain things. I would suggest that perhaps they could make a good start by coming up with legislation that would put some restrictions on the cutting of trees on private land.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to conclude here by saying that on the very last page I find the words "My government understands the principle that the customers," – there's that dreaded word again – "the people of Alberta, are always right." It's very nice to know that they hold that view, but it means very little in view of the clamouring by the people that there be a slowdown in the changes in health, education, et cetera, and certainly that the seniors' benefits be cut back less severely. Also, the people seem to be saying clearly that there be no casinos, but I know that I'm kind of getting ahead here of the Member for Lacombe-Stettler and her committee.

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but let me end with the hope that this government will indeed listen more to Albertans, especially when, as I said earlier, 70 percent or so indicate that some of the changes are going far too fast and far too deep. That's my only hope. But the question is: am I optimistic? I don't really know. I hate to say that I'm not optimistic. I thought it was fitting that His Honour ended his Speech from the Throne with the wish "God bless Alberta." I echo those words.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues from this side of the House and that side of the House have said a great number of things about what has been included in the Speech from the Throne and the speech to the throne. I'd like to start out my comments by mentioning a few of the items that haven't been spoken of.

Particularly galling is not one single word, not one, about seniors. Those members have waxed so eloquently so many times in this House about so many wonderful things that seniors have done, built this province. When it comes down to talking about doing something about it, there's absolute silence. It doesn't say anything. This is the most mean-spirited government to seniors

that this province has ever seen. Never before have they been treated to this kind of uncertainty. Now, if you want to deal a terrible, mean blow to a senior in this province that is on a limited income, then the first thing you do is give them uncertainty again and again and again. Not once, not twice, not three times but four times since this government first was elected they have changed policy as it relates to seniors. Those are the ones that are directly related to the seniors' programs. We all know that lowering the standards by which one is able to access cheaper health care is a direct one.

Now, I'm talking about some of the indirect hits on seniors, those that most of us, being youngish and of able body, would not see as hits on a senior. I'm talking about things, very subtle things, like lowering support for law enforcement. Now, you wouldn't think that would come directly, but I can tell you what it does do: it puts that element of fear, adds incrementally to every senior citizen that has to be out in the day or in the night in this province, out riding a bus or doing so many things. Whether it in reality has the effect – or maybe the police services of this province are able to deal with it such that it doesn't affect the deliverance of service, but that is not the perception. It's the perception of the seniors, and it goes right to their fear level and right to their insecurity level.

We're talking about other areas that affect them indirectly in a manner, those that still have and maintain a residence, their own residence, and are paying tax. I mean, you're downloading more on a municipal government; that hits directly to them again. Fortunately, most of the municipal governments have been able to deal with it. Not all, but most of them have been able to deal with it, to stave off some increases by lowering the standards of service which they deliver. But it adds that element of fear one more time: am I going to be able to live out my days in my own home?

There's another area that can do with some embellishment in this document too. [interjections] There's an awful noise; it's some bad rubber tire going flap, flap, flap on a road over there I hear. That's the area of transportation. Here's an area, and it doesn't say anything about it. Perhaps the minister didn't have anything to say at the time when they asked him. It's beyond me to know why, and I certainly would not impugn any motives as to why that would be. Of course not. But there's nothing, and if there's anything that this province was born on, it's transportation. We know that without transportation, relatively rapid and efficient since the days of the coming of the railroad, this province would not have been here. We thrive and in fact almost entirely exist on our ability to get about in this province, and there's nothing in this document to say anything about the transportation plan of the next year or two. Nothing. We assume nothing is going to occur? I think not. That certainly couldn't be the case. This is such a flimsy document in that respect that it deserves some comment from the other side at least.

The other area that we've heard so, so very much about from some members opposite that it said absolutely nothing about – it sort of works around things but doesn't say anything about it at all – is economic development. I mean, we've heard from successive Tory governments right from 1971 that we have to break out, we have to value add, we have to change our direction from being hewers of wood and drawers of water. We have to do all of these. And where is it again? You can shake this thing all you want and there isn't going to be any economic development coming out of that thing at all. Nothing. [interjections]

There seems to be a great deal of noise emanating from some small patch of ground over on the other side there that seems to

have said so many, many things in public but doesn't seem to say a whole heck of a lot when it comes to debate in the House and certainly not in this document.

I move to some of the areas where something has been said, however skimpy. It has been said in this document – and some absolutely farcical statements have been said. The classic one is that "adult education and training will focus more on accessibility, affordability, and responsiveness." Well, the responsiveness we saw. We saw 500 to 700 students in front of this building. Of course, people on the other side would never have seen them. They wouldn't dare go outside for fear of being lynched.

AN HON. MEMBER: I was out there, Lance. I was out there.

9:40

MR. WHITE: Sorry. I missed a few members that may have shown up. Maybe it was the less recognizable members that would be out.

Certainly responsiveness is inviting them in to talk about it and to find out what the real concerns are. I mean, you're talking about affordability, and you jack the rates. I'm sorry; where I live and in the neighbourhoods that I represent in this Legislature they simply cannot afford to send their kids to school. The kids can't make any money. It says something about giving more financial help to postsecondary students. Where and when? When is this coming down? If it is coming, it should have been here by now, because it's hurting out there. The kids are hurting badly.

Then accessibility. What does that mean? You've lowered the budgets of virtually every postsecondary institution in this province, and then you're going to make it easier for someone to get in? Well, you can do either of one or two things. Either you've made it so, so very efficient, or you're watering down the service that you're delivering. You can't have it both ways. It simply is not possible.

Another area that is briefly touched on, an area that I have spent a little time looking at, is the area of land use planning in this province. Because the government decided that land use planning was now a municipal concern, and they could just back out of it, and it wasn't intermunicipal, as it has been – and like it or not this province has had for the past 15 years some of the best land use planning in North America and is noted so – all of a sudden the support is totally and completely withdrawn. It's not phased out. It's not said: "Look; let's do it a different way. Let's manage these things in a different manner." No. It's totally and completely abandoned. Out there, as we speak, there are applications for land use, and it happens to be fortunate that there are not a lot of changes in land use going on right now, because it's utter chaos. No one knows who the planning authority is, who can actually approve things, and this document says absolutely nothing. This document farcically says something to the effect that we're going to be – where is it now? It says: adopting a new framework. A new framework? There's no framework. The framework is one single stick. It's the minister saying: yes, we are planning. That's it. Now, it may work, and it still will work in the major urban centres and some of the well-to-do rural centres that have a number of planning districts within them that can afford their own land use planning officers, but everywhere else and certainly on the periphery of those major centres planning is just absolutely gone.

I'll leave that just to see if anything can be done during the next session. The minister in fact promised that there would be an

adjunct, or an addition, or some Act to replace the land use Planning Act and incorporate it into the Municipal Government Act, but we have yet to see anything proposed. This document should have said something about that, even briefly in passing just to let the municipalities know that they will have something to be able to work to.

The last comment that I'd like to bring to your attention is that this document starts out – I mean, you'd think that one single train of thought would be able to carry through from one to the other, but the title starts out "Mandate for change." Well, that is the antithesis of the last title. It's called "Preservation." Now, you have to have it one way or the other. It's either change or preservation. Would you please, government of the day, get your act together.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it's a wonderful thing to follow the aspiring young mayoralty candidate, and in fact you're right. He's right. He's not with it. You can have preservation at the same time that you have change. As the winds of change blow, not only do they enhance those relics and those things that we preserve and hold dear to all Albertans, but they also help promote the winds of change, the winds of opportunity, and in fact the winds of tomorrow's benefits. I think what the Speech from the Throne represents is not, as we've been hearing for the last two hours, the groan to the throne but in fact a transition from where we were to where we're going to be, and that is exactly what a Speech from the Throne represents. Of course, a speech to the throne is the usual set of mumblings, moanings, and complainings about what could have, should have, would have, maybe, maybe who knows. What we see here is a vision for tomorrow, and it's a very important vision. It's a vision supported by this government, and it's a vision that was contributed to by all members of this government. I believe it's a very strong address to the shareholders of Alberta – dare we use that horrible word "customers," – the people who deserve a high level of service and a fair return from their tax dollar paid.

I think it's very, very important that we remember that there are the three keystones to this throne speech, and that's people, prosperity, and preservation. But I would like to add one more very appropriate ending to that, and that's one of prudence. In fact, what the Alberta taxpayer, what the Alberta voter has seen is prudence from a very responsible government.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in view of that prudence, I would indeed like to adjourn this evening's debate, as mundane as it has been. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for Economic Development and Tourism has moved that we adjourn debate. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

[At 9:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]