

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, January 28, 1998** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 98/01/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

Mr. Coutts 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.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the great honours in the British parliamentary form of government is to have been asked to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and tonight I want to introduce the very distinguished and honourable Member for Livingstone-Macleod to move the speech.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You're right. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to rise in this Assembly this evening to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne opening the Second Session of the 24th Legislature. I stand in this Assembly with pride as the elected representative of the people of Livingstone-Macleod, realizing that I am within sight of the realization of the objectives of why I ran for this important office with all of its responsibilities.

Earlier this evening I reviewed the speech that I gave at my nomination on April 26, 1993, and everything that I believed in then has come through to fruition in our Premier's Speech from the Throne. I am proud to have supported, to have had input to the shared vision, along with my colleagues and my Premier, into the return of our Alberta pride.

Albertans, Mr. Speaker, are a resilient folk, people who have come from tough, pioneering stock. We pride ourselves on our rugged individualism. More importantly, Albertans believe in being responsible. They believe in being responsible for their own actions and the consequences of them. They believe that present citizens of the province are responsible for the state of the province we leave for future generations. As a result, Albertans believe in responsible government, which we are providing. They also believe in fiscal responsibility. They have told this government time and time . . .

MR. LOUGHEED: That's why they elected us.

MR. COUTTS: That's right.

They have told this government time and time again that no one should spend more than they earn. This applies to them personally and extends all the way up to the highest levels of both provincial and federal governments. To do anything else would be irresponsible, Mr. Speaker. We as a government have taken these sentiments to heart. As a result of four years of hard work by every Albertan and by every public servant, our budget is now balanced. Because of that, we are able to reinvest additional funding more smartly than was ever previously possible. How we

will be doing this was outlined yesterday in the Speech from the Throne, and I would like to reiterate our investment plan at this point.

The government will be directing the first billion dollars of any annual surplus towards the debt, the next \$250 million to a onetime capital expenditure in the priority areas that Albertans have indicated, and the remainder will go towards the total accumulated debt. What this means is that investment dollars, which also include interest savings, can now be directed to where they are needed. Reinvestment does not mean that we will be throwing dollars at problem areas with universal programs that become redundant. This is a targeted reinvestment approach aimed at addressing specific problem areas and is based on real assessment of the provincial financial situation.

Mr. Speaker, another strong belief that Albertans hold close to their hearts is a strong sense of community. This stems from those days past when folks helped their neighbours out and indeed helped them get back on their feet. That sense of community has been strongly demonstrated in my constituency over the past month as donations of household items, feed, straw, fence post wire, labour, and yes, cash for the relief of the victims of the December grass fires filled the Granum community hall and the storage yards of Hurlburt Rock Products in Fort Macleod. This government has not forgotten the values which first formed our province and maintain it today.

Now that it has its finances in order, government is in a better position to help Albertans in need. That is why funding for Family and Social Services is increasing by 5 percent so that children and families needing help can get it. I am also confident that the onetime, up to \$1,000 Alberta family employment tax credit will help our low- and middle-income families as well by putting more spendable dollars into their pockets. To better meet the needs of our aging neighbours, home care and long-term continuing care services are being reviewed, and health funding is being increased to meet the needs of our growing and aging population. I am glad to see that the Premier and the Minister of Health are willing to constantly review and improve the way we provide these services.

The Speech from the Throne reflected the value this government places on children in our province both today and in the future. Early intervention and prevention are essential. That is why reading problems are being caught and corrected as early as possible. Special-needs funding is being increased along with flexible instructional and technical funding for our school boards, and cross-department co-ordination of children's programs will be improved. Since there is no excuse for abuse of children, we are taking steps to combat teen prostitution through Bill 1. There will also be more protection for victims of family violence, which will hopefully make some child's world a better place.

Mr. Speaker, people are the driving force behind the future of our province. They are the ones creating the growth and the opportunity. One of the key messages emerging from the Growth Summit was that this valued resource needs to be maintained and developed. That is why reinvesting in the priority areas of health, education, and social services is a top priority for this government and will continue to be that top priority.

In his television address the Premier referred to the kids of '97 and how we need to plan and how we will pass along an Alberta that is even better than the Alberta we ourselves inherited. It started four years ago with the goal of not passing on our debt to our children and our grandchildren. Now the results of that exercise are already starting to be seen. In the classrooms and the

communities of my constituency I have heard from the gen-Xers; that's those 20 to 30 year olds. They now feel like they have a future. They feel that our debt- and deficit-cutting measures, although difficult and sometimes painful, needed to be done. Our province's young adults are now reassured that they will be starting their lives free of the chains of their parents' debt and overspending. As a generation they are now going into the workforce with a clean slate. What an example and what a legacy we've left them and what a great foundation to build on.

What a workforce it is that they are entering. We have the highest employment rate and the highest economic growth in the country, with a reputation of being a land of opportunity. That sentiment is indeed reflected in the comments I'm hearing from my younger constituents. The economic growth in the province is generating more activity and attracting more people than ever before. This is creating untold opportunities for all Albertans but especially for our young people.

8:10

The Growth Summit also stressed the importance of ensuring that our youth are able to develop the marketable skills they need to take advantage of the tremendous growth we are seeing. To help them develop these skills, government will be creating more places for them in our colleges and universities. Government will also be expanding its apprenticeship programs to meet the needs of the marketplace. Employers and businesses are also getting involved and participating in work experience programs, apprenticeship programs, and mentoring programs. There are new jobs for skilled workers continually opening up in this province, and government is taking steps to help Albertans take advantage of this growth and this opportunity.

The future prosperity of our province does not solely lie with the development of the information highway but also with the further development of our actual asphalt highways. Our primary and secondary roads in this province are being used by an increasing amount of traffic, which causes them to wear faster. I was pleased to hear that this government will be reinvesting in this infrastructure and further developing the north/south trade corridor.

Last month, in speaking before this House about the issue of Canadian unity, I referred to the transportation trade arguments which advanced the issues of Confederation. I also made reference to the fact that free trade and interprovincial trade barriers remain and prevent us from doing more trade with eastern provinces. However, within Alberta there are transportation issues impeding effective trade between our own communities, let alone with the rest of the world.

This is why I was pleased to hear about the reinvestment in our province's infrastructure, and I am sure I can speak for my constituents as well. For them an efficient transportation system allows visitors to come to their communities, allows farmers to get their grain to elevators, get their cattle to feedlots and their hay to customers. It allows value-added manufacturers to get their products to market.

This is especially important to the constituents in the Glenwood and the Hill Spring areas, who use secondary highways extensively to get the milk they produce to the Glenwood factory and then to get the cheese that factory makes not only to Alberta buyers but to Canadian buyers. It is important to the constituents of the Crowsnest Pass, who need an efficient highway system so that their logs can get to the mill and the boards made from those logs can get to market. Value-added manufacturing is rapidly developing in the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, Mr.

Speaker, especially in the area of forestry. It is important that the flow of goods from raw material to finished product is not impeded by a weak infrastructure system.

Not only am I pleased to hear of infrastructure investment for my own constituents, Mr. Speaker, but I'm also pleased to hear about it provincewide. The north/south trade corridor, as I mentioned, will indeed help to promote and attract trade to our province. Our nation's biggest trading partner is the United States, and with it is a vast market for many Alberta products and skills. In that market we already have an advantage in being a member of the Pacific Northwest economic trade organization. For those of you who are unfamiliar with PNWER, as it has become known, it is an association of seven states and provinces and provincial governments in the Pacific Northwest region. This region makes up the 10th largest economy in the world, and we are a key member. The north/south trade corridor only makes it easier for our PNWER partners to trade with us and us with them.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who's the president of PNWER?

MR. COUTTS: I'm proud to be the president of PNWER.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be cautious when we deal with growth. I was pleased to see the recognition of the importance of developing a network of protected areas that was presented in the Speech from the Throne. The Special Places 2000 program is a policy that embraces the theme of preservation while at the same time recognizing the importance of creating a climate for attracting investment, generating wealth, and creating jobs. It is to do this by completing this network to preserve the environmental diversity of this province for generations to come.

Last year I also had the opportunity to chair the Premier's task force on wind power and in doing so received many submissions, heard many presentations during the consulting process. That process called for more choice for an electric consumer. Albertans clearly indicated that they wanted to be able to choose how the power they used was generated. Because of this, I am looking forward to seeing legislation introduced which will complete the deregulation of the electric industry, which the Lieutenant Governor referred to yesterday.

Our common heritage is something we should always take steps to sustain. In order to know where we are going, it is helpful to know where we have been. Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta know where we have been. They have strong roots for this province. They are people of fortitude, young and old alike, people strong on tradition and strong on community, people prepared to stand up for what they believe. They are people who do not want to see the hard work of the past century eroded, nor do they want to see our Alberta way of life weakened. They have always aimed their endeavours towards the future and thus show their concern by continuing to be innovative and resourceful, ever showing initiatives for employment, pointing out opportunity, and following through on promises of a better tomorrow in true Alberta pride.

That promise of a better tomorrow is based on three key steps. The first step was identifying that we were in a pattern of spending more than we earned. The second step came in 1993 with a commitment to reverse that direction, to be lean and effective in areas that were necessary but to also have government programs that were more than adequate and available when Albertans needed them. In the third step the government assesses the results of the previous steps and makes adjustments where

necessary. This process is how our province took back control not just of its finances but of its future.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier is the architect of this process, and I would like to thank him on behalf of myself and my constituents for listening to and honouring the wishes of the people of Livingstone-Macleod. I also want to extend to him thanks for the courage and the conviction it took to stand by this plan, to weather the storm so that we can see the new world.

This throne speech, Mr. Speaker, reflects that third step. It is the first throne speech in some time with a plan for reinvestment, a plan that Albertans have confidence in. It is a direction which continues to do constructive damage to the status quo while creating the environment for opportunities for Albertans to flourish and to prosper.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that this House accept the Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Thank you.

8:20

THE SPEAKER: The distinguished and hon. Member for Calgary-Fort will now second the motion in support of the speech given by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

MR. CAO: Mr. Speaker, this session is opening on the occasion of the New Year in the lunar calendar. This is the year of the tiger, the year of roaring success and prosperity. It is a great honour for me to represent the Calgary-Fort constituency, to stand among my esteemed and roaring tiger colleagues to speak on the motion made by the hon. David Coumts responding to the Speech from the Throne. From my vantage point on the higher ground at the back here, I have a panoramic view which I do not want to change with anyone in front. I only want to describe to you the scenery from my vantage point.

Mr. Speaker, I see the content of the Speech from the Throne reflecting my pledge to my constituency: we care, we listen, we act, we measure, and we improve. Therefore, I fully support it. Let's help the bad old way wither and the good new way bloom. This is a part of continuous improvement or *kai zen*, a familiar Japanese term, in total quality management principle, which is dear to my heart.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to our difficult and needed restructuring our province is now doing very well. We are in a better position to reinvest in high priority areas to ensure that we meet the demands of increasing growth. We should stay positive and celebrate our harvest. We should not let the disagreement on the size of our share destroy our hard-earned festive spirit. In determining our need, we must distinguish between equality and equity. People should have the right to harvest equitably from their effort. People should have the right to be treated equally in the same situation. In our modern world here there are corporate and individual citizens. In advanced societies like ours the two types work in partnership to improve the community as a whole.

From thousands of years of history in the Orient there is a philosophy of a natural cycle, hard and soft, to maintain the happy balance of life. Confucius wisely observed that of any government the most long lasting are the ones that are benevolent and dynamic, maintaining the balance in time and governing in the way of humanness. Our government task is twofold: to ensure the harvest is shared equitably and at the same time to ensure that our next harvest is at least the same or better.

Mr. Speaker, our government has taken the philosophy of

quality reinvestment in the right things, in the right ways, and at the right time. We have to realize and accept that we cannot be everything to everyone. We have to choose the priority areas that need our attention and address those concerns.

As a representative in the Legislature I need to reflect my constituents' input and to ensure key points. Number one, our democratic principle: all are heard and decisions are made based on needs of the majority with respect to the concern of the minority. Number two, we have a harvest to share every year. Each of our public harvests increases in size. Number three, each sector in our society has an appropriate share of the harvest corresponding to the needs and the best public interest for now and for the future. Number four, as a society and government we maintain the principle of efficiency, which is the right way, and effectiveness, which is the right things, under the umbrella of affordable government operation. Mr. Speaker, in this regard I'm very pleased that our government has identified and addressed priority areas for reinvestment as indicated in the Speech from the Throne.

To make people prosperous, educate them, Confucius said roughly 2500 years ago. Albertans have identified education as our highest priority. Education stakeholders, a major contributor to people development, have identified some priority areas that require not only new investment but new operational approaches to make it more efficient and effective.

I feel we are moving in this direction. Over the past year I visited several schools and college boards and talked with teaching staff at several schools in my riding, even during the controversial period of work-to-rule, to listen to the frontline stakeholders. I sensed and observed the stress and the strain in the people and in the system. I have also noted that there are many innovative approaches that can be shared across the province. I'm very pleased now that the government has focused on people development in education and training.

Mr. Speaker, to me education should be viewed as a continuum spectrum, from child care to the formation of careers. The pressure areas in education have been identified and addressed. Education will receive the largest targeted funding. While the funding can always be more, I am pleased that the funding is focused while remaining within our means.

There is a saying: help yourself and God will help you. Mr. Speaker, the devolution of social services from the government to community-based and volunteer groups is on the rise. The new demands add increased responsibilities to these groups. It requires that we focus in this area. I commend the nonprofit and volunteer organizations working in partnership with the government providing valuable help to Albertans.

I am pleased that our government has identified social services as a priority and has targeted reinvestment in this area. We know about our working poor issue. We are developing programs to address it. We know about our high-needs citizens. We have programs to help those in need. We have moved service delivery and funding to the community level, where decisions can be most effectively made. We will continue to be proactive in this, making sure all Albertans remain part of the Alberta advantage.

Mr. Speaker, one of the priorities identified by Albertans most notably in the Alberta Growth Summit is the need to meet the demand created by economic growth. The Calgary-Fort riding includes a large productive industrial park in Calgary. Business is growing. Construction is increasing in leaps and bounds. The business community and MUSH sector have voiced the need for more infrastructure support. I attended a presentation by the

mayor and his staff on the infrastructure of Calgary. It has reached its capacity limit. Sustaining economic growth requires sustaining investment in infrastructure. It is encouraging that the government has earmarked the reinvestment in infrastructure to meet economic growth. It's a move in the right direction.

8:30

Mr. Speaker, I had opportunity to visit Hanna, Alberta, at the kind invitation of the Hon. Shirley McClellan. It was refreshing to listen to the rural issues, the balance between economics, infrastructure, and the environment. With Alberta's incredible growth of our infrastructure needs, both rural and urban require continued investment to accommodate growth and to prevent further wear and tear, deterioration, and costly repairs. This will be a continuing challenge.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important aspects of our government's duties is to stay within our means by acting responsibly with Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars. Paying down the debt is not only my personal preference, but it is the voice of many of my constituents. When the mortgage of my house is higher than the value of my house, I shall make full effort to pay it down, at least equal to the value of my house, before I can have a restful sleep, feeling safe for my family and the future of my children. The effort includes reducing our expectations, reducing or even stopping a number of things we are used to. We will work harder, longer hours, and we'll make more and spend less so that my debt can go down faster. I am very pleased that the government will continue to live within our means so that our mortgage will continue to be paid down and we can pass on to our children a debt-free home. With our strong past economic gain, dependence on our oil revenue, and the recent uncertainty in the petroleum market, remaining responsible and paying down the debt is even more urgent.

Mr. Speaker, as a government our responsibility is also to keep looking for new and improved ways to carry out our duties. We must continue to remove non-needed and improve the effectiveness in application and efficiency in administration. Keeping and attracting skilled and qualified public staff will serve this end.

Personally I am very pleased to assist the Hon. Murray Smith, Minister of Labour, in leading the employment standards regulation review team. It is my great pleasure to work with Dennis Gartner, Mike Komaltycki, Ron Collins, Alec Campbell, Sandra Baird, David Hennig, and with the helping hands of Joe Miller, Tom Neufeld, Peter Kruselnicki, and all the others that are involved as our work goes forward. This review will address public issues such as the minimum wage, youth employment, provision for exemptions, and update the regulations, following a process that must be open and transparent to Albertans with direct stakeholder participation and public consultation. The review is also an opportunity for the employment standards department to show its value-added service to Albertans, not only in administrative services but also in the development of public policy.

We can visualize that the current situation is like a fishnet. Lifting one knot up will affect other knots, near or far, more or less. The review will certainly involve issues related to other departments, like Alberta Family and Social Services, Treasury, Economic Development, Community Development, even the Justice department. It is indeed a ripple effect. I am also looking forward to working with the experts in these related departments.

There is another thing that I want to draw attention to here, which is the level of service. One of the continuing challenges of this government will be to adjust our expectations to our affordability. Our level of service needs to be redefined, recognized, and

accepted. The priorities should be expressed in terms of need, want, and nice to have.

We also need to scrutinize our publicly funded programs, the areas that are completed and not needed anymore, the areas that are still needed to sustain the operation of services, and the areas that are new initiatives. Given that public funds are finite, we must continue to evaluate which programs or services are needed in order to free up the funds for existing priority services or for new priority areas. The first step in this process is to review our programs and services and determine priority areas and nonpriority areas and direct resources accordingly. I plan to submit a motion to this Legislature to this effect.

I would like to look ahead into the future. It is very fortunate that we are approaching the new millennium living in a blessed province within a great country. As I said before, before I began my work in the Legislature, I spent time in many other places in the world – Asia, Europe, Australia, North America – but none can beat Canada, especially Alberta. Not only is our economy doing well; our people have compassion for one another. Tolerance, acceptance, respect for differences, and a strong spirit for volunteerism: these are the traits of Albertans and Canadians. This summer Edmonton will host the World Volunteer Conference. We are truly living in a global village that others are dreaming about.

We can aspire to become an example for humanity. This year is also the 50th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights. I believe that not only should we keep practising it but also help promote it in the best way we see fit.

Mr. Speaker, our national unity has been threatened more seriously, but the issue has not been recognized as urgent to the majority in normal daily living. As leaders and elected members our duty is to make things happen, to be prepared, not to watch it happen or to wonder what happened later. The passing of the Calgary declaration in this Legislature, in consultation with Albertans and other provinces, was a major proactive step to ensure that Canada remains united, strong, and under one flag. I have a motion to this Legislature to increase Canadian content in our public education system.

As I take on the charge of representing the Calgary-Fort constituency in the Legislature and in the government, I will see to it that my duties are carried out to the best of my ability. I would like to take this opportunity to share my inner drive with the members of the Assembly and my constituents. Jesus teaches us love for one another, Buddha teaches us egolessness for self-perfection, and Confucius teaches us social duties. These teachings have been cultured in me since I became aware of our world.

To my constituency, my duty has three main aspects: to assist each one of you in solving your problems or issues, to participate in making laws, and to ensure that our revenue, which is your and my tax dollars, is spent on the right thing in the right way at the right time and for the best public interest of Albertans.

My constituency office opened at the end of May of last year. During the first six months one cabinet was filled up with individual files asking for help or explanation. They ranged from all aspects of social demand: workers' compensation, student finance, labour issues, child care proposals, even immigration, even things belonging to the federal jurisdiction. You name it; we have it. I will continue to address your concerns and act on your behalf. I have prepared a long list of bills and motions for proposal reflecting the needs expressed by my constituency.

8:40

My office also received a lot of phone calls. I could say hundreds. I made a point to talk to each one of you who called, to reply to those who wrote, to meet with those who came to my office, or to visit the homes of those who could not come. I must say that I was not successful in solving a hundred percent of the cases, but I took pride in my best personal effort for each one of you.

On the last note here I want to make a suggestion in order to modernize our Legislature. In our modern military strategy the commanding leadership stays behind the frontline troops on the higher ground, directing the military operation. The frontline troops are used to protect the commanding leadership. Mr. Speaker, the government side is always under constant frontal attack. The enlisted soldiers, fondly known backbenchers, should be moved to the front line to protect our valuable government leadership, which would be safer at the back. I will personally await your reply to this proposal.

Thank you.

**Speaker's Ruling
Referring to a Member by Name
Exhibits**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, because of the honour that's yearly prescribed to those who are asked to move and second and then the same distinguished honour provided to the Leader of the Opposition in response to the Speech from the Throne, the Speaker chose not to interject so that there would be a constant flow in the hon. member's speech. But, hon. member, and to all hon. members, I would just like to draw to your attention *Beauchesne* 484, which cautions members from specifically referring to another member in a way other than "the honourable" and the name of his constituency. In this case, the hon. member I think on several occasions, three in fact, mentioned names, but I'm sure hon. members will appreciate that.

And to the hon. Minister of Energy, perhaps I might just cite *Beauchesne* 501, which deals with exhibits, and particularly citation 502, when the Speaker of the day said:

If we allowed Hon. Members to produce such exhibits, we would get ourselves involved in a position where perhaps all too often Hon. Members would want to table dead fish, herrings, or red herrings, damp grain or wild oats.

So, again, it's a bit of advice with respect to exhibits in the Assembly.

Now may I call on the distinguished and hon. leader of Alberta's official and loyal opposition, and might I also say with a touch of sadness that all members will be hearing the hon. leader's last speech in response to the Speech from the Throne as the leader of his party. The hon. member.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. That was very thoughtful of you to say that, and I appreciate it greatly. It's often in this House that we find ourselves in pitched battle – not you and I of course – but there is the sense in this House sometimes of pitched battle, and it's very nice to have had you say that about me.

I will, on the other hand, respond by saying that I've had such a great time in the House today, being back after all these months, that I'm thinking, given that the nomination date hasn't passed yet, that I may just stand for re-election as leader of this party. The thought of not sitting directly across from the Minister of

Justice or the minister of technology in the way that I have over these last number of months almost brings me to that point, if you can believe it.

I have listened in this House – I counted today – Mr. Speaker, to I think 16 throne speeches in my time as a Member of this Legislative Assembly. Sometimes I have been inspired by some of the ideas in these throne speeches. Sometimes I have felt a sense of despair or loss that what could be done wasn't being done. Sometimes I felt a sense of sadness that the priorities that had been selected by a government weren't the priorities that were really worthy of the people of this province. If ever I have had a sense of despair about a throne speech, it is, I think, captured particularly vividly for me in this throne speech.

Over the years we have worked on this side of the House in many ways, but one of them has been to give a sense of elevation to this government, to give it a sense of vision, to raise it out of this obsession and this focus on the minutiae of money, on the minutiae of economic development. Not to say that those things aren't important but simply to say that there are other things that are important. Greatness in societies is not achieved simply by the strength of an economy. You do not measure greatness in society by the strength, by the size, by the velocity of an economy. You measure the greatness of a society by things that are often far less empirical than that which this government focuses on almost exclusively. You measure it in the strength of its people, in their ability to think and to challenge and to envision a future world, to create opportunities, to envision those opportunities, and to realize those opportunities for them in the future.

Those aren't just economic opportunities. Those are opportunities in culture and in art. Those are opportunities to be able to relate to people in a civil and decent way. There are opportunities to know that there is a richness, not just a financial richness but a richness in values and morals and education and thought for our family members and for our neighbours, Mr. Speaker.

If ever I felt a frustration about trying to elevate some of the ideas of this government, it is today having listened to and read that throne speech, because what I see in that throne speech, Mr. Speaker, first, are things that are not particularly inspiring. If ever I thought that, it was certainly confirmed when I looked across the House in the middle of the throne speech yesterday and saw at least two cabinet ministers happily dozing.

DR. WEST: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: It is true, Mr. Speaker. I did refer to them not being . . .

THE SPEAKER: Well, sorry to have to interrupt. One doesn't like to do that during this portion of the debate, but the hon. Minister of Energy has a point of order. Citation please.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Orders 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives" to other members. If the hon. member has the names of the specific individuals that were sleeping, then I would think the honourable thing to do is to mention them or to bring them forth in this Assembly now. Otherwise, he should retract the statement he has made if he's not willing to offend them by identifying individual members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on the point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: I would, Mr. Speaker, but I'd have to wake them up to make it relevant. In fact, I will withdraw. I will say that I incorrectly referred to two members that in a manner of speaking were absent from the House. I am sorry for doing that, and I won't do it again.

MR. SAPERS: I'd name them.

MR. MITCHELL: They were sleeping.

MR. SAPERS: Why don't you just name them?

MR. MITCHELL: It's okay; thanks.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: I want to say that I am left with one overriding impression from reading this throne speech, Mr. Speaker, and it is that a theme has been established: money first, people second. You only have to see the first substantive paragraph to see where the focus is going to be. "The net provincial debt should be gone by 2000 or 2001." Great. The second substantive paragraph says:

But there is more work to do. After eliminating the net debt, Albertans will still face their first mortgage, a total accumulated debt of \$14 billion.

Mr. Speaker, it is not until the third substantive paragraph that we actually have the government referring, in however limited a fashion, to the question of developing people in accordance with the direction that they received from the Alberta Growth Summit. We go through two layers of debt before we get to the people: two layers of debt. Money first, people second.

There is an overriding sense in this document that in trying to define "better" in trying to describe Alberta as having become "better", what they are really describing is that Alberta has a better economy. In fact they say, "Alberta [has] the highest employment rate in Canada . . . and the highest forecasted economic growth in the country."

8:50

It's a great thing, Mr. Speaker. However, what it neglects to point out is that we also have the lowest minimum wage in the country, and that affects directly and significantly the quality of lives of many, many people in this province. We have the highest rates of child poverty in the country. We have the highest rates of urban child poverty in Edmonton, in one of the wealthiest places on the face of the earth, Mr. Speaker. We have the lowest per capita funding for health care in the entire country. We have the 55th lowest per capita funded education system in the entire country. We're barely keeping up with Mississippi.

So when I see a document that talks about "better", what I see is a document that talks about a better economy, and I don't see a lot of people out there except the elites, except the wealthy, except the fortunate who are getting the benefit of that better economy. If government is here for any reason, surely it isn't simply to pander to elites who can largely take care of themselves. Surely it is to take care of people who can't so easily and so readily take care of themselves.

Let me point out, Mr. Speaker . . .

DR. WEST: Since when was money the benchmark?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, let's talk about the great theologies of

this world. Money isn't the benchmark in most of those, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about the great philosophers in this world. Let's talk about the great societies of this world. Let's talk about the great cultures of this world. Mostly, money isn't the benchmark. You will have defined an economy that you think represents better and best. It's a means to an end, and what you haven't focused on is the end.

Let me show you the classic – the classic – contradiction that really reveals, I think, what lies at the root of what much of this government has done. The hon. minister, Mr. Speaker, of advanced education: what did he say? What did he say? He gave to a *Journal* reporter, Trish Worrton, a story about a specialist in industrial safety who got himself into a bidding war between an oil company and the city of Edmonton. Times were good. This person had some leverage. He could bid up his value in the market. This individual could actually potentially bid up the pay that he would receive. So he used his leverage, which business does every day. What does the minister responsible for advanced education and for training people for jobs say? Imagine. He says: "I thought this was crazy, Dunford said" – and I'm quoting the editorial here – "suggesting the man was doing something dishonourable by trying to get the best possible price for his labour." Imagine that: we've got this remarkably strong economy, and it's crazy that an individual, a human being, in that economy actually wants to get the best possible price for his labour so he can take some more money home to his kids, so he can leave something to them for the future.

So what's it all for? What are you doing it for? Why? So we can have the best economy? So that people can get the lowest minimum wage? So we can create more part-time, underpaid, nonbenefited jobs? Is that why? Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, if there's some other answer, it sure isn't found in this throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, you've been part of the government for years, and you were part of a government in the '70s under Peter Lougheed, who had tremendous decency and dignity and vision. I didn't agree with everything they did, but I knew and I still know to this day that Peter Lougheed brought something to public life that I see sorely missing from this caucus and from this leadership. Peter Lougheed had a sense of people, and he had a sense of reason for why he was doing what he was doing. It's gone.

What we have instead is a very limited view, as I have said: an economic vision of the world where the economy in itself is an end. And it doesn't ever even bother to trickle down. What we also have, Mr. Speaker, is an intimidation, a government that often maybe unknowingly – I hope so, and I'll give them the credit that they do it unknowingly – intimidates. I don't know how many people I have spoken to in this province who have said – a faculty association: "You know, we've got grave concerns, but we don't really want to go public with them because we're afraid that we will antagonize government and they will retaliate." I see it in talking to municipal councillors who say: "You know, we have had downloaded to us the maintenance and provision of secondary highways, which are used by oil companies and logging trucks and other industrial interests that pass largely right through our communities. We have no money. We don't get any money from them to fix these roads, but we are being asked to carry the burden. We are afraid to go public and raise that spectre and make that case because we're afraid the government will retaliate."

When I look at the Minister of Justice – he has a responsibility to uphold the judicial institutions of this province. He has a

profound responsibility to do that. It is his job to do that. Instead, what did he do? He turned on the Provincial Court judges – his responsibility – which his very government appointed. He eroded people's confidence in the judicial system, and he neglected to point out that it's his laws often that they interpret and they are driven to the conclusions that they have to reach. It's a cheap trick, and it's an easy target, and they can't defend themselves. It's intimidation, and it erodes the dignity and the civility and the decency and the trust that people have in their democratic institutions in this province.

I saw something today that supported this theme, and it shocked me deeply. I saw the Premier of this province . . .

DR. WEST: You're losing my respect.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. Thank you. Finally. What am I doing right, Steve? Please tell me. I've lost his respect. Whew.

I want to refer to something that the Premier said today which I think embodies an intimidation that is corrosive of a strong society. He said that a Catholic church was accepting lottery funds. In fact, what he said today was that he had told them that if they don't want the money, they can return it. And he turned around and said that groups in my constituency who have accepted much lottery money are hypocrites for having accepted it if they really don't like lottery funds. What he didn't point out, Mr. Speaker, is the double-think and the nuance that goes into that. This government has dumped, off-loaded, many pressures and programs on community groups and on churches. The only source of funds that they have to fulfill those responsibilities are lottery funds, gambling funds. And when they are driven to accept them to do the job that their government has left them to do, that in fact the government should do, you know what the Premier does? He calls them hypocrites.

What has become of this government in this province? What has become of the dignity and the decency and the visionary leadership that prior governments, like the Lougheed government, provided to the people of this province? It has gone, and I see it's gone when I read this document.

The impression I am left with, Mr. Speaker, is a government that, yes, did accomplish something worthy of accomplishment, balancing the budget, that has done something about addressing the debt. That's good. At a time now when the fiscal stuff is in order and we have a chance to build some goodness and some greatness and to support people and to develop people, if you will, and develop a culture and an art and those things that make richness in society, you know what we get? We get this. And you know what it does? It does the three Rs: it rehashes, it redresses, and it reviews. It's a masterful public relations exercise. It tastes great, and it is far less filling than in fact it should be.

It announces new money, and huge amounts of that money, Mr. Speaker – huge amounts of that money – are just money that's been announced five or six times previously. It also announces money that really isn't new money but is money required to keep up with expanding populations, like the 33,000 new students that will come into education over the next three years. It redresses . . .

DR. WEST: Why are they coming to Alberta? Why are they coming here?

9:00

MR. MITCHELL: Some of them are born here, Steve. Remember?

It redresses some issues, or attempts to, but you know, it's remarkable the number of problems it attempts to redress that this government created. I want to draw one very powerful and very telling example of what I mean to the attention of the House. The government was quite open three weeks ago in describing how it was putting I think it was \$22 million into literacy programs for grades 2 and 3 students. They took about \$50 million out of the kindergarten that those students had access to two, three, and four years prior. This government, based on studies that it said it had but refused to release, cut kindergarten, saying that it wasn't worth while and it wasn't necessary. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the proof is in the pudding. There is now a much higher rate of illiteracy amongst grades 2 and 3 students, the very students who ended up with far less kindergarten than they'd received before.

VLTs as well. Not that they're doing very much to it, but they are in fact putting some more money in to try to solve problem gambling. Who created the problem? VLTs created the problem. This government created that problem by bringing them in.

It's also spent a great deal of time addressing review. Now, it didn't review anything before it brought in VLTs. It didn't review anything before it cut health care costs. It didn't review anything before it cut kindergarten. It didn't review anything before it cut education. It didn't review anything before it cut social services. It didn't review anything. But, Mr. Speaker, it's spent a lot of time saying that it's going to review seniors, that it's going to review freedom of information, that it's going to review seniors' social housing. These are excuses for inaction. The issues are defined. It's very clear. This kind of review is strictly – strictly – a mechanism for inaction.

I want to congratulate the Speaker on his effort yesterday to give some credence, some ceremony, some respect to democratic institutions. He did that in a remarkably effective way, a way for which I think he deserves great credit. That was the Black Rod ceremony. One of the themes in that ceremony was the importance of symbols. You could say the importance of symbols and myths that enshrine, if you will, or embrace, embody our institutions of democracy, that strengthen them, that give them roots and traditions, that give them stability in the hard times. It is very important that we have those, and it was done very effectively yesterday.

I want to read from a book by John Ralston Saul, a current Canadian philosopher and thinker, called *Reflections of a Siamese Twin*, in which he talks at great length about Canada and its future, but he makes the point about mythology, myths and symbols, if you will. He says: on a good day mythology can provide relief from endlessly contradictory burdens of reality. Mythology thus can help citizens to summon up enough energy to consider the public good, the good of the whole. On a bad day mythology encourages the denial of reality. As if in a bank of fog we stumble into illusion which in turn produces an impression of relief or rather a state of delusion.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that this government over the last three years did confront some destructive myths, some destructive mythology and broke through. Yes, they attacked on the level that you can't just manage with money, and they accomplished some positive things with that myth, if you will, with that slogan, with that – I'll use the word loosely – sense of principle. But in the process they have begun to create a series of myths and mythology that I think is becoming very destructive. What I

would like to say to the government is: just as it attacked some destructive mythologies in the spending sphere, in the sphere of fiscal responsibility three or four years ago, I think it is time that they began to attack the mythologies that they are beginning to generate that do not conform in fact with reality.

It is very tempting to say to yourself, when you know we have some of the highest rates of child poverty, that it's okay. It's very, very tempting to say, when we have inordinately high illiteracy in grade 2 and grade 3 students, that it's okay, that somehow it's not true and it's just been exaggerated. But these things, Mr. Speaker, become myths that can sustain great harm. There was some quote, unquote, radical thought, some thought that went against the grain three or four years ago. It's time that from somewhere they find a source of radical thought and thought that goes against the grain that they have created. That means that they've got to rethink health care, they've got to rethink education, they've got to rethink child poverty, and they've got to rethink things like their approach to the environment.

I'll tell you what perhaps defines this more than anything, Mr. Speaker. It isn't so much what's in this document but what isn't in this document. At a time, as I said earlier, when you know we've got some things in order, when there is a tremendous chance to do some things that would amount to greatness, when we could achieve a world-class education system that would support our economy and support our university, support our stock markets and our capital markets, the ball has been dropped.

We need to do some concrete things in the area of education, Mr. Speaker. We have to focus on class size. We need to have 22, 23 max students per teacher. We need to have money to make sure that occurs, not just money for interns who we can pay less but money for fully trained, fully qualified, experienced teachers who can ensure that those 22 children in every classroom get the best possible attention and the highest level of education. Study after study shows that the lower the class size, the greater, the more productive the educational experience.

We talk about myths, Mr. Speaker. They've sustained this myth that somehow people aren't working hard enough, that teachers are lazy: they get two months of holidays; they get off at 3:30 in the afternoon. That becomes a myth that allows them to say: well, it's okay to have bigger class sizes; it'll make those teachers work harder. That myth is hurting our children, and it's hurting our children grievously. Focus on excellence in education, focus on bringing down the class size to 22 students per teacher.

Health care. If there is something that distinguishes this government's health care policy, it is a subtle and not so subtle rush to get more private health care and less public health care. It is the most absurd health care policy that I think we can imagine. It is economically absurd, because private health care systems cost much more than public health care systems. It is, of course, health care delivery absurd, because the delivery of health care in this province has dramatically – dramatically – decreased to a level where there is in fact a crisis in health care. This isn't being addressed except by the reiteration and the reannouncement of old money. It isn't being addressed by assessing what the needs really are of communities for health care. It isn't being redressed by discussing and determining what the relationship should be between satellite communities and regions with more sophisticated health care services. It simply is not being redressed.

Poverty. I think that if we are to be measured as people in our society, we will be measured by how we treat children and

whether or not children, who are obviously often very helpless and very defenceless, are cared for by people who have a broader sense of their responsibility and obligation to people who are helpless and defenceless. Poverty, Mr. Speaker, is one of the most corrosive things that you can do to a child. When real wages have dropped over the last four years in this province despite its apparent economic achievement, that affects children. Again, they can say the children aren't hungry and that this economy has trickled down and everybody's better off. Children are going to school hungry every day in this province. Children are not getting the warm clothing they need in the winter in this province. Every single day. It's a myth when they say that everybody's okay, because they're not, and it's hurting children.

9:10

We'll be measured, but we won't be measured by the per capita take-home pay. We'll be measured by how many kids didn't have a proper meal before they went to school and how many kids don't get a hot lunch when they're at school and how many kids don't have a place to study when they go home from school. That's what we'll be measured by.

Mr. Speaker, we stated in our speech to the throne last year that we need a new road for this province now, that we need that road to be directed by a compass, and that our compass will be those enduring family and community values rooted in our pioneer past and so necessary today. Let me list what the points of that compass are.

There are four cardinal points:

- (1) a commitment to justice – to do what is right, and to act fairly;
- (2) a sense of duty to self, family, and larger community;
- (3) concern and compassion for others;
- (4) tolerance and understanding of other cultures and traditions.

Respect for the rights of all persons is critical. An equality of opportunity for all persons is critical. The courage to defend the weak is critical. A willingness to perform the obligations of citizenship is a given. These are the compass points that we must and we can rely upon.

A commitment to do justice: to do what is right. Get rid of the VLTs. Get rid of the VLTs. It's not gray; it's black and it's white. Get rid of the VLTs. A commitment to justice: defend the justice system. Don't fall prey to popular whim. Defend the justice system and fix it in a productive way.

Respond and respect a sense of duty to self, to family, and to the larger community. That is public health care. That's when you give up something to the community because you may not need it, but they do, and one day you will too. That's what's been a core value for our communities and for this province and for this country for the longest time. That core value has been eroded, and it is denying that important point on this compass: a sense of duty to self, to family, and to a larger community, something bigger than each of us, something bigger than whether or not we get more and more and more for ourselves, something bigger, something that's called sharing and giving something up to others, especially a responsibility for those of us who are more fortunate, fortunate beyond the wildest dreams of 99 percent of the people in the world today.

Concern and compassion for others, Mr. Speaker. A sense of "we may be okay but other people are not particular well off."

Tolerance and understanding of other cultures and traditions. That one is slipping through the cracks: a Human Rights Commission that has been gutted, and the reason, the very reason why Ron Ghitter, a former Conservative member and a Conservative Senator today, is highly critical of this government and what it's

done to erode that very, very important function in our society.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention one of our most important responsibilities as legislators, one that you demonstrate, that you fulfill admirably each day in this House but also yesterday in the way that you brought us to show our respect for the democratic institutions in this province and in this country in the parliamentary system. What I see is an erosion, except for reprieves like that, of the democratic process in this province. I see that we are sitting less and less and less. Last year we sat 39 days only. We had no fall session, Mr. Speaker, at a time when we should be debating the budget that's actually being prepared in that period of time.

We have one-party, not all-party, standing policy committees that are paid for by the Legislative Assembly. It's unprecedented in parliamentary democracies.

We had 300 orders in council between sessions by a government that wants less government but in fact by a government that gets the worst kind of government and more of it: government secrecy, arrogance behind closed doors.

We have a Law and Regulations Committee that is structured in an open forum to review the regulations that are done by order in council behind closed doors and that has not met in the 12 years that I've been in this Legislative Assembly.

We have budgetary review processes that have been more and more diminished over the years that I have been here and now in fact have reached a low, where competing budgetary committees are meeting at the same time and MLAs who want to represent their constituents on both can't because of the conflict.

We have the Premier eroding - eroding - the importance and significance of the budgetary process by spending \$145,000 three weeks prior to the budget to announce the budget. It's unheard of in parliamentary democracies that that would occur, and in fact the Economic Development minister today demonstrated our point exactly when she refused to answer a question in her area because she was going to be anticipating the budget. It's nice to see that she understood, amongst all the rest of them, the importance of the budgetary process and honouring it within the parliamentary process.

Mr. Speaker, we saw today the limits to freedom of information, a fundamental freedom of information, fundamental to strong democracy, to strong faith and trust that people can have in their elected officials. And we saw a government that refuses to allow that proper information to be ensconced under the terms of the freedom of information legislation, so it's not subject to the 30-second whim to do it or don't do it that we saw today by the Premier and the Treasurer.

Good government isn't arrogant government. We're seeing arrogance. Good government doesn't get angry in the way that the Premier got angry today at my constituents and at the Catholic church in his riding. Good government elevates people. It talks about people first. It talks about the richness of their lives and what can be done by neighbours through their government, by communities through our government to support people and strengthen them in our society. Good government has a vision that goes beyond the simplistic, minimalist view that all strong economies therefore create strong societies. It does not follow, Mr. Speaker, and good government does not put people down. It doesn't call them hypocrites. It doesn't say we support some special interest groups but not others. It doesn't reduce those mechanisms that support tolerance, acceptance, and understanding in a society. Good government elevates people.

What I don't see in this throne speech is the elevation of

anything very much but fiscal matters, and I believe very strongly that in this province and in this Legislative Assembly we are eminently capable of doing both, of having a remarkably strong economy and of building a remarkably strong society that can be absolutely the envy of people around the world, not because of how much money we make but because of how we treat our neighbours, because of how we develop and respect peoples' cultures, because of how we develop and respect peoples' differences, because of how we take care of our children to make sure they have educations that will make them productive and fulfilled citizens, and because we take care of people and we assist people who are less fortunate, Mr. Speaker, far less fortunate than every single Member of this Legislative Assembly.

What we needed at this time, a remarkable time of opportunity for government to provide visionary leadership based on the achievement of some form of fiscal stability, was a throne speech, a visionary throne speech, that took this government and the people of this province the next step to something far greater and something far bigger and something that would pursue a far broader and more elevated ideal. We didn't get it, Mr. Speaker. We got more money first, people second. If ever I've been disappointed in a throne speech, after 16 of them, this is the one, and I will be voting against the motion.

9:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

I might add, hon. Government House Leader, remarkable. So far tonight we've had three hon. members speak on the motion, a lot more members participate. As the rules provide for 10 days of speaking, the chair will really look forward to hearing from additional members in real speeches.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I would just like to begin by saying that I don't know where the Member for Edmonton-McClung really has been living the past few years, but none of his remarks have reflected the province that we have today in this country. We have the highest standard of living in the world. The sky is not falling in in this province, and I know that every member in this House should be very proud of the country that we live in. I do say with all due respect to the Member for Edmonton-McClung that if and when he does retire from politics, when he does go back into the real world, he's going to have to get his head out of the sand. I believe that each member should be proud, and each member has had some input into what kind of government we have here today.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure as the representative from the Wainwright constituency to respond to the throne speech. I believe this speech was extremely encouraging for the great people in the Wainwright constituency. One of the greatest fears they have is that this government will fall back into the old spending ways that got our province into debt in the past. It has been a hard and difficult time making the changes and making the sacrifices needed to get out of our debt, and no one wants to go back through that pain again.

This speech gives the confidence that government priorities and directions will meet their needs while still maintaining our commitment to keeping the government debt free and financially healthy. They realize that the growth, the prosperity, and the benefits that we have today have resulted from a financially healthy province. They know that Alberta has had the largest growth in these past years, the strongest economy in Canada, and has the best and friendliest investment environment in the country. We in the Wainwright constituency want policies that preserve

that standing, and we know what that standing can do for us.

The speech reflected a proper and commonsense approach to the province's priorities in health care, in education, in social services and infrastructure. Maintaining that balance between paying down our debt and meeting the needs of the tremendous growth that we have in this province is more important now than ever before. We must provide the necessary services, whether it be health care, education, or people services, that give Albertans the high quality of life that we all enjoy. We must do it as prudently and as effectively as possible and stay within our budget, and I am confident that with this balanced approach my children and grandchildren will be left with a province that they will be proud to call home.

Mr. Speaker, health care has been a continuing concern for both myself and my constituents. We are happy to know that this government remains committed to a high-quality health care system in Alberta, and particularly I am pleased to see a strong focus on promoting preventative measures for helping Albertans stay healthy throughout their lifetime. Attracting doctors to rural Alberta in the past has been a difficult problem. However, we are seeing the rural physician action plan beginning to work, and hopefully our problems will soon be behind us.

The 4.1 percent increased funding in health care across the province was most welcome. However, I do believe that the formula that is used to distribute the dollars does not reflect the true dynamics of region 7. They received 1 percent in operation dollars, which does not reflect the 2 and a quarter percent increase in collective agreements, let alone the population growth, and I look forward to further discussion to resolve this issue with the minister.

A very positive initiative in the health care field is the growth in a new form of assisted living facilities. There are some hospital foundations that are in the planning process, and construction will soon begin. This is a facility that is connected to the hospital. It is a condominium style with kitchen facilities and everything with it and a main recreation area, with the option of receiving meals from the hospital. They also have the comfort and the security of having access to the hospital and the doctors without any travel. There is the possibility of sharing other services with the hospitals. Couples or individuals that wish to move out of their own home can purchase or lease a unit and have care provided for by the foundation. Then, if needed, home care can be available to them, and then if further care is needed, they are right beside the hospital for doctoral care. There's much demand for this type of housing in our respective areas. The public are pleased to purchase their new homes, and when it does come time to sell out, the foundation will purchase them and resell them to new buyers. They feel that this will take a lot of pressure off our health care system, all the way from the lodges to the long-term care beds, and we certainly are looking forward to that development in our region.

Mr. Speaker, we have been continually making good progress in providing quality health care in the Wainwright constituency since the restructuring has taken place. Even though we still have minor issues to work out, the Alberta health care system is second to none. If you were going to be sick, I don't know where you would go to get better care.

Education is another issue of great concern to our Wainwright constituents and I am sure to all Albertans. I was pleased to hear in the throne speech of the \$380 million committed to primary education in the next three years. They support the statement made by the Premier that the children should come first. As there

are always some delicate issues regarding how and where and who delivers education, it is important that the government has recognized that the parents have a choice regarding where they choose to educate their children, whether it be in a public, a private, or a charter school. It is also equally important that there are strong support systems for children with disabilities, special needs, or who have difficulty reading. We have a wonderful school system that produces very top-notch products, and we are proud of our youth and their accomplishments in our Wainwright constituency.

I am also very pleased to see the \$90 million in the secondary education system, which is needed to keep up with the growth. Education and knowledge is Alberta's pillar that allows us to be a strong competitive force in the global market. The constituents of Wainwright know they must be armed with the proper information, the latest technology, and the knowledge of how to best use it. They then welcome the challenge of world competition. Another very positive and exciting initiative that is being developed and is now in operation is our Provost Community Learning Centre.

9:30

Our Eastpark Educational Opportunities Council has done a great job in the development of distance education technologies and the adoption of these technologies to the required programming. The council bought the old government liquor store. They leased the courthouse, which was being shut down. They renovated both of these buildings. They installed all the necessary lines and equipment for teleconferencing and videoconferencing. Linking with the Internet, postsecondary institutions, schools, and the business community have established the potential to provide local learning opportunities that range from business skills and personal wellness to university degree credit programs.

Mr. Speaker, I had during the last election an opportunity to use the teleconferencing system out in that area. I refused to do that at that particular time because I didn't feel it was quite the proper way to campaign. However, it is a wonderful system. I've seen it work from different areas back to their home base. They have something very, very exciting for rural Alberta. It's just the beginning of the change in how we deliver education. They have partnered with our public and Catholic schools for daytime use. They provide to industry and the community, and it's driven by individuals or by the community or by industry. They are busy every day, and they are busy every evening. There's a lot of competition for time now. They can offer these education and training programs for about a quarter of the price you would get them for if you went somewhere else.

One of the ongoing concerns that has been raised by our constituency, of course, is the pressures on our infrastructure and particularly on our roads. With the strong economic growth that we have been experiencing both in my constituency and across the province, roads are being used far more frequently by drivers. We have bigger and faster trucks, and many of our roads are just not built to hold these huge loads. The energy industry had record development in our area this past year, with drilling equipment, huge service trucks. We have in the town of Provost, with 2,500 people, three different service providers, and they each have roughly 60 big trucks that serve that area. Those trucks leave every morning and come back every night, and they are heavily loaded, many of them overweight, in their travels.

Certainly with our agriculture changes as well and all of the value-added, the elevators that are disappearing, the branch lines that are shutting down, our hog operations that are popping up

everywhere in the province, the feedlots, the poultry industry – we met with the poultry industry two evenings ago, and they're very excited about their expansions and the use they'll be making of our grains that are produced in this country – all of this has really put the pressure on our roads, and I applaud our government for addressing this problem. I know that they are going to put a lot more dollars into our roads, and I think it's something we're going to have to monitor very carefully and try and keep up with the growth in that area so that we can move together as we get into the next century.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that the throne speech, in my mind, sets the stage for a wonderful new beginning and into 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. The Premier and the government are fond of house-building metaphors. If you turn to the last page of the throne speech, they return to that metaphor once again. They indicate, “and as the Premier has declared, children will come first in the house we call Alberta.”

That metaphor has reminded me of a poem by Longfellow, a poem called *The Builders*. If I can remember all of it, I'd like to refresh your memories about what Longfellow said about builders. He said:

All are architects of Fate,
 Working in these walls of Time;
 Some with massive deeds and great,
 Some with ornaments of rhyme.
 Nothing useless is, or low;
 Each thing in its place is best;
 And what seems but idle show
 Strengthens and supports the rest.
 For the structure that we raise,
 Time is with materials filled;
 Our todays and yesterdays
 Are the blocks with which we build.
 Truly shape and fashion these;
 Leave no yawning gaps between;
 Think not, because no man sees,
 Such things will remain unseen.
 In the elder days of Art,
 Builders wrought with greatest care
 Each minute and unseen part;
 For the gods see every where.
 Let us do our work as well,
 both the unseen and the seen;
 Make the house where gods may dwell
 Beautiful, entire, and clean.
 Else our lives are incomplete,
 Standing in these walls of Time,
 Broken stairways, where the feet
 Stumble, as they seek to climb.
 Build today, then, strong and sure,
 With a firm and ample base;
 And ascending and secure
 Shall tomorrow find its place.
 Thus alone can we attain
 To those turrets, where the eye
 Sees the world as one vast plain,
 And one boundless reach of sky.

It was Longfellow's stanza that referred to urging us to do our

work well, and I thought of Longfellow and that urging as I looked at the throne speech and looked at the proposals in the throne speech that would have us work on those rooms in this house called Alberta that are devoted to education. I looked back at where we have come from in building that house, starting in the early days of this province. A common public school providing shared experiences for students through excellent programs, supported by tax dollars, and open to all and under the direct control of citizens has long been the ideal sought by Albertans.

That ideal had historical roots in Europe and was advanced by Horace Mann in the United States. Mann defined it rather well. He said that he sought a common school, not a school for the common people but a school common to all people that “would be open to all, provided by the state and the local community as the birthright of every child.” In Alberta we have made great progress over the years toward that goal. Barring the Great Depression and two world wars, that progress has been steady. We sought better-educated teachers. We understood that excellent programs depended on teachers who not only knew the content they were to pass on or help youngsters explore but who knew children and knew how to instruct children and students. If you think back just 30 short years in this province, most elementary teachers, the majority, had but one year of teacher education. Today, in 1998, every elementary teacher in this province has at least one university degree. That's great progress. If you had said to someone 30 years ago that every teacher should have a university degree, you would have been rejected out of hand. We recognized then and we recognize now that excellent teachers are basic to quality programs.

But there was a lot more. Counsellors, speech therapists, librarians, teacher aides, nurses, specialized administrators: all of those things became part of the school system as we made progress. We reduced class sizes. We expanded programming. Common sense – just common sense; we didn't need piles of research – told us that the number of children in classrooms made a difference in the amount of time a teacher could spend with each child. Programs were included to include art, to include music. If you go back through school board debates in this province, each and every one of those programs when they were added were subjected to great debate, but progress was made and they were included.

9:40

Second languages and just fairly recently heritage languages have now been a recognized and accepted part of our school programs. Students from the severely handicapped and the gifted were beginning to get the kinds of programs they needed. We created programs to meet individual needs. School districts responded to parent needs with alternative schools for the talented and those with special interests. School facilities became more specialized. We added gymnasiums, we added shops, we added laboratories, we added music rooms, and even the physical size of the classrooms, that many of you and I attended, that were once 1,000 square feet were reduced in size to 750 square feet to reflect the smaller class sizes and our search for being able to provide individual programs for children.

Now, most of us expected that that progress would continue. The future was to be one where student achievement across the full spectrum of intellectual tasks would be improved, fewer students would drop out of high school, a larger percentage of high school graduates would move to higher education programs, the links between school and the workplace would be stronger. Most importantly, we started to focus on very young children.

We expected that younger children three and four years of age and at risk would be identified and that we would begin to be able to provide programs at least for those at risk that would help them develop the kind of language skills, that would help them develop the kind of social skills that would allow them a level playing field as they entered kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-year programs. We thought the current programs would have to be refined. We expected they would be refined and strengthened and that individual children would more and more receive the kind of individual attention they required and deserved. We expected that technology would become an increasing part of classroom life, that not just computers but projectors, CDs, a full range of technology would be available to students as they sought to learn.

Most of us thought that there would be a push to better educate teachers, that we'd be looking at some provisions for renewing certificates, some provision for encouraging teachers to return to studies and to keep current, some encouragement for teachers to specialize, to go back and make sure that the content they were working with was current. Yes, we even thought that we might better pay our teachers.

In 1993, of course, that progress came to a stop. There was a growing cry across the country from citizens for governments to reduce spending and to work to reduce the debt. In Alberta those cries were keenly heard by citizens, where . . . [interjections] If I may, Mr. Speaker. Those voices in Alberta were heard keenly, and the government was returned to power on the promise of massive cuts. Of course, when they were returned to power, those cuts could only be done in large budget areas like education, health, and social services. The cuts for education were devastating. If you look at the throne speech today and go back to Longfellow and ask what kinds of builders, what kinds of architects are the people who put together this throne speech, I think we would have to be disappointed.

I heard one of the previous speakers applaud the \$380 million that has been announced for K to 12 education. It's interesting, because those moneys which have been announced at least five times by various members of the government across the province, those numbers, that money will bring us back to the 1993 classroom allocations that we had.

The provisions in the throne speech for a reading initiative have to be applauded. They're needed. They may not be imaginative when they're compared to efforts elsewhere – I think of one of the American states where the governor has encouraged every citizen in the state to take the opportunity to spend some time each week in a class in a school reading to youngsters – but the reading initiative should be applauded.

Also, the moves in technology and the funding of technology have to be applauded. The matching grants were a burden that fell very heavily on many schools and parent groups across the province. The question is: when you get rid of the matching grants, is the amount of money that is available for technology across the province going to be dramatically reduced?

So those two areas, reading and technology, are areas that I

think deserve applause and support. There are other areas of course. The basic funding is inadequate. It still leaves boards in that untenable position of too few dollars with too many obligations. There is just not enough money to go around. I read with interest the press release today from the Calgary parent council and their reaction to the government's spending proposals. I think the phrase that stuck out in their press release was that it was more smoke and mirrors than it was proposals that were going to make a difference in the classroom.

Children with special needs have been allowed to linger, languish in classrooms without the kind of help that they've needed for years now. Whether the kind of money that's proposed is going to alleviate that, many people have serious doubts. The provision of English as a Second Language to Canadian children – and this will particularly affect native and Métis children – is a good provision and something they've been asking for for a long time. Again, I'm pleased to see that in this report.

9:50

I think what is disappointing is that if you take all the proposals that were put forward in the education growth summit and you match them with the proposals in this throne speech, the difference is astounding. It's as if the government and the people of the province who attended those education growth summits were working on two different projects. There's very little that matches, and I think that's a tragedy.

Like our leader, I believe this was an opportunity for the government to exercise some imagination to move this province forward, and I believe it's been an opportunity lost.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: Perhaps, hon. Government House Leader, we might have a motion to adjourn the debate first.

MR. HAVELOCK: Okay; I'll throw that in. Mr. Speaker, I move the debate do now be adjourned.

THE SPEAKER: All members in favour of the motion to adjourn the debate?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 9:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]