

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 22, 1995**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 95/02/22

[The Speaker in the Chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**  
**Provincial Fiscal Policies**

14. Moved by Mr. Dinning:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate February 21: Mr. Mitchell]

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, could I ask exactly how much time I have to speak tonight? [interjections] That's so original and quick too. [interjection] Ninety? Great. Ninety. Nine-thirty. I don't know that I'll use 90, but if they get me going – I don't know – I can't be responsible.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to, as you might imagine, argue . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order in the Assembly, please. [interjections] Order. [interjections] The noise level in the Assembly is too high. Please.

MR. MITCHELL: We need some discipline in that caucus. Where's the Whip?

Mr. Speaker, I rise to argue against the Treasurer's motion on supporting his budget for a variety of reasons.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: My, that's original.

MR. MITCHELL: That was funny the first time, Paszkowski.

I can describe the budget, I think, in a general way, by saying that there were absolutely no surprises, except perhaps, Mr. Speaker, as I think about it, one particular surprise. Right here on page 3 of the budget book there is – and I'm going to use the word because I'm not accusing anybody here – a lie. The lie is: "No tax increases. No new taxes." Of course, that is absolutely not true. If anything characterizes the budgetary initiatives of this Treasurer and this Premier over the last three years, it is that their budgets have been characterized by tax increases. My colleague the Treasury critic from our caucus this afternoon pointed out that in fact there are 246 new user fees or increased user fees under this Premier's jurisdiction: taxes.

MR. BRUSEKER: Sounds like taxes.

MR. MITCHELL: They sound like taxes. They look like taxes. They are, in fact, taxes.

One of the most insidious taxes that this government has brought in and has increased, of course, is the health care premium. The Premier makes this distinction. He says, "It is not a tax; it is a premium." I don't know what's more frightening, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier doesn't know that he's been raising taxes or that he doesn't in fact know what a tax is. It's probably the second one or a little bit of both. The fact is that if you have to pay it, if it's deducted and sent to government, if you have no choice, it is in fact a tax. That is indisputable.

In fact, it was very interesting to listen to the Minister of Health, who argued this morning on the radio that other provinces had certain kinds of taxes, like perhaps a payroll tax or a sales tax, to cover health care costs. Well, the health care premium covers health care costs. So I suppose that if Ontario increased its sales tax to cover health care costs they would call that, the minister and the Premier, a health care tax increase. Therefore, logically, Mr. Speaker, it follows that if they raise their health care premiums, it is a tax increase.

What's interesting, to put this in perspective, is that over the last two years and by the end of next year health care premiums will have increased as a source of revenue to this government from \$444 million to \$602 million. That is nearly \$160 million. If you put that tax increase on the base of income tax that existed in 1992-93, do you know what that tax increase on personal income tax represents? It represents a tax increase of almost 8 percent.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. MITCHELL: Almost 8 percent. It is a huge amount of money.

Now, if the Premier were to be honest about what it is that he's doing, he would stand up in the House and say that this statement is clearly an error: "No tax increases. No new taxes." He would have the courage to stand up in front of Albertans and say, "You know what I have done?" I'm quoting him of course, paraphrasing what I might like to see him say. The Premier has raised income taxes on Albertans in the health care premium area alone by 8 percent, fully 8 percent. It's highly regressive. It is one more feature of how average Albertans are paying the price for this government's excesses for the last nine years.

I should just stop. I should just emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that these newfound fiscally responsible fundamentalists will by the end of this budget debate have voted for nine consecutive deficit budgets. Nine consecutive deficit budgets. I want to point out and emphasize that the Premier himself will have voted for six consecutive deficit budgets. It is almost impossible to keep up with the velocity of this voting for deficit budgets, but we think that the Premier is personally responsible for supporting at least 18 billion, perhaps 18 and a half billion dollars of deficit, overbudgeted expenditure during his tenure in this Legislature. That is quite a legacy. Quite a legacy.

The whole issue of new fees: they're not taxes; really they're user fees. One I find is amusing actually. There is actually a user fee on lightning rods. Well, let's hope they're never used, Mr. Speaker. It's a remarkable thing that this government would think to put a user fee on lightning rods.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, my point is that there are new taxes. There have been tax increases. Perhaps one of the lowest points in my experience in observing this Premier was his speech to the Fraser Institute in Vancouver. The Premier stood up here several days ago and said: you know, the Fraser Institute is rewarding us and recognizing me for my great achievements. The answer to that is: of course they are, because they were misled by the Premier when he said to them that we are the only province to balance the budget, to do our deficit reduction solely on the cost side. Nothing could be further from the truth. At least 60 percent of the deficit reduction has been on the revenue side, and a huge portion of that has been due to new taxes and increases in existing taxes.

One of the most insidious features of that, what's going to be about \$400 million, is the off-loading onto municipalities, Mr.

Speaker. They have taken 33 provincial programs, responsible we believe – it's hard to add it up – for about \$220 million in expenditure, and they have off-loaded that onto the municipalities. These are not optional. This is policing, for example. Who's going to pick that up? Municipalities are going to pick that up. Who is ultimately going to pay for that through one of the most regressive taxes that you can impose on a society? Small businesses. If that isn't a penalty on small businesses, I don't know what is, because they will have to pay it before they ever make a single cent. That's quite an achievement for the members across the way to think that they have imposed that lack of fairness, that initiative on small businesses, which are the engine and the future of the economy of this province.

A second theme that I have seen with great concern emerging from this budget, emerging from debate in this Legislature by these members across the way about the budget and about the throne speech is the question of division. You know, Mr. Speaker, if there is a consistent theme and approach, a consistent strategy amongst those members, amongst that Premier and his Treasurer, it is that they always find somebody to blame for each and every facet of their unbalanced budgets. In fact, they're leading some Albertans to pursue that particular initiative. They are creating division and dissension, somebody always being against somebody else in this society.

Today I had a fellow call in . . .

DR. L. TAYLOR: Agree with us, Grant, and there won't be any dissension.

**8:10**

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you know, there are times when I really appreciate some dissension. I certainly wouldn't want Medicine Hat to agree with me. I think that sometimes dissension is actually called for, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Sometimes it is actually called . . . Well, the hon. Whip across the way who just had a quip towards me is in dissension with himself. One day he's a New Democrat, and the next day he's a Conservative. He must fight all the time. We can see the internal tension in that member.

The theme, the way they justify what they do, is dissension. They consciously divide in an effort to consciously conquer. So today it was that one of their followers phoned a talk show that I was on and said: "You know what? It's that education system; it's those students that want to go four years instead of three years in high school. Do you think we should be paying for that fourth year?" You know, I'm sure you can remember when you were 17, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BRUSEKER: Just a few short years ago.

MR. MITCHELL: Just a few short years ago. I'm sure there are members across the way who can remember when they were 17, because they certainly don't have the imaginations to imagine what it was like when they were 17. But you know what? Sometimes you're not as certain when you're 17 about where you want to go as perhaps you are when you're 18, and you're certainly not as certain at 15 or as disciplined or as motivated as you might be when you're 18. So if you make the mistake under that regime's divide and conquer of just not quite knowing when you are 15 what you want to do, you get to be 17 and you decide you're going to do a fourth year, you know how you're rewarded? You are responsible for the deficit in this province. That's somebody we blame.

If we're not blaming students in the fourth year of high school, we're blaming nurses or we're blaming teachers or we're blaming doctors or we're blaming single parents or we're blaming all those five-year-old kids who simply want to have a kindergarten education, and we're pitting them against their siblings in grades 5 and 6 and 9 to see who gets what funding for whose education when.

Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? I don't think that reflects what we are as Albertans. I'll tell you right now that I don't like it, and I'm sick and tired of hearing that kind of negative leadership from across the way day after day after day. If it continues in the name of balancing the budget no matter what the cost, as an end in itself, we will get to the other side of that budget and we will not be particularly proud of the kind of society this government has created in its headlong rush to solve the problems that it itself created.

The Premier spends more time on Bay Street, more time in Vancouver, more time in who knows what other parts of the world, than he spends here. We're beginning to see why: because 69 percent of Albertans are opposed to what he's doing in health care and 67 percent are opposed to what he's doing in education. He stands up and he says: Am I not great; am I not a hero for balancing this budget? Mr. Speaker, he is not a hero for balancing the budget. You know why for sure he's not? Because he broke the budget. The least he can do is fix it. The least these guys – I can see them; I can see the ones that voted for nine consecutive deficit budgets. It must be some kind of record in the western industrialized world that they have set. They broke it, and the least they can do is fix it, and they'd better fix it, because we're sitting here waiting and the people of this province are waiting for them to do it. But they'd better fix it properly. That's the rub, because they haven't got any sense, beyond balancing the budget, of what they should be doing with government.

Never was that more evident than it was in the throne speech. How thin was that throne speech? How thin? It was microthin. There were no ideas.

AN HON. MEMBER: Here it is.

MR. MITCHELL: There it is. I can't see it. Yup, it's thin. It's double-spaced thin, because it is bereft of ideas, Mr. Speaker. They are collectively a one-trick pony.

You know what? It's not as though it's that big a deal or that difficult to balance the budget. You know how I know for sure? Because even the New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan has balanced the budget, right after the Liberal Party in New Brunswick. The fact is that great government . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Tax increases.

MR. MITCHELL: Did somebody yell "tax increases"? They're admitting it: tax increases.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that anybody can balance a budget, and we know for sure because even the Saskatchewan New Democrats could do it. Even they could do it. The fact is that great government figures out a way to balance the budget and do that other set of things that government was in fact hired to do, which is to provide quality health care, quality education, support for seniors for example, and justice, fairness, equality issues. When I said bereft, bereft characterized their approach and their understanding of those kinds of issues: division, kindergarten, fourth-year students.

Today we actually heard the minister or one of the backbenchers, the private members, over there say that parents should be more responsible for their children's education. So now it's the parents' fault: parents who volunteer in the school system day after day, parents who go to parent advisory councils to give support to their schools, parents who work with their children on homework night after night. It's their fault that children in this province even need a kindergarten education.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like the ones across there who actually still have children in the school system to speak up in their caucus and make it clear that it isn't parents who are at fault here. There are parents here, there are parents across this province who are dedicated to their children, and it is parents in fact who have taken the responsibility for their children. They have simply asked their government to help them out with some kindergarten education. They have a government who says it cares and it listens, but it clearly has demonstrated that those are two promises it made and it broke.

If ever I heard a statement that was lacking in credibility, it was the statement that we've heard several times from the Premier: the worst is over. Have we heard that a number of times? Yeah. The worst is over. It's as though the Premier is in a time warp. He doesn't know when the cuts started, and he doesn't know that they haven't ended. You see, he thinks – and he is perpetrating this idea on Albertans – that somehow the cuts have been going on for two years and we're almost to the end of them. That's absolutely not the case, and Albertans aren't buying it. The customers, which they would call Albertans, aren't buying this one, absolutely not. [interjection] Exactly. They're paying a sales tax whether they want to buy or not.

The fact of the matter in this case, Mr. Speaker, is that the government had the best of all possible worlds for the first 14 months of its regime because it was able to tell everybody in this province what they wanted to hear: we're going to balance the budget. But you know what? The major cuts hadn't even started until the beginning of August. Sure, I'm not belittling the 5 percent that they took away from nurses and other public servants. That hurts, but many of those people – not enough – still had their jobs. And I'm not belittling the impact of cuts, aggressive cuts: 11, 7, and 3. Why couldn't you have gone 3, 7, and 11 on advanced education in the first year? We don't know. But the broad social cuts, the broad cuts that had impact across a much wider spectrum of this society, began to occur in August. But you know what? It wasn't until four weeks ago that they closed the first major hospital in this province. These cuts were announced by and large in August, and they have only been starting to take effect over the last four or five or six months. The first rural hospitals weren't even tinkered with by this government until four weeks ago, and education cuts weren't implemented until September of 1994. In fact, the first year they increased education.

I will tell you a harbinger of something, a harbinger of something that this government should be aware of. The first day of school I was in St. Mary's high school in Calgary, and I spoke to a teacher who was sitting after a long, hard day in the office. She looked up at me, and she said, "You know, I have 42 grade 11 students in my class, and I will never, ever vote for Mr. Klein again."

So what we have, Mr. Speaker, is about – it depends whose numbers you get; it's tough to know – \$1.1 billion worth of cuts announced and partially implemented up until last weekend, and even many of those haven't been effected. We haven't had a whole year without the Grace hospital. We haven't had a whole

year with huge class sizes. We haven't had a whole year without kindergarten. We haven't had year after year, generation after generation without kindergarten. But what we should keep in mind is that yesterday they announced a doubling of the health care cuts, and they will add another \$122 million to those health care cuts next year, the subsequent year. They announced more education cuts, and what we will see is these cuts getting deeper and deeper and deeper. Already we're seeing the evidence. I'm going to reiterate that poll: 69 percent of Albertans are opposed to the way in which these people are cutting health care – 69 percent; it's more than two-thirds – and 67 percent are opposed to the way they're cutting education. And the cuts have just begun. We'll wait till another year, a year from now, and we will see, I think, quite a remarkable turn of events and quite a remarkable deterioration in how people feel about this government.

I mentioned a little bit about downloading on local governments and local property owners. One of the disturbing themes that we see . . .

**8:20**

**MRS. BLACK:** Talk about employment, Grant.

**MR. MITCHELL:** Okay. I'll just make a note. I'll talk about employment.

One of the disturbing themes that we see in this government's budget confirms what we had anticipated, and that is that there would be an increasing emphasis and reliance upon property tax to fund education now that the government has stolen that property tax base from local school governments across this province. It's true. When the Premier took over, 42 percent of education was funded from the property tax base in this province. In two short years we now see that 52 percent of the education system in this province is funded from the property tax base. This is exactly the way we shouldn't be going, and that is almost a 25 percent increase.

Education is not something that is related in any kind of intrinsic way to sewers or roads or streetlights. It has a much broader social good and a much broader social implication. It should more appropriately be funded from general revenues with a reduced reliance on the property tax base, freeing up that for municipalities who could do other things because of restructuring in funding relationships that would allow that kind of philosophical support for education funding, that change to take place. But what we find is an increasing reliance on property tax even now to fund education and from now on, and that is highly regressive. It puts huge pressure again on average Albertans, average Albertans who are now paying increased health care fees, increased user fees, and are bearing the brunt of much of the failure of this government over the last nine years.

Employment. You know, I was just struck today to hear I think it was the Premier standing in this House talking about how they had created the infrastructure for jobs to be created within the economy. I think they said 113,000 jobs. Last time I checked, I think the operative variable in creating those jobs was hardly the Premier and his economic fiscal policies, Mr. Speaker. It was much more likely oil prices, natural gas prices, which I would hope the Premier isn't taking any responsibility for. In fact, we have been blessed by a remarkably strong economy, and that has been a huge help in balancing the budget this year. There is some strength in being conservative about what will happen next year, but certainly the Minister of Energy and certainly the Premier cannot take responsibility for increased oil and gas prices and what they've done to sustain our economy and create those jobs.

What we should do is look beneath that figure of 113,000 jobs. Many of those jobs are part-time. Many of those are temporary. Many of those are cyclical, and certainly very few of those jobs are jobs that are picked up by nurses and teachers and public servants, who have paid the price for this government's excesses and have been laid off summarily.

Debt: debt management, debt retirement. You know, there is some indication that the government is going to retire the debt. Two problems. One, they don't know what the debt is. This is a frightening prospect. They say the net debt is \$8.2 billion. It's not; it's \$16.2 billion. The difference is by and large the unfunded pension liability. The government has amortized that unfunded pension liability of about \$6 billion over 68 years. The people who have received those benefits will unfortunately long since be dead by the time this province is able to pay off that unfunded pension liability. Our program, 2020 Vision, shows that we can pay off that debt and the rest of the debt in 24 years – in 24 years, Mr. Speaker – a period of time which is sufficiently quick so as to handle the debt expeditiously but which, on the other hand, is spread over a sufficient period of time to pace the paying off of debt and to free up resources so that education and health care and support when they need it for people who need support can be provided by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans can be characterized by many things, but one thing in particular strikes me at this point. That is their resilience, their ability to confront frontiers and to conquer those frontiers. Just because we have conquered many of the physical frontiers of this province – land's been cleared, farms have been established, and so on, and resource technologies have been refined. There are many, many frontiers still to confront us and future generations in this province. Those frontiers, while they are different, are no less compelling, no less arduous. They are frontiers, in fact, that require special emphasis on education to meet an increasingly competitive international and global economy. They are frontiers that will be confronted better by a population that is healthy and has a sense of security about a health care system which can sustain its health. These are frontiers that my children, that generations in the future will have to confront and confront successfully, but they will only be able to do that if this government understands the role that in the past governments in this province have always played.

People have built this province by working together. It's not like the member from Medicine Hat, who stood up at some point and said that the philosophy of his government is every man for himself, forgetting that 50 percent of the people of this province are women. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker . . .

#### **Point of Order**

#### **Incorrect Reference to a Constituency**

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

MR. RENNER: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has on numerous occasions referred to quotes made by my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat and continually gives me the credit for the remarks that my colleague makes. As a matter of fact, he was even doing it in his leadership contest. I'd ask that the Leader of the Opposition try and remember which is Cypress-Medicine Hat and which is Medicine Hat.

MR. MITCHELL: I apologize, because I know exactly how I would feel if somebody misconstrued anything that Cypress-

Medicine Hat said as being something that I said. I withdraw it, and I redirect my comments to Cypress-Medicine Hat.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. MITCHELL: Cypress-Medicine Hat stood up and said: every man for himself; that's the government's philosophy. Well, you know, I don't know where he grew up, I don't know what province he lives in, I don't know what culture he comes from, because I don't know an Alberta where every man is for himself, quote, unquote. I know an Alberta where people have always built upon a sense of community, where they have worked together, where they have not put up with governments who said that this group is pitted against this group, that we're not responsible, that you're all responsible for what went wrong, and as the Premier he's off to Vancouver telling everybody what a hero he is for doing something that he hasn't even done. We have to get back to basing our budgets and basing our legislative programs on a much broader vision of this province. The budget is not an end in itself; it's a step along the way to a better Alberta. We are not going to achieve a better Alberta if all that we have is a government that is obsessed and focused solely on that and can't understand that great governments can actually balance the budget and do those other things a government has to do. They can, in fact, walk and chew gum at the same time.

8:30

MR. BRUSEKER: Are you sure?

MR. MITCHELL: They can't, but great governments can.

Our position, Mr. Speaker, is that a great government must emphasize those fundamental services, provide them within the parameters of a balanced budget, and do that in order to support Albertans as they confront the 21st century and the frontiers that they will confront in the future so that they can confront and overcome those frontiers with success.

We won't be voting for this budget. We will be arguing each step of the way to improve it, and we hope, Mr. Speaker, that our arguments and our presentations will have some impact on a government that has failed to listen and, as is evidenced by this particular budget and its throne speech, has certainly failed to care about Albertans.

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

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the debate on the 1995 provincial budget, and if I had to describe the budget, I would have to say that it appropriately continues to attack the deficit but through the most inappropriate of ways. Today in the Assembly we heard that the Klein government had introduced 246 new taxes which are going to yield one-quarter of a billion dollars in new government revenues. New government taxes. This money comes straight out of the pockets of hardworking Albertans, Albertans that have already paid taxes to receive these services. They are now paying more. They're paying more to receive less. They are now less sure than ever about what they are getting for their money. We've heard the Provincial Treasurer, we've heard the Premier speak about performance and outcome, but to date it's only been words. We haven't seen any indication that the government is now performing better than it was two years ago, than it was performing one year ago. There's no mark. All we can see is that the budget numbers are changing, but as for people there's no indication that it's better for Albertans.

Clearly, this government in its budget has shown a new way of raising revenues from the same taxpayer and, as we have heard so many times from across the way, a single taxpayer, the only taxpayer because only one taxpayer exists. The government digs deeper into the taxpayer's pocket and says: "Don't worry. We're not taking tax money away from you. We're taking fee money away from you." But they're taking it away. I think back to the Premier's \$120,000 fireside chat not one month ago where the Premier said, and I quote, "it is possible to put our financial house in order, without raising taxes." I believe that statement to be true, Mr. Speaker, but I see no evidence that this Premier or this Treasurer is interested or able, for that matter, to achieve financial order without digging their hands into the pockets of hardworking Albertans. They have a history of going to the taxpayer's pocket and then straight to the gambling table. In fact, when the Treasurer earlier today answered a question about the debt, he responded that the net debt is \$8.6 billion. He can take credit for giving Albertans over 30 percent of that net debt when he was in cabinet. He was probably full of glee back then as he rubbed his hands together and rolled the dice with taxpayers' money.

Today we learned that this so-called good-news budget was apparently leaked, a most serious conflict and breach of trust by any government which negligently or knowingly permits or facilitates such action, a breach which can and quite possibly did lead to financial gain. I'm very concerned that this Conservative government's 1995 budget, which taxes Albertans heavily, may have in fact been a very good-news budget for any who were privy to the information prior to its official release. The consequences or precedents for such breach are very serious. I'm sure that the government's friends in New York and at the Fraser Institute in British Columbia would agree with this statement and would be terrified to think that this most grave breach occurred in Alberta, in the land governed by Newt of the north to be more like the United States. You know why it's wrong, Mr. Speaker? This is Alberta, and Albertans believe in responsible financial management, not Conservative fiscal policy. It is apparent that that label was the one that was affixed to those who brought Alberta to the Grand Canyon of debt, the one the Premier so badly wants to jump in one leap, once again rolling the dice but this time with the health and education of Albertans.

The opposition stated that there was no plan a little over a year ago. They stated that there was no plan six months ago. So the government glued some pages together, put on a glossy cover, and presented its plan. Consequently, everything is going according to plan, but like the rest of the work of this government there is no indication of quality. To speak of quality, the government would have to know something about performance and outcome. Mr. Speaker, once again there is no evidence of any. This government simply cannot tell Albertans what they are getting for their ever increasing tax burden. Hardworking Albertans can only tell them that they are getting less for more, thanks to this government's plan.

Somehow I can't recall that being one of the election promises from this government. No, Mr. Speaker. They were out in our beautiful province sprinkling promises of new hospitals, improved education, and defending seniors. We did lose and they did win. I can tell you that I never promised any new hospitals or any new roads, and despite not being government, I'm still living up to those commitments. I'm living up to every promise I made to my constituents. They are getting good representation. As I travel across this province, I've heard many Albertans speak of broken

promises, of broken trust, and they're not talking about the Alberta Liberals, because they weren't out there promising a new hospital.

The Premier is now telling Albertans that the worst is over, Mr. Speaker. In fact, he spent \$120,000 of their money to get prime-time TV to tell them that the worst is over. He must not have read his own budget. The worst is yet to come. Does the Premier really think that \$276 million yet to come from health care isn't serious? Well, if he doesn't, he should ask his number-crunching, hand-rubbing protector of the rich about compound interest, because the same model applies here.

MRS. BLACK: Who wrote your speech?

MR. SEKULIC: I'll tell you right away, Pat.

If you cut without a plan and an environment of accountability does not exist, as proven every day during question period, then as you cut further, you compound the problems and increase the cost of repairing the damage. Mr. Speaker, you have probably heard of people doing their own auto repairs only to take the vehicle to a qualified mechanic to know that they have increased the cost of their very own repairs. I'm afraid that the government is attempting its own repairs and is making that job that much more difficult for us after the next election. We're up to the challenge though. We're up to the challenge, and we can live within our promises. [interjection] Albertans won't have to read the fine print, Pat, because we don't have anything to hide. The Premier shakes this 500-page document, if that's what it is, if not more, and he says: it's in there; all the numbers are in there. For those who have had some work with the legal system in Alberta – and the reason we do need some of our colleagues here, our lawyers, is to read that fine print and interpret for us. As Albertans get to reading that fine print and have the Liberal opposition read that fine print for them, they're finding out that there is in fact lots to hide and lots has been hidden: 246 new taxes. That's a lot to hide, even in a book this thick.

8:40

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: How many?

MR. SEKULIC: Two hundred and forty-six new taxes. Mind you, Mr. Speaker, that would be a change, of course, if there was something new, if it was obvious, if they just came out and said that there's a new fee. The reason there may be a change, of course, is because maybe they wouldn't have been elected if in fact they would have told what they were going to do. If their brochures read anything like ours, the facts, the truth, the future – in fact, I've been asking for some of the brochures from members opposite so I can see which hospitals were to go where in the province, but they've all been gone, because history is being rewritten.

MRS. BLACK: Go back to your speech.

MR. SEKULIC: You like that part? Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy seems to have lots to say until question period. Then it seems there is silence or a referral to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, after all, there is one thing. Those hospitals, protecting education, seniors, listening, and caring were only election promises, a convenient logo, and you know what? Speaking of convenient logos, it sounds a lot like people, prosperity, and preservation. This budget places priority on the bottom line to the exclusion of people. This is a budget of misplaced priorities.

The departments of health care, education, and advanced ed are being cut by a further \$384 million in 1995. That's 73 percent of the total program expenditure reductions that are being made this year. Yet they speak of people, prosperity, and preservation. That's a strange way to preserve, Mr. Speaker. Health care is being cut by \$276 million; 52 percent of the total expenditure cuts are being undertaken in this area. People must be simply a word of convenience, simply a logo.

Mr. Speaker, we presented a plan for debt reduction, and it seems like we initiated some movement on the other side, and I'm glad to see that this government has come to realize that tackling that debt is an important issue.

When I was down in Calgary in the constituencies of some of my colleagues this past weekend, I was asked by a businessperson there, "What is our debt?" I said: "Well, there's the \$8.6 billion net debt, one-third of which the Provincial Treasurer contributed to himself. There's over \$16 billion in the unmatured debt. Or there's the \$32 billion in the gross debt." I was asked, "Which debt will the government tackle?" I said, "I assume it would be the net debt." Mr. Speaker, I was asked: "Why is the government not attacking the \$32 billion debt?"

DR. WEST: You have to count both sides of the ledger.

MR. SEKULIC: It's not my argument. I'm representing a constituent in Calgary, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this \$32 billion gross debt. I was asked: "Why aren't we attacking that? After all, we're paying interest on all of that." This individual drew the analogy to me because the Premier has convinced them of the home renovations analogy. This constituent said that if someone has a mortgage, and the mortgage is \$150,000, and they own a Mercedes, perhaps, and a computer, well, they don't say that's an asset, and we'll write it off against that gross debt. They start paying down the gross debt despite their other assets. So why is the government exempt? Now, it's interesting that the Treasurer didn't bother to explain that clear fact to some Albertans. Maybe he will tomorrow in question period, or maybe he will when he rises to debate in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I think this government has done one thing that is right. It is continuing to tackle the deficit, but I think their priorities are a little mixed up. I would hope that they listen to the 69 percent who tell them they aren't doing the right thing in health care. I would hope that they listen to the 67 percent who tell them they aren't doing the right thing in education. I would hope that they listen to the seniors that they were so convinced they had listened to the first time. I would hope that they would listen and adjust their programs to make sure that we don't do damage which we can't reverse later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always fascinating that it's only in the House, not in question period but only in debate and usually in the evening, when the government members are cloaked in anonymity for purposes of *Hansard*, that we hear the real creativity that we know exists in the government benches. These are bright men and women, and every time a budget's unveiled, every time a new piece of legislation is introduced, we keep on waiting to see all of that intelligence and all of that life experience harnessed for the benefit of Albertans. Curiously, it's only in these late evening sessions that we really

start to see that imagination and that kind of creativity. It's a tragic loss that we're not able to see that channeled into those more constructive efforts so that the people of Alberta would benefit and we wouldn't simply have those in opposition managing to be entertained and educated at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, I always try and be positive in the House, and there are always some things that the government does that warrant applause – always. I mean, there's always some positive initiative. There's always some element of leadership shown from the members opposite, but after reviewing the Premier's press clippings, and as I've been reminded in the last two weeks in this Legislature, it seems to me that the government is indeed wallowing in a sea of self-congratulations. Never mind the kudos that they feel they're getting from other jurisdictions. I think my time would be best spent not simply adding further congratulations to those they've already received but instead focusing on the areas where I think the government, with respect, has missed the mark. [interjection] I'm glad I hear some interest in the subject of legal aid, and that in fact happens to be one of the things I wanted to touch on later tonight.

I did want to say that I'm somewhat puzzled that the Premier talks about the home renovation analogy. I would have thought that of all of the figures of speech he would want to use, that would be absolutely the last one that he'd want to use, yet he repeats it again and again.

My version of home renovation and that which I think is shared by most Albertans would go something more like this. We understand the home renovation project is under way. Albertans initially were excited, but as the noise and the dust from the work site increased, Albertans began to wonder what was going on. The contract, Mr. Speaker, that was signed on June 15, 1993, was pretty clear and pretty unambiguous: what people wanted was the kitchen to be remodeled. But as Albertans are watching, to their horror they see that walls are being knocked out, ceilings are being taken out, and floors are being taken out. That wasn't part of the contract on June 15, 1993. The chief contractor is hardly ever around because he's traveling around to other work sites. His company, Demolition for Dollars, is busy trying to subcontract out virtually . . .

#### Point of Order Referring to the Absence of Members

MR. DAY: Point of order.

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

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear in Standing Orders and in *Beauchesne* that noting a member's presence or absence is out of order. It's a good thing it is. Otherwise, the record would show there were only 14 members opposite when their leader concluded debate on what was supposed to be a flagship Bill related to education. They ran in when the bells rang. They dragged them in kicking and screaming to actually be here, but there were only 14 here in the House when their leader was concluding debate. So I'd like a consideration . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The Chair does not feel that the hon. Government House Leader really has a valid point of order. The Chair understood the context of the hon. member's comments as relating not to presence or absence in the House but perhaps

from the province and the Premier's duties and obligations as the leader of the government outside of the House, not in the House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

8:50

#### Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that you understood exactly the point I was making, even if all members didn't appreciate it.

In any event, the point I was attempting to make was that what we see is the contractor that we had hired on June 15, 1993, trying to subcontract out virtually every element of the work contract. They're doing it for profit at the expense of us, the house owner. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the home renovation thing may have been what Albertans thought they were getting, but what they're getting is home demolition. I think it's time the government recognized that Albertans aren't with them, that at some point the direction of the government and the speed with which the government is moving have effectively hived away from not only the expectations but the wishes of most Albertans. I guess that may be one of our responsibilities in this House, to remind the home demolition crew that the contract was much more limited than what they would have us believe.

Mr. Speaker, we hear the government talk about people, prosperity, and preservation, three words that are curious to use when we look at the context of the government's legislative regime. In terms of people, what we've seen is a government that's refused to listen or listens selectively. We have a government that mischievously attempts to distract people when there's concern in terms of legitimate issues. We have also the making of what I call the great social experiment. [interjection] I listened to my friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He considers himself apparently something of an expert in other political philosophies.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's in transportation now.

MR. DICKSON: Transportation now. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; I can't keep up with the portfolio shift.

He always makes a point of talking about the ideology he thinks that this caucus is part of. What's ironic is that if not the chief architect, he's certainly one of the key architects of the great social experiment in Canada. It's not Ontario where you see the social experimentation. It's not British Columbia. It's the good old province of Alberta. You say in terms of a social experiment, "Well, some members think it's working." I think most Albertans are only beginning to understand that they're the guinea pigs in this experiment.

What we see is a government that talks about wanting to make people self-reliant. Now, that, in a breath, is both sweeping and the ultimate kind of arrogance. Albertans know exactly what they want. They don't want to be remade by this government; they don't want to be remade by anybody. Albertans already have a strong history of being self-reliant, and I think it's just absolutely preposterous that the government would come along and say: "We're going to teach people. We're going to make them operate differently. We're going to make them think differently." Well, I think that doesn't reflect what Albertans elected this government to do. If it's our job to remind them, then we'll be happy to keep on reminding them. So the "people" word in the three words used in the budget and in *A Better Way* is a curious one.

They talk about prosperity. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the Minister of Community Development in the House this evening. What's of particular significance to me is that we talk

in Alberta a lot about international trade. We hear the government talk a lot about expanding our trade opportunities, yet at the very same time we do that, we see the Alberta Human Rights Commission being effectively neutered. It's not having the opportunity to provide the kind of leadership that was intended by then Premier Lougheed when it was first created back in 1972. I would have thought that a government that truly was interested in prosperity for the province of Alberta, for the people of Alberta, would have started by recognizing that if the bulk of our trade opportunities happened to be in Asia or happened to be in South America or happened to be in other places, financiers and businesspeople in those communities want to know how they are going to be treated in this province. They want to know what kind of a place this is to raise their family. They want to know what kind of a place this is to introduce a business.

The reality is, and even my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat would find this if he'd come with me to downtown Calgary and I introduced him to a number of businesspeople who will tell you point blank that they're concerned in terms of the lack of leadership this government has shown in terms of human rights protection. That speaks to our economic attractiveness. That speaks to our Alberta advantage. If indeed this government was so concerned about prosperity in this province, one would have thought they would have shown some leadership. Rather than leadership, what we see is the Premier's own panel review on the Individual's Rights Protection Act and the Alberta Human Rights Commission, a report that was prepared by people selected by the Premier. They made a report, and the report has virtually disappeared from popular parlance of this government. We hear nothing of the report. We've still had no response from the minister responsible, from his government, to the very specific recommendations to strengthen both the Human Rights Commission and the Individual's Rights Protection Act. If this government were concerned about prosperity, surely that's where we would have seen leadership. We've seen none.

The government talks about preservation. Well, what are we preserving? Are we preserving what's been one of the soundest education systems in the country? Does anybody think we're preserving that? Are we preserving a health care system that's been the envy of people not only in Canada but in other places in the world? Are we preserving our communities? I'm glad to see the Member for Lacombe-Stettler here because she better than anyone else in this Chamber understands the concern that Albertans have in small towns and large towns about what's happening to their communities because of video lottery terminals and the prospect of for-profit casinos. I expect that before the end of this debate, she's going to get up, and she's going to echo what I'm telling you now: Albertans are concerned about what's happening to their communities. So what is the government preserving? I suggest what they think they're preserving is in fact the ideological notion of certain ministers who want to remake the people of Alberta, who don't think they're good enough now, who want to change their attitudes, who want to change their expectations in dramatic ways, ways that weren't part of that contract on June 15, 1993.

Mr. Speaker, now turning to the budget. I think the Leader of the Opposition did an effective job in terms of highlighting a number of the shortcomings in the budget. Let me tell you some of the things that give me great concern. There's obviously interest on the part of the one minister opposite about legal aid cuts, \$2.5 million cut in legal aid. I think that if you think of a

cut that makes little sense – and there are plenty of them – this is an excellent example.

DR. WEST: It's welfare for the lawyers.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that there are some people who really seem to believe that a legal system that's funded by every Albertan in this province with their tax dollars should be only accessible to a few. Well, I think that is exactly the kind of thinking that continues to get this government in trouble and will continue to get them in trouble. At some point they have to understand that Albertans are entitled to be able to access their own courts system. If those members opposite are concerned that the legal aid system isn't working efficiently enough, why is it that we see nowhere in this high volume entitled A Better Way II some discussion about doing what Saskatchewan has done in terms of alternate dispute resolution? Now, there's a government that's shown some leadership. There's a government that said there are people in Saskatchewan that can't access the legal system, and as a government they came up with some strategies to ensure that everybody could access it. I don't see the same kind of response. One would think that some of that creativity I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, that we're hearing tonight but unfortunately probably won't make *Hansard* and certainly won't be attributed in *Hansard* – I hope some of that energy we hear could be taken into the cabinet meetings to encourage the Minister of Justice to look at that Saskatchewan model and talk about making a truly accessible legal system here so that we don't develop a system . . .

9:00

DR. WEST: So we go absolutely broke at the expense of lawyers.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it amazes me that a minister of the Crown, a minister who would have the opportunity to travel all over this province in the course of his responsibilities, would have such a woeful lack of understanding of something as basic as our legal system. What concerns me even more than the lack of understanding is the fact that that very same minister has no concern for the fact that there are Albertans that can't access their legal system now. That's a shame. That's a shame, and one would have expected that every member in this House would be anxious to deal with that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to seeing that same kind of leadership that we hear in the anonymous comments and observations in the House channeled into new legislation. Hopefully we'll see that before the end of the spring session.

Mr. Speaker, working my way through A Better Way II, I come to page 12. We have an interesting feature there, and it's entitled "Changing the Way Government Does Business." It starts off positively; it starts off in a way I can wholeheartedly agree to. It says: we want to eliminate waste and duplication. Well, what Albertan wouldn't want to see that done?

Then it starts to build up steam, and it says something else I agree with. It talks about "streamlining processes and getting rid of unnecessary regulations." That's an excellent idea, and we've suggested some ways we could do that. We might start with encouraging the government to energize the moribund Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, chaired by my friend from Calgary-Shaw, and start reviewing regulations. You want to clean up some deadwood. I think there's enough energy in this Legislature and there's certainly the talent to start cutting through and cutting out surplus and repetitive and duplicitous regulations. That's a good starting point, and with respect, Mr. Speaker, that

would have far more impact and far more positive results for Albertans than simply another business plan or an expansion of a business plan.

We hear other bullets from the government on page 12, but we then start moving into the one that gives me real difficulty. They want to move "from direct service delivery to facilitating services delivered by other agencies," and then they want to shift "from a regulatory role to a policy and facilitation role." Mr. Speaker, when will this government understand that government exists for a legitimate purpose? It's not collecting taxes; it's doing things that ordinary Albertans cannot afford to do for themselves. There's nothing bad about that. There's nothing improper. There's nothing immoral. The government continues to pursue this fallacious notion that if we can just get government compressed and condensed, I mean, somehow Albertans are going to be better off.

The reality is that when our aging parents want health services and need health services, they don't want a lecture on how they should lead healthier life-styles. When our children are sick and we take them to the emergency ward of a city hospital, we don't want lectures in terms of preventative measures and wellness measures. The reality is that life expectancy is not going to change in this province significantly within the life of this government, and Albertans are going to need and they're going to require acute care services. That's a legitimate role for government to play. Albertans want safer communities. That's a legitimate role for government. I think it's important we recognize that that's what government is here for. It's time to start recognizing that government has a legitimate purpose. Waste and duplication have no room in this province, and I'll join with the members opposite in aggressively dealing with that. But let's recognize that we have a very legitimate role for government as well.

Mr. Speaker, the issue on page 7 in terms of the results expected, the emphasis in terms of community care services, and the emphasis on prevention – the information I get from people in the city of Calgary is that we're still such a long way from having those community resources in place, the kinds of things the government keeps talking about, that there's still no connection, there's no sequencing of abandonment or elimination of programs or facilities until after there's a better alternative in place. At some point I think the government has to recognize that if you simply eliminate beds, if you simply close hospitals without having ensured that first the alternatives are in place and that we're able to make an orderly transition from one phase to the other, Albertans are going to be prejudiced.

Mr. Speaker, I think those are the points that I wanted to make. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me. I delayed standing for a moment because the now minister of transportation – we forget; we still refer to him as the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and we credited him in *Hansard* with many profound statements this evening, but we want to ensure that we all recognize his job as the minister of transportation – was so revved up during the excellent speech, I must say, an award-winning speech virtually, from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that I wanted to give him a chance to rise, to bring himself up to his magnificent height, towering over six feet, and talk to me and tell me how legal aid, a system that is set up to defend people who are down-and-out and in trouble with the law,



is in fact welfare for lawyers, was the expression he used, welfare for lawyers.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Did he say that?

MR. GERMAIN: That is what the minister of transportation referred to about the legal aid system.

DR. WEST: We provide the money and you find the clients. That's how it works.

MR. GERMAIN: Well, let me say that I'm going to speak a little bit about that, and I want to tell the minister that by virtue of personal choice I do not take and am not on the legal aid roster. So that the minister does not stand up and suggest that this is one lawyer protecting his own turf, I want to go on record as saying that I do not take one penny from the legal aid program; all right? You know, the Speaker of this Legislative Assembly is himself a lawyer and reputed to be a fine lawyer, and perhaps it's too bad that he is restricted from debate about the issue of welfare for lawyers. It is a shame.

Now, the government, rightly so, also provides, Mr. Minister, dental care for young children who cannot afford proper dental care and for their parents who cannot afford proper dental care. Are those dentists who take and look after the down-and-out in this society of ours taking welfare for dentists? Is that welfare for dentists? The Alberta health care system pays doctors every time they see an individual. Whether they are poor or wealthy, it matters not to those doctors. Are they taking welfare for health care? When the hon. member from Brooks, who is a member of the medical profession, sees people and submits his tariff to Alberta health care, is he taking welfare for doctors? That, Mr. Speaker, is a perfect example of why it's not worth preparing a speech to come and give here in the Legislative Assembly because now in a moment, I'm sure, the minister will stand up and say that the Legislative Assembly and the parliamentarians in it in fact are taking welfare for politicians by being here, and if you are a minister of the Crown and getting paid more, then you are taking more welfare for politicians. I see the minister nods in approval. Perhaps he will stand up subsequently and confirm my comments.

9:10

But I came tonight, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the budget. That's why I came here tonight. I was delighted to see that I got to follow my friend from Calgary-Buffalo. I've got to tell you. Last fall the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I were traveling the province and were not here in the Legislature as much as we would have liked to have been in the late evening shifts. The interesting thing about it is that in a perverse way – and perhaps proving now that my mind has moved from this world into the twilight zone – I actually missed the place. There is, my friends, a quality of debate that sets in in this Legislative Assembly as the hour progresses into the evening that can rarely be duplicated, could not be planned by a Spielberg script, and could not be filmed.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: Point of order.

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

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on the point referred to in Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* on relevance, we are early on in the session, and the question of relevance is something I think we have to stick to reasonably closely. I know there's latitude in discussing the budget, but I only stood because, by the member's own admission, he has not yet begun to address the budget. The hour is still young. We have a lot of work to do over the next six months before we get out of here in August. Could this member and all members, I include myself, address the relevance of debate?

MR. GERMAIN: He raises a fair point, the relevance of it.

#### Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: You recall, Mr. Speaker, that I mentioned I had been following the Member for Calgary-Buffalo around the province in the fall, and what happened as I followed him around the province tells well about this government's priorities. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo was fond of pointing out that in a small community in rural Alberta 400 or 500 people gathered to discuss their hospital and the potential of closure, and they wanted the Premier to come. A reasonable request for a man who listens and cares. They wanted the Premier to come. The Premier didn't come that day because he had to come the next day for the opening of a funeral home, and that was a graphic example of the priorities of the government. It takes me back to why I was dwelling on following my friend from Calgary-Buffalo around the province.

Now, I have gone out of my way to compliment the government on their honesty, and there was an honest portion in the budget and an honest comment made by the Provincial Treasurer. The portion in the budget that was honest was that the Provincial Treasurer – and this was a telling statement – admitted to all who cared to listen that without the luck of the unexpected windfall revenues from oil and gas and lotteries the Provincial Treasurer would have brought in a whopping deficit, quote, unquote. Without those windfalls, a whopping deficit. I give the Treasurer compliments for honesty. But it also, members of this Assembly, indicates that we have not solved the fundamental . . . [interjection] I know the minister of transportation will want to speak after me, Mr. Speaker, and I'll try to be brief.

We have not yet solved the fundamental problem of the government and the incompetence in attempting to handle the competing needs of the public in a fair and compassionate way, yet we come in under budget each time, every time.

Now, people sometimes say to me: "What if you could have a wish? Member for Fort McMurray, what if you could have one of two choices? What if the one choice was that the province would always be awash with energy boom revenues? That was your one choice. Or the other choice is that you could be the Premier of the province." If those were the two choices, if a genie came to me and said, "Those are your two choices, member; pick your choice: Premier of the province or the province always awash in energy revenues," I tell you all that I would pick the province awash in energy revenues every time, because as you have more money, you need less competence to run a government.

The next point that I want to make when I comment about the balance and the whopping deficit is that I want to talk about the sales tax that exists in the province of Alberta. Everybody's going to chirp right up and say: what sales tax?

AN HON. MEMBER: What sales tax?

MR. GERMAIN: There it is, right on cue: what sales tax? *Hansard* will record that.

We have sales taxes all over this province, Mr. Speaker. We have them on gasoline. We have them on motel rooms. We have sales taxes on tires. Every one of those user fees that the Premier is so fond of referring to as not taxes are all in fact sales taxes.

What is a sales tax by definition? A sales tax is anything that is added on to the price of a service or a commodity that is triggered by the choice of acquisition of that service or commodity. Do we have sales taxes in this province? You bet we do. You bet we do. This is a province that has sales taxes, has had sales taxes for many years, and is a province that appears to have leadership that supports the concept of a sales tax. So we do have sales taxes in this province, and we see them again displayed in this budget.

Now, what else do we have in this budget? We have in this budget, Mr. Speaker, something that I refer to as artificial conservatism. Now, what is artificial conservatism? Artificial conservatism is when you have spendthrift government Conservatives that spend like sailors in a port after a long time at sea, spend year after year after year, and suddenly, almost like a religious revelation, they see the light and they want to now reform. That is artificial conservatism.

Now, what are the elements? What is the indication of that particular malady. Well, one of the indications is that you start with the ingredient of a wild spending government, and you still have a wild spending government. My friends, do not be lulled into believing that this government is controlling its spending where people want it to be spent.

You know, everywhere I go I tell people that we have too much government in this country, and it spends too much money. It doesn't matter, Mr. Speaker, if I'm talking to a gathering of the Reform Party, if I'm talking to a gathering of New Democrats, if I'm talking to a gathering of Liberals, or if I'm talking to a gathering with political conservatism within the core of the gathering. They all agree with that statement: we have too much government, and it spends too much money.

Little has been done to control the public perception in this province that we have too much government and it spends too much money. This government has had a chance to do that. This government has had a chance to consider reducing the number of MLAs in this province. It declined to do so. This government has had a chance to look at the budgets of its executive offices: the executive office of the Premier, the executive offices of some of the other Members of the Legislative Assembly. We haven't done enough in that area. We are asking young children to give up their schooling.

DR. WEST: I'll work on it.

MR. GERMAIN: I like that. The minister of transportation promises that he's going to work on it.

We are asking people to take a lowering of standards in their health care. We are asking people to give up some of the social net that we've decided in past governments is worth preserving. Surely they have the right to look back and say that those who are most highly blessed in society should give as much or more. We have not done enough, so we have this concept of a wild spending government that is not yet in bridled control.

Now, another example of artificial conservatism, Mr. Speaker, is when you create low estimates of your earnings. We do that by assuming that the WCB will never return any profit. We do that

by assuming that corporate taxes will be in the basket. We do that by assuming that individual taxes will be in decline. We do that by assuming that energy estimates will plummet. We do that by assuming that the minister of transportation, because he is no longer the Minister of Municipal Affairs, will not sell a single piece of land in the province or sign another lease in the next year. We do all of that in the interests of artificial conservatism. But we can't be completely honest, because we still have these snakes that are lurking about in the budget papers that threaten to come out and consume the government at any moment.

One of those snakes is the Swan Hills plant, the Bovar fiasco.

9:20

AN HON. MEMBER: Not Bovar.

MR. GERMAIN: Yeah, Bovar. This thing, because of super accounting, will now be generating a profit in the next year. That's like if you have an old Volkswagen and you know that the thing . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: I had one.

MR. GERMAIN: I had one, too.

You know that the thing is a dog, but what you're going to do is you're going to put a big stereo in that Volkswagen, you're going to drive around the streets with the sound system turned up on the stereo, and because people can hear the sound of your stereo, they're going to say, "We're getting some value for that, and therefore that Volkswagen is turning a profit now." That's the kind of artificial conservatism, Mr. Speaker, that I talk about that leads to disturbing accounting.

Now, I want to move on to another area that is going to come back to haunt this government time and time again. In fact, I know that it's already a pressure point, because when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was commenting on it, as he got close to this tender spot, he was immediately met with a point of order from the other side of the Legislative Assembly. This is common, as you know, Mr. Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Purported.

MR. GERMAIN: A purported point of order. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that you ruled against the individual making it. That's what happens when you get close to an Achilles tendon or close to a sore spot, and that is this paying down our debt.

Paying down our debt. Now, let's talk about this from two angles. Let's talk about, first of all, the big debt that really for the purpose of paying it down is going to be a little debt only. This is like a person - we've used these analogies - who has now just finished his big new house. He's got an \$80,000 mortgage on his big new house, but he's only going to pay down \$40,000 of his mortgage. Why is he not going to pay down the other \$40,000? Not because the interest is going to go away, because he knows - God bless him - that the interest will continue; he's not going to pay down the last half of the debt because he's going to say, "Well, the price of the property is going to keep going up, so my equity will stay the same." Why could this government, Mr. Speaker, not indicate to the public that they were going to pay down a debt of \$31 billion? Why couldn't they do that? They couldn't do that because with their pay-down schedule they knew that they would be subjugating Albertans for 75 years.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. GERMAIN: Seventy five years of debt repayment at the schedule they have outlined of \$350 million a year plus interest.

MR. BRUSEKER: That's even longer than a pension.

MR. GERMAIN: Seventy five years: that would be a new record. One hon. member reminds me that the pension amortization is only 60 years. This would be a new record of amortization, and they knew that the Alberta people would then know clearly and graphically the extent of government mismanagement over the last eight years. That's the legacy of the Conservative government of the province of Alberta from the '60s to '97 or '98 when it ends. That's the legacy of the Conservative government. All else will pale, Mr. Speaker, by comparison, but what will be remembered is the 75 years of debt, using the government's own figures and their own repayment schedule. So that's why they couldn't pay off the gross debt. They had to take some more imaginative lesser figure.

Now, why they took that figure means that they will continue to be able, Mr. Speaker, to adjust the asset end of the equation to always ensure that the debt appears to be getting smaller and smaller and smaller. If you can't pay it off, increase the assets. The Minister of Energy looks at me. She looks at me in indescribable emotion, because she knows that she has now seen the fallacy of the partial debt repayment scheme, where you can keep adjusting the assets and therefore always meet your deficit targets while plunging the province further and further and further on the treadmill of interest.

So we have this paying down the debt problem. Now, let's talk about it. Even if the government could not be criticized, Mr. Speaker, for their approach to only tackling about a third of the gross debt, let's look at the hundred million dollar minimum, \$350 million maximum a year. Let's look at it: 1994-95 was a good year for the government. The Treasurer admitted it. He said: everything that could go our way did go our way. Everything. Everything that could go our way did go our way. And you know what? He only brought in a hundred million dollar surplus. That's all he brought in: a hundred million dollar surplus this year. So in this, the best of all years, the sweetest of all opportunities, and the greatest of all luck for the Provincial Treasurer, this year with all the turmoil around the province and schools closing up in Fort McMurray and hospitals closing in rural Alberta, with all that turmoil the government would have only been able to hit its minimum – its minimum – debt reduction program of a hundred million dollars. That's all they would've done.

So when we examine this debt repayment scheme in the light of the day or in the intensity of the lights in the Legislative Assembly, we find that it is seriously wanting. That want will lead to aggravation, and the aggravation will lead to frustration, and the frustration will lead to anger, and Albertans will finally decide why it is that their children in this province are denied the opportunity for a good future with the so-called Alberta advantage. The reason, as expressed by one member of the press, is: it was a heck of a party, but it's now over and we have to pick up the beer bottles.

Now, I want to go on to talk about the various other attacks that are contained in the budget. First of all, there is an attack on children. Now, people will say, especially on the side opposite, that that is an overstatement, that that is an inflammatory statement concerning the impact of the budget on children, but it is . . . [Mr. Germain's speaking time expired]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, lawyers unfortunately and I think unduly receive a fair bit of sarcastic humour and abuse. The

lawyers that I know certainly on this side of the House have worked very hard to maintain a good profile for their profession. I think they deal honourably and show that they are commonsense thinkers and can approach issues on their merits. I would suggest that the Member for Fort McMurray has worked against that image and the hard work done by lawyers on this side, and here is another case in point coming up.

#### Point of Order Allegations against a Member

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

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: He has specifically, Mr. Speaker, identified this member by . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation. Citation.

MR. GERMAIN: Just a minute. I don't want to embarrass the Member for Medicine Hat, who spoke earlier on a point of order without citation.

To personally insult the Member for Fort McMurray, who happens to be a lawyer, in the *Hansard* record by saying that the member does not bring credit to his profession is frankly reprehensible. I have an excellent reputation within the legal profession. I have served this profession for many years with honour and with distinction, and I would ask that member to retract that statement.

MR. DAY: Well, on the point of order, Mr. Speaker, the member across doth protest too much. I don't know why he's so defensive. If he'll check *Hansard* or the Blues as soon as they're available, I never said anything of the sort. He didn't allow me to finish my comments, but he's hugely and somewhat surprisingly defensive on this point. I'd suggest that there's no point of order. I don't know what his vicious imaginations are all about.

9:30

THE SPEAKER: The Chair has to apologize for not paying enough attention to what the hon. Government House Leader was saying. Therefore, the Chair regretfully has to say that it is in the hands of the Blues and is unable to make an intelligent comment on the complaint of the hon. Member for Fort McMurray but does undertake to examine the Blues very carefully, if the hon. Government House Leader has indeed strayed from parliamentary tradition in referring to other members.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, you also were reflecting what I have seen from members on this side of the House in the legal profession to be a sound and commonsense approach to a ruling. I did not insult the member or in fact the legal profession, and I will now continue my remarks by saying that what I have observed from members on this side of the House who are in the legal profession is that they know how to exhibit hard work, a commonsense approach. They know how to focus on the relevant points. By listening to the Member for Fort McMurray and his speech, that shows in my view a work against what the members on this side have shown. I did not see relevance in his speech to the budget. I did not see common sense. I did not see any of those factors that I see exhibited from other members of the legal profession on this side of the House and in fact from yourself,

Mr. Speaker. That was the grand, huge insult worthy, I suppose, of having me thrown out of the House.

### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: Now, the point is this, Mr. Speaker. In listening to the Member for Fort McMurray as he purported to speak about the budget, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, there were a number of documents that were tabled by the Treasurer yesterday related to the budget. This one called Budget '95 has got about 180 pages. This was also tabled, and there are so many pages in this document. There are probably 300 pages here. In the estimates books, which are available also for discussion, there are 300 pages. We're probably talking about 800 pages, and this isn't even doing the supplementary estimates that couldn't be addressed in the budget. So conservatively – I love that word – speaking about a thousand pages, a thousand pages, of budget items, and we've listened for an hour and a half.

I'm not saying that we are a perfect government. We're far from that. I'm not saying that we've done everything right. We haven't. We've made mistakes. I'm not saying that we will be perfect in the future. We will not. We will continue to make mistakes. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? In a thousand pages they can't find one thing right and not one point of constructive criticism. I quote: we are robbing children of opportunity. Robbing children of opportunity. That's the kind of mindless diatribe we get when we're asking for positive input and positive reflection on over a thousand pages of documentation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

In all sincerity we plead with the members opposite, and we say: help us; help us. This is what we get: not one reference that is positive. Now, hopefully after these remarks it will sink in to a few who have yet to speak, and they'll start to say, "You know, if I'm going to have any credibility at all as an opposition member, once in three or four years I should say one tiny little thing positive, one piece of constructive criticism." I think – and I hope I'm not being unnecessarily optimistic – that will be the case, that in the bleak picture of doom that we are confronted with, there will be tiny little shafts of light of positive criticism. Now that I've brought these remarks out, I think that will have the desired effect. If for no other reason than just to prove me wrong, they'll do it.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we haven't heard anything positive, just a few very superficial observations about this budget. Is there one positive comment on any of the points I'm going to bring? No. Was there one positive comment that balanced budgets are the law after '95-96? Nowhere else in Canada – nowhere else in Canada – is that being achieved. Was there one positive note? No. Business plans ensuring that Albertans' priorities are the government's . . . [interjections] It's right here. It shows you didn't even get to page 3. It's right there, page 3. No other province in Canada has had a process of business plans three years ahead of time for them to look at. Not one comment about that, not one comment. Then performance measurements. No other province, no other government has had this, has inflicted on themselves performance measures by which we will be measured. Not one positive comment. Orderly debt retirement. They should be proud of the fact that in Alberta we have these. They don't have to say that we are wonderful and they love everything we do, but on these broad accomplishments, when the rest of the country is acknowledging them, not one positive comment.

Since 1992, Stats Canada figures, 89,000 jobs have been created. The unemployment rate continues to go down. Yes, even when restructuring is going on and public servants are being placed out of the government, even during that time, 89,000 jobs. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that on that particular point we were corrected by Stats Canada? We had it 10,000 jobs too low. Stats Canada said that it's even 10,000 more than the government has already tabulated. You know what's interesting to watch? As it does happen, when an undisputed, let's say, Stats Canada figure is released here from the front bench – it may be related to jobs, and of course we all pound the benches for political and other reasons. But do you know what? Even announcements like that or Suncor moving here because of the Alberta advantage . . . [some applause] Oh, now we have one honest member. They sit with glum faces, their hands jammed deep into their socks. They can't even crack a smile on a piece of good news, but I will go on. I will go on.

Government program spending in the first two years of our plan, reduced by \$1.9 billion. That's almost \$2 billion. Do you have any idea how many dollars a billion is? Have you ever thought of that? Let me run this one by you. If you could spend \$1,000 an hour every day that the stores are open, during the working hours, except on Sunday – let's pretend they're closed – do you know how long it would take you to spend \$1 billion? Would you make a guess? You're always shouting out. Go ahead, shout out a guess.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, please, hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you hear a guess through the Chair, you could pass it on to me. It would take at that rate, a fantastic rate of spending, 375 years to spend \$1 billion. We've reduced by almost \$2 billion. Was there any happiness about that? No. Is there any word of acknowledgement about that? Not one single word. Consolidated deficit, reduced by \$3.5 billion. Anything positive on that? No. Any constructive criticism to do with that? No, just ridiculous statements that we've robbed all children of any advantage and opportunity. That irresponsible, blatant, brainless type of comment is reprehensible. That's one reason I'm glad children aren't in the galleries in the evening. They get depressed enough watching the display here during question period. If they had to listen to that type of negative, black, absolute perilous doom coming at them from this bench, they would be disturbed.

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead is rising on a point of order. Would you share it with us, please.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, 23(h). It's the imputing of false motives and all that. I distinctly remember the Member for Fort McMurray coming out with one compliment. Yes, he congratulated the Treasurer on being honest and admitting that all systems had been in his favour. I distinctly remember it. Not only that, but I'd like to go a little further, if I may, because we have heard . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think that if you look at the changes that have occurred to our beloved section 23, there is a preamble now that kind of changes the issue a little bit.

Where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate;

- (h) makes allegations against another . . .
- (i) imputes false . . . motives to [a] member

You know, both sides have used this as a means of slowing someone down who is in full flight of debate, that kind of thing. I'm sure that we're not having another member here being named in the allegations. Is that the point of your point of order?

9:40

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: To me the truth was at stake here.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West is going to assist the Chair in this?

MR. BRUSEKER: That's precisely what I'd like to do, Mr. Speaker. If I might just draw your attention to that exact citation, I might point out that that is actually a postamble to section (g) and makes no reference at all to section (h). You referred to it as a preamble. I'm not sure if postamble is actually a word, but it is the end of section (g) rather than the beginning of section (h), and therefore it does not apply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. I do stand corrected on that. I did think that you were going to refer to the wonderful clauses (h), (i), and (j). However, it is rather difficult to understand the context in which the reference is made: "refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination."

MR. BRUSEKER: No, no. Move down, section 23(h): "makes allegations against another member."

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, just a minute here. I'm getting double signals here. One's saying that it's 23(g). Section 23(h) is what I addressed in response to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. It would appear that there really is no point of order unless the Blues can show me something to the contrary.

In any event, then, I will invite the hon. member to continue his debate and hopefully not inflame passions in the members who are allowed to hear you.

MR. DAY: Well, the members opposite are easily inflamed, Mr. Speaker, and in fact the member for out by Hinton has actually confirmed what I just said. I said that there's been nothing positive said. And when he can stand up and say that, yes, there was; there was a compliment from the Member for Fort McMurray because oil prices were up and you got a hundred million dollars – well, that proves my point. That's their definition of a positive statement about the government. The government had nothing to do with that, and the government totally admits to that, so that was not a positive statement that came from Fort McMurray. And I've never heard of a postamble before. I thought he was referring to a post handle. That's where he got his inspiration. But postamble? That's a new one, and I'm glad you've ruled it out of order.

#### Debate Continued

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, time has been taken up by these points of order, and even though it's not actually my speaking time, I don't want members to be wasting time here unnecessarily. I will conclude by saying that I have publicly congratulated members of the party opposite, of the Liberal opposition; for instance, the

Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for positive suggestions in improvements on the employment standards amendment Act, very positive things. I have publicly acknowledged and congratulated, for instance, the Opposition House Leader for good, positive suggestions in terms of Standing Orders and how we could improve the business of the House. I don't know why members opposite are instinctively reactionary when it comes to saying bring me some positive, constructive criticism, not just mindless negativism.

On that particular note, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully ending on some positive notes, we'll look for some good, constructive criticism, I know, in the days ahead. Given the time, I would move that we adjourn debate on Motion 14 at this point.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn debate on Motion 14. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as in agreement with the Opposition House Leader on projected business, I'd move now that we continue to consider His Honour's remarks from the Speech from the Throne.

#### head: **Consideration of His Honour 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.

[Adjourned debate February 16]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the Speech from the Throne.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We heard just a moment ago the Government House Leader say that he's looking for positive suggestions, that he's looking for concrete ideas. Since he obviously wasn't listening when I spoke earlier, let me give it to him again. Two concrete suggestions – two – and I'm going to encourage the Government House Leader to count. I'll be really clear in terms of identifying the first one, and I'll be even clearer in terms of identifying the second one. I'll come back after, and I'll sum up.

The first suggestion. If we look at the Speech from the Throne, what we find is this. The government talks about an ongoing review of every provincial regulation. I have stood in this House on at least nine occasions, Mr. Speaker, and expressed my concern with statutes that have excessive enabling provision for

government by regulation. I've suggested, I've urged, I've encouraged the government, the Government House Leader, to sponsor a motion which would empower the standing committee of this House on Law and Regulations chaired by the Member for Calgary-Shaw to undertake a review of regulations passed pursuant to the Regulations Act in this province. I've received no response from the Government House Leader. If he wants a positive suggestion, that's number one. I can go through it all over again, but instead what I'll do tomorrow is send him an excerpt from *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker, the reason that that's important is this. When we see a government that is moving pell-mell into deregulation, into getting government out of the business of being in government not because Albertans are asking for that but because that suits the ideological perspective and agenda of this government, more and more we see MLAs in this House effectively being deprived of the opportunity to raise concerns, express concerns. The Government House Leader is remarkably thin-skinned for the position he holds. One would think that we would embrace in this Legislature robust debate. That's what it's all about, Mr. Government House Leader. We're not here to throw roses. We're happy to congratulate the government when it has positive initiatives, but if the government expects that the people elected people on this side of the House to run around always congratulating the government on every boneheaded move, on every shortsighted decision, and on every missed opportunity, then I think they're going to be sorely disappointed. So that was my first suggestion. Let's ensure that in this province we have some real review of regulations.

We can also do what happens in some other provinces: publish regulations in draft form before they become law. The second concrete suggestion.

My third concrete suggestion, Mr. Speaker, and again a very positive one. If we look at the government's Speech from the Throne, we see talk about:

The government recognizes that Albertans are entitled to the free flow of information, which is essential in today's business world. It will complete the administrative work required to proclaim its freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation.

So what happens here: the government wanted a positive initiative, wanted positive recommendations; they got one from an all-party panel on freedom of information and protection of privacy. Five government members, three opposition members: we worked hard, and we came up with a report with a set of unanimous recommendations. Positive, Mr. Government House Leader? I thought so. The Premier thought so. The Government House Leader seems to have a convenient kind of amnesia and doesn't recall that event. What's the government's response? Well, they incorporated many of the recommendations. Now a government majority on the Members' Services Committee, using their majority, passed a motion to recommend to this Legislative Assembly that we amend the new Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It hasn't even been proclaimed yet, and they want to amend it to take out the \$33 million budget for the Legislative Assembly Office and take it out from under the Act. Now, we haven't seen the legislation, but it's rare that a government majority on a standing committee would move a motion, carry it, and then we wouldn't see that result in legislation. So here we have, even when positive suggestions are made by the government, even when at first point they accept them . . .

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader is rising on a point of order. Would you share the citation?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, 23(b)(i). The member refers to suggestions made to everything but the budget speech. One tiny positive comment was related to a thousand pages of budget documents. He's referring to elements other than what is under discussion. That's all.

**9:50**

MR. DICKSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but I thought we'd left the budget and were debating the throne speech. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, in debate over a point of order, please address the points through the Chair and not directly across the floor. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is addressing, presumably, the Speaker on the issue that the hon. Government House Leader has raised.

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I find and respectfully submit that there's absolutely no point of order. We're speaking in terms of a response to the Speech from the Throne. I am responding to that in a direct way. I referenced the invitation I received from the Government House Leader in the previous debate. He said he wanted to hear some positive suggestions from this side. I'm simply pointing out . . .

MR. DAY: On the budget. On the budget.

MR. DICKSON: Well, with respect, Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader made a big point of talking about a host of documents. Those same documents are referenced in the throne speech, so this is all-inclusive. It encompasses everything dealt with in the budget.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Government House Leader has raised an interesting point: 23(b)(i). The tradition of the Speech from the Throne in the debate is that it can wide-range all over the place. It's very often the vehicle for new members to give their maiden speech and talk about their ancestry and how beautiful their constituency is and all of the products that are in those places or speak about the Winter Games if they happen to be in their community. All of those kinds of things are permitted. So the Chair will not rule on the point of order that the speaker is breaking the bounds which are almost boundless in a reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I'd invite Calgary-Buffalo to continue, hopefully without further interruption.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. My only regret is that you've made me feel bad now if in the course of my comments I don't talk about the beautiful attributes of downtown Calgary. I hope constituents who read *Hansard* will recognize that I've identified those things before.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: We talked about government looking for positive suggestions from this side, and I was talking about the recommendations in terms of freedom of information. I pointed out and attempted to outline my concern that even when the government gets positive suggestions, even when they are reflected in legislation sponsored by the government, they then

start resiling from that kind of co-operative effort, start backing off. We see the government then in their standing committees, using their government majority, try to take away with one hand what they've given with the other, and they wonder why we're not always rhapsodizing about the leadership and the co-operation we get from the government.

The second point, the second concern, in terms of freedom of information. It's not bad enough that the government attempts to bury from Albertans the \$33 million budget in the legislative offices portion. It's not sufficient that the government thinks that Albertans don't have the right to find out how MLAs and caucuses use their travel budget, their housing budget, their housing allowance, and so on. What we have is also a government that repudiates the other recommendation from the all-party committee, which is that the information commissioner should be an exclusive, stand-alone appointment.

We have another government-sponsored committee, in this case the Leg. Offices Committee, which is making a recommendation to this body, to this Assembly, that we don't even have an open competition, that we install another legislative officer as a part-time, a half-time commissioner for the brand-new freedom of information Act. Now, if we really have a government that recognizes that Albertans are entitled to the free flow of information, and they say it's essential to the business world, why on earth wouldn't they at minimum have an open, public competition? If the government thinks that the Ethics Commissioner is the best person for the job, invite him to apply but do it in the open so every Alberta taxpayer, every Alberta citizen can see that it's a merit-based appointment and not another backroom appointment.

Mr. Speaker, we've got these two concerns. I say this very deliberately: it's hypocritical on the part of the government, on the one hand, to tout a commitment to openness and free flow of information and, on the other hand, to back off, to talk about restrictive amendments, to try and bring the shroud of secrecy back over \$33 million of taxpayers' money, to bring the shroud of secrecy over an important area of expenditure of this Legislature, and then to ensure that we've got a part-time commissioner that can't do the job that's required. I just point out to you that the freedom of information law in this province is based on the model in Ontario; it's based on the model in British Columbia. I think now, as I have many times before, of the leadership shown by the members for Calgary-Fish Creek and Calgary-Shaw and Peace River, those members who also recognized the importance of this. I wish they could have spoken to the architect of the Speech from the Throne before it was printed because I'm sure they could have corrected what I think is a grievous error in that area of freedom of information.

The Speech from the Throne talks about education and it talks about responding to the public and it talks about the roles and responsibilities paper. I just want to advise you, Mr. Speaker, and other members of three meetings I was able to attend in Calgary. One was with about 200 parents and teachers in the Catholic school system, mainly parents. These were representatives from parent advisory councils. These people were going through the roles and responsibilities paper. In the two discussion groups I was part of, saying little, I might add, but listening a lot, the comment that came up repeatedly was: who's asking for this stuff? Who's asking for a council, a mandatory school council? Who's asking for this council with management responsibility? So maybe it was just the Catholic school parents, you might say. I had another occasion to go to. The Calgary home and school association had a meeting at Western Canada high school in my

constituency, and they had 260 parents from all over the city of Calgary, mainly from the public system, some from the Catholic system. The Member for Calgary-Currie was there, an experience I expect she won't soon forget. An official from the Department of Education was there, the author of the roles and responsibilities paper. Speaker after speaker after speaker stood up and said: "This isn't something we want. Who is calling for this redefined role for mandatory school councils?" [interjection] I'm sorry; I can't hear the Minister of Education. I'm sure he's got something useful to add, and I'm sure that there's a lot of clarification he could give. But I'm sorry; my hearing can't pick up his comment.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that at two meetings attended by a little less than 500 parents in the city of Calgary, people already committed to their children's education and involved in parent councils don't want what the government is offering. Maybe this gets back to the social engineering that the government talks about so much, about wanting to change Albertans' way of thinking. Well, this is a good test case, because the government is trying to give Albertans something they're not asking for, put them in a position where they have to create these councils that go far beyond what they need. So that's of particular concern to me.

The Member for Calgary-Currie and also the Member for Calgary-Cross attended with me a meeting of the Alberta Teachers' Association local in Calgary . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: Don't forget me.

10:00

MR. DICKSON: And the Member for Calgary-North West was there as well.

My colleague and I listened to those two members on the government side saying: oh, there are people in Calgary that want the roles and responsibilities model; there are people in Calgary that want that kind of involvement. But they couldn't describe where these people were. You know, they couldn't describe where the support was coming from. I think, in fact, the member for the High River area had taken a group of government MLAs around the province last summer, and I think that same MLA heard very much the same message that I'm trying to deliver now, Mr. Speaker.

There may be some parents that want to wrest school management away from principals and administrators, but the vast majority of parents in Calgary do not, and I base that on all of the information we have. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is getting increasingly agitated, Mr. Speaker, so I'm sure she'll follow me and indicate that. There may be some Calgarians in south Calgary of a different view, but we had a good representative sampling at the two meetings I speak of.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say as well that there are things that are missing in the Speech from the Throne. There's nothing in here in terms of the Human Rights Commission review. That was a major undertaking of this government. I would have expected that the Minister of Community Development would have been eager to share with this House, through the vehicle of the Speech from the Throne, what's happening, what's going to give us that Alberta advantage in terms of international trading, international business opportunities. Nothing, nothing said about that.

Now, the Government House Leader may jump up and say, "Oh, you're sounding a little negative," but I think, Mr. Speaker, this is one of those areas where surely after pointing out all of the positive things that this side has suggested and which have been either ignored or repudiated by the government opposite, I'm

entitled to one minor element of criticism. Hopefully that's not going to offend the Government House Leader. I'm still waiting for that kind of leadership, and it's not in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we have plenty of other speakers that can address other elements of the Speech from the Throne. I'd just conclude by saying that there are many, many Calgarians who say: "There are elements of the government's plan which are sound. There are elements of the government's plan that we like very much. We think the government in some areas is showing genuine leadership." I don't deny that, and I wouldn't pretend there aren't those elements, but why wouldn't we look at the things that are missing? Why wouldn't we work on the areas that haven't been addressed in the Speech from the Throne? I'm certainly prepared to work with the government over the balance of this session to try and address those shortcomings. I'm happy to work with the Minister of Education to relay the views of those concerned and anxious and in some cases angry parents in Calgary.

All I ask from the ministers in the front row is simply a willingness to listen, a willingness to acknowledge that they don't have a monopoly on good solutions, on good ideas, on the answers. There are a lot of Albertans and a lot of voices in this province, and I think this government would do an enormous service both to itself and to the province to acknowledge that they need the input from every Member of this Legislative Assembly, that there will never be another committee traveling around like the committee on lotteries that deprives opposition MLAs of also being part of that. We've shown it can work. We've shown it can work on the freedom of information panel, and I challenge any government member to say it didn't work there. What better way of starting off this session than by the government making that kind of a commitment and saying, "We want all Albertans to be represented when we do these consultations, and this is a modest way we can start."

DR. WEST: What's the point of consulting when you already drew up your own policy?

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, every time I go to sum up and sit down, there's a comment which just invites me to have to set the record straight again. This time I will conclude despite whatever provocation or invitation I'll hear in the next moment.

I do want to finish on a positive note by saying that I invite the government to work with . . .

#### **Point of Order Questioning a Member**

MRS. GORDON: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler is rising on a point of order.

MRS. GORDON: Will the member entertain a question? [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. I'm sorry. There's a noise that's interfering with my hearing of the citation, so you'll have to repeat it.

MRS. GORDON: I wondered if the member would entertain a question.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to hear the question from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

#### **Debate Continued**

MRS. GORDON: It is my understanding that the members of the opposition held their own lottery review committee meetings, and they didn't ask us to take part in those. So I was just wondering if he would clarify that.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to set the record straight. When the government first announced a lottery review, my first reaction was that it was a positive initiative, it was a positive idea, and I think members of my caucus felt it was a positive idea.

My first disappointment was that no opposition MLAs were included. The second point was that the hearing schedule came out, and I looked at it, and I saw one three-hour session for Calgary. That was the same time that was going to be spent in Lacombe and Red Deer and all kinds of other centres much smaller. I knew there were a lot of people in Calgary who wanted to be heard, so that's when I wrote the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I said: I encourage you that there should be at least two full days of hearings in Calgary. And I want to be clear about this, Mr. Speaker: I received no response. The member the other day tabled a letter to me, and I stand here and I say: I never received the response, and I never saw it before it was tabled in the House. I'm happy to take her word as a member that she sent the letter, but I also expect her to take my word that I never received the letter.

When I didn't receive the letter, then we did what I thought responsible Legislatures do. We don't sit back and complain and throw stones. What we did was we gave Calgarians an opportunity we felt they needed. We said we would have a day of hearings in Calgary. We sat at Fort Calgary, the three Liberal MLAs in that city, and we talked to some - well, there were more than 20 groups that came out and made presentations, more that gave submissions. What I told each of those presenters was that we were going to put that material together, I was going to present it not only to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler so that she could incorporate it into her work, but I'd share it with every Member of this Legislative Assembly. That's in fact the reality, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair is given to understand that you have concluded your speech as to the question. [interjections]

I'm going to say, hon. members, that the Chair must confess that he doesn't recall the exact reference to it in *Beauchesne*, but there is one where a member can rise and ask whether or not the speaker at the moment will entertain a question, to which the Chair usually offers the suggestion that you say yes or no. In this case, the hon. member said yes and has answered the question and is now invited to continue debate. There is no point of order. [interjection]

Oh, okay. The Clerk assures me that time is up for the hon. member, so the debate is now open for other members to speak in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

#### **10:10**

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to use some of my time to reply to the Speech from the Throne to supplement the question from the hon. Member for Lacombe about the position on video lottery hearings other than those scheduled by the government. I, too, was tremendously concerned when Fort McMurray was left out of the rotation in light



of the concern that that community is one of the large relative contributors to the government's taxation by gambling proceeds. As a result, I wrote to the hon. member indicating that we would be obliged to have a hearing in Fort McMurray if she could not attend with her committee. I undertook to her to file the transcript of the proceedings in the Legislative Assembly, and I undertook to her in writing to share those comments with her. The hon. member, however, indicated that she would expand the hearings and come to Fort McMurray, and as a result we did not have any opposition hearings on this issue.

I must also say to the hon. member, knowing as I do her courtesy and her attention for detail, that she may wish to check her mail delivery again, because I, too, did not get a letter from her outlining that the hearings would come to Fort McMurray. I heard about it only by a press release released in Grande Prairie. That was how I was advised that the member in fact was coming to Fort McMurray. I must say to the hon. member that we're looking forward to your presence in Fort McMurray, and we're grateful that you're coming.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there was some debate earlier that was an attack on the quality of debate from the Official Opposition. Perhaps one should remember the old adage that you don't want to ask for something too loud because you might get it. The member who was making the point said that sometimes the members of the opposition, in an effort to hone our debating skills, will take modest flights of fancy, will joke a little bit, will kibitz a little bit, but of course when we do that, we take away from our direct focus on the government and our direct focus on those things that concern us about the government's handling of the economy, handling the province, and handling its social and moral responsibility to all 2.7 million people in the province of Alberta and not simply those interest groups that seem to be able to find that Premier who is characterized as one who listens and one who cares.

Now, the deputy House leader indicated that we should stay relevant. Well, I want to stay relevant. I'm going to be speaking . . .

MR. DAY: Deputy House leader?

MR. GERMAIN: I'm sorry. Government House Leader. Okay. [interjections] I wish the members on this side wouldn't eat into my 20 minutes, Mr. Speaker.

You know, three big words here: people, prosperity and preservation. If I devote my entire 20 minutes to these three big words, I don't think anybody will be able to stand up and say that I'm not relevant and I'm not speaking on point.

Let me just talk about people, people in the Alberta advantage. I want to start with the area that I left off at when my first 20-minute segment of this combination speech on the budget and to the throne was interrupted by the bell. At that point, I was just about ready to talk about people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and education. I wanted to talk about education. I wanted to draw a couple of graphic examples to the Minister of Education's attention, because I am talking about education. I know he will be interested in this.

I want to talk about a teacher in a school trying to run a typing class, trying to teach some computer training, trying to deal with the real educational requirements that will make people effective citizens, trying to deal with those subjects that the government always says are so important. Members of the government say: don't teach philosophy, don't teach literature, don't teach the

humanities because you can't parlay those into a job. Well, let's talk about computer training and typing, for the benefit of the Minister of Education. Let's talk about a typing teacher in despair, in despair in a prosperous city in northern Alberta having to write to businesspeople in the community to see if they can fund typing chairs because there are no typing chairs in the room that are safe. The backs are falling off. The bottoms are falling off. They're old. They're worn out. There is no money for typing chairs, no money for a \$35 typing chair. We're talking about people. People.

Let's talk about another teacher in a small community, a young teacher just starting out in his career. There are no science supplies for that young teacher, and he has to teach science. So what he does is take his own money, his own money less the 5 percent cutback, and he uses his own money for science supplies. The Minister of Education shakes his head. I say to the Minister of Education: return to a classroom in Alberta; return to a classroom anywhere in Alberta; pick any of the schools in Alberta; return to a classroom. We're talking about people, the Alberta advantage, the cornerstone of the Speech from the Throne.

Let's talk about people. Let's talk about an individual who is 68 years of age. His hands are twisted and bent. He can't move his hands. He can't open his hands. He's finished for work. He's spent his entire life working in the northern community scaffolding in the 40 below weather, putting nuts and bolts together on scaffolding equipment without his mitts, without his mitts because it's dangerous to have big bulky mitts when you're climbing the scaffolding. Now he says and his doctor says that the cold, the intense cold and the freezing metal up against his hands affected this condition, but in Alberta Workers' Comp will say to you: "Oh, that's arthritis. You're old and that's arthritis, so you don't get any money from us." That's the people in Alberta; that's the people in Alberta.

Now, the Deputy Premier indicated that he wanted us to make constructive criticisms, and I take his constructive criticism to heart. Now, you will have to allow me to apologize, Mr. Speaker, because we see so little debate in this Legislative Assembly that it's sometimes difficult for us to find good examples. If the government members want us to improve the quality of our debate over here, what they should do is rise to their feet every so often and throw their oars into the water and make a contribution. I pride myself on being a very reasonable person. I pride myself on being a reasonable person. I think the minister of transportation would agree with me. If I'm wrong, I want it pointed out logically and coherently where I'm wrong. I don't want to hear these off-the-cuff comments from the minister of transportation that legal aid is welfare for lawyers. That's not constructive or helpful. What I want if people think . . .

DR. WEST: How does that affect supply and demand?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order.

MR. GERMAIN: If there are to be constructive examples of debate from the other side of this Legislative Assembly, let it pour forth. Let me make you this promise. [interjections] Let me make you this promise.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, hon. members. Hon. members, we have time to debate the Speech from the Throne.

If you want to reflect on the virtues of other members or the lack of them, then you only invite what's occurring. So we would ask the hon. member to address the Speech from the Throne and his reply to it, and please to do it through the Speaker and not to unduly awaken the passions of those opposite.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As always, I'll take your advice.

10:20

#### Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, we have a situation in the Legislative Assembly where the minister asks us to make constructive criticisms. I wanted to do that in this speech, and I wanted to tie it around people, prosperity, and preservation. Now, what could we do? Constructive criticism number one: we could take a good, hard look at all of these user fees and determine whether they are in fact a disproportionate tax on those people who earn less money. Constructive criticism number one.

I don't have a problem in the abstract with attaching a user fee to some services that are discretionary, that are optional. I don't have a problem if you pay to go to a theatre to watch a show. I don't have a problem if you're going to pay to go to a museum to see mounted butterflies. I don't have a problem with that. But when you get user fees on the absolute essentials and when they all apply equally – let's not disenfranchise the so-called working poor of this province. So constructive criticism number one in the concept of people as highlighted in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, is: let's take a hard look at these user fees.

Now, the second constructive criticism that I have is for the Minister of Education, with respect. Sooner or later, as Bob Dylan was so fond of saying in his song, even today's politician in power will someday be out of power. No matter how long this government clings to power, sooner or later they're going to be out on the doorsteps again in rural Alberta, in northern Alberta, in Calgary and Edmonton, knocking on the doors looking for votes. And they're going to be up there in Fort McMurray. Whether they're running against the Member for Fort McMurray or otherwise, they're going to be knocking on the doors in Fort McMurray, and someone is going to look their candidate in the eye and say, "Why did you affect our educational system by taking the highest taxed educational community in all of Alberta and cut us down so that the schools there are literally floundering?"

DR. WEST: Well, we lowered the mill rate so they didn't pay so much for 21 schools.

MR. GERMAIN: Aha. The minister . . .

#### Speaker's Ruling Rhetorical Questions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Hon. member, if you ask a question, I guess a response is almost too much to restrain. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, if he wishes to respond . . . [interjection] Order. If the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs wishes to respond to the rhetorical questions offered by Fort McMurray . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Transportation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Oh, pardon me. One of the joys of being hard of hearing is that you get to hear it often.

The Minister of Transportation and Utilities, who wishes to speak to the issue of municipal affairs with regard to taxation, will be invited to speak once the current speaker finishes his reply to the Speech from the Throne.

#### Debate Continued

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you, and I'm going to answer his nonquestion, because the tax cuts do not take effect till two years from now. The school cuts grab right now. That's the disproportionality of it. That's the hurt.

Now, my comments this evening are not about the issue of the government collecting school taxes. That's not my comment. I accept that the government has the authority to run the province how they want with the constructive criticism from opposition. They've amalgamated school tax. That battle has been lost. But I'm saying by way of constructive criticism that the cut is simply too deep in Fort McMurray for them to have a good handle on for this year, and I'm urging the Minister of Education on behalf of the citizens and residents and schoolchildren of Fort McMurray, item number one in the throne speech, people, to take a look at the issue again. That's all he has to do: take a look at it again.

Now, another constructive criticism that I would have for the government is for them to correctly and properly state their debt as \$31 billion and tell Albertans how they're going to pay off a \$31 billion debt, unless they've already decided that the heritage trust fund will be liquidated and that money put on the debt. If they have decided that, then I would ask that they terminate those hearings that are drawing only flies around the province in terms of the hearings and ask the people who are making submissions to make proper written submissions, lay out their ideas on paper and send them in to the hearing. That's my constructive criticism. That's my constructive suggestion to the government.

Now, my constructive suggestion to the Department of Health . . .

MR. BRACKO: Oberg for minister.

MR. GERMAIN: No. No. No. Some members are calling for a different personage as minister. I don't join in those calls. I say to the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: She's a nice girl.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, other government female backbenchers comment that the Minister of Health is a nice girl. I don't use that kind of phraseology, that terminology. I respect the Minister of Health as a competent professional, and I give her now this competent advice. Do not assume that you can simply eradicate all of the health abuses that exist in the system by simply squeezing out the money and squeezing out the people who genuinely need the health system. I want to tell you that there is a fundamental aspect about people who abuse a system, whether it be in social services, whether it be in health, whether it be in education. The abusers will always find a way to squirm and wiggle to the top of the heap and abuse the system. Do not assume that by simply cutting millions out of the health budget you can in fact say that the standard of health will be the same, because it won't be. It won't be.

So what you want to do, with respect, is acknowledge that we are going to have to take a cut in our standard of health and give people the proper strategies that they need on how to circumvent their own personal risk on those issues. If it is in fact that they

have to go to the large cities for their treatment in the future, then let's find a way that we can get them to the large cities.

The Minister of Health graciously reminds me that you can fly in this province with the air ambulance, and that very graciously allows me, Madam Minister, to talk about people again, another characteristic of Alberta. Why is it, then, that MLAs all over this province get phone calls from their constituencies that their hospitals will not transport them, that they will not admit them in rural Alberta hospitals? Instead they will say: "Make your own way to Edmonton or Calgary. You may have a broken foot, but we'll put a sling on it. Drive in your car. You may need back surgery, but we can't get you down to Edmonton."

DR. WEST: What's wrong with that? We're not a taxi service.

MR. GERMAIN: Now, the minister chirps up that we're not a taxi service. But there is a fundamental suggestion that's been made in this province that universality of health care should apply no matter what region you live in. So if the minister has to close hospitals, if the regional health authorities have to close hospitals, my constructive criticism to the department is: figure out where the fracture points are going to be in that system and deal with it. Deal with it. That is my constructive criticism to the minister.

As for the waste in health, the overdrugging, the over-prescribing, the overvisiting, the allegations that some government members make from time to time that people cycle through to their doctor too many times, in some cases with encouragement if a doctor is underworked, if those things are genuinely felt beliefs in the Department of Health, deal with them. Deal with them if they're genuinely felt beliefs. If there are abuses in the system, let's deal with them. Let's not squeeze out everybody, hoping that you can squeeze out the abuses, because if there are no abuses in the system and if there are no other efficiencies left to be made in the system, then the continued unwinding of funding can only result in a lower level of health care.

I hope that the ministers opposite have taken to heart some of these constructive suggestions. I want to also leave them with one other general constructive suggestion, and that is that we have too much government in this province and it costs too much money. When people say that, they're talking about the model of government itself. They're not talking about the nurses in the ward and the teachers in the schoolroom.

So if our government, if all of us were genuinely committed to saving money and to making some cuts that are truly painless for all Albertans, if there is such a thing as a painless cut, it would be again for us to examine the size of our government, the number of committees we have, the number of traveling road shows we have in the province of Alberta, the government planes flying here, there, and everywhere, partially or minimally loaded. All of these things the public sees. During good times the public will tolerate them. During bad times they become the fracture points that can bring down governments.

That is my response, Mr. Speaker, on the issues of people, prosperity, and preservation, the so-called keynotes in the throne speech presented by His Honour last week.

Thank you.

**10:30**

MR. RENNEN: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't planning on speaking tonight on the Speech from the Throne. However, I've been listening to what's been coming from the other side, and unfortunately I don't think I've heard a speech tonight that refers to the

Speech from the Throne, so I think it's time we spend a little time talking about the Speech from the Throne tonight.

I would like to compliment the Lieutenant Governor. I think His Honour did an extremely good job of outlining the agenda for this government in the upcoming year. This is a pivotal year. After the election in 1993 the government very clearly laid out some long-term plans. The fact that we laid out long-term plans was unique at the time. We did receive accolades and we did receive compliments for doing so, but the most important thing to note is that in addition to laying out long-term plans and in addition to such legislation as the Deficit Elimination Act, which would by legislation require this Legislature to balance its budget by '96-97, we for the past three years, with one more year to go, have followed that plan. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the key to the Speech from the Throne.

The Speech from the Throne indicates to Albertans, it indicates to members of this Assembly that this government is following a very definite plan, a three-year business plan tabled in conjunction with the budget and mentioned in the throne speech. The throne speech indicated very clearly that we were going to continue on with the plan that had been demonstrated and introduced at the beginning of the mandate of this government.

I want to deal with some specific goals that were laid out in that speech and elaborate a little bit on them for you, Mr. Speaker, because I think they are something that has not been mentioned tonight. In the speech His Honour mentioned three clear goals that this government set out for itself in the upcoming session, in the upcoming year.

First of all, implementation of business plans. I've had some discussion on that already, but this is key. We've heard discussion here tonight, Mr. Speaker, about the horror and the shock that we hear on the other side about increasing the fees for health care insurance in this province. Well, the members opposite obviously didn't read the business plan, because it was very clearly announced last year in the three-year business plan that the fees for health care insurance would be increasing by \$2 per person this year.

We've heard all about budget leaks and everything. Maybe the Member for Edmonton-Manning would like to take note of this. Next year, Edmonton-Manning, they're going up \$2 again. So you can mark that down, and now you have your budget leak for next year. They're in the business plan. All you have to do is read.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

The other thing we clearly said is that over the next while this government is going to streamline and deregulate. Streamlining and deregulating are not something that we take lightly on this side of the House. We have a committee that's in place right now that is concerning itself specifically with deregulation. We've heard reference to the Law and Regulations Committee. We already have a committee in place that is dealing specifically with deregulation. That committee has had correspondence with interest groups throughout the province. We will be receiving that information, and very shortly we will be making some very . . .

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

MR. SEKULIC: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, a point of order.  
Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I refer to *Beauchesne* 481(e): "impute bad motives or motives different from those acknowledged by a Member." When I was referring to a leaked document or leaked budget, I was referring to the total amount of \$110 million in terms of surplus. I was not referring to something that was disclosed in the budget, in business plans of previous years. I was referring to something that Albertans were not privy to nor was the opposition privy to but that it seems select members of the media were privy to.

MR. RENNER: On the point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, I was referring to comments that Edmonton-Manning made that there was information made available. The member made an inference that that information was made available, and I was pointing out that there is all kinds of information in the three-year business plans. When you deal with business plans, you deal with outlining in advance what your budget is going to be. There should not have been a surprise to anyone when the budget was tabled.

Now, when the member refers to the \$110 million surplus, if he took me in my comment to be referring to that, then I would apologize, because that is very clearly something that was not in the business plans. What I was pointing out is that by identifying in three-year business plans what the plans of the government are, there are no secrets and budget day is not the great mystery that it once used to be.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Now, I was listening very carefully, and I don't . . .

MR. BRUSEKER: As always.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: As always. Yes. Thank you, hon. member.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yeah. Liar.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Withdraw. Withdraw.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. I'm not like the Deputy Speaker; I do have better ears for hearing than he has. However, I will ignore it because I don't know who was talking.

I do not believe there's a point of order because I do not believe that the member imputed any motives on your part, hon. member.

So would the hon. Member for Medicine Hat continue.

#### Debate Continued

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The third goal that was clearly delineated in the Speech from the Throne – and this is very key to what this government is doing – is to develop an environment where business can create wealth and jobs in this province. We heard numerous times from members on the opposite side that they still don't completely understand this concept. They still don't understand that government does not create jobs; the private sector creates the jobs. There's an expression that I really like, and the expression is that the private sector rows and government steers. That is exactly what this whole process is all about.

We've had reference throughout the evening – and my apologies, Mr. Speaker. I sometimes get the debate on the budget and the debate on the throne speech mixed up, and I can't exactly remember what was said when. But we have had reference this evening to a real concern on the part of the opposition members that this government is setting a course to get out of the direct delivery of service. Well, I guess that's the reason why we are Conservatives and they are Liberals. There's a basic philosophical difference and different opinion on that, because that to me is key to how we are organizing and carrying forward with the business of this government.

#### Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. DICKSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I regret to interrupt the speaker, but I wonder if pursuant to *Beauchesne* 482 the member would entertain a brief question.

MR. RENNER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of notes here. I would be pleased to answer a question at another time, but I'm a little concerned that I might run out of time. As the hon. member across the way learned earlier, the question time doesn't get included in the speaker's time. I'd be pleased to speak with the member after the session adjourns this evening.

#### 10:40 Debate Continued

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, when the government is involved in creating an environment for the private sector to create wealth and jobs, we have a healthy situation and a healthy environment in the province, and that is really the key to where this government is heading not only this year but in upcoming years. I refer all members to the business plan that was tabled in this House yesterday. We have another three-year business plan, and that includes one more year further out. So we have a good idea of where this government is going.

Let me talk a little bit in the area of health. In the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor talked about the government's intention to ensure that Albertans have a health care system that is second to none in the province and in fact in the world. I would like to challenge the members opposite who are talking about squeezing out dollars from the health care system and intimating that that reduction in spending in health care is leading to the demise of the health care system in the province.

What I have in front of me, Mr. Speaker, is a chart that was actually included in the provincial government document *Our Bill of Health*. This was circulated at the roundtable discussions on health. I think it's something that maybe we've forgotten in the last year or so since those roundtables took place. This is a chart that shows that there is not a direct correlation between the amount of dollars that are spent per capita on health and the outcomes as a result. I use for example Japan – these are based on 1990 U.S. dollars – where \$1,171 per year were spent per capita. Their infant mortality rate was 4.6 per thousand. The life expectancy for males was 75.9 years and for females 81.9. That's \$1,171. In Canada that same year – this is the nationwide average – we see per capita spending of \$1,770, an infant mortality of 6.8 deaths per thousand, with a life expectancy of 74

and 80.6 years respectively for males and females. At the top of the list, the country that spends the most dollars per capita, is our neighbour to the south, the United States, where they spent \$2,566 per capita. Their infant mortality rate was 9.1, with life expectancies of 72 and 78 years respectively, males and females.

Well, what this very clearly shows is that there is not a direct correlation between the dollars that are spent and the outcomes that can be expected. This comes for a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker. Certainly some of it has to do with the socioeconomic environment. There's no doubt that life-style has a lot to do with it. But there's something to be said for the delivery system. Members across the way are always liking to infer that this government is moving towards a U.S. style of health care delivery. Well, we have no intention of moving towards a U.S. style of health care delivery, because you can see from these statistics that that is the most inefficient system going in the world, and we would be absolutely insane if we were trying to move towards the U.S. style of health care delivery. [some applause] I thank the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is redesigning and changing the way health care services are delivered in this province. In so doing, we are ensuring that they are delivered in the most cost-effective, efficient manner. We're doing so by consolidating some 200 or more different health care authorities into 17 regional health authorities. We are consolidating services so that we incorporate some kind of organization into the delivery of service, so we don't have hospitals doing one thing entirely independent of health units that are delivering preventative services, entirely independent of home care and community service doing something entirely independent again. This was the system that was facing Albertans for the last couple of years.

We really won't see the effect of the regionalization of health care until we begin this fiscal year, because the regional health authorities don't begin to have full authority until April of this year. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the next year in health care because we have been organizing and putting a plan together for the past 18 months, and we now will have an opportunity to put that plan to use and to have the regional health authorities involved in developing their vision of health care in this province.

I also want to talk a little bit about deficit elimination and, more importantly, debt elimination, because we've had reference this evening to net debt. The members opposite have indicated that they feel that tackling net debt is not tackling the debt problem. Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't tackle debt until you get rid of deficits.

I have a lot that I would like to talk about in the area of net debt, but in noting the time, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could adjourn debate. Next time we get back to this debate, I would love to explain to the members opposite why we have targeted net debt and explain where that net debt comes from.

So with that, I would move that we adjourn debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat has moved adjournment on the throne speech. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would like to make a statement.

**Point of Order  
Member's Apology**

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to offer an apology to you and retract my remark. I'm sincerely sorry for the remark I made. I'm so used to sitting beside you that it just sort of . . . Anyhow, my apologies, sir.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's obvious that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek can't get along without me sitting beside her.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DAY: Well, it shows what the lofty position will do, Mr. Speaker. Beside her you apparently are one thing, and in the Chair you have risen in her estimation and in the estimation of all of us.

[At 10:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

