

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 21, 1997 **8:00 p.m.**
Date: 97/04/21
 [The Speaker in the Chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**
Provincial Fiscal Policies

12. Mr. Day moved:

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

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Sapers on behalf of Mr. Mitchell]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise of course to respond to the budget speech today. I have a few things to say. I'd like to begin by saying that we're all pleased to see that the government is staying the course on balancing the budget. It only took them about 10 years to get around to figuring out how to do it. We're happy to see that they are going to deal further with the debt. We of course are unhappy to see that they have yet to acknowledge that they are the ones who created it all. But having broken both of those things, it is encouraging to see that they are setting about to fix it. The problem is that with their obsession with balancing budgets and reducing the debt, they have neglected the human deficit in this province, the social deficit in this province, and they are only dealing with half the job the government in this province or in any jurisdiction has the responsibility to deal with.

There are some premises in this budget speech, Mr. Speaker, that in part address the problem I have identified. I think it probably isn't a conscious effort on the part of this government to neglect people. It isn't their intention to hurt people, to see the differences and the distinctions, the divisions grow larger despite the positive economic situation in this province. I think it has happened perhaps to some extent because of faulty assumptions right here in this budget.

They say – it's interesting to see the Treasurer actually wanting to become an economist so that he can have a reason for being wrong all the time:

This budget acknowledges Say's Law which dictates, "Production creates its own price of consumption." A healthy economy will generate the incomes which will enable all Albertans to share in the abundance of Alberta.

That's an interesting assumption, but there is very little evidence that that assumption about economic processes in fact works anywhere, let alone working in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I think you only have to ask the Safeway workers whether they are getting the incomes that will allow them to share in the abundance of Alberta. I think you'd get an interesting answer from the laundry workers in Calgary last year were you to ask them if they were getting the income that would allow them to share in the abundance of Alberta.

Teachers and nurses and other public servants took a 5 percent cut in their pay. Are they sharing in the abundance of Alberta? Real wages in this province have dropped over the last four years. Are wage earners in this province sharing in the abundance of Alberta?

Fees and health care premium taxes and the money that people have to spend to send their children to elementary school, larger fees than many of us had to pay for tuitions to postsecondary institutions 20 or 25 years ago: are these families and their children sharing in the abundance of Alberta?

I'll tell you who's sharing in the abundance of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, a very select group of people, an elite, very much a business elite, a corporate elite. Who have been forgotten and who certainly haven't been remembered in this budget are those people who simply do not have the incomes to share in the abundance of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the second interesting assumption in this budget is: "There are no surprises in the budget announcements I'm making today." That's exactly right. The same mistakes that were made in the previous budget are being reiterated here.

Albertans saw Budget '97 on February 11. A month later Albertans put their stamp of approval on the plan and the track record of this government for keeping its promises.

Let's not get carried away. Forty-nine percent of the people of this province did not put a stamp on the track record or on the promises of this provincial government. What this government, I think, should understand is that while they're re-elected, they were not re-elected with the overwhelming support of Albertans that they anticipated they would get, and in that distinction there is a very profound message that has not been reflected in this budget.

It also says here on page 3 that "for the sixth year in a row, there will be no increases in provincial taxes and no new taxes." Just for the record, Mr. Speaker, let's make it very clear: there have been huge increases in provincial taxes in this province. In fact, a large part of the balanced budget has come as a result of revenue increases.

The most profound and obvious is the increase in health care premium taxes. They want to call it a premium. It's not. It's a tax. Those premiums come from exactly the same pocket – this one – as every other tax an Albertan pays except they're worse than many of the taxes because they are regressive and because people with less income pay a bigger portion of their income for that kind of service than people with greater incomes. Again, the divisions and the distinctions; again, the clear indication of who they represent, and it isn't the general population of Alberta. It's a very select elite. In fact they are in many respects the arm, the weapon, and the apologists of that elite.

I was struck, absolutely struck, as were all of my caucus colleagues . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: But we weren't stunned.

MR. MITCHELL: But we weren't stunned, Mr. Speaker. I only said it in fun, in jest, in the interests of give and take in the Legislature. We're just frolicking with them.

The story about the slaves. It's almost incomprehensible that the Treasurer would have used this analogy, an analogy that emphasizes abuse, an analogy that would actually refer to masters over slaves, in a sense indicating, I think, that that's what the government think they are, and an analogy that would say:

"You've been a good slave and now you need only four blows."
 The slave was naturally overjoyed and thanked his master for his kindness,

as though Albertans are thanking this government for relinquishing ever so slightly in education, ever so slightly in health care, and saying: you should be thankful; we're not hurting you as badly as we were two years ago.

Mr. Speaker, the question that is raised by each of these observations and by the philosophy that underlines this budget is: who is getting the Alberta advantage? We can see in the statistics that it isn't everyone. Personal income and disposable income have increased by 4.5 percent and 4.1 percent cumulatively over the last four years, but inflation has increased by 6.8 percent. People have less personal income and less disposable income in real dollar terms after inflation than they did four years ago.

Personal bankruptcies are up 53 percent over 1992, and wage and salary levels have increased only 5.1 percent over the past three years while inflation has increased by 5.6 percent. Those on wages have found that their real income has dropped as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a legacy that a government should be so proud of at a time when Alberta has one of the strongest economies in the western world but still finds itself with dropping real incomes, with the lowest minimum wage in the entire country, with the lowest per capita funded health care system in the entire country – and it will remain that even after these increases – with one of the lowest per capita funded education systems in the entire country, with the third highest level of child poverty in the entire country, with the fourth highest level of single mothers living in poverty in the entire country . . .

8:10

DR. TAYLOR: What's poverty, Grant?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you don't know, Lorne, because you haven't had it.

Mr. Speaker, this budget speaks to wealth, but it doesn't speak to the fairness in its distribution that one would expect as a reflection of the generosity of Albertans. Fairness is a theme that really isn't captured in this budget.

Let me talk about some of the people and some of the things that are being done to disadvantage them. Do you know that caseloads in social services are increasing, the estimate is, by 2,000 this coming year over last year? But there is no increase in caseworkers, so the people who need the support to try and get off social services simply won't have the support, and social workers who are clearly now already overburdened in the extreme are only going to have more burden dumped upon them without any other additional help.

Child poverty: I think there isn't mention of child poverty in this entire document. No mention. There's mention of cutting taxes for business. There is mention of cutting the child advocate's funding. There is of course no mention of cutting doctors' pay; that's going up. Perhaps that's right. But, Mr. Speaker, there is no mention of child poverty.

Forty percent of the people who use the food banks in this province are children. One hundred and twenty-five thousand children in this province live below the poverty line. There are literally thousands of children who go to school every day hungry and many thousands who go to bed every night without having one nutritional meal. That's the legacy. That's the legacy that has been left, created, and sustained by this government in its most recent budget. They can shake their heads, and they can try to deny it, but it is undeniable. Every day that that occurs without something being done to stop it is another day that something is taken out of each and every one of us Albertans.

To further the pursuit of this theme of fairness, doctors are going to get, I think, \$16 million more for three major areas of health care which need some attention: dialysis, transplants, cardiovascular surgery. Of course, family physicians aren't getting any increases, yet family physicians are the front line.

That's where you're going to have real breakthroughs in the way we deliver health care. Nurses aren't getting any increase. Teachers aren't getting any increase. Public servants aren't getting any increase. They took cuts. It's not fair, Mr. Speaker. Doctors may need some increases. I think they should be paid properly.

MRS. SOETAERT: Some ADMs are getting increases.

MR. MITCHELL: Some ADMs are getting increases, but other people aren't. Again, it's a question of what political elites have how much power. It's not fair.

The government talks about an equalization fund to equalize education, but of course inherent in what it's doing is an inability to really address the question of equalization. For example, in technology the fund is going to be matching, so it will be very clear that those communities who are wealthier will be able to come up with the funds matched by government funds and get more of the benefit of this funding. Those lower income communities, communities that need the support, that don't have the resources will simply fall farther behind.

There is no mention in this budget of much to do with small business. Again it's a question of where the political power lies and how fairness is implemented by this government. Corporations are doing very well. They've had a huge decrease in the machinery and equipment tax. Small business has received nothing. There remains a capital markets problem for small business. We would propose that the small business tax be reduced from 6 percent to 4 percent. Small business is the engine of the economy. It's been neglected.

In the face of all of this the Treasurer talks about a prosperity dividend. He's going to put back, he thinks, \$100 a year into the pockets of each Albertan. This is less than the price of a cup of coffee per day. To a family that is now paying as much as \$800 to \$1,000 in extra fees for one or two children to go to school, for families that are seeing tuition to postsecondary institutions go from 15 to 30 percent and may have one or two or three children in postsecondary institutions or not, because they can't afford it all at one time, this is less than the price of a cup of coffee. For the working poor who have the lowest minimum wage in the entire country – and the Treasurer throws out that tidbit as though that's going to help somebody who can barely sustain a minimal standard of living right now. That will not reduce the pressures on those families that the government talks so much about wanting to preserve and to promote.

I remember somebody telling me – I think it's very true actually; the more I see in this Legislature over the years I know it's true – that one of the things that distinguishes Conservatives is that they cannot imagine what it's like to be somebody else. I think this budget says that they can't imagine what it's like to be somebody else. Not many of these people have ever been poor. Not many of them haven't been able to feed their children. Not many of them haven't been able to afford postsecondary institutions. Not many of them have really ever experienced what so many people in this province experience, and they can't even imagine what it's like.

DR. TAYLOR: And you've experienced it; haven't you, Grant? Vice-president of Principal, you've experienced it.

MR. MITCHELL: How original, Lorne.

They can't imagine what it is like to be somebody else.

The Member for St. Albert, I was really struck by her speech to the throne. I think there were some interesting things in it. I think she did try to promote that social, human side of the issues. In fact, I think she reflected what some of the new members brought to this Legislative Assembly. They ran on this idea that we'd better change because we're not happy with what we see; we're going to change from the inside. In fact she went on to say, Mr. Speaker, that we had to add colour to the canvas. I see this canvas in my eye after reading this budget, and I see a canvas with two parts. The top part with all kinds of colour is a very small sliver, but it's got brilliant, powerful colour. The bottom part, the other part, is at best black and white and at worst gray, and that gray really reflects and determines what many people in your constituency and many people in this province live like. I said it the other night, and I'm going to say it again. They live without colour, they live without joy, and they live without hope for the future.

You can say that you're going to change it from within, and for all those ones who ran against their government – and they're here now – well, here it is. Here it is. You can say that you can change it from within, but nothing has changed. All of these documents, all of this budget, Mr. Speaker – and we'll see it more and more throughout this debate – is a testimony to one thing. It's a testimony to the failure of all of those Conservative MLAs who ran to say they'd change from within. Nothing but nothing has changed in this budget.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

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

8:20

Mr. Shariff moved:

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

To His Honour the Honourable H.A. "Bud" Olson, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate April 17: Mrs. Sloan]

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I had concluded my speech.

THE SPEAKER: You have? Okay.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise tonight to give a few remarks to the Speech from the Throne to open this new, 24th Session of the Alberta Legislature. Before I start my remarks I would like to congratulate everybody

in this House for their election win on March 11, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, I give my sincere congratulations to you on being elected Speaker of this House. I know you will do an honourable job in your duties.

Before I get into the throne speech, I did take exception – and I know it's always awful difficult whether we're talking about the throne speech or the budget. The Leader of the Opposition did mention that we on this side never knew what it was to be hard up. Well, let me assure you – with the exception of the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House. I can remember that when we were first married, we lived on \$12 a week, and we had three children in three years.

Four years ago this government was given a mandate to in fact cut spending. I want to give credit to the Premier of this province and to the members of this government that did exactly that. The people of Alberta told us: cut your spending but make sure that you look after our health care, our education, and our social services, people that truly need social services. You can't quit spending unless people's lives are affected. When we heard the budget today, I believe the Provincial Treasurer said that it doesn't matter how much money we put into health; the more we put in, the more we spend, unless we have control of our spending. The Leader of the Opposition has said that we campaigned on putting money back into the health care system, and in this throne speech that's exactly what we're doing. We also said that we are not going to throw money away, whether it be in health care or education. The fact is that money doesn't solve our health care needs. To put more money into education doesn't solve our needs. Good management is what it's all about, very good management.

I want to personally thank our health care workers, and I want to personally thank our educators and our civil servants. We as a government did not do this by ourselves. Let's make that absolutely clear: we didn't do it. We had help. We had help from our civil servants. We had help from business. We had help from the educators. We had the health care workers. This Premier and this government were the ones that took the lead role to in fact make sure that we didn't overspend every year.

You see, I was here in 1986. Maybe I shouldn't be proud to say that, but the fact is that from 1984 to 1986 we lost 3 and a half billion dollars in revenue to this province. It's a very simple formula. What happened from '84 to '86, the price of oil went from almost \$40 a barrel down to \$10. What happened was that we lost 3 and a half billion dollars in revenue. Now, it doesn't take much of a psychiatrist to figure out that if you lose 3 and a half billion dollars in revenue and don't cut your spending down, in a period of seven or eight years you've got \$20 billion or \$25 billion. That's exactly what happened. So this government decided that they had to quit spending.

When I was campaigning – you know, every election the Liberals always think they're going to bring in somebody to beat Glen, but they haven't yet – I said that we have our funding under control. Yes, I have a daughter who is a nurse, and I have one who works in the medical records in Grande Prairie, so I have a good insight on health care. Everybody throws figures around about our health care. The fact is that we are doing more – yeah, I've got a heartache here – heart transplants, we're doing more hip transplants, knee transplants. We're doing far more than we ever did, and we're doing it with less money.

Now, the Liberals said in the election campaign: you've destroyed our health care system, but you're still spending as much money. They're almost right. They're never quite right,

but they're almost right. What we have done is we're almost spending the same kind of money today, but if we hadn't controlled those dollars, instead of being around \$4 billion for health care, it would have been \$5.8 billion. Then they said: well, you've got all this surplus. For the life of me – and being a farmer I'm always borrowing lots of money. We've still got a financial problem. The Treasurer today went into the unfunded liabilities. We have a problem yet, and until every cent is put back, then we have not in my mind got a balanced budget.

Education, again a top priority of this government. We know that the people we're educating today will in fact be the future 10, 20, 30 years down the line, and we are throwing more dollars into it. I don't want anybody to think that by throwing dollars at something it makes it better. Our marks, with less dollars, have improved in Alberta. Again, I want to give the teachers credit for that.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention my former friend Al "Boomer" Adair. As many of you know, Al Adair represented the mighty Peace River constituency. From 1971 till 1993 he held many portfolios. He knew the Peace River area from one end to the other. First, he was for the Peace River constituency, and he was for the people of Alberta. As I travel around Alberta, there are very few people that don't have a respect for the former MLA and minister from Peace River. That's not saying that we haven't got a good MLA from Peace River now. [some applause] Well, I didn't expect to get a clap for that. No reflection on you, hon. member. Certainly you are in fact doing a wonderful job.

Again, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the constituency of Dunvegan. Dunvegan is blessed by long summer days.

8:30

AN HON. MEMBER: And a great MLA.

MR. CLEGG: Yes, and a great MLA. There's no question about that.

We have the oil and gas industry, we have wonderful, flat farmland, we have forestry, and we have wonderful parks. I don't think many around here have visited the Dunvegan historic park and campsite at Dunvegan.

MRS. SOETAERT: I have.

MR. CLEGG: I'm glad to see that the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has visited. We're not even fussy who we have up there. We'll have all hon. members. We appreciate it if you do come up.

In Dunvegan we grow about 80 percent of the small seeds – fescue, brome, alfalfa – in Canada. We produce 40 percent of the honey of Canada in the Peace River area. I have to give a little credit there to the hon. members from Grande Prairie and Peace River because they are part of it, but most of it is produced in the constituency of Dunvegan.

In closing, I just want to again thank the people of Dunvegan constituency, the councillors and the administrators. We as a government again looked at every department, and they have taken a reduction in their municipal grants. They have done a magnificent job of balancing their budget, and I want to thank all those people in the municipalities in Dunvegan that in fact have worked with us to make Dunvegan a wonderful place to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise tonight to respond to the Speech from the Throne, my very first speech in this august House. Before doing that, however, I want to congratulate you first on your election as Speaker. I know it's a challenging task, responsibility, but I'm also confident that you will perform these responsibilities with elegance, with style, with fairness.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to extend my warm greetings to my colleagues in this House, on all sides of this House. I want to congratulate them for their election or re-election to this Assembly, and I'm looking forward to working with each one of you to serve the best interests of Albertans. We are here to serve the public interest, and I know that each one of you is as committed as I am to that task. So I certainly look forward to working with you.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my constituents for the opportunity that they have given me by electing me to speak on their behalf, to represent them in this Assembly. The constituency that I represent is a diverse constituency. It's a constituency which on one side includes the University of Alberta, one of the great hospitals in this province, the University hospital, and some of the finest high schools in this province. It also includes perhaps the only bilingual postsecondary institution, Faculté Saint-Jean.

It's a constituency that includes people of diverse economic status and levels, individuals who pursue a variety of different occupations to earn their living, to raise their families, to live their lives in that very, very rich constituency: rich in cultural terms, rich in its artistic creativity. It's the site of the Fringe festival, that is world famous, if I may say so. It's a constituency in which reside most of the best actors that live in this city, most of the best intellectual leaders that live in this city and in this province. The constituency is rich in all these different ways. So that makes it an even much greater pleasure for me to serve such a diverse, such a rich community and such a rich electorate and constituents.

The throne speech is obviously an expression of this government's desire to pursue certain lines of action over the next four years. What I find missing in this throne speech, however, are the concerns that I heard as I went from door to door seeking the support of my constituents for my election. There is very little in this speech, I'm afraid, that reassures university students that their tuition fees will not go up any more. There's no promise here that there is a limit beyond which most postsecondary students in this province cannot afford to pay the fees to go to university or to college and that therefore if tuition fees at the minimum are not capped – and perhaps they should be rolled back, but that's difficult to dream about in the context in which we find ourselves – our students who want to go to university will not be able to go to university.

I have spent 28 years of my life teaching at the University of Alberta, one of the best universities in the country, I might say. I know from personal experience, I know from working with undergraduates and graduate students that they have reached the limit of their capacity in terms of their financial ability to pay their way through university. Many undergraduate students now take not four years, not four and a half years, not five years to complete a degree but six, seven years. It is because most of them have to find work at minimum wages to earn some extra money to supplement what they get in terms of student loans, what they can get from their families to support them, to put themselves through university.

Because they have to spend increasing numbers of hours

working in order to earn those meagre dollars to supplement their incomes to support themselves through university, they cannot carry full loads. They can't carry a full load of five courses during a given year. So many of them start with five, come down to four, drop another course, come down to three. They have to extend their stay at university to seven years, on the average six to seven years, which I think is an indicator of the kinds of problems that increasing tuition fees, increasing costs of going to university are doing to our young people, who are our future, whom we all say are the source of our future wealth and well-being. I don't see any indication in the throne speech with respect to how we are going to relieve the burdens that our students are feeling.

The debt burdens of our students are increasing at a very fast pace. In 1991 the average undergraduate debt in the U.S. was higher than the average undergraduate debt in Canada and in Alberta. In 1996 the situation has reversed. Our typical undergraduate carries in Canadian dollars \$4,000 more debt than their American counterparts. It's an achievement that I'm sure no one of us should feel proud of. It should be a matter of concern to us that we are putting our students in what I would call a debt bondage. We are transferring debt from the public level, that we as a province have, to these students. I don't think this is fair. I think we ought to pay some attention to the increasing costs – psychological, social, and financial – that our students are incurring in order to put themselves through university.

8:40

I'm also very concerned that this throne speech is silent about what's happening at the grade-school level. Class sizes have grown enormously over the last five, six years as a direct result of the massive cuts in funding to schools. Teachers are carrying huge workloads. Not only are they responsible for large class sizes, increased work related directly to their teaching, but they now also have to spend time in addition to that to raise funds to subsidize the running of their schools.

Teachers are trained professional workers. Their time, their talent is highly specialized. I think it must not be wasted on fund-raising. Rather it must be used to enhance the capacity of students to learn. What's happened as a result of these massive cuts to education funding at the school level is that the learning conditions have deteriorated.

We all seek to enhance the capacity and the chance for our students to learn. We want to see their achievement levels go up, yet we sometimes overlook the question: what are the conditions in the school, in the classroom that will enhance their achievement performance vis-à-vis that of students in other places and other countries? What we need to do is ask seriously the question of whether or not the kinds of cuts that the education system has suffered, the kinds of increases in the burdens of work that our teachers experience today, whether these changes, whether these increases, and whether these cuts hamper learning conditions in the classroom or whether they enhance the chances of students to do better.

I submit respectfully to you that the consequences of these cuts are negative. We cannot close our eyes to the continuing deleterious effects that these cuts will have on our students in the short term in their performance in school but also in the longer run, in the kinds of productive citizens that they can or cannot become, if we deny them the chances to learn the very best things that they can do and become the very best scholars and productive citizens that they can become, provided that the conditions in the schools and the conditions in the education system are conducive to their so doing.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne has two new thrusts. Much of it is very much in agreement with our Premier's statements during the course of the election; that is, staying the course. It is staying the course. Much of what the speech proposes is to simply not change the way things have been done over the last four years, over the last 25 years, I'm afraid. It's the same government, the same party that's been in power, and what the speech does now in particular is emphasize that what has been done in the last years will be carried through during the next four years. But there are two new things that I want to draw to the attention of the Assembly and draw to the attention of Albertans in general. One is, of course, capping the personal and corporate income tax initiative. The second one has to do with the posting of performance bonds by our students in high school. Both of these initiatives need some attention from us.

Not the most radical paper in this country, the *Globe and Mail* just a few days ago drew our attention to the fact that poor students, students who come from poor families, students who come from conditions of poverty, are the ones who do the worst in school. I ask how the introduction of this performance bond is going to help poor children who do badly in school because they're poor in the first place. If it is the case that poverty is directly related to poor performance in school, then we ought to be doing something about removing poverty, fighting poverty, not fighting the students who do poorly in school because they are poor. I fail to understand the logic of this proposed initiative on the part of the government, on the part of the hon. Minister of Education, I suppose, in this case, who I'm sure will address this issue. There seems to be no reason for it. I don't see any point in this.

The real educational issues in this province are not the poor performance of less than .5 percent of students who don't complete a course at that grade 12 level. The real problem is the stress on teachers. The real problem is the radical downsizing of financial resources that are available to schools. We hear a statement repeated over and over again which says that throwing money at problems doesn't solve problems. On the other hand, I want to ask: is there a bottom line? Can we buy certain things without paying what it really takes to buy them? Good education has a certain price. Good education does require us to invest a certain amount of money in it. I ask members of this House, certainly members on this side of the House: what do they think is a minimum price for a good education? This bottom-line approach to education is no answer to the problems of education. I think we need to look to science, we need to look to research, we need to look to evidence to answer these questions, not how many dollars we spend on it. Dollars are important. I'll come to that in a moment, Mr. Speaker.

The second issue, then, is the initiative about capping personal and corporate income taxes. Capping these taxes and introducing referendums to see whether or not Albertans as citizens want to increase their own taxes is obviously a very novel, perhaps not so novel approach to taxation. We're all elected here, and I hope that we are confident that our electors have reposed their confidence in us so that we can make certain tough decisions in this Chamber. Why do we want to go back to our electors to find out whether they want taxes to be increased or decreased? Let us make some tough judgments here. Let's debate those things. Let's go back and consult our constituents about it, but this is the right forum to make decisions about whether we want to increase taxes or decrease taxes.

In this province in particular, where our fiscal situation is very

much dependent upon the vagaries of the oil and gas price markets, we have to be even more careful and cautious about not talking about putting ourselves in this fiscal straitjacket by saying that if the oil prices fall precipitously again, if gas prices go down all of a sudden unpredictably and we face a serious fiscal crisis, then what are our choices? Close more hospitals? Cut the number of nurses and teachers and professors? Increase tuition fees? Increase user fees? I mean, surely that's not the way we want to run our province. We are a wealthy province. We have some of the best institutions in the world. We need to ask questions very carefully about how we can somehow smooth out the unpredictable, possible depression in our fiscal capacity. Our fiscal capacity is variable.

8:50

Members on that side of the House know this very well. They have been in power for 25 years. They should know better. All of them should know better than tying our hands as elected representatives, as the representatives of our citizens, citizens in whose judgment we trust. Citizens have reposed their trust in us. They told us: go there and make these decisions; don't come back to us every two months, three months, and ask by a referendum.

The *Globe and Mail*, again, one of the rather neo-Liberal papers in this country, had an editorial just three days ago about referendums. It said, "Say no to referendums." It's our job as legislators to make these decisions, not to go back and seek some sort of refuge in this practice of going to referendums every time we want to make a tough decision.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few remarks in closing to draw attention to the dilemmas that this referendum approach to making public decisions results in. Will we use the referendum method to see whether or not we want to cap or, even better, abolish health premiums? Will we go to a referendum and ask students whether they want a freeze on their tuition fees? Will we go to a referendum with corporations to see whether or not they want us to stop direct or indirect subsidies to them? Obviously not.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying that the constituents of my riding are disappointed that they don't find anything new in this throne speech. I will certainly work very hard in co-operation with all members of this Assembly to serve my constituents as best I can and to represent their wishes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and deliver my maiden speech in this House today. As a new Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly I have been given a great responsibility by the residents of the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills constituency, and the first words I say in this House are on behalf of those Albertans.

To begin, Mr. Speaker, please accept my sincere congratulations on your election. You will bring a tremendous record of experience in the Legislature to this position. As well, I would like to congratulate all the members of this Assembly on their election success.

I applaud the Lieutenant Governor for delivering a throne speech which I consider represents sound and progressive government policy. The confidence of Albertans in such a progressive policy was confirmed by the electorate on March 11.

I am pleased that this government has re-established its commitment to continue to focus on Alberta's growing economy, on increasing provincial prosperity, and on continuing to seek alternatives for increasing employment opportunities for residents of this province. I am pleased that this government has re-established its commitment to solid financial management. The fact that we have the lowest taxes in Canada and will continue to balance our budgets and pay down our provincial debt will positively affect the lives of all Albertans.

I have the distinction of representing the new constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and will be proud to do so during my term in the Legislative Assembly. Our new constituency is comprised of portions of what were the Olds-Didsbury and the Three Hills-Airdrie constituencies. As most of you know, prior to the change in electoral boundaries we were capably represented by Mr. Roy Brassard, now retired, and Carol Haley. I look forward to carrying on the same level of commitment that my predecessors had to our new constituency. Roy will be missed in this Legislature, and we wish him well in his retirement. I am pleased to have the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View still with us and look forward to working with her in this new capacity.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to provide you with an introduction to our new constituency. Our boundaries extend from just south of Bowden on Highway 2 to just north of Crossfield. Our eastern boundaries extend to the Red Deer River just east of the hamlet of Huxley and west of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Within my constituency there are nine incorporated urban jurisdictions including Acme, Carstairs, Cremona, Didsbury, Linden, Olds, Three Hills, Torrington, and Trochu.

Each town has its unique facilities and industries. For example, Acme is best known as the hub of the intensive hog industry. The community of Carstairs is soon to be the home of a new Saskatchewan grain terminal. Didsbury and Linden are both well known for their high-quality manufacturing of agriculture-related products. The Three Hills area will soon have a new Alberta Wheat Pool grain terminal and is well known for its annual antique car show, which attracts over 1,000 antique car lovers. Torrington, a community of 170 people, is known for its gopher museum and dollhouse museum. I'm sure you all remember that. The community of Trochu is the home of historic Saint Ann ranch and is soon to be the home of a new Saskatchewan Wheat Pool terminal as well.

Like many rural areas in Alberta, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has an active sports culture. Olds is home to the Olds Grizzlys Junior A tier 2 hockey team, from which many successful hockey careers have begun, including in the NHL. Many world-class athletes have trained in the constituency at the many sports facilities maintained by the communities and have Olympic medals as proof of their competency. We take pride in our commitment to provide these facilities for our young people to assist them in leading active and productive lifestyles.

The seniors population is generally very active and contributes meaningfully to each community. Seniors offer a connection to a lifestyle and value system that I believe we can all benefit from, especially the youth. Seniors are indeed encouraged to become actively involved in community organizations for their mutual benefit. In fact, Three Hills will be hosting the 1998 Alberta Seniors Summer Games, and Olds-Didsbury will be co-hosting the 1999 Alberta Seniors Summer Games. We are very happy to be involved with such worthwhile events.

Our constituency is very diversified. We have an extensive

agricultural base complemented by several agri-service industries including secondary meat operations and intensive farming operations. Several intensive livestock operations including poultry, hog, cattle feedlots, and exotic farming enterprises exist.

To support this, we are very fortunate to have Olds College, one of Canada's finest agricultural colleges. Olds College offers a superior selection of agriculture programs to prepare our youth to continue the agriculture tradition within the province and take on the challenge the agriculture industry offers. As producers find new markets for value-added agricultural products, the opportunities continue to multiply. Enterprising producers have established successful businesses such as providing pelleted hay to consumers in Asia, woolen mills such as Pasu Farms and Custom Woolen Mills. Pork processors such as Pig Improvement (Canada) also supply products to destinations in the Pacific Rim. Oil exploration is common throughout the constituency, providing a large service sector supporting the industry.

9:00

Tourism is a growth industry in our constituency, with vast diversity and attractions varying from the Dry Island Buffalo Jump provincial park in the Red Deer badlands on the east boundary, crossing over one of the most productive cereal grain and oilseed producing areas of the province west to the foothills of the majestic Rocky Mountains. Various methods of exploring these scenic areas of our constituency are available. However, being an avid horseman myself, I have been fortunate to view much of these regions from the back of my horse. I strongly recommend that if any of you, the hon. members here, have such an opportunity you take it. As you can see, I have the fortune of representing one of the most productive and inspiring constituencies in the province.

Mr. Speaker, as I am speaking on behalf of my constituents, I will seek to inform you of the issues that concerned them during the last election. The citizens of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills have elected me to represent them to the best of my ability. They have assured me that they support this government's staying the course and continuing legislation like the Deficit Elimination Act and the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act. They are confident that government policies like this will guarantee that Albertans will not have to deal with increased taxes, allowing for more of their tax dollars to be reinvested in core services in the future, something Albertans benefit most directly from. The foundation we have set in place with our social programs, such as education, health care, and social services, is vital.

I believe we can all agree that the education of our youth forms the foundation of a strong economy and stable community. Children learn the principles that will guide them through life at a very young age. They must be able to access the best education system available to allow them to develop those principles. As a prerequisite students must be given the opportunity of attending the schools of their choice, which are made available and affordable through equitable funding. We are fortunate to have access to very high quality educational institutions within our constituency. In the past term our education system has had to adapt to the fiscal reality in the province, and I commend them for the co-operation they extended to the Minister of Education during this time of restructuring.

In addition to excellent public and separate schools in my constituency, we have several independent schools. The Prairie Bible Institute provides general education along with college level courses, including an aviation program. The Prairie Bible Institute is also a seminary dedicated to providing holistic Bible

education and is an institution of international acclaim. Students in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are fortunate to have such an excellent choice of schools to attend: independent schools, public schools through the Golden Hills and Chinook's Edge school divisions, and separate schools administered through the Calgary Roman Catholic school division.

We all know from personal experience that when one is not healthy, they cannot successfully take on challenges available to them. The maintenance of a healthy population affords us the luxury of being able to pursue other activities in our lives, providing confidence to the current generation and generations to come. I have seen changes in the delivery of health care services through both the David Thompson regional health authority and No. 5 regional health authority, changes which have been beneficial to the system as a whole. Professionals working within the system are second to none in their commitment to the health of the individual, and I commend them for it.

We have a high-quality system in place in Alberta and maintain a standard of excellence I am proud to be a part of. Recent experiences of close friends and associates of mine have validated the quality of health care being administered. We must ensure that as the system evolves, we continue to listen to those involved in the system to determine that that continued quality of health care is being received by the patient. I am pleased to see that the government is committed to helping people who are unable to provide for themselves, and we support the government initiatives. I know that my constituents readily provide for others their assistance at the local level through a network of volunteering in various community activities. We must continue to be fair to the recipients of social services while also balancing the system with need while ensuring it's fair to the taxpayer.

In closing, I realize the task that is set down before me and in this House is indeed great. I have set before you an outline of who we are as a constituency, our aspirations for the future and commitment to the government's agenda as outlined in the throne speech. My commitment is to you, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, this Assembly, and to my constituents, and I do not take this responsibility lightly.

I would like to close by sharing a quote attributed to a fellow by the name of Sydney Smith, who once said, over 200 years ago, that it is the calling of great men not so much to preach new truths as to rescue from oblivion those old truths which it is our wisdom to remember and our weakness to forget.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today in the Alberta Legislature on behalf of the people of Edmonton-Castle Downs with this, my maiden speech. The people of my constituency have placed their confidence and trust in me, and I plan to honour that trust as well as accepting their guidance.

Also, Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your election. As an experienced and seasoned parliamentarian, I know you will preside over this House fairly and impartially. In doing so, you will serve all the people of Alberta well.

I am sure that many of the new members present are not familiar with the riding I represent in this Assembly. Edmonton-Castle Downs is located in northwest Edmonton and is bordered

by 184th Street on the west, the city of St. Albert, the municipality of Sturgeon, 97th Street to the east, and 137th Avenue on the south. It is a relatively young community, where over 50 percent of the geographical area retains its rural ambiance, and is growing rapidly, with new houses in the neighbourhoods of Skyview, Oxford, Castlewood, and Castle Brook.

The population of the riding is in excess of 34,000 people and, as I said, growing. Approximately 33 percent of Castle Downs' population, just over 10,000 people, is 15 years of age or under, and by deduction some 2,000 to 2,500 of these are junior high students. The reason I am bringing these figures to the attention of the House, Mr. Speaker, is that every day well over 2,000 junior high students are bused out of our neighbourhood to other areas of the city. You see, sir, Edmonton-Castle Downs has no junior high. As well, it has no high school, and the existing elementary schools are filled to the rafters. This government sees fit to write off hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars to huge, profitable corporations, but it has no funds to provide schools for our children in their own neighbourhoods.

My constituents are all too familiar with restricted budgets, delayed projects, and the accompanying limited access to essential services. Perhaps, as my predecessor once pointed out, this is due to the fact that Castle Downs has grown largely in years of fiscal restraint. As a result, much of my constituency's community infrastructure, such as schools, playgrounds, and recreation facilities, has been accomplished as a result of my people's persistence, tenacity, and dogged focus on accomplishing one goal at a time. Edmonton-Castle Downs has by process naturally evolved into a community that is characteristically self-reliant and confident but continues to expect officers, elected officials, to listen, represent, and respond.

9:10

Immediately to the north of my riding is a rapidly developing super army base and headquarters of western Canada's land force, CFB Edmonton. Eventually, we are told, this base will consist of 10,000 personnel, and many of these newcomers are choosing to purchase homes and establish their families in my riding, therefore adding to the existing pressure of limited facilities. We welcome them with open arms, but we need schools. We need them now.

I do not believe, Mr. Speaker, that the people of my riding are characteristically different from those found in similar urban suburbs. If there is a trait that distinguishes them, then it is their strong resentment towards this government for the pain, suffering, and injustices bestowed on individuals and families because they happen to be single parents, the poor, ill, elderly, infirm, unemployed, or of school age. Make no mistake. I stand before you in this House as a symbol of their displeasure with the Klein revolution and its negative impacts on the most valuable members of not only my community but all across this province.

Unfortunately, sir, this government will dispense more of the same during this, the 24th Legislature, and it will attempt to do so as much as possible outside the scrutiny of this House and by cabinet decree. Already we have learned that this government has reneged on its commitments to a fall session of this Legislature. The Premier states that if there is no business to conduct, then there is no need for the House to sit. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that if the government is unable or unwilling to tackle proactively the numerous difficulties facing our people, then we as the opposition will gladly accommodate him. We will assist him in determining what Albertans need and want. If he were to listen, he would have a very busy fall indeed, but the motive for the government's

announced cancellation of the fall session is not based on their work ethic or lack of it. It is an example of their deliberate attempt to dilute and circumvent the democratic process. I predict that in spite of this government's obvious need for governance behind closed doors, Albertans will increasingly come to understand its hidden agenda and who this government truly serves. The Alberta advantage – for whom, and at whose expense – will become crystal clear. I believe it is my duty to assist this process at every opportunity, anywhere, at any place.

Mr. Speaker, it should be apparent why I stood for this election. Enough is enough. For 10 years our federal and provincial governments have gutted our social programs, sold off viable Crown assets, and subsidized huge corporations via tax breaks, incentives, and nonpayable loan guarantees. Indeed, since the free trade agreement and NAFTA we have seen a wholesale drive towards the Americanization of health, education, social programs, culture, and the arts, even though our Canadian services are more efficient, more effective, less costly, and of significant benefit to our people and to business.

Trade, Mr. Speaker, is not merely limited to products and services. Rather, it is also a parallel exchange of ideas and beliefs. Allow me to illustrate. In order to do so, I must go back to the late 1980s, to the time of the free trade debates. We were warned that the FTA and the NAFTA would destabilize Canada's fiscal policies and this in turn would erode Canada health care, education, social programs, culture, and the way we conduct business by subjecting every facet of our society to a thousand cuts and, also, that the switch from federal conditional shared-cost grants to block funding would lead to pressure for extra billing and user fees. We were warned of the possibility of two-tiered health care and education systems. Does anybody still believe that these warnings were ridiculous? Does anyone still believe that these unfettered federal transfer payments continued to shrink? We can plainly see the results and extrapolate into the future. For a comparative model we need only look at what has happened to our American cousins to the south. Sometimes it is helpful to look at the outside in order to see ourselves on the inside.

First, nonessential services were cut, reduced, or privatized. Services such as libraries, recreation programs, parks and swimming pools, roadways, public transportation, culture and arts grants, wildlife and wetlands conservation, garbage collection and waste cleanup projects and facilities fell to the axe of fiscal restraint in the name of reinventing government. Next came the abandonment of unemployed and the poor. Workfare, punitive conditions for welfare such as restrictions based on age, redefinition of physical disabilities, residency, and lower benefits became the norm. Funding for stabilized housing was severely curtailed, and unemployed youth were punished severely. I am referring to our southern cousins, but does it sound familiar? Look at the budget that was delivered today.

The next scapegoat is the public service. Anyone with a secure job, especially if paid by the taxpayer, attracted resentment. Their unions and associations were labeled as special interest groups, and government first downsized its civil service and then bargained one on one to rehire them at reduced wages, reduced time, or as independent contractors. Many of the services they once provided were outsourced; example: privatized, cut back, or eliminated under deregulation. As the general public became less and less satisfied with government services, the reluctance to pay taxes increased while their support for the civil service decreased with the inevitable result that fewer taxes translated into more cuts and more privatization.

Next on the chopping block were essential services; namely, medicare, education, and welfare programs. Proportionately, education was hit the hardest since roughly only 30 percent of the electorate have children in school at any time, but all citizens require health care. So when the real showdown came in the communities of our southern cousins, education lost as books, computers, buildings, and plants deteriorated or became obsolete and class sizes became excessively large. With no funds to remedy these failings, parents opted for private and charter schools. Naturally these parents wanted to take their school taxes with them, and the public system was savaged even more.

In the end, however, medicare did not survive as it is known. Much was made of what were essential versus nonessential services, and as health dollars were decreased, the list of essential services grew even shorter. Simultaneously, private clinics and private treatment centres sprang up in order to fill the vacuum. Under pressure of ever decreasing revenues, public hospitals attempted to cut costs.

First, wages were frozen, then rolled back, and finally frontline health workers were dismissed only to be hired back on a part-time basis at lower salaries with no job security and no benefits. As a last resort, fiscal restraints forced the replacement of many of their certificated health workers with unqualified personnel or even workfare workers. As this trend continued, those able to afford it started to take out private medical insurance in order to protect themselves and their families from the direct cost of the increasing number of nonessential services.

The public's demand for recall legislation, balanced budgets, and lower taxes became increasingly insistent. This was to be expected, because their incomes were increasingly diverted to private medicare and direct support for their children's education. As a result, those that could afford it concluded: if government can't provide essential services, then give me back my tax dollars and I will purchase them privately.

9:20

The vicious cycle of individual interest continued at an increasing rate until class divisions became deeply pronounced: rich against poor, majorities against minorities, young against old, employed against the unemployed, men against women, urban against rural, and so on. This has been the experience of many of our southern cousins.

Mr. Speaker, if anyone thinks these scenarios are fictitious or implausible, then let them examine our Alberta of today. The more our provincial government is freed of national standards and regulations, the more this government has engaged in a race to the bottom. This province, which once prided itself on spending more per capita on health care and education than any other province in Canada, is now expected to pride itself on spending the least and even on spending less than the majority of American states. Our government boasts that they also have the lowest level of taxation, the lowest minimum wage, and the highest subsidies to large corporations.

The Alberta advantage in a nutshell: where qualified frontline workers are being dismissed and replaced by \$6 per hour workers, welfare recipients who are being forced to accept workfare; where the deficit they've created is being balanced on the backs of children, the aged, and the poor; where 50 percent of hospital beds are closed and thousands of nurses laid off; where education of our young is slashed and charter schools are encouraged; where seniors are transferred to community foster homes to be cared for by unsupervised, unqualified personnel; where mental patients are turned out on the streets with no resources and no support

services; a place where public servants who dare speak out for their own rights and those of the public are branded, suspended without pay or fired.

The Alberta advantage, to borrow political scientist Laurie Atkins' word, is where the Alberta government is a holding company for an assortment of private companies which will be selling the services previously provided and managed by the government. That, Mr. Speaker, is where we are today, and we can expect more of the same. Witness the private hospital in Calgary and what the Workers' Compensation Board is doing.

What will Alberta be five to 10 years from now if the Klein revolution continues unabated? For a glimpse of our province's future I suggest we briefly examine our province's single largest trading partner, the state of California. Some time ago California was the American dream. Today it is a social disaster. Virtually every public service has been privatized, municipal governments are bankrupt, and the state is billions of dollars in debt. Due to bankruptcy some municipalities in California are in the position where they have been forced to sell libraries, courthouses, drug treatment centres, airports, and similar public facilities in order to generate revenue to meet payrolls and other government costs. Orange county, California, for example, has been in the position where all this municipality can do is issue IOUs to its workers in lieu of payroll cheques.

One of the reasons this state has slid down to financial ruin is because it entrenched laws that required referendums on a case-by-case basis for any type of tax increase. When only a minority perceives itself to benefit from government services, how can one expect to obtain majority consent to raise taxes via referendum?

One of the few public services provided by that state that continues to receive majority public approval for tax increases is the prison system. In fact, this state now spends more on prisons than it does on postsecondary education. Quite a feat, Mr. Speaker. But, if anything, I am understating the deplorable conditions that exist there. They are much, much worse.

Some will ask, Mr Speaker, what California has to do with Alberta. Well, sir, as Albertans we are subject to the pressures and constraints imposed on all Canadians as a result of FTA and NAFTA, a colossal corporate agenda. Our trade with California, I submit, is not merely in commodities but also in ideas. Witness, for example, how far similar ideas on reinventing government, downsizing government, privatization, that government is ineffective, et cetera, have moved this government along the California path.

Other clues are to be found in the Speech from the Throne. A particularly disturbing clue is this government's intent to entrench in legislation the government's inability to raise future personal and corporate income taxes and other taxes – presumably natural resource royalties, property taxes, school taxes, and the like – unless and until Albertans expressly vote to increase such taxes by referendum.

What, I ask the skeptics, would happen once such laws are enacted and this province again experiences the inevitable energy slump we experienced in the 1980s? What, for that matter, would happen if we enter another downturn in the business cycle, a recession, which will surely come as it always has on both scenarios and/or if both scenarios come simultaneously? Naturally this would necessarily mean fewer revenue dollars for the province and municipalities but also increased unemployment and larger caseloads of welfare recipients but without the ability to increase revenues other than by way of referendum.

The results, I submit, can be found in California and would

prove to be a complete disaster for our communities and our people. Also, this government speaks of managed growth, and this government has already adopted legislation that requires by law that it must operate on a balanced budget.

With this government can we look forward to Hershey bar elementary schools, Coca-Cola junior and senior high schools, and Pepsi-Cola libraries. We in Castle Downs need schools and we need them now.

These agendas, Mr. Speaker, are the primary reasons that determined me to seek this elected office. It is time that this government listens and comes clean. Enough is enough.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise before you today as the MLA for Edmonton-Norwood. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I'm sure your wisdom and guidance will find its way to my corner at some point in the next four years.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those residents who elected me and also present you with issues that impact the well-being of my constituents in Edmonton-Norwood and relay a few of the concerns I have heard from these Albertans over the past few weeks.

This constituency is a community of 33,000 people, rich in ethnic diversity and propelled by strong community values. The residents come from all walks of life, from lawyers to labourers, stay-at-home moms to students. The community reflects some of the early history of Edmonton and is presently going through an exciting revitalization process that should create increased economic stability for business and residents alike. These residents have chosen to live in this community and many have been there for a lifetime. These are the very people who are now and will continue to be instrumental in the revitalization project. They have long-held ties to the community and do not want to see further neighbourhood decay.

Public safety concerns along 118th Avenue have begun to be addressed through the Alberta Avenue Business Association, the Edmonton Police Service, community groups and agencies as well as initiatives fostered through Judy Bethel, the Member of Parliament for Edmonton East.

As a police officer I have worked and volunteered in the constituency for many years. I have been in the unfortunate position of witnessing human behaviour most of you will never see. This experience gives me the unique advantage of seeing firsthand the successes and the failures of our government. As a result, I have been able to determine a set of priorities for Edmonton-Norwood.

9:30

My first priority is community-based health services that reflect the needs identified by the community. All too often political leaders determine not only the framework for service but policy that is developed without consulting the users or client base. If community health services are to reflect the needs of the community, consideration must be given to cultural issues, socioeconomic factors, age and gender, transportation routes, and facility location. The community health model I see this government introducing calls forth images of a system that creeps noticeably closer to a private health care system. The idea of introducing a managed care system that disenfranchises more vulnerable Albertans regarding their choice of care facilities and health care

professionals does not support a true community health care environment.

Smaller classrooms and more teachers are another priority. This government states that it supports the public school system yet repeatedly siphons funding to select schools that reflect programs found in more exclusive private institutions while the children in my constituency in the inner city are housed in overcrowded and sometimes physically deteriorating classrooms. Funding must be returned to a level that will allow a reduction in the student/teacher ratio and provide more assistance in the classroom for special-needs children. Over 89 percent of the teachers in my constituency have identified the lack of funding for special needs as the single most damaging factor in their classrooms.

As a police officer I have had the opportunity to visit many of these schools and can confirm the problems that teachers in the classrooms are confronted with. One school I have worked in has 200 students, and disturbingly 100 of these children are considered at risk. Many of the teachers spend more time attending to social problems with their pupils than they do in actual instruction. In this school it is imperative that children be fed breakfast and lunch. Otherwise the actual learning these children could accomplish would be minimal. This is only one of many schools I have dealt with where early intervention and crisis intervention programs are crucial in contributing to a healthy learning environment.

This government takes pride in the reduced number of welfare recipients. Well, I believe I've found some of those recipients. They're now on student finance. Some of the unemployed residents of Edmonton-Norwood have stated that the job training they have received has led to a total dead end for them. Once upgrading is completed, they are not in a position to carry on to a postsecondary institution as the financial burden is too great. This is especially true for students who have been removed from welfare and placed on student financing. Many of these students wish to carry on with their education so they can get a decent job and make a livable wage in this global environment, but they are unable to do so.

One constituent expressed concern over the number of classrooms that have substance abuse problems. These students attend only the required time, collect their funding, and leave the institution. This particular instance is not an anomaly. These types of incidents have been highlighted by other students as well, and I have notebooks full of names of these people who go to the institutions and leave without fully completing their instruction. This is destructive and divisive in the classroom.

Just prior to leaving the Police Service, I arrested a man for assaulting his pregnant wife. He took great pride in showing me the seven certificates for job retraining, computer courses, and life skills courses displayed on his walls, none of which by his own admission did he complete. This man was like many folks I have dealt with in the upgrading or job training programs sponsored by this government. Many students forced into the school are not ready to be in a learning environment. Their drug and alcohol dependencies must be addressed before they can function effectively in a classroom.

I'm reminded of another incident, where a man I arrested received \$8,000 in student loans from the federal and provincial governments. He had spent 26 years in jail as a dangerous offender. He was released to a halfway house. This fellow was enrolled in a four-year degree program but had spent the bulk of his funding after he withdrew from the institution, stating that he

couldn't concentrate. My investigation showed that he had made no attempt to return the funding, nor was he obligated to do so. This is an incident that shows lack of foresight on the government side. Would this 60-year-old man not have fared better if he'd been put into more realistic job training for his ability and skill level? The future job market is of a technical nature. Surely this government will endeavour to focus on job-related education towards the future needs of the people in this province, not only for those people who can manage to pay for their own education but for those who can't.

My fourth priority is to seek the return of law enforcement funding. This government speaks of its commitment to community policing and justice. It is outlined in the '97-98 budget and business plan. I question this commitment when the funding for law enforcement has been reduced from \$33 million in actual spending in '93-94 to a collective budget to the municipalities of \$57 million.

Community policing is not just a specialized crime prevention program offered by a police organization. It is a philosophy, a way of doing business. As citizens of this province our constituents are entitled to effective police service, a level of service that is consistent with the demographic needs of a city. We have made great strides in delivering police services; however, the funding reduction can only be considered regressive, which is a complete detriment to the community. It's far more cost-effective to have proactive policing and adequately funded preventative agencies than it is to have organizations simply reacting to crime.

The previous Justice minister also identified the fear of crime as an issue. I question the likelihood of detailed research and collaborative efforts when this government operates from a purely economic model. Many residents in my constituency have a fear of crime. This is exacerbated when they or someone they know becomes a victim of crime. This fear is very real to them but may not reflect the true nature of their environment. This fear does, however, inhibit their ability to enjoy their lives and their own neighbourhoods. I urge this government to pay more than lip service to this issue and consider establishing a joint task force with police organizations, academic advisers, and crime prevention specialists to identify ways to resolve this problem.

Edmonton-Norwood currently has a high degree of social welfare and child poverty problems. I recognize that there are no

quick fixes to these social problems. Crime, alcohol, drug abuse, family violence, and welfare dependency are all cyclical problems. Effective legislation is one means to break these cycles, with government support for community-based programs being another component to the solution. This means that the government must not abdicate its responsibility and expect community volunteers to design and deliver programs. Communities are capable of articulating their program needs and delivering these programs, but the government is responsible for setting out the regulatory framework and for providing appropriate funding so these programs can fulfill their mandate. We must also have means to evaluate all the programs so that changes to regulations, policies, and funding levels are made based on reliable information and not political ideologies.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, may I say that I look forward with great anticipation to continued lively debate over these issues and others in the time to come. I'm hopeful that members of this Assembly will consider respect, empathy, and compassion for all Albertans, as this is the real bottom line. This would be the true Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Chair had already indicated that the next speaker would be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont caught the Speaker's eye as well. Hon. minister responsible for science, research, and information technology, do you wish to be added as well?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: I move to adjourn the debate.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

9:40

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 9:41 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

