

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, January 29, 1998

1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/01/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people.

We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to give notice of my motion of privilege against the Premier. As is required by the Standing Orders, I sent you in writing official notice earlier today. My point of privilege refers to comments of the Premier in question period yesterday and shortly after question period outside the House in which he cast aspersions upon the character of constituents, community groups in my constituency, a certain religious faith.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, the purpose at this point is to give notice, and we'll deal with the motion later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will rise after question period today and seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to consider the following motion.

Be it resolved that this Legislative Assembly congratulate the nearly 100,000 Muslims in Alberta on the completion of Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Yesterday was the end of Ramadan; today is Eid, the day of celebration. We would like to wish Eid Mobarik to everyone celebrating this joyous occasion.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 in recognition of the fine Canadian athletes who are departing today for the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan: the urgency of this request is that these amazing athletes are departing today, and it is imperative that they have the support and best wishes from all members of the Assembly. By allowing the Assembly to speak to this issue today, we can give our athletes our heartfelt best wishes to take with them over to Nagano and support them in their competitions. I ask all members of the Assembly to please support me in my request for unanimous consent to deal with this urgent matter.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 2

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998.

[Leave granted; Bill 2 read a first time]

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

Bill 5

Canadian Airlines Corporation Amendment Act, 1998

MS GRAHAM: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Canadian Airlines Corporation Amendment Act, 1998.

The intent of this bill is to remove the 10 percent ownership cap presently existing, which should encourage further equity ownership.

[Leave granted; Bill 5 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I request that Bill 5 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 7

Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, being the Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998.

This bill proposes to consolidate regulations of both urban and rural gas utilities under Transportation and Utilities and to privatize Gas Alberta.

[Leave granted; Bill 7 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 7 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 8

Agriculture Statutes (Penalties) Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development I request leave to introduce Bill 8, being the Agriculture Statutes (Penalties) Amendment Act, 1998.

The purpose of this bill is to establish new penalty levels for offences already identified in 10 pieces of agricultural legislation.

[Leave granted; Bill 8 read a first time]

Bill 9

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce

Bill 9, being the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 1998.

The purpose of this bill is to clearly provide for the continuation of plans by means of re-enacting the plans.

[Leave granted; Bill 9 read a first time]

Bill 10
Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act, 1998

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 10, being the Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act, 1998.

The bill proposes to accommodate the appointment of federal appointees to the boards of the airport authorities and facilitates the securing of long-term financing from the private sector.

[Leave granted; Bill 10 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 11
**Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and
Wildlife Foundation Amendment Act, 1998**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 11, being the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Amendment Act, 1998.

The purpose of the bill is to eliminate the requirement that a Member of the Legislative Assembly and a government employee be included in the membership of the board of the foundation.

[Leave granted; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:40

Bill 203
**Municipal Government (Environmentally
Significant Areas) Amendment Act, 1998**

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 203, being the Municipal Government (Environmentally Significant Areas) Amendment Act, 1998.

[Leave granted; Bill 203 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Bill 204
Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 1998

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 1998.

[Leave granted; Bill 204 read a first time]

Bill 205
Alberta Bill of Responsibilities

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 205, being Alberta Bill of Responsibilities.

[Leave granted; Bill 205 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Bill 206
**Human Tissue Donation Procedures
Statutes Amendment Act, 1998**

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek I am pleased to table Bill 206, Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 1998.

Bill 206 establishes the mechanisms and atmosphere which may increase the total number of organ donors in Alberta and subsequently reduce the number of recipients on waiting lists for organ donation.

[Leave granted; Bill 206 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Bill 207
Whistleblower Protection Act

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to beg leave to introduce my Bill 207, the Whistleblower Protection Act.

This bill will enshrine protection for whistle-blowers in provincial legislation and prevent action being taken against government employees who alert authorities to dangerous or illegal activities occurring in government.

[Leave granted; Bill 207 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Bill 208
Government Accountability Amendment Act, 1998

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave this afternoon to introduce Bill 208, being the Government Accountability Amendment Act, 1998.

The purpose of this bill is to enhance the Government Accountability Act.

[Leave granted; Bill 208 read a first time]

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

Bill 209
Access Enforcement Act

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 209, the Access Enforcement Act.

This act sets up an access enforcement co-ordinator to enforce access orders the way that maintenance enforcement enforces maintenance orders.

[Leave granted; Bill 209 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Bill 210
Protection of Personal Information
in the Private Sector Act

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member from Calgary-Buffalo it is my pleasure to introduce Bill 210, the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector Act.

This bill, once it becomes law, will control the manner in which a private body may collect personal information from individuals and will control the use that a private body may make of that information.

[Leave granted; Bill 210 read a first time]

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

Bill 211
Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 1998

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce Bill 211, the Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, or what I call the returning democracy to Alberta act.

This bill would guarantee two full sittings of the Legislature in each and every calendar year whether the Premier liked it or not.

[Leave granted; Bill 211 read a first time]

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

Bill 212
Amusements Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to request leave to introduce Bill 212, being the Amusements Amendment Act, 1998.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to stop access by minors, which are persons under the age of 18, to adult videos containing sexually explicit material.

[Leave granted; Bill 212 read a first time]

Bill 213
School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. GORDON: I request leave to introduce Bill 213, being the School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998.

The intent of this bill is to provide a basic level of computer literacy for Alberta's students and teachers through specifically prescribed, standardized courses of study in computer technology.

[Leave granted; Bill 213 read a first time]

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

Bill 214
Post-Secondary Education Statutes
Amendment Act, 1998

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 214, the Post-Secondary Education Statutes Amendment Act, 1998, a bill that would cap tuitions at 20 percent.

[Leave granted; Bill 214 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Bill 215
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 215, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 215 amends the Highway Traffic Act to allow photographs taken by an unmanned, red light enforcement device to stand alone as evidence in a court of law.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 215 read a first time]
1:50

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. SAPERS: Here it comes.

MR. KLEIN: There's lots of it too, Mr. Speaker. Believe me. We don't do things in a small way around here.

I would like to table four copies of grants allocated by constituency under community facility enhancement programs 1, 2, and 3. These programs have distributed some \$250 million since 1988 to assist with the construction, renovation, or redevelopment of community public-use facilities, including many facilities that were constructed for the benefit of children.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table today, as is our practice, the report of selected payments to members and former members of the Legislative Assembly. These expense accounts of MLAs include everything from indemnities and salaries to fees they received to benefits, including life insurance. These elements also cover the kilometre reimbursement for vehicles, vehicle rentals, airfare, accommodation, meals, taxis, parking: any of those particular items are all included here. This will, of course, be followed by even more itemized individual MLA accounts.

It's fascinating reading, Mr. Speaker, especially the accounts of tens of thousands of dollars claimed for personal vehicle use and hotel accommodation by Liberals living in Edmonton. It's fascinating reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of children four copies of the international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights, of which Canada is a proud signatory. Article 7 ensures a minimum wage and working conditions.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of the government agenda for opportunity back-grounder, Education Re-Investment to 2000/2001.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's with some sadness that I make this introduction today. I would like to introduce someone who really needs no introduction because he has been sitting in the members' gallery for nearly nine years now. He's been with me since I was first elected mayor of the city of Calgary some 17

years ago. I would like to introduce a person really who has never been formally introduced in the Legislature: my executive director, Rod Love. He is here with his family: his wife, Charlene; his son, James; and his daughter, Katie. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Willow Park school in Leduc along with teachers Mr. Howard, Mrs. Sandy, and Mrs. Burrell and helpers and parents Mrs. Jobs, Mrs. Glesman, Mrs. Polnik, and Mrs. Neiman. Please extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 26 to 29 of this year Alberta will be hosting the international conference on human rights in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. The conference is to be held in Edmonton and is supported by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you in the gallery today from Montreal the chief executive officer of the foundation, Ruth Selwyn. With Ruth are three local organizers of the conference: Professor Gerald Gall, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta; Robison Koilpillai, commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission; and Professor Patrick Bendin, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I introduce to you and to members of the Assembly some parents and a son in the member's gallery who have come up from the Lethbridge area and the riding of Little Bow. Lloyd, Connie, and Ryan Mercer are active farmers and strong community supporters down there, and they're also friends of our Minister of Transportation and Utilities. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

Community Facility Enhancement Program

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, community groups and churches in this province are forced to provide services and programs because the government has downloaded so much on them through their unplanned cuts. The only source of funds this government gives them is gambling revenue, and when they take it to pick up the pieces that the government's policies have created, the Premier calls them hypocrites. When will the Premier realize that he and his government have created not only gambling addicts in Alberta but also a social service and community infrastructure that is dependent upon their addiction?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is really reaching far and long. The community facility enhancement program has been in effect since 1988. As you saw through the tabling just a few short moments ago, some \$250

million has gone into community facility programs. These are the kinds of things that were never funded by the government in the first place. They were never part of the government funding programs out of general revenues. These were community halls; these were playgrounds. These were the kinds of things that are nice to have in communities, that enhance the quality of life in communities. It has nothing to do with restructuring government, with getting our finances in control.

As I pointed out, this is a program that has been in place since 1988. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I haven't heard any complaints from any of the community organizations that have received funding through community facility enhancement programs 1, 2, and 3. They have been very, very grateful for this particular program.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, doesn't the Premier understand that between 1988 and 1993 – he's right; community groups received CFEP funding, but there were no VLTs required to support it. So why do they have to have them now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the introduction of VLTs no doubt enhanced the amount of money that we were able to reallocate back into the communities. But it goes to the point that I made yesterday, and the point is this. Is the leader of the Liberal opposition willing to go into his constituency and have a good chat with the people who received community facility enhancement program funding – applied of their own free will for this money – and tell them: "Really, this is bad money; it's gambling money. You ought not to have taken it"? Will he do that? Will he do it?

2:00

MR. MITCHELL: Since the Premier, Mr. Speaker, is calling religious groups and others who apply for gaming and lottery revenues hypocrites, although that's the only money that is available to them, what label does he put on his own government when it balances the budget on the backs of the poor, the desperate, and the addicted?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I never called anyone a hypocrite. I said that there is a question of hypocrisy. [interjections] Well, check the media tapes on this. I said: there is a question of hypocrisy. The question of hypocrisy refers to the leader of the Liberal opposition. I know that it is unparliamentary to call the hon. leader a hypocrite. I'm not. But I can say that there is a question here of hypocrisy, because he talks about harm to children. He talks about harm to children, and I quote from the *Hansard* of yesterday. He said, "Government shackled our communities, many of our families, and many of our children with the burden of video slot machines."

Mr. Speaker, the only point I was trying to make is that in the member's own constituency under community facility enhancement program number 3 there was something like \$445,621 allocated for community enhancement, including playgrounds for children. Playgrounds for children. Now, is this what he's talking about when he's talking about hurting children? Building playgrounds for children: is this what he's talking about? Maybe he would like to provide that answer.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: If they had a choice, they wouldn't take gambling revenues, Mr. Speaker. Only in Alberta does a Premier

use his bully pulpit to attack people and groups who are unable to defend themselves. The Premier's attack on community groups and on people of a religious faith reeks of a cowardice seen only when moral courage is absent. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Inflammatory Language

THE SPEAKER: Wow, and it's only Thursday. Day two.

Look. I don't think that hon. members bring any honour to themselves in this Assembly whatsoever with the usage of certain words. Now, there are a couple of points of order that have been raised, and normally we would wait until the end of the question period to deal with them. However, you know, the rules that we use in terms of expressions are clearly identified, and sometimes there is a contradiction in terms of the rules. There is one section of *Beauchesne* which says you can call someone a hypocrite, and there's another section of *Beauchesne* which says you cannot call someone a hypocrite. But words like "hypocrite" and "bullying" and "coward" do not bring any honour to anybody in this Assembly.

I want to encourage all members to understand that this is a place of great honour to come to. This is a great place for debate. Members can freely express their opinions both ways, and members might want to clearly listen to the expressions of those members both ways.

So, please, there are a lot of people in Alberta. Three million. Maybe not many really watch what we do, but it is a great honour to be here.

Second question, Leader of the Official Opposition, of your second set.

VLT Plebiscites

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in communities across Alberta including the Premier's hometown of Calgary are asking that a provincewide plebiscite be held. Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier just sidestep the issue of whether or not he wants to make the decision and hold a provincewide plebiscite so that Albertans can make the decision for him?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I go back to the report of the Lotteries Review Committee. I go back to the initial meeting that resulted in the public consultation taking place. That was the meeting I had in Bonnyville with the mayors and reeves of a number of municipalities who quite clearly said first of all that they wanted a greater share of revenues from lotteries. That has been done with the creation of community lottery boards and an additional \$50 million. Secondly, they said that they wanted to make the decision. They wanted to make the decision.

As a result of some 22 public meetings – and again the leader of the Liberal opposition said there was no public consultation. There were 22 public meetings in 14 locations across the province. Over 2,200 Albertans attended these meetings. The committee heard a total of 462 oral presentations and received over 8,500 written responses in the form of letters, discussion papers, and petitions. After all was said and done relative to the Gordon report, the recommendation, based on community consultation and the wishes of community leaders, was brought forth that the matter of VLTs be a matter of community, that the communities be allowed to deal with these matters on the basis of individual community standards.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, why won't the Premier simply

admit that he has dumped the plebiscite issue on underfunded communities who can only do it in a piecemeal way so that he can delay and obstruct and undermine the ability of Albertans to make a clear-cut decision on this issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, holding a plebiscite, particularly in conjunction with a municipal election, ought not to be a huge problem. I know that when I was a municipal legislator, we had plebiscites on a number of issues.

MRS. BLACK: Fluoridation.

MR. KLEIN: Fluoridation is one that came back year after year after year.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back in history, local municipalities used to have plebiscites on liquor, on mixed drinking in their own municipalities. There were situations in this province where in the city of Calgary, for instance, men and women could not drink together. Therefore, they went to the communities of Forest Lawn or the communities of Bowness or to the town of Airdrie, where they voted on a town-by-town or city-by-city basis. All the municipal leaders are saying to us: we want to be able to determine on the basis of community standards whether VLTs should stay in or go out.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. leader; I count that you've already had three questions.

Third official opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Day Care Subsidies

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dozens of individuals and organizations have written letters to the Minister of Family and Social Services outlining their concerns in relation to the elimination of the day care operating allowance. The throne speech this week, while emphasizing that "children will come first in the house we call Alberta," offers no real commitment or funding to address the fundamental service of children and families. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: how do you respond to the dozens of individuals and organizations who say that your cuts will lead to more families opting for private, unregulated, and substandard child care?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the way I respond is with the facts. This year we are taking \$10 million from the operating allowance and putting it into the child care subsidy program. So to put that in perspective, we are taking \$10 million out of the operating allowance which pays for people that are earning \$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000 for day care, and we're putting it into the hands of the lower class, of the lower income earning people. These are the same people that yesterday were talking and complaining about child poverty and us not doing enough about it.

2:10

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, could the minister perhaps share with this Assembly what measures and research he has done of the "lower class" – his words – to determine the impact the elimination of the operating allowance will have on the operators and the recipients of that service?

DR. OBERG: I find it quite repulsive when you talk about "lower class." [interjections] I made a slip of the tongue. I made a slip

of the tongue. What I was referring to was lower income.

I would love to answer the question. As a matter of fact, in a recent article in the *Edmonton Journal* that the hon. member was quoted in, there were three day cares mentioned. Mr. Speaker, when these changes are taken into full effect, which is not until August of 1999, Edmonton Northwest Day Care will actually receive \$17 more per child. The current fees are \$480. The South Edmonton Child Care Centre, which was another one there, does see – I confess – a \$9 loss per child. The current fees are \$495, which is higher than the \$480. The Canada Place Child Care Centre, which has 681 nonsubsidized children – these are children that come from parents of families that earn over \$60,000 a year. So anyone in this Assembly – anyone in this Assembly – could qualify for the child care subsidy. The expected change in funding in August of 1999 is \$72 per child. The current fees are \$554.

MRS. SLOAN: Wouldn't the minister agree that the real objective of these reforms, singular and inclusive, is just to put women back where he thinks they belong?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I find that type of attitude absolutely, inadvertently repulsive. I absolutely find it repulsive that this person would say that. I will not dignify that comment with an answer.

Private Hospitals

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health's announcement yesterday about private health facilities is, in my opinion, a wolf in a sheep's clothing. What this announcement does is set up an approval process for private, for-profit hospitals without any prior public consultation. So it appears that what the HRG group wanted to accomplish from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in December but failed is now being facilitated by the Minister of Health in the bill that he plans to push through the Assembly in February. I'd like to know how the Minister of Health can justify pushing through legislation like this without having conducted the wide range of hearings, the wide range of consultations recommended by the College of Physicians and Surgeons at that December 5 meeting, where they even cited that pressure because of closure of hospital beds in the public system was going to enhance the desire for a private, for-profit hospital system.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the hon. leader's question in that during previous question periods at previous sessions I felt she was very anxious to make sure there would be such additional legislation and controls in place, despite the fact that in answer to a number of questions at that time, I indicated that the government fully supports and desires to follow the principles of the Canada Health Act and that we do not want to do anything that would jeopardize or diminish the effectiveness of our public health care system. This legislation is designed to make clear and to provide the clear and complete legislative authority to manage any issue that might come up in that respect. Therefore, I would think that this would be acceptable to the hon. member.

MS BARRETT: Well, if the minister was serious about this, Mr. Speaker, he'd introduce the legislation specifically prohibiting private, for-profit hospitals. He would, if he was serious.

Given that HRG group says, anyway, that it's invested up to

\$10 million in its private hospital in Calgary, will the minister let the Assembly and the people of Alberta know if he or any of his officials have met with any HRG officials or their representatives since that December 5, 1997, meeting with the College of Physicians and Surgeons?

MR. JONSON: I have not met, Mr. Speaker. I would check to see if there's been any discussion back and forth since then, but I am not aware of that.

MS BARRETT: Fine. I'll wait for the answer.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain something I just don't understand about this new policy and this legislation? Under current legislation in-patient procedures are only allowed to take place in public hospitals under the direct control of regional health authorities, but under his new proposal it would just be the minister's. Can he explain why it would be the minister's decision and not the RHA's?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. member was to check the legislation, she would find that the matter of approving hospitals or using the term "hospital" is something under the minister's jurisdiction. I think, however, that although our policy position and our actions have been very consistent in terms of following the Canada Health Act, supporting the public health care system, doing nothing to be detrimental to the public health care system with respect to this issue, we want to make sure in the legislation that we have a very clear set of clauses with respect to this particular issue. I would think the hon. member would be very anxious to actually wait a very short period of time, I think, and we will debate the bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Farm Vehicle Safety

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am continually receiving calls and concerns with respect to the government implementing a regulation requiring that all farm vehicles over 24,000 kilograms in gross weight will require commercial plates. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Is this minister or his department planning to implement such regulations?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. This is part of the regulatory review process that we conduct periodically on every regulation that we have in government, anywhere from three to five years depending on the regulation. The regulation that's being reviewed is the whole aspect of truck safety on our highways.

In this particular case we've asked for comments because of the review process for trucks, as the member has correctly pointed out, over 24,000 kilograms. This is strictly a safety issue. It has nothing to do with commercial plating. It has nothing to do with farm fuel rebate. It is strictly: should farm trucks be subject to the annual inspection which commercial trucks are subject to? Nothing more, nothing less.

We've asked for input from the agricultural communities. We've contacted all of the municipalities in the province for their input, and at this stage we're very interested in hearing from the agricultural community as to what they would like to see as far as safety with farm trucks over 24,000 kilograms.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I've had positive comments with respect to the safety regulations from the constituents that I have spoken with. Can the minister advise if he or his department are receiving many responses from Albertans?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have. We've had fairly good input from the agricultural community. Something like 85 written letters to date, over 500 phone calls, as a matter of fact, have responded on this particular issue. Unfortunately, part of the issue was clouded in that there seemed to be a representation that made it appear that the whole issue of commercial plating was up for discussion here. That was never the case. This was strictly a safety issue on farm trucks, and nothing more is being addressed at this time.

2:20

MR. SEVERTSON: My final supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is there still time for my constituents and all Albertans to respond to this review?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, there is, but time is running out because this is a process that the regulatory review committee wanted to deal with last fall. That date has been extended to February 2 of this year, so there is time. The clock is ticking, and we'd certainly ask that anyone that may have any ideas or views on this issue consult with us immediately.

Our next step, after we have received all of the input from the various agricultural communities, will be to go back to these same agricultural organizations and indicate what it is that we have heard. It's our plan to further consult with the agricultural community before any final decision is made on this issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Provincial Tax Regime

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 8, 1997, the Premier promised Albertans that he would pass legislation to prevent increases in personal income taxes unless a referendum is held. On November 20, at the Toronto Board of Trade last year, the Premier went further and said: we will not raise taxes. And neither would we. I'm tabling a copy of a November 1997 Standard and Poor's report, which states that the Alberta government "has not ruled out enacting revenue measures should they prove necessary to meet debt-reduction goals." I'd like the Treasurer, in the Premier's absence, to tell us why the Premier is telling Main Street Albertans no tax increases while the Treasurer is telling Wall Street financiers that he won't rule out possible tax hikes?

MR. DAY: You know, this is really getting ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. It's been very clear that the Premier, among Premiers in this country, has been a leader in terms of saying: taxes only go one way in this province, and that's down. We happen to agree one hundred percent with that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That being the case, perhaps you could clarify for us and define what you mean by revenue measures, and why it is that you won't prevent the possibility of tax hikes?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I won't pretend to know why Standard

and Poor's writes a particular comment, which is not a comment I ever gave. But I'll tell you what. I sure do like it when they write that we've got the best ratings in the whole nation.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Treasurer, if you're truly committed to taxpayer protection, why does your regulatory plan contemplate no amendments to the Taxpayer Protection Act for three years, and why did you kill the No Tax Increase Act last year?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the record is clear when you check back the four years. First of all, on sales tax, the only party that has raised the possibility of looking at sales tax is the Liberals. That's a matter of record.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go on to say that our Premier and this government have been very, very clear about taxes and taxation. We are involved in an exciting process now. Alberta again has led the negotiations with the federal government in terms of saying, "We want more autonomy; we want more and more of the ability to adjust rates and brackets to meet the particular needs of Albertans." We've also said that we're reviewing our tax regime for small business and corporate tax.

There's a little joke that's circulating around on the street. I'm not referring to the Leader of the Opposition; I'm referring to an actual joke, Mr. Speaker. It asks: what do Liberal popularity rates and taxes in Alberta have in common? They're both going down.

THE SPEAKER: Stick to the day job. The joke bombed.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Career and Technology Studies

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several years ago the government introduced the career and technology studies program, which gives students real skills that help them get jobs after high school. This is an excellent program, and I'm very supportive of it. It allows schools to offer technical courses from welding and automotives to marketing, forestry, and cosmetology. However, the parent council and many concerned parents from the Willow Creek high school in my constituency have serious concerns about the funding provided for that CTS course. These courses have higher costs and require more equipment and more expensive facilities than many academic classes. My question today is to the Minister of Education. What kind of funding does the government provide for schools that offer this special CTS program?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in going throughout the province we can say that there is a fair degree of support for the career and technology studies program, that it does give our students good skills and opportunities to prepare them for life after high school. There are 22 different areas of study and over 600 different course modules. CTS is funded by the provincial government in three ways. First of all, CTS equipment comes out of our capital budget; secondly, the basic instruction grant will cover the instruction and material costs; and third, technology integration grants can also be used.

Mr. Speaker, our CTS equipment guidelines are based on equipment purchases that are actually made by school boards over the last five years. These guidelines are used when a CTS capital project is approved. So, for example, if a commercial food CTS program is approved for a school, we'll provide them with \$200,000 for the equipment. Since 1993 nearly \$20 million has been given to school jurisdictions for those equipment purchases.

MR. COUTTS: To the same minister, my first supplemental: why does the government fund students equally but not equitably and in a way that reflects the cost of the program each student takes?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've considered this notion of funding students based on the programs that they take, but I've come to the conclusion that that program would be too cumbersome to administer. It would also diminish the flexibility of local school boards to recognize their own list of priorities.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, some CTS modules, like mechanics, are going to be much more costly than, for example, running a CTS module on marketing. School boards must decide where to allocate their dollars, and it's the school boards' responsibility. I think that they for the most part exercise their jurisdiction well, but the school boards must act prudently and balance some of the high-cost programs with some of the lower cost programs in providing CTS to their students.

MR. COUTTS: Can the minister assure the parent council of Willow Creek high school that a portion of the government's \$540 million reinvestment in education will be used to help the schools purchase additional CTS equipment?

MR. MAR: I can give that assurance, Mr. Speaker. CTS equipment is part of the capital expenditure of my department, and details of our capital expenditure plans will be available following the provincial budget being delivered.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday an excerpt from the Calgary home and school association's press release, after their analysis of the government's education reinvestment announcement, stated:

When around 65% of the announced funding for education is not what it is projected to be, it sets up a scenario of smoke and mirrors and brings troubling questions to the integrity of this education budget.

My question is to the Minister of Education. Is the Calgary home and school association correct in their calculation that two-thirds of the announced reinvestment is putting money back in that had been previously cut and is not new money?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I've said on a number of occasions in response to this type of criticism that regrettably and sadly there are some people who will never acknowledge that there's enough money to be spent in education. The fact is that if we're spending roughly \$3 billion this year and we're going to be spending \$3.4 billion by the year 2000 for that school year. That's new money. It doesn't matter how you slice it; that's \$380 million we weren't spending before. On top of that, there's \$60 million that's been allocated from the early pay-down of debentures that came from interest savings that is also being directed to the classroom. On top of that, there is an additional \$100 million that the Provincial Treasurer announced with respect to capital for onetime funding in this year. So for those people who level the criticism that there is not new money, that is not correct.

2:30

I can identify the areas that the money is going into, and I can say that throughout the province the Alberta School Boards

Association has endorsed the areas that we're targeting our reinvestment in. We've received letters of thanks and press releases that have come from the Edmonton public school board. It's come from the Calgary Catholic school board. It's come from the Public School Boards' Association. It's come from other stakeholder groups, and people have said: "We're glad that you've recognized that these particular areas like English as a Second Language for Canadian-born students, that the early literacy reading program is an outstanding one, that you've recognized that the cost of special-needs students are higher," and accordingly we've increased the per capita grants by 30 percent in that particular area.

We've recognized that there's going to be growth in this province. We've allocated \$171 million to recognizing that there are going to be additional students in this province. Mr. Speaker, anybody who suggests that this is not new money is not doing their homework very well.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. I'm sure the Calgary home and school association will appreciate that.

My second question. The minister has referred to his allocation, his \$380 million. Is the \$40 million in this announcement for children with mild and moderate disabilities included in the total for basic instruction or in the total for special-needs children, or is it in both? Where would we find that \$40 million?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has asked a reasonably good question here which I'm happy to clarify. He's referring to the document that he tabled earlier today entitled Education Re-Investment to 2000/2001. Included within the \$93 million reinvestment is an increase for the basic instruction grants. Also \$86 million is identified for reinvestment in the area of special needs. The money that he's referring to, the \$75 per student for mild and moderate grants, is included in the \$86 million for special needs. We did want to break down the amount of money that's identified under the \$93 million for basic instruction grant rates, but he is correct that they ought not be double counted but that they should be counted under the one heading of special needs, the \$86 million total.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Then, Mr. Minister, will you put out a correction that the reinvestment is actually \$340 million, not \$380 million?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it would not be correct to say that there's been double counting in terms of the total. The total is correct. The total amount that has been increased, that has been directed toward schools is roughly \$440 million, of which \$380 million is new money, \$60 million of which comes from a reallocation from interest savings. But the totals are correct. Although they are listed in both areas, the total at the bottom of this document is correct.

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

Multiple Sclerosis Treatment

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Health. Multiple sclerosis is a disease that affects an estimated 50,000 Canadians. The disease attacks the myelin covering of the central nervous system causing inflammation and often destroying the myelin in patches. This process interrupts

and distorts the natural flow of nerve impulses, resulting in vision problems, numbness, loss of balance, extreme fatigue, tremors, and even paralysis. I have some constituents that are affected by this, and they have informed me that there are treatments available for MS but they are quite expensive, and some of the better ones that are more effective are not covered by the Blue Cross drug plan. One such drug, Betaseron, costs \$17,000 per year, while Copaxone costs \$13,000 a year. This cost is prohibitive for most people, especially seniors. Can the minister please answer why drugs like Betaseron are not on the government-sponsored Blue Cross drug plan list?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we certainly acknowledge that there are new pharmaceutical products coming on the market, and we do approve a number of products each year. We also, as they become replaceable, drop products from the list that is covered.

In the case of these judgments, Mr. Speaker, I rely very heavily upon the expert committee that is established under Alberta Health, which has representation, of course, from physicians and pharmacists and experts in this overall area. During their last review of this particular drug, the evidence that they had to consider would indicate that the effectiveness, the advisability of supporting and funding this particular pharmaceutical was not supported by the research and evidence they had to date. They relied quite heavily in that assessment on a very respectable, reputable agency, the Canadian Co-ordinating Office for Health Technology Assessment, which is not supportive of this particular drug's effectiveness.

MR. MARZ: Can the minister tell me when Betaseron will be approved in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do make our assessments and decisions about approval or nonapproval of drugs biannually. The next round of approvals will be decided upon, I believe, the end of February, and I expect to be able to notify doctors, medical facilities, and pharmacists of any changes in the supported drug list by the end of March.

MR. MARZ: Could the minister tell me: are there any other provinces currently funding this drug in Canada?

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Ontario provide this drug on a restricted or special authorization format that they have. Manitoba does not support it, but they have entered into a research project just recently on the effectiveness of Betaseron. So there is no province that I am aware of that provides complete coverage under a plan such as Blue Cross, but there is some limited authorization in the provinces that I've mentioned.

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

Child Prostitution

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Assembly amended the Child Welfare Act to say that a child involved in prostitution is a victim of sexual abuse. The government indicated that one of its purposes for this change was to allow police to charge pimps and the johns who prey on the children under the Child Welfare Act. Yesterday we heard that this has never been

done. To the Minister of Justice: if a john or a pimp is convicted of an offence under section 95 of the Child Welfare Act, what would appear on that predator's criminal record?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I simply gave the response that I would have to find out whether or not anyone had been charged under the provisions of the Child Welfare Act. In fact, the hon. member had asked this question sometime last year, and I believe the Minister of Family and Social Services responded that the answer was none. I am able to confirm that.

I'd prefer to have the Minister of Family and Social Services answer that question. However, what I'd like to indicate at this stage, Mr. Speaker, is that the hon. member and the party of which she is a member espouse a philosophy of wishing to help those in need. Bill 1 is intended to do just that, yet she's raised publicly concerns about the constitutionality of the bill. We've examined it and feel it is constitutional. If she really wants to help us address this issue and if her party wants to help us address this issue, then why doesn't she offer some support, as opposed to continuing to criticize Bill 1, which is good legislation and we need it?

2:40

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about amendments to the Child Welfare Act from last session, and I could tell the minister that nothing will appear about the conviction on his criminal record.

Can the minister answer this: if a man is sexually abusing his stepdaughter, would the minister have his prosecutors prosecute that man under the Criminal Code or under the Child Welfare Act?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, that of course depends on the circumstances of the case. I can't answer a hypothetical question of that nature. It's impossible.

MS OLSEN: My third question is to the Minister of Justice again. Can the minister answer this: if a pimp or a john is charged under the Child Welfare Act, would he have his fingerprints taken?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I will have to get back to the hon. member on that issue, but I don't believe that fingerprints would be taken under the Child Welfare Act.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I would love to supplement that answer as the minister responsible for the Child Welfare Act. What we are trying to do under Bill 1, looking at juvenile prostitution, is we are trying to take a tremendous scourge on society and eliminate it.

Mr. Speaker, if I can, I'd just love to quote what the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police said.

On behalf of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, I would like to commend the Government of Alberta for their initiative in addressing the serious and disturbing exploitation of children and young people through juvenile prostitution.

Mr. Speaker, I beg the opposition to talk to the people on the street. Go out and talk to some of these people, and you will get unanimous support for this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mental Health Services

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Health. There have been concerns brought to my attention by citizens that we don't have enough dollars to deliver adequate programs in the mental health system due to the tremendous growth pressures in northern communities. My question to the minister is: what is being done to help in facing these many growth pressures that we're experiencing?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member certainly raises a priority area as far as the government and Alberta Health are concerned. He may have noted that in the recent announcement of funding for health authorities, both provincial and regional, mental health is receiving, I believe it is, a 6.3 percent increase in funding. Within that funding we will be able to continue our emphasis on increasing the amount and the proportion of funding for community services. Across the province we'll be making an effort to certainly provide additional community-based mental health care services, and of course we recognize the pressures that areas such as the hon. member's constituency are under. So very definitely, yes, there is an increased emphasis, within resources, on mental health and community mental health.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Obviously, it's been noted that we don't want to throw money at particular programs just for the sake of throwing money. What specifically is being done to help, pertaining to community-based mental health programs, in northern communities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of components, and I will not endeavour to cover them all, but specifically I think an excellent example is that our mental health system now in Alberta has the capacity to provide telepsychiatry, which is of significant benefit, particularly to northern communities, to rural locations in the province. This is just one of a number of initiatives. We have the whole concept of clubhouse, which is a byword for providing a support mechanism, a gathering place for people, particularly in urban centres, to socialize, to have friends and support, and to have supportive treatment and care.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is also important to indicate that the proportion of our overall mental health budget in this province has shifted from community care, which was about 26 percent of mental health care funding in 1994-95, to about 36 percent of our budget today. So I think we're headed in a significant direction towards community care.

MR. BOUTILIER: My final supplemental to the Minister of Health is: what is being done in transferring the responsibility that the minister speaks of for community-based services to the RHAs, and is this really going to work?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly the overall direction that we have – and we will begin as early as possible in this year – is to move the provincial mental health clinic operations to the regional health authorities. I think that in the hon. member's question there was a very important phrase. He is questioning: will it work? Yes, I think it will work, but I think we have to move at it methodically, step-by-step. We have to be respectful of the staff situation in terms of their contracts and what's involved in any type of transfer. The regional health authority has to be co-operated with, worked with, and this will have to be

phased in. But, yes, I hope to be able to say that we have the first transfers in place quite early in this year.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now eroded. The hon. Minister of Health has requested approval to supplement an answer.

Private Hospitals

(continued)

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is further to my answers to the leader of the ND opposition, and that is that I am advised that none of my senior officials have had any meetings with HRG, the Health Resource Group, since September. I have not either, and I just wanted to add that for the member's benefit.

Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Lunar New Year Celebrations

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday several of our members spoke on the subject of the lunar year. To our awareness there are many cultures in the world celebrating festivities following the lunar calendars, such as the Ramadan lunar New Year. The Assembly generously and unanimously moved and passed a motion to recognize the lunar New Year celebration.

The last few days and nights I've had the pleasure of attending several functions in Edmonton celebrating the lunar New Year by Chinese and Vietnamese groups. It is called Sun Lin in Cantonese or Xin Nian in Mandarin Chinese or Tet in Vietnamese.

The New Year celebration is a family event. However, there are celebration ceremonies at clubhouses, Buddhist temples, Christian churches. In a particular one, organized by the Viet-Canadian association of Edmonton, the ceremony was held at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton and was attended by close to a thousand people with officials from federal, provincial, and municipal governments. The organizers expressed their appreciation to the government of Alberta for its global view of diverse cultures and its assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this type of cultural event helps to reduce social misbehaviours and enrich Albertan culture by adding thousands of years of tradition to our young province. Alberta now can be proud that we have a cultural depth and breadth dating back thousands of years.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Creek and the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to join me on this occasion, asking for your kindness, Mr. Speaker, to pass on our lucky money, Li Xi, to every member in the House, every person in the House. I need the page to help me.

Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, that would be permitted on the basis that this would be provided to all members of the Assembly.

MR. CAO: Yes, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Fine.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Regional Health Authority Boundaries

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many times in this Legislature I have stood and expressed my concerns about health boundaries that were defined by political whim and how they have become brick walls. There are fears in my constituency and around this province about access to health care. Articles in the paper state that different RHAs throughout this province are so cash-strapped that they do not have enough beds or funds to meet the needs of people within their own region, let alone people from other regions. Do you have any idea what it is like to live five miles outside the Capital region and read the headline in Monday's *Journal* that says, "Out-of-region patients face long-term care restrictions"? Do you know what it is like to be an elderly couple living in fear that one of you will be placed in a facility hundreds of miles away?

The area just northwest of Edmonton asked to be in the Capital region, and the Minister of Health said no. So much for local autonomy.

I'm tired of hearing slogans such as healthy Albertans living in a healthy Alberta. I'm tired of task forces and reviews which do nothing while the waiting lists grow, and finally I am very saddened that constituents are unable to access needed health services in facilities just minutes away from their own homes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member from Livingstone-Macleod.

Southern Alberta Grass Fire

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now we're all aware of the devastating prairie fire that occurred December 14 in the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, in that part of the Porcupine Hills. High winds, in excess of 100 kilometres, plus an ample supply of dry grass resulted in over 72,000 productive acres of private and agricultural lease land being totally destroyed beyond any sustainment of human and animal life, let alone anyone's ability to maintain a ranching or a farming livelihood.

Volunteer fire departments from Pincher Creek, the native reserve of Brocket, our own Environmental Protection department, Blairmore, the Crowsnest Pass, Fort Macleod, Claresholm, the MD of Willow Creek, plus all fire departments south of Calgary responded and spent 15 hours putting out this treacherous fire under very difficult conditions. Volunteers from every corner of southern Alberta, municipal district of Willow Creek staff members, plus many businesspeople worked side by side with these qualified volunteer firefighters to put out the blaze.

The command centre at the Granum fire hall was in jeopardy when fire threatened that small town and its residents, and volunteers came in to move everyone and evacuate that entire community and place those unfortunate folks in safe places like Claresholm and Fort Macleod. Fortunately by midnight that night the town was saved, and the fire was pretty well out.

A special thank you to Don Douglas, the Granum fire chief; the mayor of the town of Granum; all of those ladies of the town of Granum who provided food; and those businesses who helped donate coffee to everyone who helped put that fire out. Particularly I'd like to thank the RCMP who stayed through the entire episode over those three days and put in many hours of overtime to help sustain law and order.

Of course, after a fire of this magnitude there needs to be assessment and cleanup. Thank goodness there was no loss of life, and I would like to thank all the volunteers who donated hay, straw, posts, and wire, particularly Joy Hurlburt for administrat-

ing these funds, the minister of agriculture and the Minister of Transportation and Utilities for quick response in helping our people.

Mr. Speaker, with time, rain, and the grace of God that grassland and people's livelihoods will be restored again.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Orders I would request that the Deputy Government House Leader reveal the government's agenda for next week.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to unfold for you the projected government business for next week. On Monday, February 2, in the afternoon we would be delighted to proceed with Government Bills and Orders to second reading – bills 1, 2, 7, and 10 – and furtherance of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. In the evening Government Bills and Orders for second reading, again bills 1, 2, 7, and 10, and furtherance of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Tuesday, February 3, at 4:30 p.m. Government Bills and Orders and under Government Motions we will be addressing the Easter and sessional adjournment motions. In the evening government bills 1, 2, 7, and 10 for their next order of reading or Committee of the Whole, as the case may be, and again address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Wednesday evening under Government Bills and Orders second reading for bills 5, 8, 9, and 11 and address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, February 5, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and second reading, Committee of the Whole, or third reading for bills 1, 2, 7, and 10.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we now have to deal with a large number of procedural matters. We have one Standing Order item that has been brought to the attention of the Assembly, and I would ask all members to get their Standing Orders out and carefully read those sections under Standing Order 15. That is the most serious of all sections within the Standing Orders. We have two submissions under Standing Order 40, and we have between three and five points of order, which I'll have to review after just to make sure. Some have been withdrawn or not withdrawn. There's been a flurry of notes.

So we will first of all deal with a notice that I had received this morning from the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to wanting to rise on a point of privilege in the Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 15.

Privilege

Reflections on a Member and on Community Groups

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to explain my point of privilege. The Premier of Alberta by calling me, community groups, constituents within my constituency hypocrites yesterday has threatened my ability to represent my constituents and to ensure that they are treated fairly and equally by this government. Those statements plus the statement he made concerning a Catholic church in this House yesterday further threaten the ability of many Members of this Legislative Assembly

to ensure that their constituents are treated fairly and equally by this government.

The not so subtle threat in the Premier's statements is that he will punish anyone who is inclined to criticize him or his government's policies. He will take away or deny lottery and gaming grants to those organizations that for whatever reason disagree with some of his policies. Of course, the Premier will say that it will be their choice, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that he leaves them absolutely no choice.

The Premier's comments yesterday made it abundantly clear that he believes there are some organizations that deserve lottery and gaming funds and other organizations that don't. Apparently the ones who deserve it are the ones that agree with the Premier's politics and policies.

There is nothing more fundamental to democracy than fairness. There is nothing more privileged than our freedom to choose and to vote our conscience free of intimidation, implied or direct. This Premier with his statements yesterday threatened that freedom and that privilege.

The Premier has put a chill into the hopes and aspirations of community, religious, and not-for-profit organizations throughout this province who have developed expectations and even dependencies upon gaming and lottery revenue because there is no other source of funds for the things that they must do to fulfill their community, religious, and other responsibilities. The Premier's comments demonstrate just how capricious and uncertain that funding is, and his challenge to return the money if it comes from gaming demonstrates just what kind of government this government truly is.

3:00

The Premier's insensitive and threatening words cannot be interpreted as anything other than threats and as very real barriers to myself and to any other member of this Assembly who tries to represent their constituents and ensure that they are treated fairly. I submit that this constitutes a prima facie case of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

For support of my case I refer to a number of excerpts from *Beauchesne* and *Erskine May*. I refer you to section 26(2) of *Beauchesne*:

A question of privilege, on the other hand, is a question partly of fact and partly of law – the law of contempt of Parliament – and is a matter for the House to determine.

Section 28:

It is clear that many acts which might offend against the law or the moral sense of the community do not involve a Member's capacity to serve the people who have chosen him as their representative nor are they contrary to the usage nor derogatory to the dignity of the House of Commons.

Beauchesne, section 62:

To amount to contempt, representations or statements about our proceedings or of the participation of members should not only be erroneous or incorrect, but, rather, should be purposely untrue and improper and import a ring of deceit.

The Premier knew, I believe, when he made his statements that in fact video slot machine funds are not required to cover money that goes to community groups. In fact, all that video slot machine money goes into general revenues, and it is other gambling revenues that could be used to go directly into community groups from sources that are not anywhere nearly as addictive. But better yet, Mr. Speaker, that money doesn't have to come at all from lottery revenues should they make a different budgetary decision.

Section 64:

The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual

Members. Most notably, in 1880 John Macdonell, while seated at his desk in the House, referred to a Member, L.S. Huntingdon, as "a cheat and a swindler". Removed from the House, he returned twice more to repeat the charge and finally concluded with a written note to the same effect. For the offence, Mr. Macdonell was judged guilty of a breach of privilege and was summoned to the Bar to apologize.

From *Erskine May*, Mr. Speaker, chapter 9, page 115:

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence. It is therefore impossible to list every act which might be considered to amount to a contempt, the power to punish for such an offence being of its nature discretionary.

Page 119: "The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt."

Page 121:

Indignities offered to the House by words spoken or writings published reflecting on its character or proceedings have been constantly punished by both the Lords and the Commons upon the principle that such acts tend to obstruct the Houses in the performance of their functions by diminishing the respect due to them.

Reflections upon Members, the particular individuals not being named or otherwise indicated, are equivalent to reflections on the House.

Page 124:

Other acts besides words spoken or writings published reflecting upon either House or its proceedings which, though they do not tend directly to obstruct or impede either House in the performance of its functions, yet have a tendency to produce this result indirectly by bringing such House into odium, contempt or ridicule or by lowering its authority may constitute contempts.

"It is a contempt to molest a Member." This is at page 126 in *Erskine May*. Mr. Speaker, in more current language we would say that it is a contempt to threaten a member.

"That it is a gross breach of the privilege of this House for any person to obstruct and insult the Members of this House in the coming to, or the going from, the House, and to endeavour to compel Members by force to declare themselves in favour of, or against any proposition then depending or expected to be brought before the House'.

I want to read that again.

"That it is a gross breach of the privilege of this House for any person to obstruct and insult the Members of this House in the coming to, or the going from, the House, and to endeavour to compel Members by force to declare themselves in favour of, or against any proposition then depending or expected to be brought before the House'.

Page 128: "To attempt to intimidate a Member in his parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt, cognate to those mentioned above."

Page 129:

Conduct not amounting to a direct attempt improperly to influence Members in the discharge of their duties but having a tendency to impair their independence in the future performance of their duty may be treated as a contempt.

Mr. Speaker, I leave the matter with you and look forward to your judgment.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have reviewed

the relevant sections in *Beauchesne*, especially those relayed to the Legislature by the Leader of the Opposition, and quite frankly I have not found any arguments made by the leader which would qualify as a question of privilege. Rather, his arguments are based on alleged statements or subtle threats which he has attributed or inferred to the Premier. I can find no such statement having been made by the Premier, nor can I or, I would venture, any reasonable person infer any subtle threat from those statements that he will punish any constituency that has not voted Conservative by taking away or denying lottery or gaming grants to those organizations in those constituencies.

It's always impressive to cite precedent in support of one's arguments but only if one has an argument and only if such precedent applies to the argument. In fact, Mr. Speaker, his allegation, in my opinion, is so baseless that it should not only be dismissed, but he should apologize here and now to the Premier for his remarks.

Alternately, Mr. Speaker, if you do not feel it would be appropriate to dismiss this question of privilege, I request that you delay a decision until at least Monday so that I may have an opportunity to prepare a further response to the allegations.

THE SPEAKER: I gather no other members wish to participate in this point.

The chair received notice of this this morning – and it did receive notice of it by 11 o'clock this morning under Standing Orders – that in essence such a purported point could be raised, and at least the raising of it certainly does deal within compliance of Standing Order 15(2). Secondly, the chair certainly would indicate to all publicly and to the Leader of the Opposition that this was the earliest opportunity that he would have had to raise this matter. So from that point of view he certainly has complied with it.

The chair has read the subject matter on at least half a dozen occasions and refers to the letter that he'd received from the Leader of the Opposition. The leader points out in his letter, "My point of privilege will refer to comments of the Premier in question period yesterday." It is that point on which the chair has spent his time assessing what was said. It had to do with the comments of the Premier in the question period yesterday.

Now, in the remarks given by the hon. leader here in the last few minutes, several things were said. The use of the word "hypocrite" has already been dealt with. That was today, not yesterday. I guess the primary point that the hon. leader is saying is:

The Premier made a subtle threat that he will punish any constituency that has not voted Conservative by taking away or denying lottery and gaming grants to organizations in those constituencies.

I guess the formative words really, in reviewing this, would be, one, "subtle threat" and then a simple word, "punish," by itself.

3:10

The chair would have hoped that the focus of attention today would have been on showing how the Premier had said that yesterday in question period. A very, very, careful review of the *Hansard* on more than one occasion leads the Speaker to the following conclusion. The evidence does not support a prima facie case of privilege, and under Standing Order 15(7) when the Speaker finds there is no prima facie case of privilege, there are no further proceedings on the matter. [interjections] No further proceedings on the matter means exactly just that.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

Completion of Ramadan

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two aspects that speak to the urgency of the motion that I proposed earlier in the House which would congratulate Muslims who have completed Ramadan and are now today celebrating Eid, which is the day of celebration following the monthlong fast. One of them has to do with the timing of Ramadan.

Ramadan is the last month in the lunar calendar for Muslims. It officially ended the day before yesterday. However, because the ending of this month holds such significance in the faith, many Muslims rely upon a visual sighting of the moon before they'll start the new cycle. This sighting is required in the Middle East, and on the appropriate day this time the day was cloudy and the moon could not be sighted. Therefore, the ending of Ramadan was postponed to yesterday, and the day of celebration of Eid is today. Today, therefore, would be the appropriate day to pass on our good wishes to this large community.

The second aspect that I would like to deal with was very well said yesterday by the Member for Calgary-McCall. When he was speaking to the congratulations we sent on in terms of the year of the tiger, he said, "What we are witnessing here today is a real example of where we as a society have arrived." I think that also speaks to being able to pass on good wishes with regard to Ramadan.

Today, we have an opportunity in the Assembly to promote tolerance, understanding, and the celebration of one of a variety of cultures who call Alberta home. So from that perspective, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of the Assembly to give unanimous consent to my motion.

THE SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? It's carried.

Ms Carlson moved:

Be it resolved that this Legislative Assembly congratulate the nearly 100,000 Muslims in Alberta on the completion of Ramadan, the month of fasting.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to stand today before you and speak to this issue. As a non-Muslim I don't have a full and complete understanding of the religion, but certainly I am working towards a better understanding. We have a member in the Assembly who I am sure will be addressing this issue and who can further enlighten us.

As the holiest month for Muslims, Muslims fast from the beginning of the month to the end of the month, and they fast from dawn until sundown. No water, nothing passes their lips during this time period. To fast during this time is part of the Muslim commandments and is the third pillar of Islam in their religion. The other pillars are faith, prayer, Zaka't, which is charity, and Hajj, which is the pilgrimage to Mecca. As such, this is a very fundamental belief for their faith that really needs to

be carried out and recognized, I believe, by all of us who work with and know Muslims in the community.

I would compare this to our Easter celebration. Many people say that Eid is like Christmas for us, but for me as a Christian I believe it's more like Easter. Traditionally, in the past we have fasted during Lent. You give up something that you cherish, that you hold dear, and then everybody celebrates with family and friends and the sharing of gifts and good food on Easter. Here the same happens on Eid. Today will see many families throughout this province who have visited the mosque during the day and who will then gather and travel from house to house sharing the ending of the fast with all of their friends and family. From that perspective, I think it's very important for us to recognize it.

Today I've come dressed in a traditional Shalvar chemise, which is really native to people who originate from Pakistan, from the lower Indian subcontinent, and from some areas of Africa. It's a long blouse and pants, which make ease of movement very applicable, and it is also accompanied by a dubuttah, which, while being decorative, has a more formal aspect in this particular religion, and that is that most Muslim women adhere to some form of veiling while they are praying and while they are in the company of men who are not close relatives of their own. What you would do with a dubuttah like this is simply cover your head during prayers or in the company of people who are not close male relatives. In doing that, I would like to recognize this culture, congratulate them on being in Alberta and helping us to learn more about them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my greetings and congratulations to the hundred thousand Albertans of the Muslim faith who are celebrating Id al-Fitr today.

Mr. Speaker, some 1 billion people around the world practise the Islamic faith. They belong to numerous cultures and traditions; however, they come together in this one month, the occasion of fasting. For this full month they fast from sunrise to sunset. It is a very holy month in the Islamic calendar. It is the month when the Holy Koran was revealed.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time for Muslims for introspection, for self-discipline, for generosity, for contemplating . . . [interjection] Have I said something that's . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. It is a time when we think about the underprivileged, those who are less fortunate, and I'd like to add my greetings to the Muslim people. I'm sorry that I didn't understand some of the laughter that was going on, but this is a very important and a very serious occasion, and I'd like each one of you to join me in extending greetings to the Muslim people.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I have a question to ask of you, and it's one that I'll also ask of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. These kinds of congratulations are very much in order. The difficulty the Speaker has – and it arose out of a question asked the hon. member yesterday, when congratulations were to go under the lunar New Year – is that traditionally what the Speaker would do is have a very nice scroll prepared with the official symbol of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and it would be directed to a community, to a commu-

nity leader. The motion yesterday puts us in a position where we don't know who to send this to. Perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall might get back to our office today or tomorrow or over the next several days as to whom we might send this official greeting and congratulations from the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Surely with 100,000 individuals in Alberta it would be quite prohibitive for us to send 100,000 individual congratulations, because quite frankly we don't have the addresses. So perhaps that would be helpful.

3:20

Winter Olympics

THE SPEAKER: The second SO 40 that we have is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The urgency of this request is that our athletes are departing today, and we would like to see them have the support and best wishes from all members of the Assembly to take on their journey with them. By allowing the Assembly to speak to this issue today, we can give our athletes our heartfelt best to take with them over to Nagano and support them in their competitions. I seek unanimous consent to speak to this motion.

Thank you.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried. Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Bonner moved:

Be it resolved that under Standing Order 40 the Legislative Assembly recognize and congratulate all athletes and coaches who will be representing Canada at the Winter Olympics, to be held in Nagano, Japan, February 6 to 23, 1998.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The journey for the Alberta athletes to the Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, began many years ago. These athletes have been working for years to reach this highest goal of worldwide excellence. They have dedicated a large part of their youth to the pursuit of excellence in their chosen sport, hours spent away from their families and friends to train and push themselves to be the best at what they can do. Have they achieved these feats alone? Of course not. They've had the support of their parents, coaches, family members, teachers, and the community at large to place them where they are today. We are watching Alberta's finest compete over the next few weeks. Entire communities will be bursting with pride and know that they have played a part in sending such fine representatives to the Winter Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry will be well represented by one of these fine young athletes, a young man by the name of Chris Yule, a hockey player who played the majority of his hockey in northeast Edmonton. He enjoys dual citizenship and will be playing for Japan in these Olympics. When we watch our young athletes like Chris compete in Nagano, I'm sure that many of us will remember those miraculous few weeks when Alberta was the host of these special games. The

manner in which this province worked together to make the Winter Games such a success is symbolic of the very meaning of the Olympics. We hope that the citizens of Nagano will work together as we did in 1988 to host the world in friendship and unity throughout these games. We wish our athletes the best of luck in their venture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, as an Edmontonian myself and one that deals a great deal with amateur athletes I'd like to rise for a few moments to wish special congratulations for making the team to a young man by the name of Pierre Lueders, who is on his way. He has made a dash in the world of the two- and four-man bobsleighs. He comes from our city and our province. He does all his winter training in the province and does the best he can to represent us. He is one of those that has dedicated his life thus far to the pursuit of gold at the Olympics, and he does not receive a great deal of funding. In fact, he lives annually on a matter of \$10,000 or \$15,000, that he can make in between the time that he's off training. I would like to send a special message to him to do the best he can to represent us. We're all very proud of him here regardless of the outcome.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in support of this motion. On Tuesday I had the opportunity to attend a send-off luncheon in Calgary for the Canadian athletes – and certainly all of our Alberta athletes were there – and to bring our athletes, our Canadian team, our congratulations and best wishes on behalf of Premier Klein and all of my colleagues in government. It was an emotional opportunity for me, I can tell you, and I want to just tell you a bit about the staging of the event. The athletes marched in and stood at the front, were called out by name, by province, and by event that they would be participating in. A singer from our province, Susan Smith, a very talented lady, who many of us have heard sing our national anthem, sang *O Canada* in French and in English. I always feel very proud when our anthem is sung at any occasion, but when I looked at the athletes and saw the emotion on those young people's faces, I believe that it really struck some of them for the first time that they are competing for their country.

I had the opportunity to speak to the athletes and to send them our best wishes. I told our Alberta athletes that regardless of the outcome in Nagano – the pronunciation is, I guess, a choice – to remember that here in Alberta they are already heroes and champions. They have proven themselves to be among the best athletes in Canada, and when they go to Nagano, they will rightfully take their place among the best in the world. I also mentioned that as they team up with their colleagues from across Canada, whether it's New Brunswick, Quebec, Newfoundland, British Columbia, or any other province, they represent what makes Canada the best nation in the world.

The Olympics are not just about three medals given out for each event, and I truly believe this. They are about competing for your country, for your family, for your community, and for yourself. For every gold, silver, and bronze medal that will be given out at those events, there will be a number of personal bests, personal victories by Olympians from around the world, and I think we want to remember that. The personal victories or goals that are reached seldom receive media attention, but I believe they are just as important as that trip to the platform. There is something about the Olympics that inspires every athlete to be the best that they can be.

I think there's something special in our province, and I believe

it perhaps started in 1988, when Calgary hosted probably the best ever Olympic Games. The spirit of 1988 has remained with us since that time. Our athletes have stepped up their efforts. This year our Canadian athletes are expected to improve their record for the third consecutive year. For the first time curling, snowboarding, and women's hockey will be official sports at the Nagano games, and you've all heard of the interest in, particularly, women's hockey. I had the opportunity to sit with Hayley Wickenheiser and talk to her about this wonderful opportunity for them to be at the Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, as minister responsible for sport and recreation in this province I've had an opportunity to spend time with many Alberta athletes of all ages. These are some very special people and fine Albertans. They conduct themselves on and off the field or in the event that they are in in a very, very fine way, and every one of us should be proud of these young people. I believe that the same can be said of our 1998 Winter Olympians. Their hard work and dedication have already made them role models for many young Albertans.

Like most achievements in life, Mr. Speaker, athletic successes are rarely achieved alone, and I think today we should recognize and thank all the families, all the coaches, the sponsors, the supporters, and the communities of these athletes. This support along the way has enabled these young people to compete in these Olympic Games and realize their Olympic dreams. Many of us will not be able to attend the Olympics and see them in person, but I assured those athletes that we would be watching them at every opportunity and that they would be in our hearts and that our best wishes go with them and how very proud we are of them. My last comment was "Go, Canada, go."

Thank you.

3:30

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

MS KRYCZKA: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I stand here before you today, and this is a totally unprepared speech.

MRS. McCLELLAN: So was mine.

MS KRYCZKA: Okay.

I was listening to the minister and saying: well, my daughter is an ex-Olympian, and I can tell you firsthand what she went through to get to the Olympics and the personal price you pay but also the ultimate reward, even if you don't bring home a gold medal.

Kelly, this is for you. I don't want to get emotional.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I did in Calgary.

MS KRYCZKA: Did you?

My daughter Kelly Kryczka swam in the '84 Olympics in L.A., and she came home with a silver medal with Sharon Hambrook and was a member of the Aquabelles synchronized swimming team for many years. I can tell you that from when Kelly first started synchronized swimming, when she was eight years old, it very quickly got to be that the fun left the sport and you work really hard. I was thinking of some key points. I have lots of memories, you know, of walking her to a certain point, and I could see her go down the hill into the club where she goes to swim at the 6 o'clock morning practices and all of that. But I'm not here to talk about the parent; I'm here to talk about the competitor.

I have seen firsthand the hard work and the dedication and commitment that these young athletes are committed to for years. I do want to also make a point that I think I can speak on firsthand: there's a personal price they pay for this. Their schooling often is delayed because, for instance, if you're going to university, you go part-time for a number of years and might finally finish your degree. There is a cost, a personal cost, to it. She had some boyfriends, but I can tell you that they didn't hang around very long when they realized that the number one thing in her life was her sport.

I did go to L.A., I have to say, in '84. I went on a number of exciting trips before that, but the excitement of being down at an actual Olympic event and being a parent is something I just can't describe. There were a number of us that went down from Calgary that year. I did watch, again, the athletes, and they knew in that particular sport that there was no way they were going to win the gold, even if they were the best competitors, and that was a bit of a bitter pill to swallow. I just have to say that the pride they felt as Canadians, the send-off that they got locally, and the reception they came home to – it's something we have to do for these athletes. That's the least we can do for these athletes, because they do have hurts inside if they aren't number one in the world, and not everyone can be. Just to tell them that they did their personal best and be proud of them is the true message.

So thank you very much. This was great. I wasn't expecting that I would ever say what I just said, not to this audience. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before I call the vote, I've been accused of making the odd editorial comment, but I'm going to do it again anyway. To the hon. Member for Calgary-West. In 1984 your daughter was 14? You must have been a very young mother.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: Well, since we last notified the House that there were anywhere from three to five points of order, we've now received notice that two of them have been withdrawn, so we've got three to deal with. The first we'll deal with, if it still is one, is by the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, there was a heated exchange during question period, as you're well aware. The first time that I rose on a point of order, it was to deal with the Premier's name-calling in the House, and I believe that you correctly intervened at that time. So the first point of order dealt with the Premier's use of the word "hypocrite." Subsequent to your ruling, I will withdraw that particular point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I'm pleased to advise that the Government House Leader has also indicated to me that he's withdrawing his point of order on the basis of the interjection.

So we're now dealing with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview the point of order cited pertains to a violation of Standing Orders, under 23(j), the use of insulting

language, and I will also reference *Beauchesne* 494.

Again, it came up during question period, and it was an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Minister of Family and Social Services. The Minister of Family and Social Services referred to certain Albertans as lower class Albertans. The first time that he did so, Mr. Speaker, my colleague was prepared to let it pass. However, in response to a subsequent question, he then tried to turn the table and suggest that the use of such a word was despicable. I think that was the word that he chose.

Now, under 23(j), the use of insulting language, I think it's clear that calling some Albertans, particularly those in need, despicable is very insulting. On the other hand, he may have been referring to another member in this Assembly; I'm not sure. That would be equally insulting.

Section 494 in *Beauchesne* reminds us all that we must take one another's statements at face value, that we have to take all hon. members at their word. Certainly we accept the hon. minister's word and agree that referring to some Albertans as lower class is in fact despicable. Based on that, I would ask that the minister withdraw his use of that term to describe some Albertans who are in need.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think that the use of a point of order on this type of an event is a misuse of the point of order itself. It was clear from the exchange at the time that the minister had no intention of using the term "lower class," and he made that clear. What he referred to as despicable was the follow-up that came from the opposition side. The Official Opposition House Leader has tried to indicate that the minister was describing a group of Albertans as being despicable, and from my recollection of the event that clearly was not the case. So there's no point of order here. There was a clear exchange. The minister clarified what he intended to say and made it very clear that he thought the use of such terminology would be despicable.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the Blues clearly indicate that the hon. minister in question did use the phrase "lower class." That certainly is in there. The Blues also indicate that the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services then retracted that by saying the following: "I made a slip of the tongue. What I was referring to was lower income." Further, the Blues indicate that the hon. minister did say, "I find it quite repulsive when you talk about lower class." From a quick review of this and having heard the arguments, it is a fact; the statement was made. It is also a fact that the hon. minister said that it was a slip of the tongue and that what he was referring to was "lower income." On the basis of the retraction, I'd submit that there actually is no point of order at this point.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order Repetition

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is actually on my very own point of order. It has to do, once again, with an exchange during question period between the Treasurer and my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Creek. I cite Standing Order 23(c) and *Beauchesne* 62, I believe. In any case, just to remind you and all hon. members, section 23 reads that

a member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(c) persists in needless repetition.

Mr. Speaker, this House has been abused by the Treasurer for

some time now with his perpetuation of the myth that a Liberal government in the province of Alberta would impose some kind of sales tax. In trying to deflect a question about the fact that he was saying one thing to bankers in New York and something else to farmers in Red Deer about the Alberta government's plan to raise revenues, in order to deflect attention away from that question, he once again had the temerity to stand in this Chamber and raise this straw man of an Alberta Liberal sales tax. Frankly, I'm sick and tired of that myth being repeated by that member in that way, and it clearly does violate 23(c).

It also violates *Beauchesne*, where we are reminded that members must not make knowingly false statements. I think the Treasurer clearly knows, because he's been told in this Chamber and outside this Chamber time and time and time again that the only political party in the province of Alberta that continues to talk about sales taxes are the Progressive Conservatives, not the Liberals.

3:40

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition is using points of order to try and engage in debate and make points which would be more properly made elsewhere.

In this particular case, the Provincial Treasurer was not engaging in needless repetition. He only said that once in the House today, as I recall it, and surely that section of the rules talks about needless repetition within the same context of the same speech, not over a period of time.

Nonetheless, getting to the point of the discussion, what I heard the Provincial Treasurer say – and I haven't had the benefit of the Blues on this matter – was that the only party in this province which continually raises the matter of a sales tax is the Liberal Party. And that is clearly correct. The Conservative Party does not raise the question of a sales tax on and on and on. We basically have said that there will be no sales tax. As I recall when I ran in the election in 1993, the people who raised the question of whether there should be a sales tax were Liberals. The Liberals have raised this many times. It's evident to Albertans that that's the case, so to suggest that's wrong or malicious is clearly false.

Once again, I hesitate to do this, because I think we're debating a point which should more properly be debated elsewhere, other than under points of order, but I'm drawn to do it because it's been raised in this particular context. There's no point of order in this case.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's certainly the right of an individual to rise on a point of order. The onus then is having to actually make an argument that there is a point of order.

An argument was given under section 23(c), which says, "Persists in needless repetition or raises matters which have been decided during the current session." This session will not make any decision whatsoever with respect to any sales tax that the Liberal Party of Alberta would not want to deal with, would never want to have or anything else, because the Liberal Party of Alberta is not the government. So I don't think citation 23(c) is probably quite the correct one.

Deputy Government House Leader, your addition to the debate had to do with other than section 23(c). Then we started talking about what happened in the past. Well, that's really not the situation today. This is clearly a difference of opinion, and it's going to continue each day and every day, so let's make sure that we understand what the rules of order are all about.

A couple of hon. members have written me notes and said to

me as the Speaker: "What can you do about this situation? The clock now says quarter to 4 and we started at 1:30." Well, the Speaker can't do anything about this. The members control the House. If the members want to stand up and raise questions, if the members want to interject with one another, if the members want to insult one another, if the members want to laugh when a certain member is giving a statement, if the members want to continue a Standing Order 40 to allow one- and two-hour debates, it's the members who write the rules, not the Speaker. It's the members who control the House, not the Speaker. If the members want to have five points of order, that's the members' right, and we'll take the necessary time in the protection of democracy to do that. The members write the rules, not the Speaker. The Speaker will deal with the interpretation of them.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of His Honour
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.

[Debate adjourned January 28]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to support the motion that was so eloquently made by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod and ably seconded by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. I'm pleased to extend congratulations as well to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his fine reading of the Speech from the Throne last Tuesday.

I'd like to underscore the comments made at the outset of the speech.

Our greatest obligation is to leave our children and our grandchildren a province that is even better than the one which was left to us . . .

Over the past five years Albertans have built a solid foundation for the next generation. Thanks to their hard work there is renewed and more balanced prosperity throughout our house . . . The net provincial debt should be gone by 2000 or 2001 if oil and gas prices remain stable.

But there is more work to do.

I think these comments from the speech outline much of the work that lies ahead in this year, the second-last year of this millennium, and I think we all will look forward to the challenges of the new legislation that's coming before us and a new budget that will be here on the 12th of February.

Mr. Speaker, I want next to draw to the attention of all hon. members something that appears near the end of the Speech from the Throne wherein reference is made to the quality of Alberta's public service.

The government will continue to provide responsive and responsible programs through a public service recognized as among the most focused, creative, and productive in Canada. It will strive to retain, attract, and develop the talented, skilled, and versatile employees required to serve Albertans' developing needs into the next century.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a tremendous compliment to all those who serve Alberta in the public service: the nurses, civil servants, school bus drivers, forest rangers, teachers, janitors, custodial officers, social workers, Legislative Assembly employees and officers, peace officers, and many others, whose efforts and personal sacrifices made our deficit elimination and debt pay-down programs possible. It was all of these energetic Albertans who continued to find new ways to spend public money with greater stewardship and efficiency in these past few years. Their contribution is recognized, and all Albertans are appreciative of their dedication, fiscal responsibility, and effectiveness. Yes, we have fine people who work in the public service to make Alberta a better place.

Mr. Speaker, I support and endorse the Speech from the Throne. This speech, delivered by His Honour on Tuesday, is an exciting and forward-looking document. I now take my seat to afford colleagues the opportunity to make their comments, which I'm sure will be supportive.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to certainly add my congratulations to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for the articulate speech that he gave and also to the Member for Calgary-Fort in seconding the motion.

I was particularly pleased to see the highlights in the Speech from the Throne that continued our manner and our practice of fiscal conservatism. I know that many constituents that I represent in Lethbridge-West became very concerned when the media was inundated with messages from our government, your current speaker included, when we discussed an increase in spending in some of the areas we view as critical here in the province. The question that I was asked repeatedly, particularly in coffee shops and on the streets, was: have you guys gone back to the old way of doing things? So I was particularly pleased, then, when the speech set out in very clear terms and very early in the speech that as fiscal conservatives we were still on track and with our plan.

3:50

I want it to resonate hopefully through my words this afternoon that the class of '93 that came forward with the Premier and where we took it upon ourselves to create a revolution in terms of spending in this particular province, that that spirit continues to live. The announcements that we are making in this speech and in these days in terms of increased spending are really, in my view, fiscal dividends. The speech that was given the other day by the Lieutenant Governor would not have been possible had not all of the things that have been done since 1993 and basically right through until today taken place.

We appreciate, of course, the support that we received in the election of '97 from the constituents that voted for not only the particular members that are now represented on the government side of the House but also the new MLAs that became part of our team after that particular election. I don't know what the exact turnover was in terms of new members, but each of them in their own particular way is now adding strength to the team that we know as the Klein government, to the team that has always had as its motto: an Alberta advantage. Everywhere we look on the government benches, we continue to see the fiscal conservatism that was brought into place early and now continues.

I can't stress how important I feel a continued fiscally conserva-

tive frame of mind and manner of governing is, so important, because when we read the documents now of the government in terms of the accumulated debt that still remains . . .

MR. DOERKSEN: How much is it?

MR. DUNFORD: It's \$14 billion once we have reduced our net debt to zero. What is particularly amazing to me and I'm sure to other Albertans, if they were to stop and think about it for a moment, is that that debt of \$14 billion costs the taxpayers of this province approximately \$1 billion each and every year.

Let's frame up what \$1 billion actually means. If we were not spending that \$1 billion as a line item in our budget in terms of interest on debt, that \$1 billion would actually fund all of the colleges and the universities that are now operating in this province. I mean, this is . . .

MR. HIERATH: Double your budget.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I'm not asking for my budget to be doubled, because I've already explained that I'm a fiscal conservative. However, it just merely points out, you know, what would be possible for the people of Alberta, whether it be in the education system or in the health system or in a social safety net, if we had our total debt at zero.

So we want to encourage all members, as we view this particular Speech from the Throne, recognizing that we are bringing more resources to work in the key, critical areas, that we still are a government whose first objective is the pay-down of debt. For that, I'm extremely appreciative.

The Alberta Growth Summit, which was also highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, I believe will be viewed by history not as a watershed but as a turning point in how we deal with government budgets. I think that for too long – and I'm talking now prior to 1993 – we've paid lip service to people, but what we actually had were dollars that were being spent on buildings. We had dollars that were being spent in areas that came primarily from influences by vested-interest groups in health, in education, in postsecondary education, in many, many areas. Transportation would be another. Utilities is another; energy is another. We're trying to remove that influence. What the Growth Summit has clearly put on the political agenda for all of us in this House – and we all have to respond to this – is the fact that the number one concern of Albertans is the development of people.

Now, the Premier has said previously and continues to repeat – and I hope that other members who have already taken up the message will continue to repeat it – is that there's a new style of government that's going on in Alberta and that that style of government is not going to just start adding to global budgets. What we are going to be doing is finding in whatever way we can what the needs are that have to be addressed. In identifying those needs, the first thing we want to look at – and I believe that we will do this, and it's certainly my opinion that we should do this – is: how can we address that need in a nonfinancial way? Why is it that we should just automatically be driven toward a dollar problem-solving type of process? So I would hope that as we examine the needs, as we do it collectively within this House, we will view it from a perspective of the need that's identified and here are the nonfinancial ways in which we will deal with it. Now, if we are unable from that perspective to deal with it in its entirety, then of course we want to look at: what financial resources do we have? We should not be frightened by the

prospect of spending some of those dollars but, again, always within the context of our ability to pay.

So the Alberta Growth Summit I think has done a number of things, but the important thing to me is that it's changed the perspective away from bricks and mortar to people, and for those of us that have been involved in the people business for oh so many years, this is a great thing that has taken place. Of course, we're encouraged and enthusiastic as we start to try to address, then, the needs that have been identified. Identifying a need is one thing, but we also of course must keep in mind that always – always – we must focus on what will be the outcomes. Need based, outcome driven is a slogan that I think we would want to start to use in our various conversations that we have with people.

[Mr. Clegg in the chair]

It was very apparent in the speech, particularly from their placement, when we started to look at some of the needs that we're going to address. It is in my opinion only proper that the K to 12 education system should have been identified. I don't think there's an MLA in this Chamber who hasn't heard the concerns that were being expressed in terms of our education system. We did hear, of course, again a tremendous voicing from particular vested-interest groups as to amounts of money: "Look, you took X amounts out; you should throw a bunch more in." We had this gobbledygook kind of stuff: "Out of 65 jurisdictions in North America, our spending per capita was 63rd." I was able to point out to some folks that it wasn't a particularly dark cloud when you looked at the situation and discovered that a lot of the spending that we had taken out of the system was administrative costs.

The situation that I was particularly concerned about was: well, you know, if we looked at the dollars that were going into the classroom, then where did we rank? Well, folks, there wasn't much discussion on that by either opposition, vested-interest groups, or by the media generally, because all of a sudden then Alberta starts to look not too bad. I don't know that we led any sort of polls in that particular situation, but we substantially moved up the level.

4:00

I find the same sort of discussion going on now with this new money. You know, what is that? It is hard to envision a parent with a child or children that are involved in the school system sitting down after the newscast, looking at their spouse, looking at the children and saying: "You know, \$380 million going into the school system. I mean, those guys, what do they think they're doing? They can't do this. That's not new money." Really, it is such a transparent mood from folks who won't be our friends anyway. So I would encourage the Minister of Education that when people come forward with that type of an argument, that is a signal to him: here we are, a vested-interest group. There will never be enough money we could put into education, so he might as well focus and concentrate on the good job that he in fact is doing, because we've identified the needs that are in education, and we're making a start in getting to them.

The adult education section of the speech of course was particularly welcome as I happen to be responsible for that particular area. Where the Speech from the Throne, in talking about an agenda for opportunity, dovetails nicely into the Growth Summit and its people development is that I think most people, perhaps not all but most people, would understand that with a postsecondary system we do a number of things. One of the

things we're able to do because we're investing in people is provide skills that are required not only in the existing economy that we have but of course in the new economy that we're marching forward to. Not all of us know exactly what that new economy is going to look like – I don't think it's important for a minister to have to be a fortune teller to forecast the future – but certainly we need to have a plan in place so that we can move toward that future. This is what we of course try to do in a postsecondary education system.

The consultations that have taken place under my predecessor, the then Member for Cardston – can I mention his name now that he's gone? I want to then make special mention of Mr. Jack Ady, who, by the way, left this ministry in incredibly good shape, and I've been able to spend most of my time simply initiating plans that Jack Ady already had on the books. Through Jack Ady and through the department they went through two years of consultations. It's just been very gratifying, and I certainly welcome the amount of discussion that's been able to take place amongst the folks that have an interest in postsecondary education and how we've been able to move some things along.

What we're particularly proud of in the adult education area was our ability to move forward into the system a new accountability framework, which we call the performance funding envelope. For the interest of members here in the House who might not be fully up to date on our performance funding envelope, what we've done is we've taken a number of key performance indicators and an institution is rated against these particular indicators, and through the evaluation, through the calculation of the scores that they come up with, they then are eligible to receive performance awards. So you have now in Alberta a system whereby part of the institution's operating budget is actually based on a performance evaluation system, part of which is internal but part of which is external as well. I'm happy to report that we are the only jurisdiction in Canada and one of three jurisdictions in North America that has implemented this type of funding mechanism.

Now, the other thing that Alberta did in the performance funding envelope was bring in the concept of research. We have key performance indicators that evaluate at the university level: how is this particular institution doing by way of attracting research dollars? I'm happy to report that in that particular case, Mr. Speaker, now Alberta is the only jurisdiction in North America that is doing this. So many of us remember as SPC members and as members of our caucus that Jack Ady made a commitment to our caucus that there would be more accountability in the postsecondary system, and I'm happy to report today, speaking to the Speech from the Throne, that that in fact is in place.

These are tremendous, tremendous days for the postsecondary system. We want to be sure that everyone understands that through the transition period we've gone through, through the cuts the postsecondary institutions had to their operating budgets, to now the implementation of different funding envelopes, while we've had certainly a real decrease in the dollars that taxpayers spend in the postsecondary system, we've actually had an increase in the number of students. By any definition that is an increase in productivity. We should be extremely proud of our postsecondary system as it operates in Alberta today.

One of the opportunities that we now have in the better way of doing business within the government – I think clearly there's a lot more co-operation and collaboration between departments. The Speech from the Throne recognized one of those particular

areas, although it didn't define it, and I would like to take just a moment to do that now. That was regarding the national child benefit and the manner in which Alberta has decided to react, then, to the federal government's movement of the dollars into our area. [Mr. Dunford's speaking time expired] Hopefully I can get to that at another time.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have some remarks that I would like to enter into the record as far as my response and the response that I have heard from my constituents regarding the Speech from the Throne that was delivered on January 27. I would like to open my comments by reflecting momentarily on some of the points just made by the minister responsible for advanced education as he was reflecting on the Speech from the Throne, and I wonder whether or not we are in fact reflecting upon the same Speech from the Throne.

What I am very interested in knowing is: where in the Speech from the Throne does it say that parents who want the best for their children are a special-interest group that should not be listened to, Mr. Speaker? Where does it say that because I want the best education system for my school, for my children, that makes me a special-interest group and I should be shunned by the provincial government? I don't believe it says that there, even though I do believe that's the modus operandi of the government.

Mr. Speaker, the \$95 million that that minister was just bragging about, which constitutes the so-called new spending on advanced education, is not even enough to keep up with the increased demand. It is not even enough to keep up with the projected increase in enrollments. It's not enough to keep up with inflation. It's certainly not enough to meet the capital deficit in our postsecondary institutions. It represents just a little slice of what Mr. Ady took away, and if that minister was doing his job as minister of advanced education, he would be demanding more. He would be at that cabinet table saying: "No, it's wrong. You don't gut postsecondary education when you're trying to build an economy for the future. You invest in it, and you invest heavily in it." And you defend that. But that's not what we hear, not at all.

Mr. Speaker, what we need is student support and funding for postsecondary education that is based on what students can afford, not based on what banks are willing to loan.

4:10

The Speech from the Throne, you know, could have been subtitled: all of the dreams that money can buy. It doesn't really give us any hope. It doesn't address the human spirit. It doesn't address the aspirations of my children, of my neighbours. What it does is address the needs and the wants and the demands of business elites. It addresses the needs and the wants and the demands of the friends of the government. It addresses the needs and the wants and the demands of those people who seem to be able to control the Alberta advantage in a way that meets their needs, not the needs of all of the people in this province that have worked so hard to help this government do the one thing and the one thing only they've been able to do. Like a one-trick pony they've been able to write a smaller cheque. They've managed to write a smaller cheque for every important human and social service, and they've done that with brilliance, Mr. Speaker. That's what they've done. That's what this Speech from the

Throne does. It just gives more hope to those people who want to see less support for those less fortunate, who want to see less help for those people who need just a little bit of a hand.

Mr. Speaker, this Speech from the Throne does not address the deficits in democracy which are present and growing in this province. We have not seen any commitment from this government to truly represent the words that they mouth in law and in action. There's no commitment here to two complete sittings of the Legislature every year. There is no commitment here to open up the standing policy committees to the public and to all-party membership. There's no commitment here to make sure that the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations meets to review all of the regulations that this government passes behind closed doors and in secret. Do you know that nearly 300 orders in council were passed by this government in secret over the seven months that we weren't allowed to debate the laws and the needs of the people in this province?

MRS. SOETAERT: How many?

MR. SAPERS: Nearly 300. Secret government, yet they talk about being open and accountable.

Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't like debate. This government doesn't like discord. The Premier says that it's hypocritical when people question him. This is a government that does everything it can to minimize any kind of accountability through debate and discussion, and then they call names. They say that they're special interests, that they're vested interests. They diminish and they belittle and they degrade, but they certainly don't listen. If you take a look at the great civilizations and the great parliaments in history and compare that to what's going on now, do you know what you'll find? You'll find one major glaring absence in Alberta today, and that is the recognition of the necessity of bringing competing ideas to the table so that the best ideas can take root and can carry us forward.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a certain mean-spirited arrogance about it when it pretends that it has done no harm, when it pretends that it has made no mistakes. They continue to pretend that they haven't hurt the health care system, that they haven't hurt the education system, that they haven't hurt children, that they haven't hurt women, that they haven't hurt the poor and the needy and the desperate. We know that that's not true. That's simply not true. What pomposity, what arrogance on the part of the government to pretend that it's never made a mistake, that it operates without ever making a mistake. The way that you hold the government accountable when they make mistakes – mistakes are excusable as long as they're recognized and corrected, but the first thing you have to do is you have to recognize you've made a mistake. You know, it's like an alcoholic on the way to recovery. The first thing you have to do is admit that you have a problem.

What you will find if you read some of the great thinkers – for example, if you read Powe in *The Solitary Outlaw*, he makes this point.

Controversy is the spirit of the active life: how to argue and to criticize; reason against reason in the complexity of contrast.

That is the essence of what we should be doing in this Chamber, and the government has a special obligation to do everything in its power to ensure that the debate is at the highest level, that the most opportunity exists for debate and discourse, agreement and disagreement, not the smallest opportunity, not the least but the most, Mr. Speaker.

Even some well-known fascists of time past have recognized

that, and I will refer to what Wyndham Lewis said in his essay on *The Art of Being Ruled*.

It is, in fact, quite surprising how totalitarian you can be without anyone so much as guessing that they are a whit less free than they were before.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that this government has read Lewis' work and have learned from it.

Powe then went on to comment:

Power cells . . . could control the social mood, the mind of a time, and ruin people without appearing to do so directly. They operated through ambiguity. They moved in backstages.

In back rooms, I would add, in secret, by not convening the Legislature but by operating behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, what about this so-called Alberta advantage? What about this agenda for opportunity, which I think really is an agenda for opportunists? What about this? Does this government really believe that there is anything in this throne speech that will give hope to the addicted gamblers in Fort McMurray, or perhaps those people in need of community mental health services that simply can't find any in Medicine Hat, or maybe those people in Edmonton that have been told that their emergency rooms are full more times than they have capacity to treat them? What about the homeless in Calgary? Is there anything in here that addresses the homeless in Calgary? Not that I could find. What about those people in Grande Prairie that go to bed hungry every night and tell their children, "Sorry; you can't eat lunch today." Anything in here, Mr. Speaker? No, there isn't. What about the seniors in Red Deer that are going without eyeglasses that I met on my last trip through? Any hope in here? None; none whatsoever. This advantage does not seem to be percolating through Alberta. It seems to be made for elites, certainly not my neighbours or my constituents.

MR. McFARLAND: You could go down there and charge for the travel, Howard.

MR. SAPERS: If the Member for Little Bow would just be quiet, show some respect for the House, that would just be so nice for a change, because he is getting to be such a pest, you know, Mr. Speaker. He's yappy, yappy, yappy; he squeals like a little puppy. It's like a pig that's being stuck with a sharp object, and it's so annoying. He's just so juvenile. I wish he would just be quiet. Of course, he never has the courage to stand and speak like a man. No. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the floor, and I would just ask all other members to keep their comments. I'm sure they'll have the opportunity to give their comments.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I sure hope he listens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you correspondence that I received by fax today. This is from a woman in St. Albert who is writing me about her mother, and she has been paying attention to government services. She has been paying attention to the plans of this government, and she has been paying attention to the throne speech. We had a chance to talk today. This letter has been sent to the Premier's office. This letter has been sent to the Minister of Health. It's been sent to myself. This is in part what

she says. Our government offers no help in any way. After multiple meetings with Social Services, she has been offered only to have some prescriptions paid for two months. No help for back rent and utilities that are owed. No help in being able to subsidize a decent apartment for herself and no help with anything else. Frankly, she felt like she was a disease, and that is the way she was treated by some young girl who, in quotation marks, knew what was best. Is she right? Is there no future for a female after turning 60 and unfortunately with no mate to lean on for support emotionally, financially, or otherwise? Her mother gets monthly pensions totaling \$650, which is her total income. She has been looking for a job, but nobody will hire a woman who is 61 years old.

4:20

What hope does this daughter have for her mother? What does this throne speech do for this senior Albertan who has worked every day of her life to build the best community that she knew how? What's there for her, Mr. Speaker?

And yet they heckle and they smile and they laugh and they look away. Mr. Speaker, this is a despicable abandonment of people in need. That's what we're seeing today.

I would like to refer for just a minute to the writings of Charles Handy in a book that was published a few years ago called *The Age of Unreason*. When Charles Handy was warning us about some changes coming in the economy, he was talking about how organizations are changing. In fact, it's somewhat of a right-wing piece. You know, it talks about how we shouldn't worry about being laid off and downsized and rightsized and all of that, because organizations are changing and the nature of work is changing and we all have to adapt with it. But even in this rather right-wing writing, this is what we are told.

"To make profits" or "the bottom line" is not, by itself, a useful way of describing the purpose behind an organization. It does not begin to tell you what to do or what to be. It is akin to an individual saying that he or she wants to be happy. Of course, happiness and profitability is a state devoutly to be wished for but it is not a purpose. If anything, profits are a means and not an end. Without them, purposes are difficult to achieve.

I wish this government would learn that simple truth. Profits are simply "a means and not an end. Without them, purposes are difficult to achieve." What is the purpose of this government? It certainly isn't governance, because they certainly don't seem to care about doing that. What they seem to care about is catering to their own special interests and rejecting everybody else who doesn't agree with their party bottom line.

Mr. Speaker, Handy goes on to say:

Governments, in the meantime, having discovered that the market, the mechanism of choice, liberates initiative and penalizes inefficiency, are tempted to leave all to self-regulating choice. That would be dangerous. Markets do not look much beyond tomorrow, or at least next year. Markets are inherently selfish, disinclined to make investments whose outcomes cannot be precisely predicted or whose benefits cannot be claimed in advance. Basic research, for instance . . .

Mr. minister of science, research, and technology,

. . . in new sciences and new technologies has to be an article of faith. Who could predict in advance that the Science Research Council's investment in tracking down the structure of DNA at Cambridge would result in the whole new industry of biotechnology?

Mr. Speaker, this government seems to be caught between its own rhetoric and a hard place. It doesn't seem to know where it wants to take the Good Ship Alberta. The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development talks about being a fiscal

conservative, and that's all he's got to say over and over and over again, but he doesn't say anything about what that means for the benefit of my family and my neighbours and the people who don't share this government's myopic, bottom-line, narrow, profits-at-all-expense mentality.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this Speech from the Throne. I cannot endorse this government's agenda, I cannot accept this government's abandonment of hope, and I will not tolerate this government's disregard for my neighbours and my friends.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm really pleased to be able to address the Speech from the Throne. I have not done so since I was first elected, and today I think is a very important day to be able to talk about some great initiatives which are happening within government. I'd like to speak from two perspectives, Mr. Speaker: first, as minister responsible for children's services, and secondly, as the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake.

The Speech from the Throne has clearly stated that this government places top priority on our young people. There could not be anything closer to the hearts of Albertans. I know this and have heard this in my work with communities across the province. This government is acting on behalf of children and families in many ways, and we are acting hand in hand as partners with the communities of Alberta.

We have entered a very exciting phase in our move to a community-based system of child and family services. In December 1997 we announced a child and family services authority for Calgary-Rocky View. The Calgary-Rocky View authority will begin to oversee service delivery this spring. It is now preparing its business plan. The contribution made by Albertans by this initiative has been remarkable. More than 12,000 Albertans have participated. Literally thousands of meetings and consultations have taken place. These have involved community members, parents, elders, youth, aboriginal communities, service providers, government staff, people who use services, and others.

Albertans care deeply, Mr. Speaker. They gave their time and energy and commitment to our young people. They have the opportunity in the new service system to play a vital and ongoing role in services for children and families. This government is fully supportive of communities as they take on this role of local decision-making, and the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, certainly weaves children's services and the needs of communities throughout its contents.

Mr. Speaker, I find it really interesting, because as we go through the Speech from the Throne, children's services is acting on Premier Klein's instruction to work closely with other departments and agencies to better plan and co-ordinate children's services. Senior government officials are looking at ways for our programs to function in greater harmony. This involves close work with Alberta Family and Social Services, Education, Health, Justice, Aboriginal Affairs, Community Development, and AADAC.

I am pleased to say that the departments are developing common goals and strategies in a business plan for the delivery of children's services. Across Alberta at all levels new contacts and partnerships are being forged among human service professionals, community boards, and agencies. We will build upon these

positive examples. We will strengthen our collaborative efforts. This government will support communities in their development of integrated approaches to meet the needs of children and families.

Mr. Speaker, we are also finding ways to build strong, healthy children, families, and communities. In our child welfare work we place top priority on safety and protection of the child. Our Forever Homes initiative focuses on permanency planning. We do everything we can to bring nurturing, long-term stability into the child's life. The communities of Alberta in their planning of services are looking at ways to help children and families before they reach a point of crisis. Community groups have developed a variety of local services with the help of \$50 million provided by the early intervention program. These services address a range of family issues such as the need for parenting skills, success-in-school programs, literacy, anger management, substance abuse prevention, and family violence prevention. These programs are a good base of experience for communities to learn from and build on as they design preventative approaches at the local level.

We are also taking several actions on the issue of child poverty. There are no easy solutions. Child poverty is a concern across Canada, and we are working with other provinces and levels of government to address the problem. We are addressing the needs of low-income families through the Alberta family employment tax credit and a national child benefit. We are increasing day care subsidies for low-income families. A greater number of low-income families will be able to apply for child care subsidy. The dollars will go to the people instead of the day care.

One of the most important ways to fight poverty, Mr. Speaker, is to help families get back to work. Our government has a range of training, education, and support programs to help people become self-sufficient. All across this province as I make my way through the communities talking to people, their greatest concern is that they want to be employed but be meaningfully employed. I believe that as we work towards making sure that we make opportunities available for people, they will seize these opportunities to be able to help themselves.

Another important way to address child poverty is to make good use of our resources. Many organizations offer help to local families. One positive action we can all take is to form links among our groups. We can focus on needs of low-income families and then co-ordinate our ideas and resources and activities to respond to those needs. This is not a new idea, Mr. Speaker. Community groups are forming these partnerships in their planning of children's services. They are finding that creative and efficient solutions take shape when they pool their knowledge and their resources.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that as we work through this whole Speech from the Throne, whatever we see and whatever we have to do, we have to make sure that those opportunities are going to be made available for people to be able to become self-reliant and to be able to help themselves.

4:30

It is on that basis, Mr. Speaker, that I want to speak as the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake. The constituency of Lesser Slave Lake is probably one of the most beautiful constituencies in Alberta and, yes, one of the largest. It's 90,000 square kilometres, with a population of 28,000 people. We also have 562 buffalo. There are 42 communities in my constituency, and you can access those communities in anywhere from 15 minutes to eight hours. It takes eight hours for me to drive from my home in High Prairie to the farthestmost part of my constituency. So in

most cases, when I'm in one end of the constituency or the other, some of my constituents don't know I'm even there. They don't know whether I'm at one end or the other.

Mr. Speaker, it takes a lot of driving to be able to get to my constituents, and this is probably one of the greatest joys that I do have: going to meet face-to-face with my constituents. I've got three municipalities, five MDs, three Métis settlements, and 13 Indian bands. Every weekend I touch base with from one to three communities for meetings. I also have three RHAs and six school boards. As we are going through, in terms of talking to the various groups, and when we read the Speech from the Throne, my constituents are very, very, pleased to see that we are addressing some of the greatest needs they have identified.

One of the greatest needs that they identified is in education. They were talking about the special-needs students and how the special-needs students need more funding to be able to address the mild to moderate as well as the portions where the constituents are seeing some very grave concerns. So that was the number one priority in my constituency.

The number two priority, Mr. Speaker, was infrastructure. Infrastructure was a big issue. When you have a constituency the size of mine, 90,000 square kilometres, it is very difficult to get from one end to the other. Sometimes there are no roads, and these people would love to have roads. It is on that basis that I am very, very proud to see that our Speech from the Throne addresses infrastructure.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, is agriculture. Agriculture has always been one of the mainstays in the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake. People who are farmers and ranchers in my constituency certainly like to see agriculture being one of the topics addressed in the Speech from the Throne.

I could go on on a number of other areas. Adult education is an area where many of my constituents need education. I know that Advanced Education and Career Development have made sure that they address the needs of those constituents who are sometimes less skilled than most of the people in the province of Alberta. As we begin to look at the apprenticeship program and as we look at more funding made available for students to be able to go to school, this is probably one of the greatest areas that we can deal with in terms of skill development. Mr. Speaker, no one can dispute that, because when you look at my constituency, some of my constituents are really demanding that they get educated and have a right to that education.

Another issue which I think is a priority for all Albertans of course is strong communities. When we talk about strong communities, it means that people begin to take control of their own lives. What does this mean in my constituency? It means that now people will have an opportunity to be able to see what they can do to build a better community. To build a better community means that they take that world we have provided for them and the opportunities we're providing for them and are able to put it into action and for them to be able to take it further.

Mr. Speaker, I see the Speech from the Throne as a great step, a big step from the point of where we have not addressed some of the concerns that have been needed many, many times over many years. Now I see this as probably the lead in making sure that we address those concerns. People, the people that I see on a daily basis on the weekends, have told me they need these areas of concern to be met, and I commend this government for looking at being futuristic rather than reactive in a number of areas.

Mr. Speaker, another area that I think is really important is developing people. The communities that I represent have

suffered much. The people have gone through many, many areas that I think are very important for us when we're talking about developing people. What happened in my constituency is that most in the communities that I represent have been through the mission schools, and many of these people have suffered the ramifications of what the mission schools have done. Some have been positive, but in many instances there's a lot of healing that has to be done.

I see developing people in two perspectives, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about developing people, it means that we as individuals look at ourselves and should be able to see what we need and then seize on those opportunities to be able to build a better life for our children and our grandchildren. Secondly, developing people means that we have to look and see where the errors have been and be able to correct those and move on. I see this as one of the greatest steps.

Mr. Speaker, I for one support the Speech from the Throne because it gives my constituents and my ministry responsible for children's services an opportunity to be able to investigate some really wonderful things that could happen in this government. Of course, the greatest is integration and making sure people are number one, and yes, I support this.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure, of course, to stand in the House and speak to the official Speech from the Throne, as I have done on previous occasions and hope to have many future occasions to do again.

As I look at the Speech from the Throne and compare it to some of the years past, I always have to remind myself of the important questions that my constituents ask me all the time. That is: whatever it is that the government is up to, what good does it bring? What bad does it bring? How does it affect me as an individual at the street level? So I always take a look and see what the purpose is behind speeches like this which have, I guess, as a general background the idea of setting the tone and the direction that the government hopes to take this province and its people over the next year. How does the government enunciate that vision? Is there the presentation of a plan and some semblance of order as to how they're going to go about doing that? So I go searching, sometimes with a candle, to try and find answers to those questions for my constituents.

Of course, there's great anticipation always built up in the minds of individuals. Some of that anticipation of course was taken away from the throne speech with the Premier's televised address a few weeks earlier, which I suppose gave the Premier a chance to put his particular stamp on the ideas and his particular spin on it and perhaps expound a little further on some of the election campaign pledges and promises that he made.

So I go into this very much with an open mind, Mr. Speaker, because I am always open to new ideas. I go searching for the good ones, and I try to sort them out from the bad ones. I will attempt to compliment some of the good ideas as I see them, and I will try to critique some of the bad ones or the shortcomings as I see them.

However, before I get onto that, I want to just say that in looking at this particular speech, as I do all government documents, I always look for some thread of balance. I take a look and see: is the government approaching its incoming year with a

balance between, let's say, business concerns and people concerns, a balance between urban municipalities and rural municipalities, between urbanites and farmers? Is there a balance here between investments and expenditures? Is there a balance on the bottom line between taking and giving? For example, the amount of moneys that are flowing in from things like VLTs and lottery revenues: is there a balance between the amount the government is taking in and the amount the government is giving back from that same pool of resources? I don't know that there is that balance projected in the documents that will be coming shortly to back up the Speech from the Throne.

4:40

I also looked at the municipal angles to see what the balance was there between taxes that would be flowing in and the promises the government might make insofar as taxes flowing back out. We hear lots of cries about infrastructure costs and the fact that there are municipalities right across the province who are accumulating rather large hidden deficits. It's a term that we'll need to get used to, Mr. Speaker, because more and more municipalities are afraid of some of these hidden deficits that are accumulating, as too, I suspect, are school boards and school trustees concerned with the same thing. What we tend to see here is a lot of our friends in the municipal level of government having to forestall some of the projects they would have gone ahead with that are new projects. So there's an accumulation there of a hidden deficit, not to mention, of course, the fact that there are other projects they had to put on hold which were already on the books when the downloading, the off-loading, and so on occurred.

So I was looking to see how the government might be addressing some of those fundamental issues that are on people's minds right now and certainly on the minds of our friends in the municipalities, who are facing an election here in several months' time. I did not see a great deal of balance that way in the throne speech, but we'll wait and see what the budget does before we cast a final opinion on that.

I will try and make my speech balance by pointing out some of things that I thought were particularly good that were at least alluded to, and then we'll stay very vigilant on the government, as the government's watchdog, to make sure they in fact deliver on that.

There were a couple of very blatant omissions, Mr. Speaker. You know, if this is the position paper of the provincial government, then I would expect it to be rather all-inclusive. I would've expected there to have been some mention of culture, for example, be it as remote as the government may choose to make it. Let's talk about culture and the fact that we know that in Alberta we have the setting for cultural crumbling taking place, with the devastation that's occurred in the film and video industry, for example, and the possibility of the National Screen Institute now moving. We know that there are a number of film projects, and along with those film projects the infrastructure that supports the film projects such as the producers, the directors, the writers, the actors, the musicians, et cetera are starting to leave the province because they can't ply their trade here as effectively as they can somewhere else where they're being given a truly competitive advantage. I was hoping that the government would have seen fit to at least mention culture somewhere.

By the same token, I would have thought they would have made some mention in here with respect to our multicultural groups as well, Mr. Speaker, just a recognition that they exist. We stand in the House here; we have the great Standing Order 40s that have been presented yesterday and today, for example, celebrating Eid,

which I want to extend my congratulations on as well, and yesterday the Chinese and Vietnamese lunar calendar New Year. We talk about all of these cultures that flourish in the province of Alberta and how they add and how they contribute and how we're all proud of the ancestors who came from those various cultures that helped build the programs and the province of Alberta. Yet when it comes to the government's position statement on what is most important and fundamental, there's no reference, not even a passing blimp, about culture or the multicultural aspect of it.

If you want to talk a little bit about hypocrisy and hypocritical acts, I would say that that's a statement of hypocrisy: to not even reflect it. I have watched this throne speech now for four or five years in a row, and not once could I find any reference to any of that, Mr. Speaker. So I think that's a blatant omission, and I hope that this verbal chastisement to the government will be remedied and will be corrected, because I want to stand in this House one day and see things like culture and multiculturalism talked about in this particular official Speech from the Throne. I think there needs to be, then, that type of inclusion. There are other examples, but let me move on for the sake of time.

I wanted to see some more commitments from the government to specific acts. There are several references – I think about a dozen or so; I stopped counting after a while – to the government undertaking to review, to study, to examine, to further an assessment, that type of phraseology. While I understand there's a need for some of that to occur, what I'm interested in now is what the government is actually going to implement. The government, for example, on the tax review issue had a Tax Reform Commission go around the province, I think in 1995 or somewhere thereabouts, that came out with a large raft of suggestions. I'd like to know why it is that those suggestions haven't been incorporated or addressed fully enough and why there's a need now to reinvent that particular wheel and go through the same process at a great expense to taxpayers and at a great delay as well when we have a series of recommendations that have already been enunciated, that are already there, that the government surely could just dust off and do something with. We haven't seen that, and I thought that was a rather blatant opportunity missed by the government to act on and to implement.

It's interesting, too, that as I went through here searching for some shred of evidence that there was some real concrete planning going on, I still haven't found it here in the throne speech. I didn't find it either in the Premier's television address, which I listened to carefully twice. I reread it and reran it for myself, and I read the speech a couple of times because I was looking for the plan. [interjections] I appreciate the applause from the side opposite, but what I was looking for, Mr. Speaker, was that this time around, now that the government is moving into an era of spending, I thought there would be some kind of rationale for that spending, some explanation of the numbers, how they came up with them, some kind of justification, if you will. I welcome the new spending in some of those areas because I know how critical it is and how much it's needed there. I congratulate the government for some foresight in that regard, but I don't yet see that kind of a plan having been developed.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I have no idea – and I don't think the ministers at this stage can tell me – whether \$95 million is sufficient in adult education or not. Is that adequate or not, and on what do you base that research? Is \$70 million enough in the area of social services? How much of

that is intended to go toward the administration, and how much is actually going to get down to where the rubber hits the road, where the people really need it? Particularly those of us who serve in the urban areas know that there are critical needs in those areas. The most critical need, apart from the recipients themselves – the truly needy ones I'm talking about – is with the short staff and the short staff lists that we have to accommodate the needs. There is so much intervention required by MLAs these days that it hardly leaves you enough time to do some of the legislative duties on certain days, because we're inundated with requests, particularly in the towns and the cities.

I know, Madam Speaker, that you know of what I speak. So I look at this, and I say: where is that plan to tell me whether those amounts of moneys are enough? Or, in education, is the \$380 million or \$340 million – I'm not sure which it is, but whatever the final amount is of new funding – sufficient to meet the growing needs of our classrooms, or is that sufficient to simply be enough to meet the legal requirements? Is there any improvement to that? We know there are new kids being born every day, and they're growing up and they're going to school. We understand that, and there's a certain legal requirement to fund those children. But are you doing anything to alleviate the problems that we already have – I'm talking about things like teacher/student ratios in existing classrooms – before we get to the next generation?

If the government is true to its word – and I expect it to hold itself to it – to focus on children, that's a darn good place to start, with the education system. I don't know if that's enough money or not enough. There's just no explanation, no rationale to it, but we'll wait and give the minister a chance in the budget coming up to see how his business plan pans out. I want to know how the numbers came to be what they are. As I say, I welcome the new money, but I'd also like to see some what I would call performance measures being addressed.

As a former schoolteacher I am always reminded how the best education possible occurs when it's one teacher, one student. We know we can't have that, but there's a reasonable number somewhere between one and 40. I would suggest it's probably about 22 or 23, as I think you'd find in studies; all members would find that. Yet we have some classes in the province – in particular, I've heard from classes in Calgary – where we have up to 40 students in the classroom. I'll tell you that if you've ever been a schoolteacher, you know how difficult it is to communicate and effectively educate 40 students at grade 8 or grade 10 levels when you really need to first of all address the student learning needs and try and teach a little above the level of the lowest learner there.

There are some good things that I want to turn to here. Having set the stage for some things that I want you to be vigilant on and pay attention to, I do want to comment very briefly because I'm a balanced individual and I believe in giving credit where it's due. Members opposite and present know that. I think it's good that the net provincial debt is targeted for eradication within about a year or a year and a half. I would caution the government, however, that in the previous budgets we've always heard that there's been a spending problem, that we have a spending problem. You remember that, those of you who were here or those of you who were aspiring to be here a few years ago. It's true that we did have a spending problem, but it was never true that we didn't also have a revenue problem.

4:50

I know that oil prices, according to industry analysts, are going

to bounce back up like we said they would. They've bounced back up to just over 17 bucks a barrel, and you can maybe expect a little bounce one way or the other. But I'll tell you that within a few years, maybe two years, you can expect our cyclical economy and especially the natural resource-based sector to experience some dramatic drops too, and that's when this province is going to have one heck of a revenue problem. That's where you're going to have to take a rereview of where you're going with this road map and how much money you are pledging on an annual basis toward the gross debt. I know that a billion dollars sounds great and it'll sell really well out there, but it's a very, very aggressive approach, and I would ask that members opposite rereview that. If they can't do it in this budget, then have a look at it in the second or third quarter, because there's bound to be a blip in those oil prices, natural gas prices, forestry prices, and so on at some point, and it's going to affect the bottom line here sooner or later.

That's why we on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, have said for years that the government should start a plan now for what we called an economic stabilization fund. The purpose of a fund like that would be to put aside about \$200 million a year for, let's say, three or four years and build a pool of easily accessible, easily liquidable moneys that would be there for days when it's necessary. That is not any longer true of the heritage savings trust fund, because we don't have the accessibility to all the dollars that are there. It's a proven fact – and I support this, incidentally – that if you leave the moneys invested that are there now, they attract more interest than they would if we took those moneys out and tried to pay down the debt. We know that. That's a statistical fact, and all members of the House who sit with me on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee know that to be true. It's a caution that I say: it's good to get rid of the debt. I ran on that ticket. I'm very fiscally responsible, and I will continue to be that. My constituents expect it of me. But you've got to be careful how quickly you're going with it and what kinds of protections you're building in.

I'll be interested to see this new fund, the oil price insurance fund or whatever it's called. I'll be interested to see if that's a clone of our suggestion for an economic stabilization fund. And if it is, when we see it, I'll certainly support it because that's a move in the right direction.

I notice here, too, that there are some other priorities the government has enunciated in Education. Funding for kindergarten: I was there at the rallies, as were other members, particularly on the Liberal side. I don't know if members from opposite sides were there or not – I never saw any of them – but we were certainly there helping out. I congratulate the government for recognizing that they had made a mistake a few years ago, for reinstating that funding, and even the Minister of Education for realizing that children who are in grades 2 and 3 now who were deprived of kindergarten funding earlier now need some remedial help in that respect. It's good that they've recognized that and are correcting that.

I also am very sensitive to the needs of students who require transportation to get to and from school. I have a very, very wide riding, Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you do as well, and it takes in a good chunk of rural Alberta, a number of farms and so on. I have in my constituency Maple Ridge and Oak Ridge, which is a trailer court development at the far east end of Edmonton-Mill Creek. There's a horrendous problem with busing that has developed there, and we've had many, many meetings with the school boards trying to correct it. It always seems to come back

down to money. So when I read on page 2 that the government is going to "provide further funding to address the costs of transporting students," I'm grateful to see that, and I wish them Godspeed in providing enough funding to help alleviate the difficulties that we see.

I also want to say thank you for looking at extending the funding for ESL, English as a Second Language, programs. I would say thank you with one hand, and then I'd have to give a little slap with the other for having cut it in the first place, because I think it's critical that we give these new speakers equal footing, equal opportunity by having ESL programs. So I think that's good, as I also think it's good that there's funding for students with special physical and mental difficulties. I think that's a good recognition on the part of the government, to help those students out.

With respect to the Advanced Education portfolio, I know that the minister mentioned there would be some additional moneys going into that area. I would just wonder whether or not there's been a review done, Mr. Minister – in the throne speech we can't tell – if there's a review being undertaken in that respect to make sure there are sufficient moneys in the loans portfolio. I think there's a sharp focus on this right now because students are graduating with debts of \$20,000 to \$25,000 to \$30,000. My God; I can't imagine how far behind the eight ball they must feel by the time they have to hit the streets and start looking for a job. It sure puts them at a great disadvantage.

I also welcome the additional \$70 million in Social Services, in particular to help the truly needy, as I've said before, and handicapped children as well as the funding of women's shelters. I've had too many experiences in that area, Madam Speaker, to comment on without getting somewhat emotional on it, because it really hit me over Christmas when my phones were ringing off the hook with families that were in desperate, desperate need of assistance. I saw it, too, in the faces of the children in the families when I delivered my annual Santas Anonymous presents with the CHED radio station. So I welcome that, and anything that helps low-income families such as the throne speech alludes to is also a very welcome benefit.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I don't think there was enough done for seniors. I think there's a lot more that the government could do with regard to seniors. The agreement of the government to "assess the effectiveness," to quote them on page 3, and to "review the impact of an aging population," are laudable comments, but what we need is some concrete action to back that up. We know that home care, for example, which affects primarily seniors, is desperately in need of review, revision, and perhaps a boost in moneys.

My final comment, since time is running out, is with respect to maintenance enforcement, and I would welcome the province's look into this. It kind of ties in with the final comment there. That is the protection of vulnerable consumers, and I have a motion to that effect on the books.

I hear the clock has gone, and I will take my leave and thank the government for listening to my words.

THE SPEAKER: Several members on the government side interjected, and normally there's a courtesy provided as to which government member would like to go first. In this case the whip prescribes it as the minister of science, research, and information.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Whip.

MR. SMITH: Don't let us go home on this negative note.

DR. TAYLOR: No, I won't let us go home on this negative note.

I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to stand and be able to address the throne speech. I consider it a very balanced document, a document of hope, a document of prosperity, and a very positive document for Albertans.

Like the speaker before me, Mr. Speaker, I consider myself a very balanced individual. I compliment him on being a balanced individual as well. But when we look at this document, the document talks about a strong foundation, and that's exactly what this government has built over the last four and a half, five years since we were first elected in June of 1993. We have built a strong foundation for this province to develop on. When we took over, as all of you know, this province was running deficit budgets year after year.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was your government.

DR. TAYLOR: The member opposite has interjected, Mr. Speaker, that it was my government. No, it certainly wasn't my government. I was not a member of this government until 1993, as she well knows if she would perhaps get her figures correct. I know it's difficult for the hon. member opposite to give correct figures because these . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Point of order.

Point of Order False Allegations

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is implying that it wasn't this government before 1993, and regretfully it has been for several years a Conservative government. He may have joined it in 1993, but regretfully they had been in government and putting our province in debt for many years before that.

5:00

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the point of order is?

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm still trying to find it. Just a minute here. False innuendo. Which one is that? Yeah, 23(i). He was saying that I had said that he was a part of the government. He is part of the government. [interjection] Well, it's close.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is clearly inappropriate again, an inappropriate use of points of order by the opposition to interject into the full flow and discussion of debate. Clearly, a new government. While I would acknowledge with pride that the Conservative Party has formed the government for many years in this province and has done a wonderful job, a new government is elected at each election, and therefore the minister is absolutely correct when he says that it's a new government that was elected in '93 and again a new government elected in 1997.

THE SPEAKER: Perhaps a suggested hint to avoid this kind of confusion in the future. It is a fact that the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta has been the government of Alberta since 1971. Perhaps we might refer to the 1997 administration or the 1993 administration or the 1989 administration. That might just allow for a bit of differentiation with respect to this.

Please proceed, hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course there wasn't a point of order. It was just a deliberate attempt to interrupt my flow of thoughts, but of course it didn't work. I will continue with the positive message that I am bringing on this Speech from the Throne.

Debate Continued

DR. TAYLOR: Back to where I was, Mr. Speaker. This government's Speech from the Throne provides an excellent balance. It provides a balance between paying down the debt and people. In fact, quite clearly if we look at about the fifth paragraph on page 1, it says:

Albertans told their government . . .

This is speaking of the Growth Summit.

. . . to respond to the pressures of growth and to develop the heart of our Alberta advantage, our people, while remaining fiscally responsible.

And that's exactly what this government intends to do over the next five years while we are in government and then the next five years after that when we form the next government. We will continue to be fiscally responsible, yet we will continue to develop people. This quite clearly is illustrated through this whole speech, but let me talk first about the fiscal responsibilities.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this government has promised in the next few years, or next year at least, that we will direct the first \$1 billion of any annual surplus to pay down the provincial debt. One billion of a surplus. Now, we know in this province that perhaps by next year we will have our net debt paid off. That's very much like credit card debt. You've taken the money; you've had the fun. You've spent it, and now you have to pay for it. It's like going on a vacation on your credit card, which of course I don't do and don't recommend that anybody does. I believe you have to pay for things before you enjoy them.

MR. SMITH: Just like research grants.

DR. TAYLOR: Just like research grants. Exactly. Thank you, Minister of Labour. A very wise comment, and I know you will support me when I bring forward some suggestions a little later through the committee structure on the availability of research money in Alberta. But let me get back to my speech, Minister of Labour.

We will pay down this debt. By the same token we will spend \$250 million, if the money is there, on people programs, but we will not spend it if it's not there, Mr. Speaker. This is the wise choice of a fiscally responsible government, not what I've continually heard opposite in listening very intently I must say, listening to every word of the opposition's comments on the throne speech. It started last evening with the opposition leader's comments, and quite frankly, you know, there was no positive direction added. It was kind of his whining anthem, I guess I would call it, before he leaves his leadership role.

We will first of all pay down the debt. We must do that to be responsible to Albertans. We must pay down the mortgage, just like all of us who have house mortgages. Our goal is to pay down our house mortgage and get out of having a mortgage so we will no longer have interest payments and we can put that interest payment in our personal lives to what we would consider better use. That's the same thing we intend to do as a government. Each year we are still paying about a billion dollars in interest. We need to pay down that debt so we can reinvest that billion dollars of interest into programs for people in Alberta, and that's what we intend to do.

The opposition has criticized it as just being a fiscal agenda,

Mr. Speaker, but it's not. It's a fiscal agenda for what? It's a fiscal agenda to pay down debt so we will have more money to invest in programs that Albertans have asked us to invest in.

We must remember at the same time, Mr. Speaker, that much of our budget is based on \$18.50 for a barrel of oil. That's why we cannot expend money. Last time I checked, about two days, I think oil was trading at \$15.80. Well, that could be a very severe problem if it stayed at that price for any length of time into the new budget year. It could seriously affect what we are able to do as a government. That's why we cannot commit to excessive spending. We must be fiscally responsible.

When we're talking about investing in people – and it is our top priority – we only need to look at education. We quite clearly see, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to increase the education budget from kindergarten to grade 12 by 13 percent. I do not believe any other province in Canada will be increasing education budgets by 13 percent. This is a huge increase for education. Not only are we increasing basic instruction grants; we are giving school boards flexibility to meet the needs of the students. We know right now in Alberta that there is a deficit in some children in their early reading skills, and as you see quite clearly, we have promised an approach of early intervention.

Now, in my past life, Mr. Speaker, when I was a professor, one of the areas of expertise I had was early intervention. I have in fact designed a number of written programs both in Canada and overseas that are still in progress and still being developed. There's a program in a preschool in the outback of Australia, in Burke, Australia, that is still using the program, with some minor modifications I'm sure, that myself and another professor developed in the 1970s.

AN HON. MEMBER: The poor Australians.

DR. TAYLOR: No, not poor Australians, hon. member.

These programs were developed as early intervention programs. What they did, Mr. Speaker, is provide opportunities in the preschool years for children who could be identified as children at risk to develop certain skills, language skills in particular, that would allow them to be successful in school. What we did was provide what is called an extended linguistic code to children that did not have the advantage of developing this in their home.

So I know the value of early intervention, and this government recognizes the value of early intervention through funds that are going to be expended in programs for young children, children at risk, as early as kindergarten, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that if we can get these children in kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2, these programs will be successful. I am pleased to be able to say that our government has the foresight to take this kind of development in hand.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, the government's commitment to research and advanced education. Now, I don't wish to steal any of the minister of advanced education's thunder, so I will . . .

MS CALAHASEN: Call it 5:30.

DR. TAYLOR: No, I'm not going to call it 5:30, as some members opposite have encouraged me. I've got some points I want to make here, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

In terms of research I want to point out that the government is committed to modernizing the research infrastructure and the

ability to attract high quality researchers. To have high quality researchers come to Alberta, we have to have the research programs. We have to be able to support their research programs at the university level or perhaps at institutes like the Cross Cancer Institute.

One of the things this government has committed is \$15 million to a program called IIPP. That stands for the intellectual infrastructure partnership program. The federal government – and I must say it's unusual for me to give the federal government credit, but I will in this instance give the federal Liberal government some credit for their foresight in establishing a program called the Canada infrastructure program. What this program will do is put money into universities if we match it as provinces for equipment and infrastructure in the universities.

One example of that would be the NMR 800 at the University of Alberta. We have at the University of Alberta a gentleman by the name of Dr. Brian Sykes, who is a world-renowned NMR researcher. He was being recruited by Columbia University, amongst others, to take his whole program, all his staff. Columbia was going to pick up and transport into Columbia University not just Brian but all his staff and provide them with an NMR 800 because we didn't have one in Alberta. Well, we approached the federal government; we approached the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Saskatchewan and said: all of you recognize this as a valuable program; let's do some joint ventures here. We now have the ability to keep Brian Sykes because we can provide the moneys to provide that NMR 800 in Alberta. The government has committed funds to build up this infrastructure. We must do it. We must have that NMR 800. We must have the equipment if we are going to keep this high quality research.

So I am very proud of this government, that it has the foresight to commit that \$15 million. It has the foresight to commit at least \$5 million to a science and research fund, and perhaps more. We'll have to see when the budget comes out if there is any increase in that, but I'm certainly hopeful that the Treasurer might grant us a small increase. Budget day is coming February 12, so we will see at that time.

This government has committed to increase that infrastructure. This government is committed to attracting high quality research, and we will because we have more in this province than just the equipment. We have first-rate universities. In fact, I visited recently with a top cancer researcher at Cross Cancer. She just moved up to Edmonton from the U.S., and last year was her first winter in Edmonton. She'd moved from a place in the U.S. where it was considerably warmer. I said to her: why on Earth did you move from there to Edmonton to experience that horrible winter? She said that winter didn't matter, that two things cause her to move: one, Cross Cancer and the University of Alberta committed to support her research program, and secondly, she liked the Alberta environment, a healthy environment to raise her children. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that she looked at the quality of our education system, she looked at the quality of our health care, she looked at the quality of life in Alberta, and she said that this was where she wanted to raise her children, in Alberta. This person could have gone anywhere in the world; she chose to come to Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, to a large part this government is responsible for creating that environment, not just the environment at the universities that attract these people but the whole environment in our society where we have a terrific education system, where we have terrific health care, where we have safe communities in which to

live, where you don't have to worry walking down streets at night that you're going to be mugged or raped or whatever may happen. This is a healthy environment, and this is a responsible government that has created that environment and will continue to create that environment.

I would point out as well that we're doing something as a government in terms of commitment to lower income Albertans. We look at the child tax benefits for employed Albertans. They will be able access a thousand dollars a year into their pockets. That's for families earning up to \$50,000 a year, and that is a very good thing we can do to help some of these families.

It talks briefly about infrastructure, and I'll bring in some of my constituency comments now. My constituency is a huge constituency. I've a third of Medicine Hat, but I also have about 20,000 square miles of rural Alberta that is quite sparsely populated. The Member for Taber-Warner's adjoins mine, and he's got similar problems in terms of large spaces and not too many people living in those spaces. For instance, in the county of Forty Mile I believe there are 4,500 people living in that whole county, and what we have is a road system, Mr. Speaker, that needs to be well maintained.

In the county of Forty Mile the railways are closing their branch lines. There used to be a line that started at Manyberries and went from Manyberries to Orion, went from Orion to Etzikom, went from Etzikom to Foremost, and went from Foremost to Stirling. That was the grain line in this huge green area, the grain belt down there. The people would drive their trucks into the local elevator, load onto the tracks, and away they went. Right now, Mr. Speaker, that line has been pulled out from Manyberries to Orion. The line has been pulled out from Orion to Etzikom. The line is being pulled out from Etzikom to Foremost by the year 2000 and will be pulled out from Foremost to Stirling.

What that does is make huge stress on our roads. Just from the Foremost area alone we would need – this is just Foremost, not Etzikom, not Orion, not Manyberries, just Foremost – something like 43 B trains a day going out of there. That's just the grain that's handled at the Foremost elevators: 43 B trains a day, 200 days a year.

MR. RENNEN: And that road can't take it.

DR. TAYLOR: And that road can't take it. The road from Foremost west to Stirling cannot handle it. It can't handle B trains right now, Mr. Speaker. So what the B trains are doing is driving gravel roads. The county of Forty Mile does not have a road that is not banned, not one road that is not banned all year. Every road in that county is banned 100 percent of the time, 100 percent of the year. This past year they've been developing a gravel road that they can run up to highway 3 that will not be banned. That will be the first year-round road.

Now, when you have roads that are banned, Mr. Speaker, it increases the cost to the producer. If you can only haul 75 or 85 percent of your load, of course your trucking costs are going to go up. Your trucking costs will go up 20, 25 percent. So if I can haul on my B train 75 percent of a load, I'm missing 25 percent. If I have to haul 25 percent less fertilizer when I come back, I'm missing 25 percent of the load. It increases the cost, and I can tell you right now that the margin is not there in the grain business or the cattle business, of which I have some familiarity, to do this.

So that's why this government is paying attention to infrastruc-

ture. The government recognizes the need for this increased infrastructure and will commit to Albertans to spend more money on infrastructure, will commit to my constituents that we will maintain these roads. For instance, in Alberta we have about 15,000 kilometres of secondary highway. They have a life span of about 15 years. We will maintain 10 percent of those highways, or 1,500 kilometres, every year to make sure that we maintain our roads so that Albertans can drive on them, so that the grain trucks, the cattle liners can continue to move on them. [interjection] Yes, I still believe I have some time.

I want to talk briefly about science and research, Mr. Speaker. It says quite clearly that "our government will introduce legislation to bring about a cohesive . . ." [Dr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

Mr. Speaker, could I have unanimous consent to continue, please?

THE SPEAKER: The request has been made by the hon. member for unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed. Is unanimous consent being granted to this request? All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, I'll move to adjourn debate.

[At 5:20 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

