

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 4, 1996 **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 96/03/04
 [The Speaker in the Chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated. Before we begin this evening's proceedings, might there be unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this evening to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly 14 members of the 193rd Village on the Lake Scout troop. Today they're accompanied by troop scouter Michel Audy, scout counselor Bill Ince, scout counselor Scott Visseur, and parent helper Don Rech. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Now might we also have unanimous consent to revert to Notices of Motions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give oral notice on behalf of the hon. Premier that tomorrow he will make the following motion:

Be it resolved that the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Second Reading**

Bill 10

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Provincial Treasurer, I would move second reading of Bill 10, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1996.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To refresh the memory of the members of the House, we are again, for the third time in 1995 through to March 31, 1996, dealing with budgetary estimates and budgetary matters. Now, there has been a lot said over the last couple of weeks in this particular Legislative Assembly, some of it rather sharply said and some of

it very cordially said, about whether or not we give budget scrutinies and budget estimates enough scrutiny and enough debate in this Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this supplementary Bill that we're talking about now, which again spends millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, is another example of why it is that budget debate should be closely scrutinized at the budget process early in the year rather than have a form of high court press in the dying days of the year to spend additional money.

Now, I want to focus on only two of the issues raised in this supplementary estimates Bill, Mr. Speaker, but other members of this Legislative Assembly, I'm sure on both sides of the House, will also rise and point out their concerns with this spending, which is significant. I want to remind Members of the Legislative Assembly that we are voting on an additional \$77 million of expenditure. By the government's own definition, these are new expenditures. Ironically, almost all of the expenditures are in areas where they had laid out a game plan less than 11 months ago and certified to the Alberta people that the game plan was sound and that the budget process was sound. Here we are, in the dying days of this particular year, into March, with the year-end March 31, dealing again with these budget estimates: \$77 million dollars in budgets and another \$2 million for capital expenses and half a million dollars to the public service for nonbudgetary items.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that many others want to speak to this Bill tonight, so I'm going to restrict my comments to only two areas. First I'm going to ask the hon. members hypothetically if they feel good about the additional \$5.7 million that is being paid for a computer software and energy-tracking system that has been, I respectfully suggest, poorly defined and poorly explained in this Legislative Assembly. What is astounding about this particular system is that the increased percentage is approximately 45 percent of the original figure of around \$5 million that was going to do it all in terms of collecting data on energy resource royalty calculations and calculating how much should be collected from the energy sector as the government's share for the various royalties, licences, and government shares. This particular program was clearly not installed by the lowest bidder, clearly not installed by a fixed-bid contract, because what we have here is a 50 percent overrun.

The minister presented to this Legislative Assembly a 10- or 15-minute overview of her whole department, promising frankly that she would do better. Well, I don't think, with respect, Mr. Speaker, that that kind of explanation for \$5 million of additional expenditure, some of it coming out of previous research and science money spent at the AOSTRA oil in situ steam project near Fort McMurray – all of those savings plus another \$3 million, just about, are going to pay for a computer program, a computer system, ladies and gentlemen, that less than 11 months ago was all in and set at less than \$5 million, and that cost has now grown to \$10 million.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that that should set up warning bells and that should set up alarm bells. So when we move to Committee of Supply on this Bill and I talk about the principle of this kind of doubling of expenditure, I hope that all members then will join with me in rolling back this particular expenditure, not on the basis that it may not be absolutely necessary but on the basis that we have not had adequate and sound explanation and that while a computer tracking program may be in fact exactly what the government needs, we have to be, on the face of it, suspicious when the costs double.

Now I want to move on to another singular irritant that many

Members of this Legislative Assembly have identified, and that is the black hole, Mr. Speaker, that constitutes the Bovar hazardous waste treatment plant. Last year, in this Legislative Assembly in November – I respectfully suggest to the members of this House that it was wrong for the members of this House not to roll back that \$500 million cost that we were voting on as a supplementary budget process. For what purpose? To get out of what the Auditor General described as a most peculiar and odd deal from the government of Alberta. While most people in Alberta believe that hazardous wastes . . .

MR. CHADI: He called it bizarre.

MR. GERMAIN: Bizarre was the word. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper, Mr. Speaker, reminds me and refreshes my memory that the Auditor General, the financial watchdog of the province of Alberta, referred to that bailout as bizarre. If I could use a card analogy, he asked hypothetically in his report: how is it that when the government had all of the aces in that deck in negotiation, we ended up losing to a broken flush?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, who I must say informally acknowledges now, sporting his new Queen's Counsel designation, proving once and for all that there is recognition of lawyers who will fight above and beyond the call of duty to protect their clients – in that case, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw was doing his absolute best to protect the government in an absolutely indefensible position of squandering documentation, of erroneous negotiation, and of course in getting involved in a system for which there can be no reprieve and no reversal. The hon. member assured us then in this Legislative Assembly that except for pollution control, which would of itself be costly, there would be no more expenses, that all of the disassociation costs had been identified, had been properly catalogued, and had been properly brought forward into this Legislative Assembly. Some \$500 million, I believe the number was, was spent on just that basis.

Well, what happens less than four months later? We're asked to pay off another \$2 million or \$3 million for severance packages and for bank interest charges to financial institutions that this year, at the expense of Canadian taxpayers across Canada, have made over \$6 billion in profits, Mr. Speaker. We have a government that continues to negotiate with a hand consisting of four aces. They continue to negotiate like a neophyte in a poker game who has a pair of deuces, and they get beaten every time.

So again, ladies and gentlemen, you would not roll back this obscene Bovar expenditure last time when we voted on it. I urge you this time in this Legislative Assembly to say no to this \$3.1 million of additional expenditure, to say no to those people who are getting big severance packages, to say no to those people, to say no. Finally, 10 years late, finally, when the province is \$32 billion in debt, when we're 10 years late, I urge all Members of this Legislative Assembly to have the courage for once to stand up and say no. Simply say no. Vote against this appropriation for the Bovar transaction, and do not put yourself in another position where you have to stand up and vote for this continuous black hole. It will never go away, Mr. Speaker. It will only disappear finally when this Legislative Assembly has the courage to just say no.

8:10

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that many others on both sides of the Assembly want to speak to this item in the appropriation Bill and to other items. There are budgetary miscues in the area of Health. There are budgetary miscues in the area of Community

Development. In Advanced Education and Career Development the minister could not get his interest prediction right, yet sitting four chairs over from the minister is an individual minister who claims to be gifted enough to administer a heritage trust fund of over \$12 billion, based on the government's assessment of its worth. Four chairs over a minister cannot figure out how much interest he's going to have to pay on student loan financing.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge Members of the Legislative Assembly to debate hard on this appropriation Bill, to consider and to remember that this is the third time this year we are looking at budgets and the third time we are asked to spend more taxpayers' money than the original books and the original proposal when we started. It is time for us to show restraint to Albertans, and it is time for us on some of these projects to simply say no. And when those individuals who are urging us to spend the money can come forward with a fully documented case, when Bovar can come forward and with fully documented agreements say that it's finally over, when the Minister of Energy can come forward and say we have a guaranteed opportunity to get the computer system we need, when the Minister of Health finally can come forward and prove that she's got it right, then and only then should we be passing these extraordinary expenditures.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I intend to take my place, because I know that other hon. members want to speak to this \$77 million of dying year-end estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to speak to the supplementary estimates. In relation to Environmental Protection and the request for a further \$3.211 million, I want to carry it a step further from the point that the Member for Fort McMurray was trying to make. That is that the Auditor General some time back said that in 1992 we could have gotten out of this deal, that we could have gotten out of this deal for around \$40 million in total. As it stands, Fort McMurray, I believe we ended up with a total of how much more?

MR. GERMAIN: Five hundred million dollars, I think.

MR. CHADI: Five hundred million dollars or more is what it ended up costing us. Now we're asked to put up another \$3.2 million. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Shaw at the time he was negotiating on behalf of the government in these large expenditures actually went out and instead of giving these large golden handshakes . . . What he should have done at that point – and I'm wondering if he didn't do it – was go after those individuals that got us into this mess in the first place and instead of giving them all of this money, asked them for some of that money back, gone after some of those people that have put us in this mess, people like the engineers, people like the accountants, people like the lawyers perhaps. [interjections] Well, everyone. I think everyone who brought us into this mess, including the politicians, ought to be held accountable. Now to ask us for a further \$3.2 million is outrageous. It's totally outrageous.

I think that we all have to not support this. We should all get together now and say no to this. I think the Member for Fort McMurray is not wrong when he says: say no to it. Here's our opportunity to do so. Say no and vote no to \$3.2 million and

enough of these foolish expenditures with respect to Bovar. Quite frankly, when you look at the explanation and the reason the supplementary estimate is requested, it says that

\$1.1 million is required to settle business commitments of the Corporation . . . \$2.1 million is required to fund shared financing costs while the divestiture was [still] being negotiated.

That's all it says. You're expecting us to deal with \$3.2 million in two sentences saying: we have no choice; these were our commitments and that's all there is to it.

Now, I suspect that when this vote is called that members in this Assembly, the majority, will probably vote for it. They'll vote for it on two sentences, not knowing what the money is really going for. I can't in good conscience be doing that, and I won't do that. The people that elected me from Edmonton-Roper and the people all across Alberta need to know more and want to know more, and I know that once they find out what it's really about, they'll say no to it too.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak against the ability of a government that once again is showing that they're not capable of good management of their responsibility when it comes to the tax dollars of Albertans. You know, it's a little bit like the homemaker who suddenly discovers she has overexpended her budget and has the ability to go out there and say: well, you know, I need another \$5,000 to make my budget balance at the end of the year, so I've got to find some extra revenues.

AN HON. MEMBER: Ask your husband, Muriel.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: This is in essence what this government is doing. They'll say: well, why don't I go and ask my husband? That's what this government is doing. They're not accepting the responsibility, and the husband that they're asking is the taxpayer of Alberta.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we're saying that we have legislation, and are proud of it, to make sure that we balance our provincial budget. But that's not good enough. It's how you balance that provincial budget. This example is not the way you achieve it: by coming in and saying to the Members of this Legislative Assembly: "Whoops. We made a mistake. We don't have the appropriate funds to meet our needs. We've mismanaged in an area that's going to cost the taxpayer significantly larger amounts."

To look at what's happening in Swan Hills with Bovar with this supplementary estimate is really disgraceful when we're asking our seniors, we're asking parents in the educational system to pick up more of the cost to have our children educated, whether it's through supervision, textbooks, transportation. Likewise in health. Yet we can see where we have totally mismanaged our hazardous waste management treatment systems to the extent that people in the private sector benefit through the public purse, and they're coming in here and asking us to support that. Well, that's just not acceptable. It's sheer mismanagement of the public purse. If a government can't live within the means that they've planned for, then there should be some penalty quite frankly. It shouldn't be that they actually get a bouquet by coming into the Assembly and asking for \$77 million more, which is indecent. What an example.

8:20

You know, Mr. Speaker, we're supposed to lead by example. I look at the public gallery, and I see the future generation sitting up there. Hopefully one day they'll be in this Assembly. I would think that this is a poor example. It's like saying to a municipal government that you have the ability halfway through your budget year to realize that you're going to overexpend your budget, so you go back into the municipal council chambers or to a regional health authority, and you have the ability to turn around and say to your taxpayers: "Whoops. We didn't just need \$5 million in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. We needed \$7 million to balance our budget, so we're asking you halfway through the year to give us another \$2 million." Do you know what would happen out there in the city of Fort Saskatchewan? There'd be anarchy.

Unfortunately, in the province of Alberta people don't realize that in essence this is what this document is doing. We've got to somehow make Albertans realize, Mr. Speaker, that these supplementary estimates indeed are in essence doing that. It wouldn't be acceptable in your household budget because if you did that, you'd be bankrupt. It wouldn't be acceptable at the municipal level, and it certainly wouldn't be acceptable in a regional health authority, I would suggest, when they are actually looking for extra revenues that they've not budgeted for.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would support my colleagues who have spoken to this point in time against supporting these supplementary estimates and specifically in the environmental area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's embarrassing to have to come up and speak to government mismanagement and government incompetence. You know, it's almost like a broken record: time and time again, government waste, government incompetence since 1971, when they were elected, the waste of taxpayers' dollars. It's embarrassing that we have to go through this continuously without any apology to the public, without any apology to the taxpayer, without any apology to our young people, who if they're in grade 6, will bear the burden of the debt from this government till they are 78 years old. The grade 6 students will be paying for this government's incompetence.

We look at Bovar, Swan Hills, the black hole, as the Member for Fort McMurray says, continually sucking the taxpayers' dollars from the public purse. Misuse, and it continues. They try to stop the hole in one area, and the hole gets bigger and bigger. Pretty soon it's going to be close to \$600 million of taxpayers' dollars, and you can tell . . . [interjections] Yes, exactly, and we should.

AN HON. MEMBER: They woke up, Len.

MR. BRACKO: Yes, exactly. You'd think they would after this many years.

Education's suffering because the money's gone to Swan Hills: 550 some million dollars. The student/teacher ratio's increased so you cannot do as efficient a job. In special ed they do not have the instructors that are needed, the aides that are needed to help these students to keep up or at a certain level that would be a benefit to their future.

As we look at even mental health, they're pushed out of institutions quickly onto the streets. I can give you examples of

at least three cases we know of in Edmonton where a person has committed suicide because he was not accepted in the hospital or institution, and in Red Deer the same was true when I visited in that area. In the Red Deer *Advocate*, I believe it's called, the same thing. A person commits suicide because he was not allowed into the hospital when he needed it, and he went out and committed suicide because he didn't have the care he needed. Then they can come in and embarrass us with this type of appropriation.

Overbudgeting. You know, for years our parents and grandparents budgeted. They did not have an extra taxpayers resource. They had to make ends meet, and if there was a shortfall in the income, they cut somewhere. They knew how to do it, and they did it well, and they went without. But not this government. In fact, they rewarded their members. They gave them a big pension, the ones that are out, for being incompetent. What role model does that set to our young people up in the audience there: that if you do poorly, if you're incompetent, you get rewarded for it. Well, that is shameful, Mr. Speaker, unbelievable.

Then the Premier says: we will cut 5 percent from their pensions. The Member for Peace River was supposed to get a 5 percent cut. I look at his pension. It's still \$82,000 a year for this incompetence, instead of \$78,000 that he had promised. He can't even keep a commitment to the people and the taxpayers of our province, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we need the young people to realize what's happening and to stand up and fight against the incompetence and mismanagement. [interjections] They think it's funny. They think it's funny giving the next generations this debt, Mr. Speaker. Unbelievable.

We brought a petition into this Legislative Assembly from kindergarten students, young five year olds who did artwork, did it well, took their time, to fight for kindergarten in this province. You know what? The government members laughed and jeered at it – laughed and jeered at it – an embarrassment to the whole province. Role models we're supposed to be, and here we're role models of unbelievable heights of not allowing a creative petition, Mr. Speaker. They worked hard at it. Unbelievable.

It's time the government had a wake-up call again. I cannot support this, and I won't. I would have to look these young people in the face and say, "No, I cannot support this mismanagement," Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will conclude.

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

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it will be hard to follow the barn burner of a set of comments by my colleague from St. Albert, but a number of points should be addressed. Here we are in second reading. We were dealing with the issue of principles built into this Bill. [interjections]

Let me, first of all, focus on environment . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. The House is rather enthusiastic this evening.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the supplementary appropriation for environment, it's related to Swan Hills. Here is a series of managed catastrophes that have cost taxpayers over \$500 million. We now have the final indignity in that taxpayers now have to pay the cost of negotiating the divestiture of our 40 percent. We will pay Bovar \$147 million.

They kicked and they screamed before they were brought to the negotiating table, and we have to pay for that time they spent being obstructive to trying to put a cap on the losses and to divesting ourselves of this black hole for public funds.

There's been no cost to Bovar of this financial fiasco. They've worked on a cost-plus contract . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. member would entertain a question?

DR. PERCY: Certainly, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member mentioned that there's no cost to Bovar with respect to this negotiation. Is the member aware that the costs associated with operating the plant actually were accruing against the \$147 million settlement amount effective July whereas the interest didn't start to accrue until September 1?

8:30

DR. PERCY: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. When I look at the profits that Bovar has racked up over the last year, I think it was well within their financial capability to absorb the cost that taxpayers now are being asked to absorb. Moreover, when you look at this and you look at the \$1.1 million required to settle business commitments of the corporation, we didn't settle the issue of the exclusivity provision which remains with Swan Hills, where they actually have a monopoly on the treatment of hazardous waste in this province.

So here we're in the unique position of a province that's committed to competition except with regards to Swan Hills and the waste facility, where no competition is the rule of the day, where taxpayer dollars is the fuel that fires the furnace of the facility. We end up as well, when we look at this \$1.1 million, realizing that no one knows what happens at the end of the agreement. Do we end up, again, being stuck with the plant? Is it shut down, or, miraculously, will Bovar suddenly efficiently reduce the costs of the facility so that they can turn a profit on the meagre volumes that will be generated by Alberta-only waste? Well, I would hazard a guess, Mr. Speaker, that it's likely they've got a pretty good handle on where they can cut costs, how they could make it more efficient, and that in fact they could and conceivably will turn a consistent profit in the future, something they could have done in the past had they been so directed or had they any sense of husbanding the taxpayer dollar. But there was no cost to them. It was a cost-plus contract.

So we're paying \$1.1 million to settle business commitments of the corporation, the 40 percent, the province's share with Swan Hills. Yet the big-ticket items are still out there: the exclusivity clause, what happens to the plant at the end of the term of the joint venture agreement that we've capped, and of course the other issue, the environmental cleanup. That's again one business commitment that we didn't deal with which again remains with the taxpayer.

So while on one hand we can congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw for putting a cap on losses, he only went halfway. Had he in fact held their feet to the fire, had he pushed harder, or had he worked as hard on behalf of the taxpayers as Bovar worked on behalf of their shareholders, the taxpayer loss may not have been \$500 million.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. A point of order: 23(h), (i), (j), imputing motives. The hon. member has absolutely no idea how hard the board of ASWMC worked in trying to settle this, and quite frankly I take exception to the remarks that he's just made.

DR. PERCY: Well, as a member of this House firmly committed to measuring outcomes and performance, when you look at an aggregate cost of \$500 million, what outcome? The hon. member is asking me to be charitable, to say that it could have been worse. I hazard to guess that it could actually have been worse than half a billion dollars. If the hon. member, who was almost on his feet, was going to tell me how bad it really could be, I'd really appreciate hearing.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, my impression is that it isn't over yet and that we're going to see more costs associated with this rolling down the road. Again, I am willing to give the hon. member his due: he did cap the losses. But the bottom line is he was stuck with a joint venture agreement that was ironclad in its construction. I hope that some of this \$1.1 million that we are going to pay out as settlement will go part of the way to understanding what bunch of lunatics actually signed this joint venture agreement and what rationale they could have had for signing it.

This was a contract that was totally tilted against the taxpayer, totally tilted in favour of the private facility, Swan Hills. Again, the hon. member says that he tried as hard as he could, but given the lunacy of some of his current colleagues, who in fact sit on the front bench, in signing this joint venture agreement, in not dealing with the joint venture agreement when they could have, he asks for our sympathy. Well, he's still associated with them, Mr. Speaker. There is a real cost here. This joint venture agreement was costly. It was poorly conceived, poorly written, and totally tilted against taxpayer interests. So while I can sympathize with the hon. member regarding the problems he had negotiating with Bovar because of the constraints of the joint venture agreement, I hope he has been equally forceful with the members on the front bench who actually signed the absurd contract in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, in principle I am totally against this supplementary estimate with regards to the facility, and I do believe that we on this side of the House have to make the point. The point will be that we will vote against this supplementary estimate because at some point Bovar should have borne a greater share of the cost. They have escaped unscathed from this episode, whereas the taxpayers of this province have been stripped of at least half a billion dollars. The interest on half a billion dollars is significant. We're looking at \$50 million, \$55 million a year, each and every year, that could be used to fund a tax cut, that could be used to fund program expenditures. Instead it's just paying dividends to members in the private sector at the expense of taxpayers.

With other aspects of the supplementary estimates I could see

myself voting in agreement on the principle involved. Who could argue against hardwiring schools? Certainly not I. Who could argue against the appropriation to cut down waiting lists in our hospitals? Not I. But with regards to this expenditure in Environmental Protection, certainly I, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. It's always difficult to follow such an eloquent diatribe. Nevertheless, I found the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to be rather interesting, especially so in light of the fact that he has stated on numerous occasions publicly that given the constraints of the joint venture agreement, actually the arrangement which was arrived at was reasonably good.

In fact, I will remind hon. members in this House that we had a fairness opinion conducted by a reputable firm of chartered accountants to determine what our best case and worst case scenarios were with respect to this project. They came up with numbers ranging from a best case scenario of \$123 million to a worst case scenario in excess of \$300 million. I think that fairness opinion went some way to giving members of this House some comfort that given the constraints of the agreement, again, it was probably in the interest of the taxpayers to conclude the negotiation.

I think the other thing I'd like to simply say is that the members of the opposition have actually given no credit to the government for having solved this significant environmental problem. PCBs back in the '80s were certainly the hot environmental issue. We now have essentially a PCB-free province. Quite frankly, Ontario spent \$100 million in just simply trying to find a site for a plant, and they still have the problem.

8:40

I've stated in this House before that certainly the contractual arrangement was not a good one for the taxpayers in that we wound up paying more to dispose of the waste than we probably should have. The Auditor General confirmed that. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we are trying to wind this down, and hopefully in the next two to three weeks we actually will have phase 2 concluded. There is still a lot of work that remains to be done.

Some comments were also made with respect to severance payments and some of the moneys that are required at this stage. Last week in the House when we debated the supplementary estimates, I gave quite a detailed review of the numbers. It's clear to me from some of the comments from some of the members this evening – certainly not the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud but others in his party – they didn't bother to come by and listen to the supplementary estimates debate, and therefore they aren't familiar with what the moneys are being used for. So I would recommend that they go back and read the debates to confirm why we actually need these moneys. Essentially it's to wind down the corporation, move on, and basically ensure that the fence which we built around this contract is solid and that we will not see any further losses with respect to this agreement.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Administrator's Speech**

Mr. Stelmach moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Adminis-

trator as follows:

To His Honour Mr. Justice J.W. McClung, the Administrator 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 20: Mr. Renner]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of observations I wanted to make with respect to the Speech from the Throne, and I'll go through them and try and organize them by subject matter.

The first one I wanted to draw attention to was the provision on page 4. This was the one very positive thing I found in the Speech from the Throne.

MRS. BURGNER: Only one thing?

MR. DICKSON: Well, there may be a few more, Calgary-Currie, but the one that I immediately noticed was the reference that to reflect "the importance of information in our society, the government will increase Albertans' access to the information they need." Then a number of means are suggested. Now, I guess one of my concerns there would be that we heard members, including the Member for Calgary-Currie, the other day in debate on Bill 204 list all kinds of reasons why they couldn't support it. Bill 204 was surely a Bill that reflects this statement, this observation in the Speech from the Throne, about the importance of information in our society.

It's an interesting contradiction that in the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor and presumably members of Executive Council acknowledge the importance of information in our society, but the only legislative reflection of that commitment is seen in Bills which were introduced the other day by my colleague for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and my colleague who moved Bill 204. I'd ask members to consider that if in fact they want to acknowledge the importance of information in our society, that's a powerful way to do it.

I think the other question that's begged by the reference to the electronic library network and the Internet is that in Alberta we still have this problem with Crown copyright. There are those who believe that what we do in this Assembly – the laws of the province of Alberta, the regulations of the province of Alberta, that sort of material – is something that we should be able to sell to Albertans. I think that's a preposterous position for anyone to take. If there's anything that deserves to be in the public domain, that people should have access to, it ought to be the kind of material and stock-in-trade we deal with in here, which are Bills and ultimately statutes.

When the freedom of information panel, chaired by the esteemed Minister of Environmental Protection, traveled around the country, that minister will recall that we received a number of presentations from different people that wanted access to statutes of Alberta in electronic form. I remember the Minister of Environmental Protection said at the time that he thought it had some merit. He thought that was an important kind of idea, that we should be able to find ways to remove obstacles to accessing that information. Yet what we see this government flirting with, as other governments have before it, is the notion that they want

to assert Crown copyright in a very aggressive fashion and charge Albertans for sharing the stock-in-trade: the statutes, the laws, and the regulations of the province of Alberta. I still find it offensive. If the verbiage in the Speech from the Throne means anything, then it ought to be matched with a meaningful commitment to peel back the oppressiveness of a Crown copyright and find ways that we can get the material we use here out to as many Albertans as possible at little or no cost. I think that still has to be a priority.

I looked through the Speech from the Throne to see specifically what the government was going to do in terms of the office of the Justice department. No more department for my money in the provincial government. The Minister of Justice is responsible for – it'd been 102 statutes at one time, and with some shrinkage of statutes a smaller number. But that surely should be one of the busiest ministers in the Executive Council.

Before the Legislature started, I had challenged the minister to move in four major areas because this is what I hear Albertans saying they want to see leadership in. One was in family law reform. I suggested to the minister that we do some things in terms of a unified family court. I suggested some things we could do to improve access for families, for mothers and fathers and grandparents that are trying to sort out some of those difficult, contentious problems related to family breakup. I'm disappointed that it appears that all we've seen is, I think, two private members' Bills sponsored by government members: one modest Bill that proposes some improved access to grandparents; another Bill, that we saw the other day, that deals with a Saskatchewan-type screening to determine suitability for mediation. That's a major disappointment, because I've talked to a number of people who want to see family law reform. It's a major disappointment, Mr. Speaker, to groups of noncustodial parents that met with the Minister of Justice and at least one of his colleagues in July of 1995.

At that time, you know, the Minister of Justice made some commitments. He said that there would be some legislative response to deal with those concerns. This was the same minister who in June or May of 1993 said in the Assembly, in moving a child access enforcement Bill: this is such a high priority, members, it cannot wait. Now that's a paraphrase, but that's what the Minister of Justice said before he became Minister of Justice. He's been Minister of Justice now for a year and a half, and what happened to that sense of urgency? What happened to that imperative that drove the Minister of Justice to say as a private member – he would have been a private member then – that this was something that required urgent attention? Well, Albertans are asking, noncustodial parents are asking, and do we see anything in the Speech from the Throne about that? Nary a word, Mr. Speaker. Nary a word.

The second thing that I'd said I was challenging the Minister of Justice to move on – and we see nothing in the Speech from the Throne – is aboriginal justice. The Cawsey commission report, another in a series of excellent reports done in this jurisdiction, talking about what we do about the very basic problem: we have too many native offenders in Alberta jails. I continue to regard that as a top priority.

After the Cawsey report was done, the minister appointed a coordinator within the Department of Justice to start addressing some of the recommendations, and there has been some progress made, Mr. Speaker, particularly with the RCMP, with local police forces. There has been some significant progress. Perhaps the most significant recommendation of the Cawsey report was that there ought to be an aboriginal justice commission, a commission

that could provide some real leadership in terms, if necessary, of challenging the government to move on and deal with some of these serious problems. The government has refused to budge. They've refused to create that aboriginal justice commission, and the bottom line is we still have too many native offenders in Alberta jails. If we want to start shaving dollars in our correctional system, I can think of few better ways of doing it than finding a better way than warehousing native offenders in jails, the most expensive way of trying to deal with that whole issue. There is nothing in the Speech from the Throne that deals with that.

8:50

The third thing I challenged the Minister of Justice to deal with before the session started was access to our court system. I looked again in vain when I looked through the Speech from the Throne for something that addresses the question of public access to the courts. It's not there, Mr. Speaker. I'd suggested that it's time for the provincial government to say that they have a coordinating role in terms of public legal education, but it appears that the government doesn't share that view, and that's unfortunate. Because before members get all hepped up about trying to elect judges in perhaps a sincere but a misguided effort to overhaul our judicial system, why wouldn't they first give the key, open the door to Albertans to be able to use their own system? Without a public legal education program they can't do that. There are also the problems with – we have no support in this province for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, whether mediation or arbitration, and I continue to challenge the Minister of Justice to deal with the multidoor courthouse concept.

The other area where we've seen no progress is in terms of victims. We still are in a situation where money accumulates. The last balance I saw was over \$1 million in the victims assistance fund. Something in the order of \$750,000 a year goes into that fund. We're not moving it out, Mr. Speaker. We're not putting it in the hands of people that can use it.

I refer again to the fact that we've got a problem with juvenile prostitution in Calgary. We've got a Minister of Justice who's waiting, apparently, for Ottawa to do something. We've got a Minister of Family and Social Services who says: well, we can't change the Child Welfare Act to specifically address the fact that we've got 13-, 14-, and 15-year-old girls on the streets of Calgary and Edmonton. Well, here's a way we can provide some assistance to help those kids get off the streets. The government's not addressing it, and they're not doing anything with it.

In terms of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, I'm disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that when I look through the Act, we have this notion still that the government wants to dilute the Alberta Human Rights Commission by combining it with a citizenship commission. Now, there's an interesting provision here on page 3. It says: "It will simplify and modernize employment standards and filing procedures at Alberta registries." Does that mean that Alberta registries are now going to manage what have been employment standards issues? Does it mean that Alberta registries – privatized, for-profit Alberta registries – are now going to be places you go if you've got a human rights complaint? It's curious wording. I assume that the Speech from the Throne goes through numerous, numerous proofreading exercises. So when I see something in here like that, I have to assume it's in there for a deliberate purpose. If in fact the government thinks they're going to turn around and treat human rights complaints again as employment standards issues, then that's definitely turning back the clock.

We continue to look for three things in terms of human rights protection. The first one is an independent commission; secondly, a human rights commission that's got an education budget commensurate with the challenge they've got. We spend more money to keep rats from crossing the border from Saskatchewan, vastly more money we do, than we spend in terms of trying to give information to Albertans and break down problems with tolerance and misunderstanding.

Just moving on quickly. A concern also has to do with health care, a big concern in my constituency because of two things: the loss of the Holy Cross hospital and the fact that there is still a very large number of seniors living in Calgary-Buffalo and a great deal of concern, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what's going to happen to those people in terms of accessing health care. In preparing for the commencement of the session, I had a chance to go to the different seniors' residences in downtown Calgary, and there are plenty of them. A great deal of concern from seniors in terms of problems with the threshold limit yet. We hear rumours that's going to change, but I don't see a commitment from the government to that extent.

We have problems with the fact that although the city of Calgary emergency medical services have set a 12-minute response time, what we've got is we've already bumped up against the 12-minute response time and we've only closed one of the downtown hospitals. What's going to happen when the General hospital emergency ward is closed? How can it be that we're not going to see a further degradation in response time? That's a major concern.

The other problem has to do with the fact that the Calgary regional health authority was planning on liberating some money from the closure of the two major hospitals that I guess was going to be used for home care, but because of deferred closure of the two hospitals, the RHA can't access the money. The result is that there are too many seniors in my constituency that require home care that can't get it. In fact what we're seeing is somebody that was getting home care for two hours a week to be able to live in their own home is now seeing that home care reduced to two hours a month. Well, the reality of that is those people aren't going to be able to live on their own. They're going to have to move into an institution at a far greater cost over to the taxpayer. We've got to do something urgently about that, Mr. Speaker.

The other concern I've just got in the Speech from the Throne is a major inaccuracy. One would think again that the proofreaders would have caught this. There's a false reference to the cost. "Alberta faces a 22 percent reduction in transfer payments from the federal government." Well, you know, the reality of that is that the Alberta government is not being forthright in describing the reduction in federal transfers to the province. They're ignoring the transfer of tax points. In fact, when the total transfers are examined – and that's cash and tax – the actual reduction in transfers is \$218 million, not \$342 million. So we've got a reduction of 8.6 percent, not the 22 percent that's described in the Speech from the Throne. Once again, one would think accuracy should be paramount, and that's not the case at all, so I wanted to register that concern as well.

I'm pleased that this evening I got a commitment from the Minister of Health that there will be a formal privacy impact assessment undertaken by the Information and Privacy Commissioner before the smart card pilot project is commenced.

I'll say with that, Mr. Speaker, I've raised, I think, some of the major concerns I had with the Speech from the Throne. Thanks for your attention.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, sir. [some applause] Don't raise any expectations. I'm not going to be nearly as excited and as exuberant and as enthusiastic as the Member for St. Albert. Actually, it was very refreshing. We get so used to hearing some of the folks over there, it's kind of nice to have a new voice for a change.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Have you not been living with yours?

MR. DUNFORD: Excuse me?

THE SPEAKER: Order. Through the Chair.

MR. DUNFORD: I want to just take a couple of minutes this evening to make a few comments on the Speech from the Throne. I've said here in the House a number of times that I don't have a lot of good ideas, but I can certainly spot one when I hear it.

I want to give credit tonight to the Member for Medicine Hat. We were having lunch together, and I was questioning out loud about who I was going to invite up to hear the Speech from the Throne when the Member for Medicine Hat indicated to me that he was inviting students from his high schools. Ding dong; it didn't take long. That was an absolutely great idea, and I want to indicate, then, to all the members of the House what an enjoyable experience that was for five young people from Lethbridge. Every high school that we have in Lethbridge was able to find a way for either their president or their vice-president to get away from classes for that day to come up to the Speech from the Throne. After hearing that speech and taking them back to the airport, we sat to have dinner, and I asked them, "What do you think about the Speech from the Throne?" It was very interesting on the part of these young people. They indicated that there weren't too many surprises, and I took this as an extremely good compliment for this government and of course for Premier Klein. In fact, what it meant was that instead of having speeches tucked away, hidden under a bushel somewhere, he's been so open and accountable with the people of Alberta that even students at the five high schools in Lethbridge really had keyed in on most of the messages that were then delivered. I've since either seen directly I guess three of those students and have heard anecdotally from two others that they really appreciated the experience they had and of course hope that we'll be able to find some way in which to keep it up.

9:00

Just for the record, Mr. Speaker, in case people aren't aware of these young people. We had a young fellow named Brandon Fletcher from the Lethbridge collegiate institute. We had Chris Nguyen from the Catholic Central high school. We had Dustin Stotz from the Allan Watson school, which, by the way, is one of those integrated occupational program facilities. We had Audrey Tannant from Winston Churchill high school and Carissa Bekkering from Immanuel Christian school. I was very pleased to have them attend, and what they did hear I thought was an extremely well-delivered Speech from the Throne, one that clearly indicated that we're in a year of transition. This is a time for Albertans to catch their breath a bit and to analyze what we have done, and of course we're all looking for another speech and another budget before the next election.

Health care is listed of course as our number one priority as well as education. I'm very proud of both the writers and the

deliverers of the Speech from the Throne and extremely proud of our leader, Premier Klein.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of points that I wanted to raise on the Speech from the Throne. It was an interesting mid-session. Between the fall session and the beginning of the spring session in Lethbridge we had a really good opportunity to kind of get around and find out what the community felt about a lot of the changes that have occurred during the past two years and how they were approaching the different role that the government wanted to play in supporting both their organizations and the community. The end result was that I got a lot of feedback and comments about and reaction to the changes that they were seeing, and I'd just like to convey those ideas to the government this evening.

First of all, I'll just do it on a kind of a broad-area basis. The first area I'll touch on is health care. It seems like this is the area that most people want to talk about when you get them sitting down and talking about changes that have gone on. They are really quite concerned about what health care is going to be like two or three years down the road. They recognize the fact that there's a lot of transition going on right now and that it's hard to make a judgment, but they're really concerned about where we're going to end up. The kind of reaction to the current situation was in the acute care area. Most of them felt that right now the acute care crisis type of medicine was quite well handled: if you were in an accident, you got looked after; if you had to go to the doctor, that was there.

What they were really concerned about, though, was kind of the follow-up and the secondary parts of the education system. The main part here that has to come out, then, is some kind of an education component that makes people aware of what the new health care system is going to be and how it's going to deal with their concerns at the community level.

They also talked a lot about the home care situation, the new emphasis that this is taking in the overall picture of health care. A lot of them were concerned that there might be some inequities arise in the home care area in the sense that if you happened to be in a community where you had your family, you could get support if you had to kind of complete your health care program at home. The concern was for people who didn't have family in the community and how they were going to have the support that was available. Mr. Speaker, everybody can come up with stories about experiences of people who had misfortunes in this learning phase, but I just wanted to bring them out in the context of a lot of general comments about these concerns. They were looking for support for people who were in a crisis situation in terms of a family or other mechanisms, especially those that didn't have the dollars that they could hire in their support to help them through that transition at the home care point.

The other area and one that has really caused a lot of concern in the Lethbridge community has been the relationship between long-term care and the community. There's a lot of concern about the status and the focus for the St. Mike's facility. What's going to happen to it? Is it going to be completed? What form is it going to take? Also, the other concern they're talking about is: what happens when the long-term care facilities have to be spread around the regions so drastically? This is a mechanism that the regional authority implemented in order to deal with facilities that were already there and make some use of them. In

the concept of prioritizing and getting people into these facilities, a lot of families have been disrupted, and they'd really like to see some kind of a mechanism put in place through the changes that would allow them to have a closer family unit maintained.

There are situations in southern Alberta where people are traveling across southwestern Alberta to visit different members of their family because the priority and the waiting lists have resulted in them being put in facilities at opposite ends of the regional authority structure. We need to bring up some kind of a situation where we can bring these families together and keep the families where they can support their senior members in their years when long-term care is their situation.

The last area in the health care that I'd like to discuss a little bit is some of the concerns that were expressed by the employees. Just in the health care area, Mr. Minister. The employees were really quite concerned about some of the changes that are rumoured to be occurring. They don't feel that they're getting enough of a participation in the process. There's a lot of uncertainty created by the changes that are going on in the professions Act, in the definition of professions, the relationship between professional organizations and scope of practice trade-offs. A lot of them are feeling that this is not being done in enough of a participatory way, and they'd really like to have that changed, so that we should be looking for some kind of a more complete consultation process to meet these needs.

The next area I'd like to address for a few minutes is the seniors' concerns in the community. This varied quite drastically depending upon what group of seniors you were talking to. There were a lot of really strong concerns about the lack of regulation for the new, privatized senior-type homes, where we've got the small one to three person homes. These are individuals in the community who are opening up their homes to seniors for a profit, yet there's very little that can be done in terms of the regulation and the control of how these individuals are treated.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that any of us would consider a Big Mac split in two, divided between two seniors living in a home as a satisfactory nighttime meal, yet this is the kind of thing that we're seeing. We have to look at situations with providing some kind of a regulatory mechanism to look after how these people are being handled, especially when it's being done for profit. I can understand the reluctance, and I don't think we as a public should be involved in putting in place regulations when family members are looking after seniors, but when we have agencies or groups that are doing it for profit, there should be some kind of a set of guidelines that talks about, you know, good nutrition, good community spirit, good mental health environments for these seniors when they're going into these for-profit homes.

9:10

One of the other concerns that has really been discussed at length relative to the seniors' residence in Lethbridge is the initiative that's being put in place to bring forth a single administrative unit for the three different agencies in Lethbridge that look after seniors' lodges. Mr. Speaker, I think the government in this area is being a little bit heavy-handed. We have three organizations in Lethbridge. They're running very effectively in different focuses, with different scopes of their approach to seniors' lodging, and rather than just come in and say, you know, "You must combine under one administration," I think what the government should be looking at in terms of their funding mechanisms is saying, "All right; this is the maximum amount that we will allow for administrative overhead, and the rest of it goes into the direct lodge care." If a group wants to come in and

operate within that constraint, they should be allowed to do it. It makes no difference to the government how many organizations are involved as long as they're doing it within that constraint in terms of an efficient and effective level of administrative cost.

So what we've got in Lethbridge are these three organizations. The structure of the three of them is set up so that one of them through their community service component is underwriting a large part of that overhead for the administration, yet they're going to be asked to disappear through this amalgamation. So what we need to do is look at it from a dollar point of view. If they're meeting the guideline, if they're meeting a recommended level of administrative cost, they should be allowed to continue to operate and not be rolled into an administrative unit which is less efficient than they're performing at. So it's a different approach. Rather than just do it, let them deal with it in terms of the dollars, and if they want to subsidize our operation, the public participation, let the organizations do that.

The other one that comes up under the seniors area has already been addressed by a number of the speakers to this and to the budget. It's the area of a need for a review of the trigger levels for the eligibility on benefits. There's a lot of concern by many of the seniors that these may be just a little bit too low. There was quite a bit of excitement in the community because there were rumours running around before the budget, before the Speech from the Throne that these eligibility levels might be raised a little bit. That wasn't to be in the presentations either of the Speech from the Throne or the budget, so the people in Lethbridge still would like to see some review of that.

The other area that I wanted to just address very briefly is education. There's a lot of talk this winter about the idea of technology in education and how this was going to deal with the current systems. Technology, I think, for most of the people that were involved in the discussions, focused around the use of computers, access to the Internet. There was a real concern, both in terms of the magnitude – you know: is one computer or two computers sufficient for a high school of 1,000 or 1,500; is it the same for a high school as it is for an elementary school? So there's a lot more information needed in terms of the proposals that the government's putting forth.

Supplementary to that are the in-service training requirements for the teachers. I spoke with a number of teachers who were saying, "Well, you know, it doesn't do us any good to have an Internet connection in the school because I don't even know how to talk to my students about it." We've got to make sure that the teachers are brought up to date in this area as well, so some kind of in-service program should be put in place for the teachers.

In the area of advanced education, here the concerns were a little more directly with the administration of the institutions. They all supported quite strongly the government's initiative in bringing the cost efficiencies, as they called it, in line, but they were really concerned with the idea that in many of the areas Lethbridge Community College and the University of Lethbridge already were, on a student basis, some of the lower cost delivery programs in the province, and they're being asked to cut back. They're being judged, still, in terms of the amount they can further reduce these costs, yet they're already the lowest cost, and then any incentive payments they get come about because of their ability to reduce these further. That seemed to them not to be a very fair, equitable approach to dealing with the kind of performance based on historic effective use of their dollars.

The students were also very concerned about the cost that was accruing to them in terms of the increased tuition fees. Many of

them were finding now that for the benefits that accrued from a university education, the costs they were being asked to bear didn't make it a very economic decision on their part anymore, and they were looking at other options. This is one of the things, Mr. Speaker, that we have to really look at in terms of its benefit to Alberta. There is a real benefit associated with a well-educated population, and we're getting now to the point that good education is no longer just high school. It requires some kind of post-secondary education. So we've got to be able to make education beyond high school really an option that these young people can still pursue. The unemployment level in the youth across the province is really very high. It's very unacceptable, I guess I could say, if we want to think of ourselves as a progressive province. We've got to provide these youth with the opportunity to get the education that they need.

I'd also like to just address briefly the area of social services. In southern Alberta, the Lethbridge community, the Chinook region approximated, where they're doing the new children's service initiative, there's a lot of concern there. The people have spent a lot of time this winter committing to helping to develop the new strategy and the new program for children's services, and now they're seeing things that are beginning to come out. They're beginning to question whether or not all the work that they've done might be in vain. They really would like to get a commitment from the minister. Even though the regionalization and the divestiture from the central authority down to regions is rumoured to be going to occur in this session, they would like some commitment that that is still going to be very open and very receptive to the suggestions they are going to bring forth over the next year, which was the mandate of their children's services program.

One of the other areas that came up in kind of the same area was community services, and I spoke with a number of people that were involved in providing community support services. Mr. Speaker, they brought up a really interesting kind of problem that they're facing, the phenomenon of volunteers, and this is associated with the fact that a community only has a certain number of volunteers readily available. You know, I think we all recognize the city of Lethbridge and the surrounding communities in their efforts in terms of volunteer contribution for the Winter Games. But on an ongoing basis the volunteer organizations are finding that more and more now they're getting this response when they call up their regular volunteers and ask for a little bit more help. They're saying: "No. Sorry. I've got to have some time for myself as well." So the volunteers are actually now starting to say no once in a while.

9:20

Another interesting phenomenon that they talked about in the volunteer area was a change in the structure of volunteers. Many of the community service organizations were saying that two or three years ago a significant proportion of their volunteers were university and college students, who would come over and put in five or six or seven hours of service a week for them. But now, because of the stress of the education system, the commitment to make every credit count, to take that extra course so they don't run an extra semester in their education program, these college and university students have disappeared from the volunteer pool. They're now having to rely on seniors, people who are retired, people who have other activities they're willing to sacrifice and replace with a volunteer activity. So there's been really quite a change in the way they're approaching volunteerism in the community.

There's a final area, Mr. Speaker, that I want to just address briefly. This is people's perception of the debt and the deficit: the government's approach to getting rid of the deficit and the impact that this has had on the community. I don't think I spoke with anybody, in all of the time I was out, who wasn't pleased that the deficit was being brought under control. This was something that everybody focused on and everybody thought was a good thing to be happening. There was some concern, in fact a lot of concern, expressed in terms of the structural impact of that deficit reduction. In a lot of cases they saw this basically as what we're doing is taking and transferring what is a public debt into private debt. They explained that from the fact that students now have to borrow a lot more money to get their education. People who have had the misfortune to participate in the health care system have ended up having to borrow money to support the home care they needed; they've had to borrow money to support some of the other health care costs that are associated with it.

So in essence what we're doing is transferring the public debt to people who don't have the ability and, especially in the senior's case, the opportunity for the senior to ever be in a position where they can earn the dollars to pay off that debt again. So, you know, we're really making a difference in terms of who owns the debt in the province. It's being transferred to groups that can't make the payments.

Mr. Speaker, that's it.

THE SPEAKER: Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first say that I want to wish the Lieutenant Governor a speedy recovery, and I hope that he's on the mend.

I want to praise, firstly, the mover and the seconder of the throne speech, because as I listened to them, I was impressed by how they talked about programs for their constituents. They talked about the kinds of things they needed, and they offered alternatives, which is refreshing to hear. My colleagues in this Assembly have made a number of good suggestions on the throne speech, and that's very refreshing.

I've heard and I've listened to the opposition members and to some of their negative comments. They've been less than complimentary. It's so unimpressive that after my 28th throne speech that I've sat through in this Assembly – that's some 2,223 sessions. [interjection] I didn't get what the member was hollering about, but I guess I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, sitting here through some 2,000-plus sessions I've heard a lot, both good and some bad. I wanted to go back and have a look at what I said. I looked at my speech on March 3, 1972, when I moved the throne speech, the first speaker in this Assembly from a new government, a new constituency. So I looked through it, and I want to talk about what I said then and how we've done and how does it compare to what we've done and where we are today. I talked about economic growth. I talked about government providing the climate for industry to do their thing, to provide jobs. As I look around the province – and I'm sure all of you, each and every member, can look at your communities – there's hardly a community in this province that hasn't grown dramatically. Industry has moved in because of the climate in this province. I talked about highway development, moving our commerce to market. I'll speak about that somewhat later, because in 1972 we never had one square inch of pavement other than highways 16 and 43. Today I'll remind the members here of what we have had happen.

I talked about agriculture and programs for our beginning farmers. We set that up, and that was a positive move. I talked about health and the need for hospital facilities in my constituency, and we have those. I talked about education and how important that is to our young people, because they are the leaders of tomorrow. I talked about seniors' programs. They're so important because they're the pioneers who helped build this country, and that's what I said on March 3, 1972. I talked about listening and responding to Albertans, which was so essential and important. I said we had to do that, and maybe that's why I have been returned here several times since then. I talked about change, change that's so important to Albertans and to our communities and to our people. I said then that changes should involve seeking new markets, welcoming new ideas, making changes in an orderly and deliberate way, planning changes carefully and with sincerity. I said that changes then would be viewed with optimism, new opportunities, and a sense of challenge.

I recall so well that an astute politician told me that we should look for changes. He said that if we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always had. That's so important. I remember that so well. You have to change and proceed further along the way.

I just have to chuckle at this. I think the Member for Lethbridge-West said that there are more people who have talked their way out of this place than into this place, and he's so right. I've watched that happen over the last number of years. I just want to leave this comment with all my colleagues on both sides. It's not how much you say that people remember; it's what you say that gets you farther or farther back. So remember that: it's not how much you say; it's what you say that people remember.

I recall a member on the other side making a speech here, one of those speeches in the session. I listened carefully, and when he was finished, I sent a note over. I said: I listened to your speech, and you have proven without doubt that you are a one-term MLA. I was right. He never made it back.

So let's review the record, Mr. Speaker, and what took place 25 years ago. The population of Alberta in 1971 was 1.6 million people. In 1994 it was 2.7 million. The city of Edmonton had 438,000 people; today it's 627,000. Calgary: 403,000 people in 1971; today, 738,000. So there's strong growth – and it's proven so well across the province – strong growth not just in the cities but in practically every constituency and every small community in our province. That's just something I didn't expect when I made that speech, but I talked about how we had to have changes.

I want to talk about the workforce because it's so important to have jobs, and people will know what industry can do. Of course, just the other day we had an announcement on Joffre, on the jobs that will be there. I am fortunate, being in the Whitecourt constituency, with the jobs that we have in the pulp business, the lumber industry. The workforce employment figures in 1971 were 630,000 people in the employment force in Alberta. In 1995 that figure is 1,389,000, and that didn't happen by itself. It happened because a government listened.

Sure, we've had some ups and downs, but overall the province grew, and we moved in dramatic ways to make that growth. If you do nothing, you'll never fail. It's when you start to do something that sometimes you might fail once or twice. But I'll take the positive moves and the gains we've made over the losses we've had over the last 25 years. I want to say that my own constituency, Whitecourt-St. Anne, in 1971 had 3,000 people; in 1995 over 7,000. Mayerthorpe: 1,000 in 1971; close to 1,700

today. Onoway: 473 in 1971; close to 700 today. So you can see growth in not just the bigger centres but the smaller ones across the province.

9:30

I just want to talk about education, because it's so important to our young people, as I've said, the leaders of tomorrow. In 1971 the University of Alberta had 18,000 students; in 1995 that figure was over 25,000. The University of Calgary had 9,000 students in 1971; that figure in 1995 is 19,000 plus. The total: 28,600 students in 1971 – and this is in universities – compared to 49,000 in 1995, a 71 percent increase. So there's growth there. Total part-time students: in 1971 there were 6,500; in 1996 close to 19,000, a 187 percent increase in student enrollment. That's important, Mr. Speaker. I want to move now to the elementary schools. The total enrollment in 1970-71 was 419,000 and today, 1995-96, close to 550,000 elementary students in the province of Alberta.

On education, I just want to touch on something that I was so impressed with last week and the week before, and it's called the DARE program, the drug abuse resistance education program, that has taken place for the first time in the province of Alberta in a rural setting. The Onoway school and the school in Alberta Beach, Grasmere school, were the first schools in rural Alberta to have this program, done by Constable Wayne Oakes of the Stony Plain detachment. I want to say again today, as I've said to him, that I'm very pleased and very proud of the way he took on the 64 students in Onoway and 46 in Grasmere school and provided them with a program that had some 17 lessons running from September to just the other day when they graduated. They talked about drug abuse, alcohol abuse, violence, and all those things.

I'd like to say both to the member that's responsible for AADAC and the minister of lotteries that we should look at ways that we could provide some funding to get some educators in the province – because we don't have them now; we only have one group of people in Edmonton that have taken the course – and get this to grade 6 students in every school in the province of Alberta. If we can educate them there in regards to alcohol abuse and drug abuse, it should carry on beyond that, and I think we'd save a lot of time and effort and money and suffering if we did that as quickly as we can.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little about the constituency, because that's what I talked about some 28 sessions ago. We've provided the seniors with self-contained units in practically every centre in my constituency. We have three lodges, we have hospitals, and we have nursing homes. We have auxiliary hospitals aiding our seniors, as I said before, our pioneers.

I want to talk about the kinds of things that happened in regards to industry. We have a pulp mill now, we have a newsprint and a large lumber complex all situated in Whitecourt and in Blue Ridge. We have community growth: recreation facilities unmatched anywhere, I would say, in the dominion of Canada here in Alberta. We have a number of MDs that were formed from local improvement districts. We've moved more and more to local government, which is a very, very positive move.

I talked about highways. I mentioned at the outset that the only pavement we had was on highways 43 and 16, and that's right. Today as we look throughout my constituency – and I'm just referring to mine because I know it better than the rest. But every member here in rural Alberta knows of the improvements we've had to rural roads across our province. Of course, I'm sure the members in the cities know the kind of assistance they've had, the type of roads through whether it's Calgary – and I've

been on that one – or Edmonton. We have some bottlenecks here, but hopefully with the announcement the minister made we'll have that corrected.

In 1971 it was a wet year, and if you wanted to travel from Whitecourt to Jasper, you went from Whitecourt to Onoway to Carvel Corner and then back to Jasper, a long, long route around. If anybody knows the route, you know what I mean. Well, today when you want to travel from Whitecourt, you can go south to Edson on Highway 32, that's all paved, and north to Swan Hills. That's all paved. You can move down to Blue Ridge, and you can go on 658 to Fort Assiniboine and towards Cottonwood on 751 to MacKay: paved road. You can go to Green Court and you can move towards Barrhead, Highway 18: totally paved. At Mayerthorpe taking Highway 22, you can go towards Highway 16 to the south and 18 to Barrhead on the north. At Sangudo 757 is paved both ways, south to Highway 16 and north to Barrhead. Cherhill, 764, again paved both ways, through Darwell to Highway 16 and north to Barrhead. At Gunn Highway 33 is paved to Barrhead and on to the north and of course a paved road from there south to Highway 16.

In 1971 we had 8,200 kilometres of paved primary highway. In 1995 that figure was 12,767 kilometres of paved highway. The multilane, the four-lane highways in 1971 were 645 kilometres. In 1996 that figure is close to 1,600 kilometres. Secondary highways, which are so important to rural Alberta: in 1971 we had 584 kilometres of paved road – probably mostly in your constituency, sir, because we didn't have any – and in 1995 we had 7,563 kilometres of paved highway. So that's quite an improvement, Mr. Speaker.

I want to touch now on the constituency boundaries – I've been asked this question, and I really don't have an answer – and it's on the reduction of rural constituencies and an increase in the urban centres. Somebody asked me: why do you have to have 20 or 24 MLAs in an urban centre when 12 aldermen or councillors – what do they call them? – do that job very well and have more to do with the local people than MLAs? So I don't have an answer to that question.

Is the 25 percent differential the right differential? I don't know. In some areas it might be fair, but throughout rural Alberta, where it takes you three hours to travel from one end of your constituency to the other, it's not the same as traveling across a constituency in Edmonton or Calgary. I did that once. I took my car and I drove across one. It took me eight minutes. So see the comparison: three hours plus against eight or 10 minutes in an urban centre. So hopefully the people who are doing the boundaries will have a look at that. I know it has something to do with the Constitution, but as I said some time ago when we brought that in, it might be the document that destroys this country instead of helping it, and I hope that doesn't happen.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to close in saying that I've seen many changes, and I'm sure all these members have seen many changes if they go back 25 years and look till today. Changes were made because they were necessary. Changes, in my view, were made because we were progressing; we weren't standing still. As I mentioned before, if you do nothing, you won't make a mistake, but if you do something, there is a chance that you will make an error. I've played lots of sports, and there are times where you might miss the ball on third base, a hot liner comes at you and you have an error, but you let that go by and you continue on and you work towards winning.

So let me close in saying to all the members – because I believe strongly that it's not how much you say, it's what you say, I'll

close as quickly as I can – that we should continue as a government to listen to Albertans and to respond to Albertans. By working together we can build a better Alberta for today and for the future for our children and for our grandchildren.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

9:40

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite pleased to follow the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, because of course I grew up in that constituency that he has represented over the years. It's as fine a testimony of a lot of the work that the hon. member has done, particularly in regard to pavement, as I have heard anyone ever say. I can relate to a lot of what he's referred to, and I can even help support some of what he's said.

In speaking directly to the throne speech itself, Mr. Speaker, I'm compelled to make a few observations that perhaps might not be quite as glowing as what the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has just enunciated. For example, I'm moved by his closing comments that we must continue to listen and we must continue to try and provide good government and be a better Alberta and so on. I certainly agree with that. I just wonder when it is in this particular term that we're going to start doing that particular listening and that particular caring.

I'll tell you why I say that, Mr. Speaker. I've read the throne speech through several times now, and I find just a few things that are perhaps somewhat inconsistent with what I see happening. At the same time I hear people in different meetings making suggestions to me and to other members hoping that the government will take these things a little more seriously. So I read the throne speech through thinking I would see some of these things there. For example, just within the last little while I was at one of the community health care meetings where a number of very qualified individuals provided some presentations regarding the state of health care in the province and what it is they would like to see the government do. I'm going to share just a couple of those.

One area, of course, that we were looking through the throne speech to see a little bit of relief from was in the area of home care. We've heard a number of people in meetings – and I've received a number of letters substantiating this – who say that the home care support network is simply still inadequate. I wonder what it is that the Minister of Health is undertaking in that regard to provide some deeper scrutiny into that area, to help determine who is eligible to receive it and at the same time who also is eligible to give it, and what kind of support financially can we expect in the immediate future, not leading directly into the election writ period, Mr. Speaker, but right now. What is there? Unfortunately I didn't see anything really in the throne speech that sort of touched on that.

What I did see, which I compliment the Minister of Health on saying – at least I assume she had some input into this – is that there is going to be “quality and accessible health care.” Now, I think this is a really laudable goal to aspire toward, but I keep looking for the proof of that. Where is this quality and accessible health care beginning to happen in the province? What I see on the other hand are disturbing headlines such as, “Don't get old and sick in Barrhead.” I think that's a frightening headline from the editorial department. I see something else here just recently in the *Edmonton Sun*: “Untrained nurses hurt health care.” Now, there are many others. I'm not trying to attack the Minister of Health; I'm simply raising these for her awareness, knowing full well that she probably has received similar comments from others.

When you hear these things at the local level, Mr. Speaker, in a nonpartisan meeting, where people who are familiar with the health care system either as former doctors or perhaps just recently retired ones or nurses themselves telling you stories like we heard just in the last couple of weeks, it is frightening for many. It certainly is frightening for me and the constituents I represent.

We heard one story here from a retired nurse who was recently a patient. She told me this from her observations in the hospital. She's still a young woman; she's only in her late 50s or early 60s, Mr. Speaker. She felt, upon speaking with the nurses a little bit, that the nurses felt very unsure and insecure, that they were faced with too many new things, very many unknowns. In fact, she actually saw a graduate nurse tell a student nurse to administer a syringe of morphine knowing full well she wasn't qualified to do it, but they were so short staffed, so short handed that the syringe task had to be done. Here you had a completely scared nurse-to-be trying to deliver this particular injection, and it was frightening to this former head of nursing as well. This is a real story.

Now, there are others. I'm not trying to scare the Minister of Health, because I know her to be a conscientious person. I do think that concerns like that, including accessibility to health care and the holistic view of health care that many have expressed, should seriously be taken into account and in particular as they relate to seniors. Seniors really fear not knowing who it is that is going to look after them. I have heard this, I'm sure you've heard it, and I'll wager a bet that everybody in this Chamber has heard that kind of a comment made by seniors, that they are afraid of what is happening and who's going to be there to look after them when they perhaps need that extra special bit of help.

So I would say that it would have been a better plan – and perhaps it's still not too late for this plan to come in – for the government to embark on what we have often referred to as efficiency audits. What does that mean, Mr. Speaker? Simply put, it would mean that you would go out there, find out what the needs are, be it in health care or be it in education or be it in the environment, and then you design the program that goes with that. Then you match the dollars, insofar as you have them, to accommodate that particular program. In the process of doing that, you would eke out what it is that is right with the system and what it is that is wrong with the system.

You see, you can liken balancing the budget to weight control, if you like. This is a story that I've told before, and I'll tell it again because it bears telling, Mr. Speaker. If you wanted to lose 20 pounds, then there are two ways to go about doing that. One is a very sensible way of going about it where you go and consult a nutritionist, a dietician, perhaps your doctor, and you get put onto a special program of exercise and good nutrition and proper rest. Over a period of time a sensible plan would take you to your conclusion, and happily you would lose your 20 pounds.

The other way to lose 20 pounds is to go and cut off your leg tomorrow. Either way you'll get rid of 20 pounds. But which one is the more sensible? It's a rhetorical question, Mr. Speaker. The point is that there is a proper way to go about doing things, and there's an improper way.

So I read here where we talk about the choices that Albertans are going to be faced with in the next little while with the stop, wait, or go brochure that has just come out asking people redundant questions like: do you want to pay down the debt? Well, of course we want to pay down the debt. It goes without saying. We campaigned on that. Eighty-four percent of Albertans said that.

DR. WEST: The Liberals have never done that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: The Liberals have always said that we want to pay down the debt in this province, in spite of what the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is saying. We are here to help retire that debt, bearing in mind that we're not the ones who created it in the first place, Mr. Speaker. So you've got to give us an equal chance on that, hon. minister.

However, carrying on. The other choice is to reduce your tax burden. Well, who doesn't want to reduce their taxes? Is there anybody here who wants to pay more taxes? No. Absolutely none. [interjection] Not the person speaking nor the speaker. There is not a single Liberal in this House who wants to increase the taxes. Certainly as we speak there absolutely is not.

Then we see a third point in the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, which says: or do you want us to "target spending to areas in which we will see an increase in the quality of program or service." Now we get to something a little different and not quite as imminently and easily answered as the first two questions. Now the government seems to be looking at possibly bringing in some kind of a plan, something that we talked about two and a half, three years ago in this House. Finally we're now seeing it. Well, obviously we're seeing it. There's an election coming, and people do need to sort of have a sense of where we're going and to contribute toward it.

I sincerely hope that we're not leaving the health care equation out of there. It says right here in the throne speech, which I have to congratulate the Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Gordon Towers, for having put in writing, that the "top priority for government is health." I'm looking still to see evidence of that, because I see too much of the other things: a lack of co-ordination and planning. I still see insufficient provincial funding to some areas. I see inadequate enforcement of standards. I see elimination of a lot of things that affect the aging population, the aging fact in our province.

So I'm hard-pressed to see how the government is convincing me as a voter that this health care business is really the top priority. I'm not saying that it's easy, hon. minister. I respect that. I know it's not easy, and I know you're trying. I wish you well in that effort. It says that in the end they want the system to be more accountable. However, I wonder how it's going to be more accountable when what we're seeing right now is really the layering of yet one more community health council.

9:50

Now, I applaud the effort behind this move to look like it's opening up the discussion to more people so that more individuals, more Albertans can take part in it. However, I also recognize that we're creating yet one more distance between me the voter, me the taxpayer, and specifically the Minister of Health, who has the full power to do something about it. So we'll have the Minister of Health, then we'll have the bureaucracy – the deputy minister and so on – then we'll have the RHAs, then we'll have the community health councils, and finally somewhere down the line we will get the voter. That's just too far down the line. People want a little more direct access to it all. They want direct access to the minister's ear on this where the impact will do some good. But it hasn't happened. So the fears are out there.

However, I want to pose one question, if I might, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Health will undoubtedly undertake to answer it at her first ability. That's on page 2 of the throne speech, where it says, "Half of these funds will be invested in an innovation fund." I would really like the minister at some point to just

explain a little further. There might be something really good there that I'd like to share with my constituents, because undoubtedly a great deal of thought has gone into this. After all, it bears the official emblem and everything else. I'm curious to know what that is. I have a lot more that I'd like to say on health care. Some of it I'll take up privately, if I'm able, with the minister.

I'll just move quickly here to education for a moment. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne said that education is absolutely critical. I couldn't agree more. A number of us in this House are educators and have done a great deal in that area to try and impact the generations that will follow us, and perhaps some will be returning to that vocation once they leave this hallowed hall. Nonetheless, it says here in an opening sentence of the throne speech that "Alberta's education system has turned the corner." I think that's a valuable statement to make. The danger in that corner turning is: what do you now see? Is there a road now that you've turned the corner, and where does that road take us? It says here that "initiatives will focus on improving learning and teaching through the use of technology." But what's missing from that equation, Mr. Speaker, is the frontline workers, in the same way that nurses are missing in the equation on health care, or at least they are somewhat missing.

So, too, is there a lack of attention paid here to the specifics of teaching itself and particularly to the people who deliver the teaching. Teachers are suffering a tremendous burnout. I've said this before during the Budget Address, and I want to re-emphasize it. As a former teacher myself I am absolutely alarmed at the large number of teachers who are on long-term disability or long-term leave as a result of stress. I don't know that the Minister of Education has yet had a chance to comment on that specifically, but I look forward to his illuminating us on that issue. I think it's a very serious one that needs an immediate response. As we move through this information age and as the world becomes smaller and smaller through Internet and webnet and every other kind of net that is out there, so too must we be vigilant in preparing our young people to deal with that and to use those new tools of education to become competitive.

I was looking through this throne speech just to see a little bit of a hint of what there would be by way of hope for our young people, not necessarily just hope in terms of lower tuition fees or that type of thing, Mr. Speaker, but hope in terms of job prospects and where we as a province are going in regard to the larger economic picture. I didn't find it.

The other area with regard to education that has my concern is with regard to transportation. Mr. Speaker, you will remember that we had members here from the Twin Parks area - Oak Ridge, Maple Ridge, the trailer courts - who came here as individuals concerned about the uniqueness of their particular situation. They are an isolated community that fits between Sherwood Park and Edmonton, but there are miles between them. Nonetheless, they are technically annexed under the city of Edmonton, and we still don't have a formula figured out here or any light being shed on how it is that we're going to solve their transportation difficulties. These students travel to a designated school that is far too far away, and some of them are paying exceedingly high rates in comparison to other parts of the province, yet we don't feel satisfied with the answers that we're able or not able to provide to them.

Again I have to ask the minister: why is that there still exists this inequity? Well, the answer is: because the municipalities themselves make the determination. I understand that, but I would make the argument to the minister that getting students to

the schools is an integral part of education. You must sometimes reshuffle your focus and, in particular, relook your budget to see if you're able to include transportation a little more solidly as an integral aspect of education, put it within the School Act in such a way that the transportation might be provided. [interjection] The minister is telling me that it already is.

What you're saying is that there's a provision there, but it's optional. What's happening here is that school boards are asking parents to subsidize. Am I right, Mr. Minister? I'm sure I'm right. Otherwise, why are people paying transportation fees? So you can't argue the point that people are paying transportation fees. They are.

MR. JONSON: You're saying it should be in the School Act. It is.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I know it's in the School Act. I'm saying to entrench it in such a way that it becomes integral to education and it must be covered. If you have to reshuffle or refocus your budget, then do that. What you're really saying is that the allowance for it is there, but the application of it doesn't yield what your intention is in its inclusion. That's what I'm saying, because there are still people paying a lot of money for that.

So I want to move just quickly to the area of economic growth and jobs and put in my favourite item here, and that is with regard to the job prospect and the so-called Alberta advantage which, in the words of the throne speech, "attracts business, investment, and jobs to our province." Yet as the Speaker knows full well because he's heard me say this once or 15 times in this Assembly already, we see jobs being driven away because of the ill-planned and haphazard treatment of the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, I know standing here before you today that this sounds a little bit like the sky is falling. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? In this instance the sky really is falling, because real jobs are going to be leaving this province in a matter of months, not in a matter of years but in a matter of months, and along with those jobs will go the investment that they talk about, and along with them will go the businesses. We will become unattractive for certain businesses because there is already an alarming rate of bankruptcies in this province. What the government is going to be doing here is adding to that, and it will become a disadvantage to people in the film and television industry. This is a very buoyant industry, but as we tried to impress upon others, it's also a very fragile and mobile one. Mr. Speaker, last Friday morning when we met as a Liberal caucus with the mayor, His Worship Bill Smith, and his council people, I impressed upon him this point because it affects Edmonton in a very, very dramatic and direct way: we're going to be losing hundreds of jobs.

I've given you the example of the one production only, *Jake and the Kid*. Please remember that one, because when it moves to Saskatchewan, it takes with it 700 jobs, or it takes enough jobs out of here and grabs the rest from there all because we here, the province, the government, mismanaged this transitional period. They cut it short by about six months. That's all that that industry would have needed: just a little bit of play ball from the minister of economic development. The undertaking was there, but suddenly there was a reneging on it in the last minute. It looked almost as if the Provincial Treasurer was running the economic development department, and it's an unfortunate turn of events. So I say that.

On the other hand, I want to extend one compliment to the minister of economic development for his announcement surrounding the \$60 million in road projects, which affects my area directly because I happen to have in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, the 34th Street/Whitemud freeway interchange, which is budgeted for within that particular money. That area of the city, that area of the province, is one of the fastest growing areas in terms of housing and population that you'll ever find.

Mr. Speaker, I hear the bell going, and unfortunately I don't have a chance to comment on the social services issues and WCB, which I had wanted to, but I thank you for your kind attention. I'll continue this at another time.

10:00

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, with that, if I might be permitted, I would ask to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore has moved that debate be now adjourned under this item. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**

Bill 6
Gaming and Liquor Act

[Adjourned debate February 27: Mr. Bruseker]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last day when I was talking about this, I covered the first two parts of the Bill. This is an eight-part Bill dealing with gambling and liquor sales and the provision of liquor sales. I'd gotten up to part 3. I want to continue my remaining time talking about the remaining parts of the Bill, if I may, in a rather more accelerated fashion than I did over the first two parts.

Mr. Speaker, a familiar refrain occurring in this Bill once again deals with the whole issue of regulations. When one reviews various sections within part 3, there are a number of citations that one can look at that talk about regulations. I guess the concern that I would raise on this particular piece of legislation, as I have with other pieces of legislation, is that this Bill will produce a commission that can produce policies. Then another part of the Bill talks about the minister being able to produce regulations. As well, we have the Lieutenant Governor in Council – i.e., the cabinet – also being able to produce regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that with all of those different authorities producing policies and regulations, the obvious question is again: where are they? Why have they not been introduced with this Bill? It would be more appropriate to see them now with the Bill, because certainly when one reviews part 6 that deals with only regulations – the entire part 6 deals just with the issue of regulations – then I would suggest that we should have those regulations before us, particularly in light of the fact that in a number of locations within both parts 3 and 6, as you read the Bill, it almost seems as if the regulations themselves will

supersede the legislation.

In fact, section 126(1)(m) says that “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations . . . respecting the requirements and consequences that apply despite anything in this Act.” In other words, we have a piece of legislation and the Lieutenant Governor in Council can simply override the piece of legislation completely, which then begs the question: why are we bothering at all introducing a Bill if in fact the council can do anything they want to at any time without any public debate by Members of this Legislative Assembly?

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's acceptable to Albertans. Members get elected to the Legislature to represent their concerns. They are here to debate issues that are of concern to Albertans, and certainly the thrust of this Bill that deals with gambling and liquor sales is of major concern to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill is quite a lengthy Bill. Again, as I mentioned, it provides a variety of legislation, rules, and regulations and new regulations to be created at some point in the future. Those regulations, I think, should be tabled in the House along with the Bill. Until I see them, I cannot support this Bill at second reading.

In light of the time, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 6.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West has moved that debate be now adjourned on Bill 6. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[At 10:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned until Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

