

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 2, 1998

1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/02/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Let us pray.

At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature.

We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly the Hon. Darren Praznik, Minister of Health from the province of Manitoba. Mr. Praznik has served as MLA for Lac du Bonnet since the 1988 Manitoba general election. He has held a variety of cabinet posts in Manitoba including Minister of Labour, 1990 to '95; minister responsible for workers' compensation and for French language services 1991 to 1995; Minister of Northern Affairs and minister responsible for Native Affairs 1993 to 1997; and Minister of Energy and Mines, 1995 to 1997. In addition to his duties as Minister of Health Mr. Praznik also serves as minister responsible for French language services. Mr. Praznik is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Alberta Assembly.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented last week now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to limit funding to private schools to the current (1996/97) level of \$1,815 per student.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to give oral notice today of the intention to move the following motion under government business tomorrow at 4:30 p.m.: be it resolved that the membership of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be changed as follows: Mr. Klapstein to replace Mr. Friedel.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will rise again at the appropriate time to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta recognize February as Black History Month in Alberta and congratulate the National Black Coalition of Canada, Alberta chapter, and its

related organizations for undertaking various activities in this regard.

I hope that will meet with unanimous approval as it has in the past.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice to propose the following motion to the Assembly: be it resolved that this Assembly recognize and congratulate the women's curling team from the Edmonton Ottewell Curling Club on their victory this weekend in the Alberta women's curling championship. We wish them the very best in the upcoming Canadian Scott Tournament of Hearts in Regina.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: There are quite a few today hon. member, so we will proceed with the hon. Government House Leader first.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the interest of ensuring that both CP and the *Edmonton Journal* get it right, I'll be tabling today the following four documents: one, a news release dated January 30, 1998, pertaining to the Alberta Justice Summit; secondly, a full copy of the speech which I made to the CBA on that afternoon; third, a 1997 document entitled Summary of Environics West Poll of Albertans on the Justice System; and finally, a 1997 summary of the Angus Reid group survey entitled Public Confidence in the Justice System.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. January 29 was a great day for the environment, for Canadians, and for Albertans. In St. John's there was the signing of an accord and three subagreements that I wish to table this afternoon. These were signed by the federal minister of environmental protection, all of the provinces with the exception of Quebec, and the territories.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to file five copies of a letter to the National Black Coalition of Canada, Alberta chapter. Black History Month is an Alberta tradition since 1970 which highlights the important contribution black Albertans have made to the social, economic, and cultural structure of this province. It happens that the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency enjoys one of the largest black communities in Alberta, and they have made a major contribution in that part of the development of the province.

On behalf of the government of Alberta, I thank all black Albertans for their unique contribution to this province and congratulate you on the occasion of Black History Month.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Legislative Assembly copies of letters I sent earlier to five recipients of the Order of Canada. John Currie of Calgary, Bobby Curtola of Spruce Grove, Zoie Gardner of Edmonton, were all named members of the Order of Canada. Harley Hotchkiss of Calgary was named an officer of the Order of Canada. These special Albertans have worked to improve the quality of life in their communities and in this country.

I have also sent a letter to Wayne Gretzky to congratulate him for formally receiving his Order of Canada medal last week and to thank him for his contribution to sports and citizenship in Alberta, throughout Canada, and around the world.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, I wish to file a copy of a letter I sent this morning to Ms Cathy Borst, skip of Alberta's new provincial championship curling team. Ms Borst and her teammates captured the championship and for the third time will represent Alberta at the national Scott Tournament of Hearts in Regina later in February. I know that every member in the Assembly joins me in wishing her and her team well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first tabling is a news release from the chief of police, John Lindsay, who wishes to reaffirm the support and approval of the Edmonton Police Service for the proposed Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

The second tabling is from Crossroads outreach, from DeWayne Brown, who deals with juvenile prostitutes in Calgary.

The third one is from Street Teams, which is an organization again that deals with juvenile prostitution and is headed by executive director, Ross MacInnes.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth one is a list of children who died in child welfare care April 1, '97, to January 15, 1998.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of the Child and Family Resource Association accreditation standards. These standards are used, they accredit day care facilities in this province, and they exceed the standards set down by this province.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table this afternoon copies of correspondence with Calgary-Buffalo constituents with advice in terms of how to access records of expenses both in terms of my constituency office and me as MLA.

MRS. PAUL: I am tabling today four copies of the ATPC leverage report for the period through January 27, 1997, which was the subject of the minister's audit.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table four copies of my report on my role during the recent Alberta mission to Asia. Our education institutions here in Alberta are well recognized throughout the world for their expertise, and I was pleased to have the opportunity to share Alberta's experiences and discuss international opportunities for Alberta's education system.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 3(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 20th annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 1996. A copy of the report was distributed to all members on December 19, 1997.

1:40

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature 23 students along with their teacher from Prince Charles school. We have Mr. Ricard, their teacher, and we have two adult helpers along: Mrs. Wedel and Ms Joyce. I should mention to you, too, that these students have a very special school in that they have some courses that are taught in Cree. I must say to the students that there are at least three Members of this Legislative Assembly that speak enough Cree to be able to come and teach a course at your school. It's with great pleasure that I say tansi to those this afternoon and ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a member of my basketball team. Amelie is here today. She is accompanied by 22 of her fellow students and teachers Mr. Ray Brooks and Miss Jennifer Gluwchynski. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House. They are all from St. Richard school.

head:

Oral Question Period

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. MITCHELL: The Premier continues to link the social evil of video slot machines to the social good of community grants because it's the only way that he can even remotely begin to justify video slot machines. He doesn't want to lose that link in the argument, Mr. Speaker, because once that's gone, the only thing that he is left with to justify video slot machines is his government's greed at any cost. The truth is that the government doesn't need video slot machine money to fund community groups. Why does the Premier keep misleading Albertans about needing video slot machines to fund community and church grants?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to a matter of need, I guess we could allude to any program. The simple fact is that lottery moneys from all sources, including VLTs, used to be in a separate lottery fund, and a percentage of that was designated to support various community programs, various cultural programs, various sports activities, and so on. That money then – by the way, upon the insistence of the Liberal Party, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

Mr. Wickman: Year after year the Auditor General recommends that lottery funds be part of general revenues. What is it about the use of these lottery funds that prevents a minister from implementing the Auditor's recommendations?

Subsequent to that we have implemented the Auditor's recommendation, and we designate a portion of those funds to those community endeavours that are not deemed to be essential but indeed are deemed to be very, very important to the quality of life in this province.

MR. MITCHELL: So if it's not essential, it's okay if it's funded by video slot machine money, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier get rid of video slot machines, outright get rid of them, given that he collects more than enough money from less addictive, far less dangerous forms of gambling to cover community grants already?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I guess we have to have a discussion on the whole issue of gambling and what is more sinful or less sinful in terms of gambling generally.

I find it interesting that the leader of the Liberal opposition refers to my ability, this power that I have to eliminate VLTs with the stroke of a pen. I don't think that I have that authority, because there are still some contractual arrangements and procedures to be followed relative to the people who have VLTs in their bars and in their restaurants.

Now, the Liberals are somewhat inconsistent. They're saying that with the stroke of a pen I should get rid of VLTs. In their own Liberal material, their election material, Mr. Speaker, they were going to put in a three-year period. In other words, what they were proposing is to allow people they accuse us of addicting to VLTs – they're giving these people another three years to become further addicted.

MR. MITCHELL: He literally did away with St. Stephen's grant with the stroke of a pen right there at the bottom of his letter, Mr. Speaker.

Why doesn't the Premier simply focus on the issue and get rid of video slot machines now? It's very clear that his government was funding community groups between 1988 and 1992, when there were no video slot machines. He doesn't need the money to fund community groups.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is the subject of a debate in city council chambers today in Calgary. It will be the subject of a debate, I suspect, in the not too distant future in council chambers in Edmonton. There was a year-long very intensive review of gambling in this province, including VLTs. Quite clearly the recommendation was that if VLTs are going to be removed, let that be a community decision – a community decision – and let community standards prevail.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the leader of the Liberal opposition is going to have a lot of time on his hands very soon, and if he wants to get involved in this issue in the city of Edmonton, I would encourage him to do so.

MR. MITCHELL: So there can be a debate anywhere, Mr. Speaker, except right here in the Legislative Assembly, where the government made the decision to bring them in in the first place.

THE SPEAKER: I take it, hon. member, that that was your preamble to this upcoming question?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any church or community groups that return video slot machine money or won't take it in the first place are now going to be penalized by receiving no money at all for their good works. What this amounts to is that because these groups are going to provide the moral leadership the Premier lacks, he's going to penalize them. Mr. Speaker, why would the Premier want to penalize these groups for doing the right thing?

MR. KLEIN: Nobody is going to be penalized. Everyone who applies and receives a CFEP grant or a grant under the Wild Rose Foundation or a grant under the – what is it? – parks, wildlife, recreation program. Everyone who applies for a lottery grant and if that application is approved and if they decide they want the money once it's sent, then they're perfectly entitled to keep the money, Mr. Speaker. I've got no problems with that.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, so the Premier is saying – would he please confirm this? – that there is going to be no other source of funding to these community groups who refuse to take that money from video slot machines because it's immoral, that he's not right now considering some other source of funding. If he is, could he please tell us what it is?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, VLTs are part of the mix relative to lottery funds that come in. There is all kinds of money coming in from various forms of lotteries. There are various pull tickets, Sport Select programs, 6/49, and there are dollars from VLTs. Yes, the majority of those dollars I suspect do come from VLTs, but they're all part of the lottery program. I don't know how difficult it would be administratively to separate out the money that comes from a VLT as opposed to the others. I don't know. Perhaps we could look into that. Getting back to the point I wanted to make, not all this money comes from VLTs; it comes from the lottery pool generally. It's all gambling in one form or another.

The simple fact is that all of these organizations who apply and are approved for funding will get that funding. In the case of St. Stephen's church, my PS on that letter came on the heels of the incoming bishop making some very, very strong statements relative to how he was going to take aim at VLTs. The message was very, very simple, and I can paraphrase it. He must have the letter in front of him. I simply said: if you feel uncomfortable, in light of your bishop's statements on this issue, taking the money, then please feel free to return it. They can also feel free to keep it. It wouldn't hurt my feelings one way or the other.

MR. MITCHELL: Sophie's choice, Mr. Speaker, is no choice at all. They don't have another source of funds.

Given that the Premier, then, is now saying really that, well, we have other sources of funds for these community groups and we don't really need video slot machines, why won't he simply do away with video slot machines? They have no social value, they are hurting families, and they are hurting communities. Get rid of them.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that in fact there are two communities now who no longer have VLTs. That was done not through a dictatorial action by the Premier; that was done in a democratic fashion. VLTs no longer exist in the town of Rocky Mountain House. They no longer exist in the town of . . .

MR. MITCHELL: They exist in Fort McMurray.

MR. KLEIN: Just a moment, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the . . . [interjections] Who's asking the questions over there? You or your boss? Your boss for the time being.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Premier, would you just carry on and give a complete answer in light of the interjections.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to reply to some of the gratuitous comments coming from the other side, VLTs have been removed from Rocky Mountain House. They've been removed from Sylvan Lake. There is a problem in Lacombe. Indeed there was a plebiscite, but the validity of the election is being challenged, and until that is resolved, we can't do much. In the case of Wood Buffalo regional municipality a similar situation exists. That election is being challenged in the courts.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Long-term Care

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the throne speech the government stated that they will review long-term care services in the province. The regional health authorities and Albertans already know what the issue is. It's lack of funding which is keeping Albertans from obtaining their needed long-term care. As the review is undertaken, the waiting lists continue to soar, and families continue to be split apart. My questions are to the Minister of Health. When will this government provide the resources to regional health authorities so they can reopen the closed long-term care beds?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Capital health authority, which is the regional health authority that the hon. member resides in, I think that over the last two years we have made a very significant increase in the funding to the overall regional health authority: some \$81 million of increase last year, or about 11 percent; this year approximately \$40 million in operational funds and another \$12 million in equipment or capital funds for an increase of about, I think, 18 percent or so over the two-year period. So there has been significant reinvestment in health care in, for instance, the Capital region.

Now, with respect to long-term care we want with the committee and with the directions in our business plan to put an emphasis, yes, on looking at ways of providing more long-term care accommodation, both using the volunteer sector and the regional health authority's resources itself and capitalizing on many of the innovative long-term care projects such as the CHOICE program, which is targeting the proper population and providing good care and being cost-effective.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can this minister stand here and say that the funding in the Capital health region is adequate when over 500 people are on a wait list for long-term care. Can you explain that?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that first of all there is a very significant additional investment of funds, additional funds, in the Capital health region. Yes, we recognize all across this country, including Alberta, that the increasing proportion of our elderly population is requiring that we develop more long-term care models and more capacity, and that is something that we are putting an emphasis on in the province.

MS LEIBOVICI: Five hundred people in the Capital health region alone.

My third question is: what happens when an individual can't access long-term care in their region? Just how far are people going to be placed away from their families and loved ones?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do throughout the regions in the province put the first priority on care for the elderly and on finding a location for them outside of the acute care facility once they have progressed to the point where they go into long-term care placement. Yes, there is no guarantee that their first location will be their location of choice. But certainly every effort is made as opportunities open up within the system to move long-term care patients to as close a location, which is acceptable to them, to their home as possible. That is part of the emphasis in the system.

Health Care Premiums

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, a 55-year-old unemployed woman suffering inordinate pain from kidney stones went to her doctor last summer to get some treatment. She knew she was behind in her health care payments. She was unemployed. She was behind by a couple of hundred bucks. She got billed directly by the Allin Clinic for \$64.62. She called me at home last night very upset about this. My question to the Health minister is this: when will this government abandon its hideous policy of discrimination against those who can't afford to keep up with their health care premiums?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the hon. leader of the third party's question, this was a billing of an individual by a physician?

MS BARRETT: Billed directly.

MR. JONSON: Oh, well, that is quite different I think from the actual question, Mr. Speaker. The health care premiums of course are charged to those people able to pay in this province, but no one – and let me emphasize this – no one is denied access to health care in this province by virtue of having paid or not paid their premiums.

Now, without knowing the specific circumstances, this seems to have been an initiative of the physician, for whatever motive I don't know. It is something that one would have to get the details of and then look into.

2:00

MS BARRETT: Well, Barrett and her ferrets researched this pretty thoroughly this morning, and every clinic we called said that if the patient has been cut off of health care due to arrears, the patient will be billed directly, Mr. Speaker. My belief is that that is in contravention of the Canada Health Act. Will the Minister agree now to put an end to this policy?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the physician is paid by Alberta health care whether a person has paid their premium or whether they haven't or whether they are receiving a subsidy. There is no direct connection between the two, and I think we are mixing up two types of issues here. It seems to me, as I said, without the benefit of the details and being able to investigate it, that we're talking about perhaps a billing practice for some other reason.

MS BARRETT: No, Mr. Speaker. The document says very clearly: AHC has refused to pay for these services. They are insured services.

Will the minister make a commitment to let the people who are behind in their payments, make a commitment that no clinic – and we checked all over this city this morning: standard operating procedure. No clinic should be allowed to bill these people just because they're in arrears.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that I would ask for the opportunity to investigate this particular issue. I would certainly reply in some detail to the hon. member, and I could reply in the House if she wishes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sulphur Pollution

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few months in the Airdrie-Rocky View constituency we've had two industrial accidents, both resulting in fires involving sulphur. Concerns have been raised about standards and regulations governing the handling and storage of sulphur in the province of Alberta. Could the Minister of Environmental Protection please explain what his department is doing to respond to those concerns?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true; there were two fires in the hon. member's constituency over the last short while, and both involved sulphur. In the first one actually the company was cleaning up the site because of an order that was issued from Environmental Protection. Under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act we have the ability, if we feel that there is the danger of pollution, to issue an order. That was being carried out at the time when there was an accidental ignition of some of the sulphur. That particular incident is still under investigation. We at this point have not laid any charges.

The second one occurred just very recently. The initial investigation seems to indicate that that was an explosion created from some dust during a handling procedure and is currently still under investigation.

As it relates to human health and those standards, I would ask the hon. Minister of Labour to supplement my answer.

THE SPEAKER: I think we'll just proceed, and perhaps it'll come out in subsequent questions.

MS HALEY: To the same minister then. Could you please explain: once incidents like these fires have been brought under control, what does your department do to determine the impact of the accidents?

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The department had staff on site immediately. We also had an air monitoring device on site checking the plume as it moved to the northeast. Actually they were taking samples for over a day and are now analyzing those. We are proceeding with a total investigation to see if in fact there was some negligence on the part of the company in the handling and/or storage of this material.

MS HALEY: My final question to the same minister is: could you please tell me what your department does now to work with those companies that are involved to ensure that these situations aren't repeated?

MR. LUND: As I indicated, the investigation is continuing. We're at this time not sure whether it will be necessary to issue any further orders or if in fact it would move through to some type of prosecution.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Edmonton has been let down by this government again. The hog processing industry in this city has gone from the political pork barrel to the picket line burning barrel. Over 209 million taxpayers' dollars have been invested in the former Gainers' site.

The former Provincial Treasurer said in this House on March 23, 1994, "The taxpayers will come out even" if Gainers is sold. My questions today are to the Premier. Why, when you sold Gainers, did your government foolishly agree to separate the processing plant from the processing equipment, which the taxpayers purchased? Now as a result of this foolish agreement, there is a difficulty in attracting a new buyer to that site.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're trying to deal with that situation the best we possibly can and to create as much value for the property as we possibly can. We think it's a good site for the processing of livestock, whether it's hogs or other agricultural animals. I'll have the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, who has been charged with leading the program to find a new use for that site and put people back to work, supplement my answer.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to put this whole issue in perspective, and I would say that \$209 million has not been spent on the facility there over the years. I don't know where those numbers are coming from. I think we have to understand that the equipment, yes indeed, was sold to Burns, which in turn sold it to Maple Leaf. I'd like to say at this point that Maple Leaf is abiding by the terms of their lease, and we all know we have been very open on this.

The hon. member has gone through the plant himself. He can attest to the fact that a 91-year-old building that has had special certification to do meat because of wood and black iron in it, a 91-year-old building that is reported to be held up through the refrigeration process, which we are checking incidentally, hon. member - I don't know that for sure - becomes a very difficult buy for any outside buyer. My department has entertained any written offer to purchase that facility, and to this point there have been no written offers to purchase the facility. We're in the process of trying to market it to get the best return for future industrial jobs, whether in that area or other areas, on behalf of the citizens of that particular section of Edmonton and indeed the whole area.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the union requested help from your government on September 16 by letter to you directly, Mr. Premier, why did it take your government until October 22 to respond to the union's request for help in resolving this dispute?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, our response to that letter is the same today as it was then; that is, the services of Alberta Labour would be made available in terms of providing mediation services. Those services were provided. There was a mediation report that was rejected by the union. I'll have the hon. Minister of Labour supplement my answer, but I believe that he will reply that all reasonable steps that could have been taken to resolve this dispute were taken.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and in fact that's exactly what's occurred. The operation moved from that point to not being a strike but in fact being a closure. The parties were consistent in their messages. The unfortunate part, of course, was that there was some discussion as to what one arm of the union was doing in one province and what the other arm of the union thought they were doing in our province.

2:10

MR. MacDONALD: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier had asked the Minister of Labour in September to act as quickly as he did this afternoon, perhaps there would still be a hog processing industry in this city.

Why, Mr. Premier, did you let Edmontonians down after you promised on February 23, 1993, that you would make sure that this plant remained viable and open and that those workers would keep their jobs? Why did you say that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I made no such comment whatsoever. I'd like the hon. member to show me where those comments were made. As a matter of fact, my only comments relative to this particular situation were that mediation services were available. They were offered, and they were used. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out the way we would have preferred the outcome to have been accepted.

Having said that, my only statement relative to the Gainers' plant was - I had a conversation with Wallace McCain in Toronto. I'm just paraphrasing it now: make no mistake about it; if the union decides to go on strike, the plant will close. That wasn't my decision. It wasn't the Labour minister's decision. It wasn't the Liberal party's decision. It was the decision of the company, who said that if there is a strike, the plant will close. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. Unfortunate as it might be, that's the way it was.

Now, having said that, Mr. Speaker, we did commit that we would use all of our very, very best efforts to find a new use for that site. The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services was put in charge of the examination of uses for that site. I understand that he has consulted with the mayor and with Economic Development Edmonton. We have put together a team within government involving Agriculture, Labour, Economic Development, and Public Works to vigorously pursue a new use for that site so we can indeed reap the economic benefits, this city can reap the economic benefits, northern Alberta can reap the economic benefits, but more importantly so we can put people to work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Agricultural Disaster Relief

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the government for the way they handled the recent grass fires in southern Alberta in providing assistance to those communities in need. No one likes to see a disaster happen. However, I have received several calls from the farmers in my constituency in the northeast who have been devastated by rains this fall and have lost most of their crops, if not all of them. They feel that they did not receive the same treatment. To the minister of agriculture. I understand there's some \$50 million that will be turned over in surplus to Treasury. Could some of this money not have been used to provide relief to the farmers in the northeast and northern Alberta?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, all of our programs under the farm income disaster program, crop insurance, and some of the disaster loan program have been applied equitably and fairly to both regions, including Athabasca, Boyle, the Cleardale-Saddle Hills area, and the Granum area. Basically the program is that

anything uninsurable is covered through the disaster program we have in place in the province of Alberta and anything insurable, including crops, has to be covered by the farmer. Some of the surplus dollars have gone back to Treasury as a result of finding new and better ways of delivering services in the department of agriculture and also in the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. It's a testament to the good work that their staff is doing in those areas.

MR. BRODA: Supplementary question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Some of these same farmers have lost their crops three years in a row, and they cannot afford some of the insurance that's out there. Could the minister advise if there is any possible way of addressing their costs of insurance?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have looked at what is a unique situation in Athabasca and the Cleardale-Saddle Hills area, and that is three years of inability to put in a crop. As a result, under our current farm income disaster program, the farmers are not able to drive a margin of which we could pay 70 percent of that margin under the program. We are looking at the third year of the farm income disaster program, where it will be coming forward for a total review.

However, I've mentioned to the farmers at every opportunity that we've met that we are not going to go back to the previous policy of ad hoc programs trying to identify these single areas. We have the most comprehensive program in the province of Alberta I think, indeed, compared to other provinces: farm income disaster, crop insurance, and NISA for all of the crop farmers in the province.

MR. BRODA: No further questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Health Regions' Funding

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government's recent announcement of health care funding creates a big problem for regional health authorities but an even bigger problem for Albertans needing health services in 1998 and 1999. The Calgary regional health authority is going to receive \$33 million less than what that region has determined is needed just to hold the line on services. It's not just an isolated problem. Edmonton, Chinook, David Thompson, East Central, and Palliser echo these concerns. My questions are to the Minister of Health this afternoon, and I would ask him this: which group of Albertans does this minister think can afford to wait longer for accessing a health service? Somebody waiting for a dialysis treatment? Somebody needing cardiac surgery? Somebody needing hip joint replacement? Who should be waiting longer? Who ought to wait longer, according to this minister's plan?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the funding announcement that was made in January with respect to regional health authority funding - I would like to focus on what I understand is the focus of the hon. member's question. We did recognize in that funding announcement in the context of provincewide services, services such as dialysis and cardiac surgery - and I won't go through the whole list the hon. member quoted. That particular area is a set of services offered in Edmonton and Calgary which benefit the province in total. There we have increased funding, as I recall,

by 10 percent over last year, which I think is a fairly significant increase recognizing that particular high priority area.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question would be this: why doesn't the minister trust his own handpicked regional health authorities who have told him that they need significantly more money to be able to do the job Albertans expect when it comes to health service?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that we have provided significantly more money. I have given one example in response to the first question. In the case of the Calgary regional health authority, which has been alluded to, there has been an increase of \$35 million in operational funding as I recall and some \$13 million in equipment funding, for an overall increase of 7 percent. In addition to that, as I indicated to you and to the hon. member, last year the funding increase for that particular regional health authority was 11 percent. I think that's a fairly significant trend.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm still trying to get an answer to this question. So I'll come back and ask again: leaving aside the numbers, why is it that when the Calgary regional health authority comes to this minister and says, "We need a certain number of dollars to provide an adequate level of health service to Calgarians," this minister says: I'm going to ignore that, and I'm going to give you \$33 million less? Would he give us the rationale, the justification for ignoring the recommendation of his own regional health authority?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that we have given a significant additional amount of money to the Calgary regional health authority. I would not go so far as to ever say in any particular year that we have met every particular demand or initiative that may be referred to, but I don't know quite where the hon. member is quoting \$33 million from. I listened quite carefully to the presentation by the Calgary regional health authority, and albeit we were not able to meet their total objective in terms of funding for this year, we have made a very, very significant contribution to that particular goal that they brought forward.

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

WCB Survivors' Pensions

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1982 an all-party review committee changed the WCB policy for surviving spouses of workers who died as a result of work-related accidents. Prior to 1982 widows without dependent children received 75 percent of their spouses' eligible gross income until death or remarriage. After 1982 the payment was reduced to an equivalent of three years of benefits. There were also significant changes for those widows with dependent children. My question is for the Minister of Labour. Have there been any studies since 1982 to show the impact of the changes on the welfare of the surviving family members?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is an excellent question. I welcome it from the member. There is that issue that WCB now is undertaking an examination of exactly this policy as well as other policies. More importantly, the speaker's preamble I think

outlined the scenario in which the situation occurred in 1982 where an all-party committee – in fact the former leader of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Grant Notley, sat on that committee. They then tabled these changes, as the member pointed out, where lifetime WCB pensions were replaced by enhanced vocational support and term pensions.

It is not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, that the Workers' Compensation Board has delivered to us any impact studies, information, analyses related to that. I will certainly ask the WCB to do a complete scan and report back to this House and to the member for that answer.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also will the minister commit to having the WCB compensation for surviving family members issue placed on the agenda of the WCB benefits policy review, which I understand was to begin this week?

MR. SMITH: Good questions from a good representative, Mr. Speaker. Let me just add that the Workers' Compensation Board is an employer-funded organization. It is a board-governed institution, and it does operate at arm's length from the government. They're always under examination on how they can do things better for the employers, who pay all the money that operates that organization, and the workers, who last year received more payout than ever before and returned back to work at an earlier pace.

Anyone interest in participating, Mr. Speaker, in the broad policy consultation that the WCB is about to undertake over the next short period of time – I believe it'll commence in the next couple of weeks and go on for an extensive period of time – people who are involved in this issue directly, those mentioned in the newspaper today, are all perfectly able, one, to participate in the review and, secondly, to contact board members and also the board chair directly.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: will the minister give his assurance that any deficiencies in the current benefit policies for dependent spouses will be addressed by 1999 and hopefully in the budget?

MR. SMITH: It would have no impact on the government budget because, as I said earlier, the WCB act stipulates that, one, they cannot run a deficit, and secondly, they are totally funded by employer dollars and not by any taxpayer dollars whatsoever. Certainly I think that they would be able to move with dispatch, Mr. Speaker, and that should there be changes, they would be able to direct their recommendations for legislative change and modification through the standing policy committee process and subsequently through government in 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Child Welfare

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A four-year-old child under the protective care of this government has died. The Minister of Family and Social Services is ultimately responsible for his department and policies; therefore, his ministry is ultimately responsible for not preventing this boy's death. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: what is the government's policy on returning children to environments in which they have been physically abused?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing this question forward. I would say at the outset that the death of any four-year-old child is a very tragic occurrence. When I heard about this situation on Thursday of last week, there were some circumstances surrounding it that I as minister, ultimately accountable, as the hon. member has stated, quite frankly wasn't comfortable with. I ordered an immediate inquiry as to what part social services had to play in this. I also talked to the medical examiner's office, who stated that the issue is presently before the criminal court. Following the criminal court's investigation, there will be a fatality inquiry review. I will also say that I will make public any inquiry, anything that the social services ministry comes up with, providing that the person's privacy is protected.

MRS. SLOAN: You allowed him to go back into that home.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I do not recall recognizing you.

MS OLSEN: This again to the Minister of Family and Social Services: why was Jordan Quinney returned to live in the home of a man convicted of assaulting him?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I need to caution the member and this House that this issue is before the courts. Any mention of anything that's happened with respect to previous charges, et cetera, is actually prevented from being asked due to 23(g) under the Standing Orders.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is great need here to be careful in terms of the question that does come forward. I would refer hon. members to our own Standing Orders, 23(g) in this case. The debate must be very, very strictly relevant to the point. If it

refers to any matters pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination

- (i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence and from the date of the filing of a notice of appeal until the date of a decision by an appellate court . . .

And the rules do go on. So frame the questions very, very carefully so that nothing is said in this House that may prejudice the ongoing investigation.

Child Welfare (continued)

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask this question, then, to the Minister of Family and Social Services: is it the government's policy to return abused children to environments that put them at risk?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to answer that question. The mission statement of children's services is to keep children safe. As the name implies, that's what we aim to do.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I still will recognize a third if you wish. Do you have a supplementary question, or are you concluded?

MS OLSEN: Yes. Thank you. My understanding is that the minister has committed to a fatalities inquiry. Will he then commit to making public every aspect regarding this little boy's tragic death? A public inquiry, not just a fatalities inquiry.

2:30

DR. OBERG: Actually, Mr. Speaker, what I said was that a fatality inquiry would take place after the Criminal Code inquiry. The fatality inquiry is not something that a minister orders. It's the medical examiner's office who orders that to occur. I've already given my word that in the social services inquiry into any dealings that this department has had with that case, anything that is found will be made public. But I must caution the hon. member that nothing will be made public that interferes with the privacy of anyone involved.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Community Lottery Boards

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had several conversations with the city of Red Deer council and other municipal officials with respect to the community lottery boards. In Red Deer's case we have an organization that is perfectly equipped and meets the criteria under the name of the Red Deer community foundation. What can be best described as an irritant to municipal officials is the part that they're required to administer these funds without any administrative dollars. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Would the minister please advise this Assembly as to whether there will be any provisions made to community lottery boards to help them out with the administration of these dollars?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of avenues for assistance to the community lottery boards that will soon be in place. First of all, the province has committed \$1 million to assist in the administration. In discussions with municipalities and community groups the feeling was that the cutting of the actual cheque had a direct cost to it, and we agree. Also, a concern on reporting or the tracking of how the dollars were spent, so that will also be done by the department or the people put in place to do that. Another cost will be the formation of nonprofit societies for each one of those boards, and we have agreed that should be absorbed by us.

This program is a partnership. The one thing that all people told us is that all dollars should go to the communities and should not be eaten up in administration. I should point out that the \$1 million that is being committed by the province is over and above the \$50 million, and we are expecting that as a part of that partnership municipalities and other community groups may assist these boards in the carrying out of their duties.

MR. DOERKSEN: Again to the same minister: could the minister please advise this Assembly as to the reasons why municipal councils were not allowed to be the decision-makers for this money?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this consultation process that led to the development of community lottery boards was long and, I would say, somewhat arduous at times. That consultation was carried out by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I would invite that member to comment, as she is the chairman of the

Community Lottery Program Secretariat, which governs this program, with your permission.

Speaker's Ruling
Answers by a Private Member

THE SPEAKER: Well, it's not the common practice in this Assembly to have members of Executive Council refer those questions and matters to private members in the House other than the one question that might deal with scheduling of matters before committees or the like. So this, as a matter of administration or policy, and would have to be dealt with by the duly appointed member of Executive Council.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Community Lottery Boards

(continued)

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that this is supposed to take effect on April 1 of this year, I wonder if the minister could advise us what the current status is of the establishment of these boards and what will take place at that April 1 deadline if communities do not have these boards set up.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your advice on the answering of the questions. If I might very briefly explain to the hon. member, through the consultation process the vast majority of Albertans that responded to this asked that these dollars not be administered by municipalities but directly by communities. I am pleased to report to the hon. member that upon advice that I've received from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who is in charge of this program, a number of lottery boards in fact have all of their paperwork in place, and it is proceeding along nicely.

I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, that we do have in that program expertise that can be drawn on by any of the community lottery boards. We've made that known to them. We've put out a set of suggested guidelines. They may use them or not, whichever they choose. Certainly by calling the Community Lottery Program Secretariat or the Member for Lacombe-Stettler or my department with any questions, we are happy to respond. This is a very positive program. It's \$50 million going to our communities. We wanted to get it up and running and to operate it as smoothly as possible. So we are there to help.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour would like to supplement an answer given earlier in question period today.

WCB Survivors' Pensions

(continued)

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, I'd like to table with the House four copies of the recommendation from the all-party committee of 1982 dealing with the issue of compensation to widows by the Workers' Compensation Board.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now left us. Prior to calling Orders of the Day, we do have one point of order to deal with.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Point of Order
Clarification

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a

point of order. I cite *Beauchesne* 317. The impression has been left in this House that I have misled this House this afternoon, and I would like to table four copies of an article that appeared in the *Edmonton Sun* in 1993. Premier Klein's remarks are here for everyone to read.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I have yet to see the article. Nevertheless, the Premier certainly did not recall having made that statement. If it's indicated by the article and it's in quotes, then I'm sure that we can take a look at it, but really this strikes me as a point of clarification and not a true point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would agree. Hon. member, there's no advice or no notice given to the chair that anyone has suggested at all that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has misled anyone in the House, point number one. Point number two, documents that are published outside of this Assembly have no bearing on the workings of this Assembly. So thank you for that slick way of getting a clarification in.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now we have two Standing Order 40s that notice has been given of earlier today. So, first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Black History Month

Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta recognize February as Black History Month in Alberta and congratulate the National Black Coalition of Canada, Alberta chapter, and its related organizations for undertaking various activities in this regard.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise specifically to speak very briefly to the issue of what they call urgency surrounding the need to embrace the Standing Order 40 that I brought forward regarding Black History Month and our recognizing it here as an Assembly.

Now, the primary motivation for this is the fact that Black History Month officially kicked off at city hall here in Edmonton on Saturday. I was able to be present with my colleagues from Edmonton-Glengarry and Edmonton-Meadowlark. We took part in that ceremony, and I gave an undertaking to the black community that following with the tradition that I have established over the last few years, I would be very happy to again bring this motion forward. It has received unanimous consent in the past, and for a few brief moments of our day I hope it will receive unanimous approval again, because it is ongoing right now and there are several activities that that community should be congratulated on.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I look for and request unanimous consent to proceed briefly.

THE SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek? All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Defeated.

Alberta Women's Curling Championship

Mr. MacDonald:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize and congratulate the women's curling team from the Edmonton Ottewell Curling Club – Cathy Borst, Heather Godberson, Brenda Bohmer, Kate Horne, and coach Darryl Horne – for winning the Alberta women's curling championship yesterday. We wish the team success at the upcoming Canadian Scott Tournament of Hearts in Regina.

MR. MacDONALD: I seek the unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to speak regarding the motion under Standing Order 40.

They are representing the province for the third time in four years at the Scott Tournament of Hearts. Curling in this province is a very, very well-organized sport that's participated in by many people in many age groups, and I would urge the House on behalf of the province to wish this team the very best at Regina.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.
2:40

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 1 Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's truly my pleasure to stand before you today in support of Bill 1, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. Bill 1 recognizes that children engaged in prostitution are victims. They are victims of sexual abuse and therefore require protection. Bill 1 will provide the protection and address the full range of needs faced by these children.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking Premier Klein for his commitment to making the issue a priority for this government and for bringing this bill forward as the first bill to be introduced in the Legislature this session, also the Minister of Family and Social Services for his support through this whole process and his commitment to \$5.2 million over the next three years to support this legislation.

Juvenile prostitution has become an increasingly serious issue for Albertans and one that I have become very concerned with over the past years. The number of youths involved in

prostitution-related activities is growing, and just as concerning is that these youths are becoming involved at a younger age. It is estimated that 10 to 12 percent of prostitutes are under the age of 18. Today the average age of entry into prostitution is 13 to 14 years of age. These may only be statistics, Mr. Speaker, but these are our daughters, our sons, our nieces, our nephews, our grandchildren that we are talking about.

Many of these children come from a history of emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. Statistics show that four out of five child prostitutes were victims of sexual abuse at an early age. Sadly, many have been abused by the people in their lives that they've loved and trusted. In an attempt to run away from these abuses, these children run to the streets because they feel safer than they are at home. Unfortunately, once on the street these children only find continued victimization and abuse. Mr. Speaker, alone on the street these children are scared and vulnerable to pimps who lure them into the life of prostitution.

Violence is a fact of life for these youths and is steadily on the rise. It is estimated that seven years is the average length of time that a youth involved in prostitution will serve on the streets, and let us remember that little girls and boys become big girls and big boys. They will either be killed by a homicidal pedophile, a pimp, a john, a disease such as AIDS, a drug overdose, or they will take their own lives. In Calgary alone 11 children involved in prostitution have been murdered since 1988. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we do not have time to waste. These children need our protection, and they need our protection now.

I first became involved in addressing the issue of juvenile prostitution in 1990 through a Calgary-based parent support association which deals with troubled teens. I was working with a parent on the crisis team who had a daughter on the streets and involved in prostitution. Mr. Speaker, that was in 1990 at the age of 14, and she's still there in 1998 at the age of 22. I have seen and felt the effect of prostitution on both the family and the victim. Since then I've worked very closely with both the Edmonton and Calgary vice units and the Calgary-based street teams. Once again I have seen firsthand the brutality and injustice that are endured by these children.

As a member of this Assembly, you will recall, in March of 1995 I introduced a private member's motion to raise awareness and encourage action that will assist youth involved in prostitution. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that it passed unanimously, by both sides of this House. I am also very proud that in bringing forward the motion, we've accomplished a very big goal, the knowledge that children are involved in the sex trade here in Alberta – and this fact has become a public debate and is no longer swept under the carpet – also the work done by many people in this province, including the city of Calgary, who provided us with their handbook for action against prostitution of youth. Thanks, Alderman Bev Longstaff, to you and your committee.

In 1996, in response to the motion, the provincial task force on children involved in prostitution was formed to examine the work already done in the area of juvenile prostitution and to make recommendations to the government for action. Mr. Speaker, although many communities and agencies have looked at the issue of juvenile prostitution, this is the first time that the province of Alberta has examined it. The task force brought together a number of people from different walks of life, including representatives from the Calgary and Edmonton police services, Alberta Justice, Family and Social Services, community agencies, and school representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the task force members for their hard work, expertise

and acknowledge them by name and thank them personally from myself and our government and the children who are involved in prostitution: Elaine McMurray, public member; Ross MacInnes, agency member; Brian Serbin, Ken Ogilvie, Ernie Schreiber, Harold Keller of the Edmonton Police Service; Dan Jahrig, Glenn McKay, Verne Fielder of the Calgary Police Service; Shirley Hill, Calgary public school board; David Shanks, commissioner of services for children and families; Sharon Heron, child welfare branch, Department of Family and Social Services; and Paddy Meade, young offenders branch, Alberta Justice. Bill 1 is the direct result of their efforts, and they should feel proud today knowing that the outcome of their work will serve to protect and save the lives of Alberta children.

The goal of the task force was not simply to study the issue but to recommend some positive changes for youth who survive through prostitution. Mr. Speaker, the need for the task force was threefold: firstly, to provide the mechanisms for strong leadership and a co-ordinated effort to combat prostitution; secondly, to increase awareness both here in Alberta and across the country; and thirdly, to determine the requirements of getting the children off the street and keeping them off the street.

The task force unanimously agreed that juvenile prostitution is sexual abuse and based its recommendations on this premise. Because the issues surrounding the problem of juvenile prostitution are multifaceted, we looked at it from all angles. We looked at the determining factors leading to a youth's involvement in prostitution, what factors keep them involved, and what services would assist them in the exit from life on the streets. We examined early intervention strategies that will prevent youth from becoming involved, including educating children in their most formative years and educating parents, teachers, and school counselors about the warning signs of youth at risk. In addition, Mr. Speaker, to help these children beat the streets, we must provide them with crisis intervention services, meaning we have to be able to retrieve them from the street. It is at this point they require treatment and many, many supports. Access to the appropriate services and community agents that provide these essential services are a must.

The task force reported its findings and recommendations to the minister in January of 1997, and legislative action was taken immediately. Following provincewide consultation with Albertans, the Child Welfare Act was amended in June of 1997 so that children involved in prostitution could be treated as victims of child or sexual abuse. That is exactly what these children are, Mr. Speaker. They are victims. Picking up a male or female prostitute under the age of 18 is now a sexual abuse offence punishable by a fine or a prison sentence or a combination of the two.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that these measures got the attention of the pimps and johns across the province. In fact, the day after the amendment, while on a ride-along program, the streets commonly referred to as Popcorn Alley in Calgary were quiet.

We must not hide from the truth of this matter. It is child sexual abuse, and these children are victims who need to be protected. It is our responsibility as adults and members of this government to help and protect these children.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act strengthens our abilities to combat child prostitution and deal with it. By passing this legislation, the province will be able to implement a number of the strategies recommended by

the task force, including stiffer penalties for johns and pimps. Under Bill 1 the maximum fines will rise to \$25,000 and the maximum jail sentence will increase to two years less a day.

It is important that we understand and recognize that juvenile prostitution is a form of sexual abuse. Laws alone will not solve the problem of child prostitution, but they are a key component and a deterrent.

I've spoken in the House before about the economic model of supply and demand when speaking about the problems associated with juveniles involved in prostitution. Mr. Speaker, if we get tough with pimps and johns and show them that this province has zero tolerance for child abuse, then we will eliminate the demand for these youths and therefore eliminate the need for youths to prostitute their bodies. This legislation will also ensure that the necessary supports and services are provided to get these children off the street and ensure their safety.

2:50

As I stated earlier, one of the keys to prevention is awareness. We need to provide the tools for youths to understand prostitution and how they can defend themselves against becoming involved. I am pleased to note that significant funding has been set aside for prevention and early intervention initiatives that will support this bill. The Department of Family and Social Services will allot a total of \$5.2 million over the next three years to support this legislation. We are now working on phase 2. Social services, Justice, Health, and Education have now sent representatives so we can co-ordinate services. We will be holding meetings with key stakeholders, that being the police and agencies who work with the children, to ensure that all the resources are in place for these children. Mr. Speaker, this is a bottom-up process and not a top-down process.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it is important that all government departments work together with other levels of government, nongovernment organizations, law enforcement agencies, and communities to make the matter of children involved in prostitution a priority and stop the abuse of our children. To DeWayne Brown at Crossroads, Ross MacInnes from the street teams, and the many, many police officers, thanks for your continuing advice and thank you for your support. For many years the issue of youth involved in prostitution was largely ignored because it was too difficult and too saddening to think about. We can no longer turn our backs on these children who so desperately need our protection and our compassion. I want all of you to join me in supporting Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 1. It is an extremely laudable effort on behalf of the government to address child prostitution. It is also very laudable and commendable that the communities have worked with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Many of those people I know have put a lot of effort over the past 10 years into different sides of the prostitution debate.

There are some concerns however. Last Thursday the minister of social services indicated – and I quote from *Hansard* here:

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

Absolutely that is what the initiative is seen to be by the Alberta

Association of Chiefs of Police; however, there were five concerns outlined subsequent to that letter. I'm concerned that a number of those issues in the different communities have not yet been identified or necessarily dealt with.

I have tremendous concern with the direction this government is going with our children, and during the past five years the government has only talked about children's issues. The redesign of children's services is off the rails. Every volunteer group around this province that I have spoken to, who have donated countless volunteer hours, feels the government is not taking their efforts very seriously. They feel they are spinning their wheels.

You may wonder why I'm speaking to that issue while debating this bill. There is a strong correlation between what is not being done and what the government's abilities are to carry out the proposed programs, not yet identified within Bill 1.

I believe those who turn to the streets at such a young age are youth who perceive the world in which they live to be far more traumatic than trading their bodies for money from those predators who justify seeking sex from a child because the child is a prostitute, because the john is paying for the service. This legislation will not prevent a youth from becoming a child prostitute. Early intervention programs, such as Success by Six, education in the schools, especially schools where kids are more vulnerable due to poverty, and identifying those children who are already victims of physical and sexual abuse and helping them to know that there are choices – I remember an inner-city school where I worked where a student told me her sister was a prostitute and she couldn't wait to be one. She said that her sister got paid money and got to wear nice clothes. This was her role model.

Do I think legislation will stop this young child? No. But information about the effects of prostitution may. Knowledge about pimps, bad dates – and for those of you who don't know what a bad date is, it's when a prostitute gets picked up, raped, forced to perform sexual acts with this john who she thought was going to pay her. He then usually beats her, dumps her off somewhere on the side of the road and leaves her. These women get beaten beyond recognition in many instances, another scar to carry in their already tortured life. Information about drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases and the fact that many of these women have died at the hands of the johns or pimps is the information that needs to go out to these kids. Most of these young girls require long-term counseling, addictions treatment, and safe houses, where they can get away from the evils that face them daily. These services are neither available to these youngsters, nor are they really available to the older women on the street. Older would mean 21 or 22 years old.

Let me tell you of a time when I was a police officer in downtown Edmonton, in the summer of 1976. I stopped a couple of young girls in the middle of the afternoon on a Saturday. They were working on 95th Street. One of them was 16 years old. I asked her why she was out working on a Saturday afternoon, a time not generally lucrative for prostitutes. She told me she had only been on the street for a couple of months. She was the child of professional parents, and she stated she didn't get along with her parents at home. I called child welfare and said that I was bringing a 16-year-old prostitute in. Guess what I was told? Don't bother; we have no place for her.

That's the kind of service that has been available to our young prostitutes in this province. I didn't blame the workers for this problem. They had no beds. I believe that unwritten policy on how to handle these cases is responsible for that. I say that because I don't believe this government would be up front enough

to have a written policy in relation to what to do to 16 and 17 year olds when the police drop them off at the front door down on 107th Street and they turn them out the back.

Will legislation fix this problem? No. A policy from this government that doesn't have to rely on legislation for programs and placements for these kids will. You see; you've abdicated your responsibilities enough. You have let down these kids enough. It is time this government changed policy, not introduced legislation that is cloaked in language that says you care about kids. Get on with the job.

I find it absolutely amazing that the government wants to take itself out of the role of looking after our young street kids. This is another one of those efforts to download to communities. The preamble states:

Whereas children engaged in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and require protection; and

Whereas the Legislature of Alberta recognizes the responsibility of families and communities to provide that protection; and

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to assisting families and communities in providing that protection.

What that tells me is that it's the municipalities' responsibility, not this government's responsibility, to look after these children, and if that isn't a statement of abdication, I don't know what is. How can anyone take this government seriously about protecting these kids when it constantly downloads its responsibility to everyone else and doesn't fund the programs that should be there?

The police get the total responsibility for implementing this new bill. I don't see anywhere where the child welfare worker or director assumes this responsibility. There is nowhere in the bill where it's delegated to the police, as under the Child Welfare Act. The government has removed itself totally. Along with this, the police departments of this province have not seen any direct funding to combat this problem. It's easier to pass it off. This government then gets to wash its hands of any accountability. And won't it be great? If and when the regional authorities are up and running, they'll be able to take this on as a community initiative. Funding will have to come from what limited resources they'll have.

Now, let's not forget about the amendments to the Child Welfare Act last year. It seems to me that last year this government passed legislation, that received unanimous support in this House, to have prostitution-related activities defined as sexual abuse under the Child Welfare Act. Well, we find that this government has obviously not marketed and tested that amendment as there have not been any arrests under this act or any youngsters apprehended. How can we trust the minister's comments about that particular amendment, setting the stage for this, when that act has not even been tested by one charge?

3:00

Let's not forget about the sexual predator in all of this. Currently, charges under the Criminal Code bring about sentences up to five years for using or attempting to use the services of a person under 18 years old for prostitution. Those far exceed any legislated sanction that can be under a provincial legislation. We won't forget about the sentences for pimps who attempt to recruit or live off a person under the age of 18 years. These range from a minimum of five and maximum of 14 years. Using the Criminal Code for these sanctions then forces the offender to have his fingerprints and photograph taken. If convicted, he will have a criminal record as a sex offender. In the world of criminals this is not something a bad guy wants beside his name.

Instead of decriminalizing the offence, I believe it would be far

better to work with the federal Justice minister to have communicating for the purpose of prostitution declared a dual procedure offence so that all these guys can be fingerprinted and photographed, working towards making it easier to convict for communicating, especially with children; to direct funding to police agencies in an effort to enforce the laws that exist as their primary role; to work towards making it easier for kids to testify against johns and pimps and ensure their safety after they do testify; and to dedicate funding for long-term programs aimed at not criminalizing the children by putting them in secure custody for 72 hours but to enhance their ability to make good choices through programs focusing on their real needs and concerns.

I'm not sure we need legislation to do this. This government just has to really care and not use kids for political posturing. The jury is still out. I have not yet decided if I will support this legislation. I'll be putting a number of amendments through at Committee of the Whole, and hopefully some of those amendments will be accepted so I can then support this bill.

Thank you.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I want to make a few comments about Bill 1 here in second reading and state from the outset that anything that we can do as a government or as people to reduce the amount of child prostitution is something we should all support. Is legislation going to solve all the problems? We all know that it's not going to solve all the problems, and we have to take whatever measures we can to hopefully address this situation.

I do want to raise one issue that I would like the mover of the bill to perhaps address, because I'm not a lawyer and I don't understand how this all fits together, but I think it's something that we need to talk about. I'm making reference to the Criminal Code of Canada, which I know is federal legislation. It defines the age of sexual consent as the age of 14. This bill classifies child prostitution for those children who are under the age of 18. I would hate to see a defence raised by the courts or by the people arguing the fact that this can somehow be used as a tool to prevent the effect of this bill taking place, removing the child prostitute from the situation. Possibly the argument could be raised under that particular provision that this was a matter of consent that was given for this sexual act. If that happens and it thwarts the intent of this bill, it will be an unfortunate, indeed, circumstance.

Again, I'm not sure how that all fits, but I would certainly encourage our Justice minister in his dealings with his federal counterpart and his provincial counterparts to look at that issue, the issue of sexual consent, and make some recommendations and some moves to have that age increased, also to look at it from the point of view that this could not be used as a defence to prevent this bill from having the effect that we intend in this Legislature.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those brief comments I do want to certainly thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her efforts behind this bill, for her intentions of trying to do something positive in the province of Alberta and for the children of our province. We must support it and do everything we can to eliminate this problem.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for working so hard to keep this issue at the front door of the government and for being responsible, so I'm told, for having this bill come forward in the manner in which it has, gaining the prominence to be the Premier's number one bill for this session. That's an achievement that shouldn't go unremarked.

Mr. Speaker, I had the unfortunate experience of dealing with the issue of teenage prostitution, dealing with pimps and johns for some time before being a member of this Assembly, and one of the most frustrating experiences I have ever had, in fact, was the day that the case of a 15-year-old young woman came to my attention. Now, this was a 15-year-old prostitute in this city, the city of Edmonton, who was living with her pimp. One of the teachers of this young girl, before she stopped attending school, contacted me and asked me, begged me to try to do something, anything at all. She was at her wit's end, and none of the authorities seemed to be able to do anything about this circumstance of this 15 year old living with her pimp. So I started talking to the police and Crown prosecutors and people in Alberta Education and people in Alberta Social Services and people with the Edmonton public school board and people in church communities and other community organizations, and nobody had any kind of an answer of what to do about this circumstance.

As a member of the Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities here in Edmonton I found myself in a position where I could convene a meeting of all the service-providing departments that may or may not have a role in resolving this kind of circumstance. So I called a meeting together of people from Education, Social Services, Health, Justice – at that time there was Attorney General and Solicitor General, and we had legal counsel from those departments – in a room with some of the policy people. We went around the table, and we explored what could be done and whether or not this particular case was a one-off or whether maybe it was symptomatic of something broader.

Everybody agreed that this was not a unique case, and everybody agreed that something ought to be done. Everybody agreed that it was somebody else's problem. The people in Justice didn't think it was their issue to be dealt with, that it was the people in Social Services. The people in Social Services thought it was maybe parental. The people representing Education thought maybe it was somebody else's responsibility. What it came down to is that nobody wanted to do a thing.

At that point I asked the question. I said: well, can't we simply go and apprehend this young girl? The policy person from Social Services said to me: look; it's not a matter of child protection. I didn't understand that. I said: say it again. They said: it's not a matter of child protection. I was in disbelief that a 15-year-old girl living with her pimp was not a matter of child protection, but it was explained to me that the girl wasn't lodging any complaint, the parents weren't lodging any complaint, the girl wasn't being pursued for being a truant from school, that even though she acknowledged that she was working as a prostitute and that he in fact was her pimp, it wasn't a matter for child protection. So I thought at that point that something had to be done. That was about 10 years ago, maybe about nine years ago.

I know that the big-city mayors have worked hard lobbying provincial governments and the federal government for policy and law changes. I know that the Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities and the juvenile prostitution subcommittee and the Calgary violent crime task force and the safer cities task force in Calgary have all from time to time turned their attention to juvenile street prostitution and have urged the provincial government in particular to do something, to do anything to deal with this problem.

3:10

Now, Bill 1 is something. It is a step. In fact, I hold out some hope that Bill 1 will be helpful. Bill 1 does not treat the matter as a criminal matter; it treats the matter as a matter of child protection, child welfare. That's important, but it may not be the

only thing that has to change. Bill 1 recognizes that the children who are selling sex are themselves victims and the people that really deserve our wrath are not the children but the predators who either buy the sexual services or put these young people on the streets. So I do hold some hope that Bill 1 will address the needs that have been identified all these many years, but I also have some reservations, and I hope that during the fullness of debate that is going to develop around this bill, the government will not retreat into some sort of shell of self-protection around some of the criticisms and some of the suggestions that may be forthcoming.

I do not believe that there is one man or woman in this Assembly that is not adamant about a commitment to do something constructive for these young people or that there is one person amongst us who would not see the laws strengthened in this regard, but that doesn't mean that we should do anything at any cost without fully understanding the consequences. So while Bill 1 provides us a framework for action and while Bill 1 provides for us perhaps a springboard to do even more, I think there is more that can and must be done. As this Bill proceeds through the next couple of stages of debate, particularly in committee, I hope there will be robust debate about the pros and cons, and I hope that we can work together to make the best bill in this country so that Alberta can truly serve as a model for every other jurisdiction in this nation, so that people will be able to say that Alberta not only did it first but did it best and did it right.

Mr. Speaker, when you are talking about a bill that has such broad and immediate appeal as Bill 1, a bill dealing with juvenile prostitution, there's a danger that if you say anything negative, you'll be painted as somehow being in support of juvenile prostitution. Now, that's an absurdity. I can't imagine anybody being in support of it. Any comments that are made I think have to be heard in that light. They have to be heard as constructive. This is too important, this is too critical an issue for politics to be played around it. This is not a matter of the Liberals wanting one thing and the Conservatives wanting something else. It's not a matter of whose idea it was first. It's a matter of finally doing the right thing.

I am looking forward to the opportunity to get this bill into committee so that we can deal with some amendments, but I don't think we should necessarily rush there before people have an opportunity to talk clearly about the philosophy and clearly about the social importance of making a commitment for our children. The government has been criticized, Mr. Speaker, for not always doing enough for children, and the government unfortunately has made some decisions that in hindsight have been wrong-minded decisions for children. To the government's credit they have straightened some of those out. Now, I'm thinking of the decision to cut kindergarten funding as just one example. It was clearly the wrong policy to adopt. The government saw that and corrected it.

There are other examples where this government has made decisions which run contrary to their stated intention to do the best things for children. When a government cuts day care subsidies and at the same time says, "We want to do the best things for children," you have to wonder. When a government cuts funding for early intervention programs and then says, "We want to do the best things for children," you have to wonder. When classroom sizes are allowed to grow and grow and grow and then the government says that it wants to do the best things for children, you have to wonder.

So this is a test that we must face together as members in this House to ensure that the government will be accountable not only for putting money where its mouth is but for ensuring the political will and the commitment that goes along with a bill of such important and mammoth undertakings. The throne speech alludes to a sum of the nexus of \$5 million for programs and services. This is a good first step, but that \$5 million pales in comparison to the money that's been cut out in ECS, the money that's been cut out in day care, the money that's been cut out in early intervention, the money that's been cut out in social services. It's not a matter of saying: will this bill in and of itself solve the problem? It's a matter of ensuring that this bill forms part of a coherent strategy to serve children and to serve families at risk. It's a matter of making sure that we are straight on the philosophy and that we are clear on the intent.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that we are going to hear more comments from both sides of the House at the second reading stage, at the principle stage. I think that Albertans want some assurance that it's not just words, that it's not just a slogan, that it's not just something for the throne speech and then to be in last week's news but that in fact it is a challenge to the government that they want to be reminded of, that it becomes an insistence in this House that we always review what it is we are doing through the filter of: is it the right thing to do for children, is it consistent with this bill, is it consistent with the preamble to the bill, and is it consistent with the words in the throne speech?

Teenage prostitution will not disappear when and if Bill 1 becomes law. The police will not be able to simply deal with pimps and johns as those who offend against child welfare bills. They will still be criminals, and they still must be dealt with as criminals. The Minister of Justice won't be able to say to the minister of social services: it's now your responsibility. The Minister of Justice must still have a coterie of well-trained, well-resourced Crown prosecutors supporting police throughout this province who want to conclude criminal investigations that will lead to provable charges in court so that those predators can be dealt with through the criminal justice process. Clearly, the emphasis of this legislation must be on the child protection side of the equation, and we must not be complacent, that simply because we've enhanced the child protection side, we can further abandon the criminal side.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those few remarks that for me encapsulate both my hopes and my concerns about Bill 1, I would like to hear some more comment, particularly from government members, about the kind of commitment, because we hear so often from the government that these kinds of policy discussions that deal with values happen in the government caucus, because they rarely happen on the floor of the Assembly. I call on some of the government members and the government supporters to bring some of that debate to the Assembly floor and share with all Albertans their views, their values, and their commitment to doing the right thing for children.

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

3:20

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand as a member of government in support of Bill 1 and my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek with respect to this initiative, and I think it's really important. I'm not particularly a negative person. People who know me would say that. But I have to dispel a myth that was raised by the previous speaker. The myth is that this is a poverty issue and that our young children who are

engaged in prostitution are in that situation because of a lack of government resources or the economic strategies that their families have to deal with, and that's just not the case. I think that if you look at some of the research that initiated the member's work in this area, one of the tragedies is that the young children involved in this particular very serious activity come from all walks of life and from all levels of financial support, all levels of care, and there is no dividing line.

When a child is engaged in prostitution, it can be anything from an innocent rebellion, that is not atypical of young persons as they grow up, to a very systematic method of abduction that occurs within our very shopping centres and communities. So I think it's very important that as we debate the principles of this bill, we as the legislators of this Assembly recognize that this is not a poverty issue.

The other components I want to speak to draw on the fact there was some sense that there wasn't a government commitment, that we were perhaps just throwing a warm and fuzzy around a big problem and not walking with it in a particular way with dollars, resources, and commitment. I just want to identify a few initiatives that are in place. We have discussions around the issue of pornography. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross is dealing with that very serious aspect of youth having access to pornography. That's another private initiative, but it reflects the fact that there is a large concern about this. We had announcements in January with respect to funding from Family and Social Services for increased shelter funding dealing with women in crisis, and I support the minister's initiative on that. But there is a policy and long-term government support to the long-range issue around our families and the families in destructive situations.

I would also suggest that we could go a little further back and look at mediation in settlements where there are custody battles, where the home does become destructive because of forces that are at play that the children have absolutely no part in, and the fact that we talked about mediation and support, particularly in Edmonton, where they have mediated settlements and a pilot program they're working on and how that's being looked at in other areas of the province. Those are a few that I'd like to just bring to the hon. members' attention. My own initiative with respect to following up on the family violence legislation that we are working through would also indicate that there's a very strong commitment not only to the children who find themselves in prostitution but to the issues within their families that perhaps lead them to the street.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of AADAC I think it's absolutely essential to impress upon members here that the role of substance abuse in our families, particularly with our youth, is a significant issue. I can't speak highly enough about the various agencies who find themselves involved in this particularly tragic issue. I know just as recently as about two weeks ago when we met at the youth facilities in Calgary as the board of AADAC, we had a presentation from a group of young children who were in the treatment program. These young people are under the age of 17, and the number of young people in that program varies month to month. Over the course of a year they keep a number of statistics. What was really striking about the young people who presented to us, of that particular class that was going through, was that over about 70 percent had been involved in sexual abuse already prior to their arrival at treatment, and they were in treatment because of substance abuse.

Mr. Speaker, some of that is not learned behaviour. Obviously there is experimentation, and we as a society, not as government

but as a society, have to look at how we condone the use of alcohol, how we accept the use of drugs, how we accept role models in our community that are tied to pornography, whether it's in our music industry or other forms of entertainment, whether it's our athletes. We as a society have set a framework where our young people feel safe to risk in these very, very serious ways.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the destruction and breakup within our families, augmented by substance abuse, creates an environment where young children feel not particularly safe in, and as a result they may turn to the street. The street is not a safe place. There's just no doubt in my mind when you talk to young children about where they want to go and be: they don't want to be beat up; they don't want to be in the ditch; they don't want to be prostituting. They would like to have opportunities to learn and to grow and to be safe, and as a community we have let them down.

We had our youth summit with about 50 young people in September in Calgary-Currie in anticipation of the Growth Summit. One of our topics was the health of our community, and the young people said to us that they had a couple of priorities. One of them was they looked to us as the guardians of the community to make laws tougher so that people like traffickers in drugs, that people like pimps, that people who prey on young people would be treated harshly in our court system. They felt that they should not have to have that risk. They were quite honest about saying that they were youthful and that they did believe they were absolutely safe in any environment, that they could experiment because they couldn't be harmed. They felt somewhat, I guess, a bit like Superman, but Mr. Speaker, what they did say is that when they are at risk of harm, they wanted society to care for them. I think that given their age and the confusion around what is right and wrong, we do have a responsibility as a society to speak to that issue. I know the Minister of Justice's initiative to look at some of the aspects of our court system is controversial, but our young people are also asking for clear and defined laws that prosecute people who prey on young people.

I want to also talk a little bit about the safe houses and the shelter supports that are there. I think there is some misconception – at least I gleaned this from the previous speaker – that by lacking in what was termed adequate funding for those programs, we were doing a disservice to the intent of this legislation and were perhaps not wholly committed. Mr. Speaker, no matter what we do for these young people, any halfway house, shelter, any type of counseling, any kind of support can only be seen as a portion of that long-range success of a child reaching its maturity with a healthy attitude and the attributes and skills that they need in life.

Mr. Speaker, those shelters and those halfway homes and those other opportunities are for assessment and, with hope, the support for families to maybe look at where they have neglected that young person, or perhaps that household itself has not got the resources at this time to deal with that particular child. But we should not in any way focus on the support of our interim shelter systems as the only solution. I think it's important that we don't focus the success of this legislation on the effectiveness of that interim treatment process.

We have particularly in our social services issues hundreds and hundreds of children who are in home situations that are not healthy, through no fault of their own. In talking to a police officer in my own research on family violence, he spoke of a

situation where a three year old came to the door in diapers late at night to answer the policeman who had a call on a domestic dispute. When he went to the door and looked inside, there was unfortunately obviously a very difficult situation: strong evidence of alcohol abuse, beer cans, debris, a very filthy home. A little child standing there in a diaper yelled to his mom. He said: Mom, it's the cops again. Well, what help and what hope can that three year old have when the norm is, "Mom, it's the cops again"?

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to look at the entire range of services within the community, not only government services but the support of our schools and our churches. Our chambers of commerce have to start taking an active interest in the health and safeguarding of our families. We can look at the stress level of single moms. We know that close to 25 percent of all the live births in the province of Alberta over the last year were to single-parent families. In no way is that a criticism of those women who made the decision to keep their child, but it does tell you that when you look at issues of poverty and you look at the issues of child neglect, we need to make sure that the women who make that decision have the supports they need.

We can look at the child versus what we call the cyclical thing in our shelters, where we're starting to see children of mothers returning to shelters as young abused women themselves. That is a very frightening scenario. Anything we can do to break that cycle should be considered as a heroic measure, and we should not stop in any way the activities we're pursuing.

3:30

In my colleague's bill, Mr. Speaker, there is some concern about the jurisdictional issues between our two levels of government. I don't think that when this country was founded and when our provinces entered into Confederation and we set up our various systems of law and jurisdiction, it was ever anticipated that we would have to have a legal battle about who owns our children. So I'm very hopeful that the support that my colleague has had across the country on this issue will be focused on the abuse of these children and their support and not on who owns the law and what toes are getting stepped on. It would do us a disservice as Canadians to think that that would happen.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like the focus of this legislation to have a very strong educational impact. If we as a society don't speak to the issue of child prostitution in all its elements – in its preoccupation with pornography, in its consideration of the role of addictions and how they have contributed to the downfall of our society – to the role of our families in safeguarding and protecting our children, to the role of our business and industry and our community services to speak out and support our young children and our young families, to the issue of needing parental skills, which, by the way, are not a responsibility of the education system – we can augment it through whatever teaching we can, but they really do belong in the community.

So I'm hopeful, Mr. Speaker, in answer to the previous speaker's concerns that there wasn't a strategic role for this bill and an overall commitment to supporting our families and our young people, that by my very persuasive comments he will be assured that this is one of a number of initiatives and that we should not be bogged down in the whole debate of lack of resources but see this as an opportunity to bring all resources, not just financial, to bear on dealing with the serious issue of child prostitution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 1, that being the Premier's flagship bill for this current session, entitled Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I also want to take this opportunity to add my thanks also to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her initiative in structuring the development of the bill and for actually bringing it to this crystalized stage for debate in the Assembly. We'll see how it gets received through the various stages.

I do want to say at the outset that the gist of this bill is something I have absolutely no problem in supporting. I understand that at this stage we're speaking in broad terms to the principle of the bill rather than to the detail, but I would like to say that children are indeed our most precious resource. If there's anyplace in this Legislative Assembly where we are going to place more emphasis on one area than another, I would suggest that it would be on the care, protection, and education of our children, who are our most precious resource as well as our future.

I look at the principle and the gist of this bill, and there are several things in the bill that I very much like on first glance. I want to preface some of my comments before getting into the actual debate, as it were, by reminding members and others who will be reading *Hansard* that I was a school teacher in Edmonton's inner city for a number of years. During that time, Madam Speaker, I had the great privilege of not only teaching a lot of students, but I also had the pleasure and sometimes displeasure of trying to act as a counselor for many of these young people, who at ages 14, 15, 16 are going through that special time of life that would see them becoming young adults. It was during that time that I first really became sharply aware of the problems that exist in areas like child prostitution. It was during that time that I also learned how many children were in fact involved in this, and I subsequently found out how many of them were dependent on the avails of prostitution for their form of livelihood.

We got into discussing with the children and with other counselors what it was that drove children to this type of illegal activity. We tried to understand what the causes were that would motivate a child at that young age to become involved in something so sinful and illegal and immoral. Among the many causes, as I reflect on them now, a number of the students involved cited a lack of money or coming from a broken home where there was a lack of support or perhaps coming from a home where there was abundant abuse of themselves and of others, including alcohol abuse, drug abuse, pornographic abuse, and – you name it – abuse of any kind. So we linked a lot of the problems to their upbringing, which I realize is what this bill is attempting to address, at least in part.

There was a second great cause that I recall, and that was on the part of the young people. That was a lack of acceptance and a lack of affection by their peers or by their families or, in some cases, by their elders. So that combination motivated a lot of the students to participate in prostitution. I should say, Madam Speaker, that there were also a number of pimps that were involved who weren't much older than the children. They, too, were living off these illegal avails.

There's something to be said for the fact that there is a link between what has happened on the home front, what has happened

on the street front, and in a general sense the issue of poverty, which, I would agree, has had some impact on some of the cases. However, underneath all of those examples of causes that I have just given, the single largest and most common denominator wasn't any one of those. The single largest common denominator of what propelled these young people into their habits of prostitution was basic lack of education: a lack of understanding, a lack of ability to think for themselves, a lack of knowledge, which then gave rise to low self-esteem, low self-awareness, and so on. I think the province is right in focusing attention on education throughout this next session. I spoke earlier last week about the initiatives in the throne speech and how closely we'll be monitoring those from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition side to make sure they result in the kinds of achievements that the government is hoping for, again with specific emphasis directed at our children.

So the gist and the principle of this bill is something I find no difficulty in supporting. I like the fact that it addresses this huge and very growing problem of child abuse in the province of Alberta and attempts to do something about it. Because it's being brought forward by the Premier, I would expect it to receive very good and thorough debate, and perhaps with some minor amendments or alterations, if the government so chooses to support, it would even go through and become law in this province. We can't discuss the specifics during this stage of debate, but I will, I hope, be given the opportunity during the next committee stage to do that.

3:40

In a general sense I would like to say that the principle of the bill that I'd like to support is that it attempts to provide swifter relief to children in need. I don't think it's an argument – at least it isn't for this member or for individuals on this side of the House – that children who are under the age of 18 that are involved in prostitution are in need in some form of help.

This bill, as I read it, on first glance at least, suggests that police will be given the ability to intervene much more readily and much more swiftly than has ever been the case up until now. As part of that earlier intervention on the part of the police I think they are also being given greater powers of intervention, and subsequently, I understand, there will be some larger deterrents built into the process as well. For example, stiffening the penalties I think is a good move, stiffening not only the penalties in terms of dollars, or what we call fines, but also stiffening the penalties in terms of jail time that would be served by the pimps, who, I think, lead these children to some extent into this illegal habit, certainly do a lot to encourage them to stay there, and eventually try to hook them to become even more dependent. That probably is one of the largest areas that the police will have to concentrate on. So I like those particular aspects.

I have dealt with a few of these cases as well since becoming an MLA, Madam Speaker, and it's with no pleasure at all that I tell you I have had some constituents come to me with children or grandchildren who are facing this particular problem and don't know where to turn to get off the program of prostitution. I have also done volunteer work with the Youth Emergency Shelter during my time as a community activist. There, too, I encountered a number of individuals, not only young Albertans but young and transient people from across Canada, who had no place to turn and wound up at the Youth Emergency Shelter, and we wound up speaking with them and trying to help them at that time. Their slogan at the Youth Emergency Shelter, as I recall, was and I think still is: where do you go when you can't go

home? That dilemma faces these young people very, very regularly.

If this bill can help prevent more children from coming on to the prostitution program, terrific. I hope it does. If this bill can make it easier for children to quit the program that they are on, then all power to the bill and all power to the Premier and the member for bringing it forward. However, if the bill winds up not having that kind of impact and that kind of enforcement capability, then it will have surely failed in protecting our most precious resource.

I think we all have a tremendous responsibility as legislators and as community citizens, as people concerned about the future of our Alberta, to promote causes that help enshrine protection for children. In that regard I'm going to be interested to see, when we get it to the committee stage, exactly where the responsibility for child protection is going to fall and how much of it will be proportionately balanced between, let's say, the Child Welfare Act, which is under the purview of the government, specifically Family and Social Services I believe, and how much of that responsibility will fall to the municipalities and, more importantly, to the police officers or the justices of the peace that are referred to in the bill. Those are some of the points, Madam Speaker, where it will be interesting to see how they are balanced as we try to resolve the question of whose responsibility it is to grow our children and to ensure them protection, care, and custody and, if necessary, to straighten them out on the road to a better life. Where will that protection fall, and to what degree will it unfold? So I'll be interested to see how the province accepts its role in this respect.

I'm also interested to know what it is that the province is going to do to back up the bill. To simply bring in a bill, as well intentioned as it is – and I believe it is well intentioned, Madam Speaker – is one thing; to watch its implementation throughout the system, throughout the bureaucracy, be it at the provincial level or at the municipal level, is totally another matter. Will there be sufficient funding to enforce and to enact the principles of this bill? Will there be sufficient money to not only combat the problem but perhaps eradicate it in the longer run? I would like to think that our larger purpose in ushering in a bill like this would be to eradicate the problem, not just to treat it but to just get rid of the whole darn mess.

I'm not sure if the penalties are stiff enough. I see they've gone up to something in the order of \$25,000 for offending pimps – is that about right? That's sort of the maximum – and something like a two-year jail term. If we're really serious about eradicating the problem as opposed to just treating the problem, maybe we should throw the book at them even harder. If you wanted to eliminate speeding, let's just say as an example, in the province of Alberta . . . [interjections] Which I recognize from the members opposite as being a big cash cow; I understand that. But just by example, if we were really intent on eliminating speeding so that no one would speed, we would bring in some pretty harsh measures, such as taking away a driver's licence forever perhaps, which I'm not advocating but as an example.

Now, if we were interested in eradicating the problem of childhood prostitution, maybe we should look at how stiff those penalties can be and recognize that putting a \$25,000 fine or a \$50,000 fine or a \$100,000 fine on a pimp is of no consequence because they don't have the money to pay for it anyway. But taking away their freedom for more than two years – I don't know; take 10, 20, 30 years – would really sound out a loud, loud ringing bell of alarm to those people. So I hope the province is considering some of that.

The issue of backing up the bill, then, comes down to a better

understanding of what protective services are and what the role of these safe houses is going to be and the subsequent role of the directors who are given the power to assess these children over a period of 72 hours. In this bill, during that 72 hours, we're asking the director to determine whether the child is capable of being returned to someone's custody.

In particular, I noted on page 5, Madam Speaker, a question that I'll bring forward in greater detail when committee stage arrives, and that is that a police officer who apprehends a child under this section

- must notify a director forthwith, and
- (b) on the child's being conveyed to a protective safe house, a director must . . .
 - (ii) release the child if in the opinion of the director the child is capable of providing for the child's own needs and safety.

Well, now there would be a highly judicious moment and a tremendous amount of responsibility on the director to determine if a child who has just been brought in for protective custody from a prostitution situation is able to provide for his or her own needs. It will be interesting to see how that gets applied. I find some difficulty with that, and perhaps later someone will explain what was intended by it. I have some great difficulty understanding how that amount of authority would be placed in the hands of "the director."

3:50

The other aspect of backing up and supporting the bill would be with respect to the types of programs that are going to be made available for these young children and also the types of programs that are going to be available, let's say, perhaps through the school system as a preventative measure to educate our young people in advance of them stepping into this perilous line of duty. What programs will the government bring in with respect to addiction treatment to try and help these young people in advance? I will welcome more of those details as the committee continues its debate.

I'll just close by noting something that was brought to my attention a little earlier in the debate; that is, some of the initiatives that are occurring at the federal level with respect to child prostitution specifically, Madam Speaker. It seems to me that the feds in Ottawa have seen in their wisdom – and I congratulate them for this wisdom incidentally – to criminalize a wider range of conduct insofar as child prostitution is concerned. To quote the Justice minister in Ottawa as she was quoted in the *Edmonton Journal* on January 30 of this year:

It will be an offence not only to obtain the sexual services of someone under 18, but also to communicate for the purpose of obtaining those services. It won't be necessary to actually obtain the services.

What it suggests to me is that the federal government of Canada is also looking at stiffening the rules and provisions that are available to it to deter future participation in child prostitution and make it even harder on the people who are involved in encouraging that activity for our young children at this stage.

I was shocked, Madam Speaker, when I read a few years ago that the age of consent for sexual activity in this country is 14. Did you know that? I couldn't believe it when I saw that, and I thought: where have I been for 49 and a half years of my life? I just can't believe that that law is there. No wonder we have some of these difficulties. Perhaps we could ask our counterparts elsewhere to have a look at that particular aspect of the issue as well, because no doubt there's some type of congruency between the two.

Madam Speaker, I hear the bell going, which means my time is up, and with that, I look forward to more debate. Before passing judgment, I will wait for the committee stage, but at this time I would also take the liberty, at the request of the Government House Leader, to adjourn debate on this particular bill.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 2

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998

MR. HAVELOCK: It is with pleasure that I move second reading of Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998. The bill, Madam Speaker, is similar to Bill 20 which was introduced in 1997, the only significant difference being the deletion of the provision whereby a report exonerating an MLA did not have to be made public, assuming the MLA had made a formal complaint. The amendments are based on the Tupper report. There is also an amendment proposed by the Ethics Commissioner regarding extension of time and one by the Provincial Treasurer pertaining to reports filed by the Treasurer not including the specific amount of salary and benefits paid to persons associated with the member.

Overall, most of the Tupper report recommendations are dealt with in legislation, with the exception of senior officials, the registration of lobbyists, apparent conflicts, and the increase in the cooling-off period from six months to 12 months. Some of the recommendations of the Tupper report will be handled administratively. For example, the disclosure forms can be changed to provide for the inclusion of gifts and benefits received from a political party.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill 2, and with that I would like to also move adjournment of debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved second reading and adjourned debate on Bill 2. Does the Assembly concur with this?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No. Opposed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's carried.

Bill 7

Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 7, being the Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998.

The current act provides for the issuance and amendment of franchise area approvals, which generally gives a franchise holder the exclusive right to provide natural gas services to all consumers

within the franchise area. Further, the current act establishes the framework for Gas Alberta to provide gas brokerage services to rural gas co-operatives and municipal gas utilities. The current act also establishes the mechanics for the setting and enforcement of standards related to the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of rural gas utilities and the low-pressure distribution pipelines within rural areas.

Bill 7 proposes the following changes: to transfer Gas Alberta functions to the private sector; to transfer regulatory authorities for urban low-pressure distribution systems from Alberta Labour to Alberta Transportation and Utilities; also, to rename the Rural Gas Act as the Gas Distribution Act; as well, to take care of some minor housekeeping amendments.

The first change involves Gas Alberta. On October 7, 1997, cabinet granted approval for the Minister of Transportation and Utilities to finalize and execute agreement with an elected Gas Alberta board to privatize Gas Alberta brokerage operations effective July 1, 1998. To effect the privatization, relative sections of the act will be sunset under the transfer of Gas Alberta brokerage functions to the private sector. Other provisions include the mandatory requirement for rural gas co-operatives to purchase gas supplies from Gas Alberta and for owners of gas to sell gas to Gas Alberta until sunset after two years. This two-year period will provide the new, privatized Gas Alberta the opportunity to get established and demonstrate its viability to its clients, the rural gas distributors.

The second change involves low-pressure distribution systems. In January 1997 the Minister of Labour appointed staff from Alberta Transportation and Utilities to administer low-pressure natural gas distribution lines within urban municipalities. As Alberta Transportation and Utilities is already responsible for the administration of low-pressure natural gas pipelines in rural areas, the consolidation of this function within one department has resulted in greater efficiencies. The one-window approach is also supported by the industry. The Gas Distribution Act will provide formal legal authority for this administration consolidation.

The third change involves changing the name to the Gas Distribution Act. The name change of the Rural Gas Act to the Gas Distribution Act recognizes the increased scope of the act. Additional minor amendments are also being proposed which will correct previous oversights and increase administration efficiencies.

Madam Speaker, that concludes the majority areas of change that Bill 7, the Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998, will address. At this time I move to adjourn debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

4:00

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

Mr. Coumts 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 29]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the member representing Edmonton-Castle Downs, I am very pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. After hearing and then reading the throne speech, I am left with believing that there has only been one theme that's been projected throughout the speech, and that is: money first, people second. With that basic theme in mind, as the critic for career development and employment as well as economic development and tourism I will address each area with respect to the content found in the speech.

Having said that, it is very difficult for me to address Alberta's fourth largest industry in this province, which is tourism, because tourism has not been mentioned at all throughout the throne speech. I find this omission to be very alarming, as Alberta has become world renowned as a destination of choice. It generates a revenue for this province of \$3.5 billion, and it has a projection to generate \$4.4 billion by the year 2000. Where is this government's leadership for all the tourism operators in this province? We need to keep this industry viable, and the government must be committed to being an energetic and responsible partner in its efforts to promote Alberta throughout the world.

This metaphorical throne speech said that "children will come first in the house we call Alberta." However, the first initiative mentioned was the new debt retirement plan, which was quite skillfully placed under the subheading Developing People. The Alberta advantage is more than a set of economic indicators. It is also a set of human development and quality of life issues, which have again been put on the back burner by this government's preoccupation with the bottom line, the debt.

At the Alberta Growth Summit, Albertans told their government to respond to the pressures of growth and to develop the heart of the Alberta advantage, our people: your constituents, my constituents. Albertans have said they need a vision and a road map in order to sustain growth and to be competitive as we enter the new millennium. What I heard in the speech is a complete admission that the road traveled over the past five years has led to a dead end. I contend the time has come to find a new and productive route.

Poor economic indicators can be noted by looking at the issue of personal income, which, according to Alberta Economic Accounts 1996, has not kept pace with inflation. Personal disposable income per person increased by 4 percent between 1992 and 1996, while the level of inflation increased by 7.4 percent over the same period of time. The Alberta government Measuring Up report of 1997 stated that the average income for two-parent families with children declined by 7.9 percent between 1990 and 1995. The average family income for single-parent females declined by 6.7 percent during the same time period.

Alberta is one of only two provinces that imposes a health care tax on its people. We Albertans have experienced a 27.2 percent increase in user fees and premiums over the past four years.

Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the strong economic indicators which speak volumes that all is not well in Alberta. We must all recognize that an environment for sustained growth and the promotion of the Alberta advantage should mean the

development of policies that balance economics and human growth. Present employment criteria strategies are concentrated in the low-paying sectors that demand and need a flexible workforce. The majority of these positions are held by women, and there is very little employment creation in the new knowledge economy sectors. Alberta's economic growth remains based in resource production and export, where women are virtually excluded, and in low-paying services, where women are overrepresented. Until this government encourages businesses to adapt to the reality of women's lives by including on-site day cares, flexible work schedules, benefits for part-time workers, and pension plans that are portable and not income driven, Alberta will never gain access to all that women have to contribute to the commercial world.

I have heard Alberta's women voice their concern about the quality of day care in this province. A large number of women have encountered day care centres which lack safety standards, are rarely if ever inspected, and in which children are propped in front of a television for hours or forced to nap all day. We need to see day care assistance, which would allow women to have children without sacrificing careers and help them to balance the heavy demands of home and work. We need to see increased government regulation of day care staff training, workers' salaries, and staff-to-child ratios. This government should provide incentives to encourage businesses to explore innovative and expanded workplace arrangements that support women in their family responsibilities, possibly through the tax structure.

There is a need to have all government employment training programs assessed regularly so as to identify the individual circumstances and needs of women, and there is a need for continuing intervention and evaluation of their success rates in these programs. As well, these government training programs must take into account the specific situation of women who are abused and their material and nonmaterial needs over the duration of the program. We must work toward developing proactive proposals for changes to legislation and/or regulations to increase the inclusion of women's perspectives and roles in all aspects of government and Alberta society.

This government must be sensitive to the need to change its recruitment and appointment processes to substantially increase women's representation on the economic development authorities and all relevant boards, committees, deliveries of employment and training services, and in government policy units. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved.

Madam Speaker, what I have tried to highlight in my presentation are some of the present weaknesses in the areas of economic development, tourism, and career development. With this in mind, I believe that appropriate strategies must be developed so all Albertans have the opportunity to benefit from our economic prosperity, have the skills and the training to meet the demands of the new technology required to fulfill the labour demands, and have a wage that supports our families and allows us to live and to plan for the future.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

4:10

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with distinct pleasure that I rise today to respond to the Speech from the

Throne. Along with other members of the Legislature, I wish to pay tribute to the Lieutenant Governor for his reading of the speech.

Madam Speaker, as the government Member for West Yellowhead it is my responsibility to see that the concerns of my constituents are heard and addressed in this Legislature. During the Alberta Growth Summit last year my constituents made it clear that they wanted this government to invest in people's development. People development includes things like education for both children and adults, health services, and other ways of increasing the Alberta advantage. To be sure, Madam Speaker, the Alberta advantage is now greater than ever, with 13 percent more funding for kindergarten to grade 12 education, 7 and a half percent more for Advanced Education and Career Development, and increased funding for Albertans through the departments of Health and Family and Social Services. It is obvious that this government is listening and responding to the needs of Albertans.

As we all know, rapid economic growth puts pressure on some government services and programs. Madam Speaker, I know that the recent funding increase will benefit the children of West Yellowhead by developing their skills and enhancing their education opportunities. Adults in West Yellowhead will benefit from the increased opportunities in advanced education and career training. All of my constituents will be even more secure with the new investments in Health and Family and Social Services.

Investment in people development does not only help Alberta's youth but Alberta's seniors too. An example of these benefits in West Yellowhead is the new Pine Valley senior citizens lodge which will open this month in Hinton, on February 13. The lodge was founded by seven municipalities and local donations and is administered by the Evergreen foundation. It is the second of its kind in West Yellowhead, and there are about 150 lodges across Alberta. The Pine Valley lodge will offer a variety of services and opportunities for our senior citizens, especially those in and around Hinton but also in the seven other participating municipalities.

However, there is an issue which deeply concerns the constituents of West Yellowhead. This is an increase in the education tax, which is based on the uniform provincial tax rate. I'm deeply concerned, Madam Speaker, that such issues as a tax increase at this time, when we are seriously talking of a possible tax review in Alberta, is certainly not the spirit of the Alberta advantage. These taxes may have a drastic effect on property market values and may force some individuals and families to leave their homes, since a lot of my constituents are seniors and have only grandchildren in the school system, especially in Jasper national park. Also, there are residents of Jasper in my constituency of West Yellowhead who risk being hit with exorbitant utility and property tax increases because of lease land rent which is controlled by Ottawa. Market value assessments should be reviewed in this controlled state.

Despite this, Alberta continues to have the lowest overall tax in Canada. This is the root of the Alberta advantage. Alberta enjoys some of the finest, most competitive government programs and services in the country, with the lowest tax.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that the Speech from the Throne illustrates this government's solid record, this government's leadership, and this government's commitment to the future of West Yellowhead and indeed to all of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was pleasantly surprised after listening to the throne speech to hear of this government's obligation to leave our children and our grandchildren a province that is even better than the one which was left to us.

Young people are the top priority. I hope this is not just a slogan. There is nothing in the throne speech to reduce the gap between general unemployment and youth unemployment. Youth unemployment, those between the ages of 15 and 24 years, is double the provincial average. Unemployment in Alberta has fallen to less than 6 percent, with some regions of the province enjoying rates as low as 3 percent. However, I caution this Assembly. I caution this Assembly about the importance of oil prices to job creation. When Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, boosts production by 10 percent, the Alberta advantage can quickly become the Alberta disadvantage because we are so reliant on one industry, and one industry alone, for the majority of our job creation. As we speak, Lloydminster, the heavy oil capital of Alberta, is experiencing employee layoffs and economic uncertainty.

Job creation must be an important feature of any economy. Economic diversity is a goal we must achieve as we approach a new age. Food processing and, in particular, hog slaughtering and processing should exist in northern Alberta to prevent total dependence on just one industry, petroleum. That this government stood idle and allowed 2,200 hog processing jobs to leave this city displays a lack of commitment towards our long-term financial future.

The job creation figures that I mentioned earlier can be deceiving, because there is a gradual drift in our economy towards partial, temporary, and contract employment. In 1983, 59 percent of working-age adults were employed full time. Today, that figure has dropped to 54 percent. This employment pattern creates a climate of uncertainty and fear in the workplace. This uncertainty and fear grow even more when government members publicly advocate eliminating the minimum wage and reducing employment standards.

This government makes no reference to employment standards in this speech. In the complaint-driven system of employment standards now in place, workers are always at a disadvantage because they have to risk their job to try to enforce their right to minimum wages, overtime pay, and statutory holidays recognized. These standards should be a priority, a priority of a government which wants to develop the skills of its citizens to build a better province.

These renovations which government members are so proud of and they now say are complete – we are led to understand that the renovation is over, the foundation is built, the house is sound. The residents of this renovated house, however, have less to spend on payday. Personal income after taxes has not kept pace with inflation. Personal disposable income per person has increased by 4 percent between 1992 and 1996, while the level of inflation has increased by 7.4 percent over the same period. The average family income for two-parent families with children declined by 8 percent between 1990 and 1995. The average family income for single-parent families declined by 7 percent.

4:20

There is no mention in this throne speech of the mistakes that this government has made with its reckless path towards privatization. We all know about the problems in the Department of Labour. Privatization and deregulation are not working. The creation of the DAOs, or delegated administrative organizations,

as they are called by the ministers who oversee them, should be called dangerous arm's-length organizations.

The annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta in 1996-97 made two recommendations about these DAOs. They are worth repeating, Madam Speaker, to this House. Recommendation 22:

It is recommended that the Department of Labour establish policies and procedures to more effectively monitor the performance of delegated entities based on an assessment of risks.

The Auditor General goes on to say:

The Department needs an effective monitoring system that can obtain performance information from delegated entities, identify signs of inadequate performance, encourage appropriate performance, and achieve the timely correction of identified problems. The extent of monitoring required should be determined by the risk of inadequate performance and the related public safety consequences.

To date, the Department has performed only limited monitoring of the safety services provided by delegated entities. Monitoring that has been carried out has lacked consistency and a clearly prescribed purpose and strategy. The Department has relied almost exclusively on compliance audits to identify inadequate performance by delegated entities. Many delegated entities, however, have not been audited, and for those entities that have been audited, intervals between audits have varied from one to three years. Further, there is no policy in place governing how, or within what timelines, there should be an audit follow-up to determine whether observed instances of inadequate performance have been corrected.

Recommendation 23 from the Auditor General's report on the dangerous arm's length organizations:

It is recommended that the Department of Labour, in conjunction with the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, take timely action to reduce the backlog of in-service inspections of pressure equipment.

The Auditor General goes on to say:

In 1995, the Department delegated safety services administration to the Alberta Boilers Safety Association (ABSA) in an effort to meet the demand for inspections on new pressure equipment and to reduce the backlog of overdue in-service inspections. To date, the Department has not achieved its objectives to reduce the backlog. In fact the backlog has grown. The overdue inspections may indicate a higher risk of boilers and pressure vessels performing below accepted safety standards.

Madam Speaker, there was a question in the Chamber this afternoon regarding sulphur emissions. This is a matter of public safety, and I hope the Department of Labour listens to the Auditor General and looks after these two recommendations, recommendations 22 and 23.

Madam Speaker, there is perception among Albertans that inside managers and directors cozy with the government are growing wealthy on privatization. Martha and Henry from Rimbey are forced to pay more for fishing licences, camping fees, driver's licences, and other premiums. They are very angry with these high fees. These privatized DAOs can exploit consumers and neglect public safety of all Albertans. There is no public accountability for these DAOs, particularly during times when this Assembly is not in session. The creation of these monopolies serves the interests of their owners, not ordinary Albertans like Martha and Henry from Rimbey.

Everyone is aware of this government's arrogance in canceling last fall's sitting of the Legislative Assembly. This choice to govern in secrecy is a sign of a government unsure of itself and uncomfortable with its own ideology. Between the middle of June, when the Legislative Assembly recessed, and the end of October, when another session should have been proclaimed, 256 orders in council were approved behind closed doors – 256 orders

in council, Madam Speaker. This democracy by decree is wrong. Our democratic system allows and promotes representation from all people. I believe I should remind certain members of this House: 48 percent of the voters disagreed with your ideas and your logic. These voters oppose a two-tiered province, one for the privileged and one for the rest of us. Healthy legislative debate will protect this province against a permanent secretive oligarchy.

This Speech from the Throne lists many government departments, all of which are managed by some kind of performance measure or another. Allow me, Madam Speaker, to talk about another kind of performance measure in this province.

The annual number of food hampers delivered by the Inter-faith Food Bank in Calgary in 1988, the Olympics year, was 14,880. The annual number of food hampers delivered by the same organization in 1995: 37,500. Percentage increase in food hamper deliveries from 1993 to 1995, when this government's cuts were at their worst and their most reckless: 26 percent. That's quite a performance measure for the city of Calgary.

Jumps in public school and postsecondary student enrollment between 1994-95 and '96-97: there was an increase of 14,000 students, Madam Speaker. However, there was a drop in the number of full-time teachers in those same institutions over the same period. The drop in number of full-time teachers was 720.

The number of video lottery terminals spinning in Alberta: 5,900. The amount spent on gambling per capita in Alberta: \$1,340. Fifty-nine percent of Alberta's gambling revenues are from VLTs.

These are performance measures also, and they are performance measures that I don't think we talk about often enough, Madam Speaker. These are performance measures that are embarrassing to the government, and they're performance measures that the government does not want to hear.

The number of contacts to women's shelters – we'll talk for a minute about women's shelters in this province – has increased by 91 percent between the years 1992 and 1997. That should tell you that there's something wrong.

Child apprehensions have increased by 30 percent – 30 percent – between 1992-93 and 1996-97. That's a performance measure that we should not be too proud of.

The recent review announced by the Department of Labour of employment standards and regulations, Madam Speaker, should be a concern to all Albertans. Acknowledgment of this concern was absent in this speech. Since 78 percent of Alberta's workforce earn their living without collective agreements, the Employment Standards Code is the only workplace protection that most Albertans have. Amazingly, this group had no representation at last fall's Growth Summit. It is not acceptable for this government to ignore them. They need strong employment regulations that will be enforced. I believe this government does not want to hear from Albertans who do not want these regulations relaxed. In fact, I encourage the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and his department to strengthen these regulations so that employees will be confident about their workplace rights. Last year over 5,500 complaints of labour violations were made by Albertans. Too many Albertans, especially those just joining the workforce – and this is very important, Madam Speaker – face the frustration of weak and poorly enforced employment standards. In many cases this unpleasant start in the workplace fosters mistrust and poor labour relations between employees and their employers throughout their entire working lives.

4:30

I saw in the Speech from the Throne a mention of a segment of the population in Alberta that hopefully we all want to stand up and speak out for, and that's the seniors. Alberta has a relatively low percentage of seniors in its population in comparison to other Canadian provinces and in comparison to many of the developed countries of the world. The aging of the population trend in Alberta will unfold slowly over the next three or four decades. Alberta's projected percentage of seniors for the year 2016 is in the 13 to 15 percent range, and this is a level that's already exceeded without crisis in a number of European countries, the state of Florida, the city of Victoria. This expected percentage of seniors is already equaled in the western provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia. Additionally, the percentage of seniors or persons 85 years of age and older in Alberta – and these are seniors who are likely to require public assistance – is projected to increase from 1 percent to around 1.8 percent by the year 2016. While this is short of doubling, it is nevertheless only a small increase from one person per 100 to less than two persons per 100.

So why all the fuss over the aging of the population in Alberta? We seem to have two ideas about seniors, and that's that they're too rich and they're too sick. Various government documents, pronouncements, and policy changes suggest that Alberta faces a serious population aging problem, and that should not and cannot be ignored. There's no doubt that public opinion has been greatly influenced by this rhetoric, and Albertans, particularly those in my age group, believe there is or will be a population aging crisis in this province. The population aging crisis has been socially constructed largely outside of Alberta. Alberta's population is relatively youthful and is aging relatively slowly. The use of the crisis definition in Alberta has more to do with fiscal difficulties than with population aging. It is true that seniors are major beneficiaries of government programs, and while it is true that the population aging may make a bad situation worse, nevertheless in Alberta it cannot be argued that population aging caused the economic difficulties of the 1980s and early 1990s or will necessarily cause economic problems in the future. It is nevertheless a convenient explanation, given that the government may desire to cut back spending on seniors.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let us consider the rising costs of health care. In Alberta, as elsewhere, seniors are disproportionate users of the health care system, and the rise in the proportion of seniors is therefore cited as the cause of increased health care. Indeed, the rhetoric often implies that the population aging is the major cause of rising health care costs. However, once again this rhetoric scapegoats seniors and creates a smoke screen that hides other and more important causes of rising health care costs. The truth is that per capita health care utilization has been increasing for both seniors and nonseniors alike, and in recent years per capita usage has often increased more for nonseniors than seniors. It is easier and more politically expedient to blame seniors than to look elsewhere for the sources of rising health care costs.

We are now four years into the reform of the health services here in Alberta. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to stand and speak in favour of the Speech from the Throne in this the Second Session of the 24th Alberta Legislature.

Before I get into the very positive actions that I think this speech speaks of, I can't help but make a few comments about what I'm hearing from the other side. I refer to some comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who was very critical of the fact that the very first thing that we deal with in the throne speech is the state of Alberta's debt and the fact that we still continue even today to spend a billion dollars a year on interest payments. I don't really understand why it is that they still don't get it that when you have a \$14 billion debt and you spend over a billion dollars in interest, debt reduction still has to be a major priority. You can't just spend and throw money at the situation.

What concerned me even more, Mr. Speaker, is that if I understood the hon. member correctly, I believe she said that she is the critic for Career Development. I'm not sure if that's right or not, but if she is, then she proceeded to use the rest of her speech to talk about women's issues. I don't think that bodes too well for the other half of the Alberta population, who happen to be male. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Sorry; we seem to have some people who want to enter debate. The hon. minister of science, research, and information technology has already spoken on the issue, and perhaps some of the others have as well. If not, then you'll have your turn. Right now the speaker is the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. I'd like to hear him and only him.

Debate Continued

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the Alberta Growth Summit, Albertans told their government to respond to the pressures of growth and to develop the heart of the Alberta advantage, which is our people, while remaining fiscally responsible. One of the things that came out of the Growth Summit which I thought was so important was that the private sector committed to being an energetic and responsible partner with government in efforts like work experience, apprenticeships, mentorships, internships, and the like. I think that's so important today. If we want to talk about developing our people first, people development, we have to recognize that today we have 60 to 65 percent of our high school graduates - those are the ones that graduate - that still default into the workplace and may work at many different kinds of jobs until they recognize that perhaps they need further training, and we find them back in our postsecondary system at age 27 as a first-year apprentice. Now, that isn't unique to Alberta. We're finding that throughout North America.

So I think one of the answers is to take the business community up on their offer to be an energetic partner in developing work experience, mentorships, apprenticeships, and so on. I know that the Minister of Education, the minister of advanced ed, and, yes, the Minister of Economic Development are currently looking at many types of programs that will take on the business community with respect to their offer, because we need to partner in order to solve these problems.

Another very exciting, I thought, challenge was talked about in the throne speech. It says:

Albertans want an education system that instills in our children the values that made our province strong: the values of self-

reliance, self-discipline, respect for others, honesty, and industriousness.

I applaud that move. I really believe that, in this society, values and attitudes need to be put back into our education system.

4:40

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that many of our first-time employees, many of our children who go to their first job in this province don't survive that first job. It's not because they can't read, and it's not because they can't write. It's because they don't seem to have a work ethic, many of them. When you talk about work ethic, you have to talk about values and attitudes. So I applaud what was put into the throne speech with respect to values and attitudes, and I believe that there are initiatives under way and soon to be under way to achieve some of that. Again, the business community can partner by telling all of us and all of our students what's important to them as employers, what values and attitudes are important to them. Is it important, for example, to show up on time? Is it important to be able to deal with one's coworkers in a fair way? Is it important to be able to take criticism? Is it important to be able to work in groups? All of these issues speak to values.

The throne speech goes on to talk about some of the initiatives that will be taken with respect to the other end of the spectrum, which is, you know, the beginning student. There I applaud the increased funding for kindergarten to grade 12, about a 13 percent increase, or \$380 million, over the next three years, which is quite a large increase with respect to education.

I think the throne speech speaks well to the kinds of problems that exist in today's society. You know, the reading problems that we find in the lower grades are talked about in this throne speech, so something is being done to try to remedy that. English as a Second Language for Canadian-born citizens has been a problem. The throne speech speaks to those issues as well.

So to listen to people from the other side, where they see absolutely nothing positive in this throne speech, is just beyond belief.

The throne speech speaks as well to continuing the commitment to help students learn through the use of technology, and for the first time ever, the standard of knowledge and technical skills that students will be able to get in our system is finally now in place. We now have documents that show grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 the kinds of technical skills, technology skills, skills for the 21st century that they will now possess by the time they graduate, so I applaud that move as well.

With respect to Advanced Education and Career Development, the increase called for there is about 7 and a half percent, or \$95 million, between now and 2001. One of the big problems that we're going to face very, very soon in terms of advanced education is that we'll need more places, and that's precisely what the throne speech talks about. We have a higher number of high school graduates entering the postsecondary institutions. It will expand the apprenticeship programs as well, and I think that's so important at a time when our economy is employing an awful lot of people, but they're not necessarily Albertans because we can't find enough of the skills that are required in this province. We have to find them all over the rest of North America. So I say: let's train our young people first; let's employ Albertans first. That's what the throne speech talks about.

The other area that is, I think, a tremendous move is to create a \$30 million tuition bursary for students with the greatest financial need. I applaud and I agree with the move that essentially makes this a joint effort of the institutions and the government. Again, partnerships to solve problems.

In the area of career counseling and career information, we've seen over the last couple of years some innovations with regards to the information that is available for students. One of these systems is talked about in the throne speech. It says:

Our government will communicate these requirements through efforts like the Alberta learning information system, which gives young people details on opportunities for learning and careers.

I believe that that's extremely important as well, but that particular system deals primarily with what is available in our institutions with respect to known careers. I think there's also a need to look at having more career information available to our young people, particularly in a multimedia techno-lust sort of way to attract our young kids, not necessarily at the high school level but, more importantly I think, in grades 7, 8, and 9; you know, areas where if you can excite a child and give him a goal, then that child will certainly do much better than the child who does not have a goal. So I hope that these kinds of initiatives will in fact be worked on in this particular session.

Another area, of course, which is of concern to Advanced Education is rising tuition fees, so I applaud the speech when it talks about discussions with regards to capping tuition fees at 30 percent.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many other initiatives with respect to people in this document. Just by looking at the speech, I see, for example, that in Social Services, their funding will go up by more than 5 percent, or about \$70 million. This primarily is looking at the growing caseload in child welfare. A lot of the initiatives that have been undertaken over the last four or five years have essentially changed the social services sort of area into an area of in fact employment and employment training. So a lot more of the people who formerly were on social services are now gainfully employed and proud contributors to the Alberta advantage.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but I believe that this agenda, this Speech from the Throne, certainly speaks to the priorities of this government, which are people and people development.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are indeed some very positive elements in the throne speech, and what I want to do, simply to disabuse members that the opposition is blinded to positive elements in the government initiative, is to highlight some of the things that I'm particularly encouraged by.

I want to start by saluting the government's recognition that the English as a Second Language requirement we had before, that you were ineligible for English as a Second Language instruction if you were native-born, regardless of your facility in English, regardless of your family's facility in English – I always found that such a preposterous situation. I've heard estimates of maybe as many as 3,000 Alberta children who would benefit from and required ESL instruction but had been previously ineligible to get instruction. I understand that in fact my number was too modest. It never made any sense to me, and so I was delighted when I heard the government announcement that they're going to change that rule. While they're at it, I'd encourage the Minister of Education to go the next step, which is to deal with the other problem with ESL instruction, which is that older children require more than three years of instruction. We ought to have more flexibility in the program so that in appropriate cases instead of simply three years of ESL instruction, older children would be

able to access four, maybe five years if that's what it takes to be able to achieve a level of academic proficiency.

4:50

Something else that I found very positive: the recognition and the additional support for children with mild to moderate learning disabilities. I think that we in this province have been more focused on children with severe learning disabilities, and I think that in the past far too little attention was paid to children in the mild to moderate disabled category. So I'm very encouraged to see that provision in the throne speech as well.

While I see the Minister of Health here, I want to acknowledge that I think it was a very positive move for the government to recognize that Bill 30, the Health Information Protection Act, was badly flawed. Whether the minister will go that far, I think it was an extremely positive move that the government recognized that that bill had to be subject to much further discussion before the government made an attempt to actually have the thing debated and passed. So I think that was a very positive move on the part of the government as well.

I suppose at some point I daydream about the day when members in the opposition are going to be hard-pressed to find issues to raise in the throne speech and find that the throne speech has just hit so perfectly the issues that are top of mind for most Albertans that the opposition are left with two or three points to raise in a forum like this in debating the throne speech. We're some distance from that daydream being realized, Mr. Speaker, because I find when I go through the throne speech, notwithstanding some of the very positive elements that are included there, there are also a lot of other things that simply aren't reflective of what I hear from my constituents, that aren't reflective of what I hear, I read, I see, and that are important issues for so many Albertans. I'm always concerned, I suppose, when a government comes forward and outlines their agenda for a legislative program and I find so many things that either are not in harmony with what I believe Albertans are concerned about or, in some cases, what would be more distressing is when they're not mentioned at all.

Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary right now there are probably only 350 to 500 vacant apartments in the entire city. In fact, some of those places are going to be high-end accommodation. So what you've got, certainly in my constituency in downtown Calgary, is a huge number of people who faced the maximum two rent increases in 1997, have now received a rent increase for the start of 1998, and I'm advised by the Calgary Apartment Association that we can expect rents overall to go up perhaps another 9 percent in 1998. What this means is that there are a lot of seniors living in my constituency and, I suspect, in many other constituencies as well who simply can no longer afford to live in the same building where they've been for 10, 12, 15 years. Many of these people are widows, senior women. Their entire network and life may be within a couple of floors of the same apartment building, maybe within the same block in a community. They now find they can't afford to continue living there anymore simply because of the combination of virtually no vacancy and escalating rents.

I understand landlords will say, "Well, that's fine; we're now getting to a point where we're finally realizing fair economic rents." But, you know, if you talk to a low-income individual in Brooks or Grande Prairie or Fort McMurray or downtown Calgary, one of those very hot economies in the province, you'll find that affordable, safe accommodation is a huge issue. One would have thought that a government that was listening and responding would have considered some kind of provision, some

sort of top-up, whether it was through the special assistance program run through Community Development for seniors or whether it was some kind of a program for people on AISH or people on supports for independence. In too many cases for people who are forced out of their existing accommodation, there's all kinds of dislocation that goes on with that.

Talking to senior women, widows in my constituency, the prospect of having to leave your apartment in downtown Calgary, where you have access to your doctor and services, and move to a place in Bowness or Forest Lawn or someplace that's fairly remote from your circle of friends and supports doesn't make real good sense. So I would have hoped there would have been some reflection of that very major issue in the throne speech, and it isn't there.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech has a section entitled Listening to Albertans. There's reference made there to a review of the freedom of information act. When I read that, it makes me marvel yet again at this government's exceptional ability to be able to recycle an idea or an initiative or a promise so many times. There are some unsuspecting Albertans who may actually keep thinking these are new announcements. The very best example is that we have in the freedom of information act in section 91 a very specific statutory requirement that within three years after the freedom of information law comes into force, there has to be a review. Well, how do we go from that statutory requirement to the government patting itself on the back and boasting that they're going to respond to the concerns? "This year, an all-party committee of this Legislature will seek people's views on the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act." The obligation is already there. It's, I think, somewhat of a distortion to talk about that as listening to Albertans.

The reason I question the government's sincerity is that when I looked at the Premier's response on January 28 to a question in question period, when he was asked a question about MLA expenses and the freedom of information act, we had the Premier saying – and I quote, Mr. Speaker, from page 12 of *Hansard*. He was talking about this special committee that's going to look at the freedom of information act, and he said:

This is truly a matter for a committee of the Legislative Assembly to deal with. Here's a gorgeous opportunity for full participatory action to identify deficiencies in the legislation and correct those deficiencies, if necessary.

What I found so deliciously ironic about that is that the Premier seems to have completely forgotten that it was his government and this Assembly in 1994 that passed a law – Bill 18, the freedom of information act – that would indeed have required MLA expenses to be recorded and to have been accessed, and it was the government that then proceeded in 1995 to take that provision out. When the Premier is now questioned about it, he says: well, we may have to do some further consultation. So it seems to me that one can fairly ask whether the government is bona fide and genuine in terms of talking about consultation when it's clear that they haven't acted and responded to past instruction they got from all-party committees and all-party panels.

5:00

The health professions act is alluded to in that same section, Listening to Albertans, and it's curious to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government would cite that as evidence of their ability to listen to Albertans when in fact at least five of the major health professions have so many issues and problems with the new health professions act, which hasn't come into the Assembly yet but which has been circulated, that the government is now talking

about having to delay introduction of the bill. I understand now that the bill may not be introduced until at least March or maybe even April of this spring. So if that's the test we're to use in terms of measuring the government's responsiveness and their acuity when it comes to listening, then we find that the government is not listening and it's certainly not responsive.

Mr. Speaker, there are some other issues which I was particularly interested in. We've got reference to safe communities, and we've now got the government recycling what had been a Liberal promise in terms of more support to victims of family violence. Here it's interesting that the bill that's been circulated or distributed by the Member for Calgary-Currie and the Department of Justice to a whole range of groups has been found to be wanting in many serious elements. I think it's not simply enough to have a bill which purports to deal with domestic violence. The test is having a bill that's going to have an impact, making a law that's going to make women safer from men that don't know how to manage their anger, an act that's going to provide children with the kind of safety they don't have now, and the reality, Member for Calgary-Currie, through the Speaker, is that the latest iteration of your bill doesn't meet the test. So once we get past bill titles and we start looking at the substance of what the government puts forward as a legislative program, we find plenty of issues.

I can't resist making comment about the task force on provincial court judges. This is another great trick that the government has, Mr. Speaker. Not only are they remarkably adept at recycling promises, but they're also very good at creating a task force with one set of instructions, with one kind of a mandate and then massaging that, distorting it to give people a very different impression. The best example is a task force set up to deal with a big problem in this province, which is that we appoint Provincial Court judges not on the basis of excellence but on the basis of a much lower threshold. So what we've got is a task force that's going to review that process, which is fine on its face, but what we've got is the Minister of Justice, who attempts to pass that off as in fact a task force which is complicit in his campaign to demonstrate that the justice system isn't working for Albertans.

There's provision in reference to infrastructure in the throne speech, but you know the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that if the government were really interested and concerned about infrastructure, they might be responsive to the city of Calgary's request to take the very huge sum of money that comes from Calgarians and Calgary in terms of the provincial fuel tax and look at refunding at least half of that money to the city of Calgary to fund the major infrastructure requirements of that city. You know, Calgary is growing so quickly that it requires some extraordinary attention on the part of the Provincial Treasurer, some extraordinary attention on the part of the provincial government to address those needs. We see no acknowledgement of that in the throne speech, no recognition of that very major problem.

Mr. Speaker, there were some positive things in terms of education but some very disappointing elements too. We still have a Minister of Education who remains unconvinced, apparently, that classroom size is critically important in the quality of education of Alberta children. We still have an Education minister whose response to classroom overcrowding tends to be "Let's hire some teachers' aides," people with not a great deal of training. That's going to be this provincial government's answer to overcrowded classrooms instead of saying: let's have an adequate number of properly certified qualified teachers. That continues to be a problem in terms of the people that I hear from.

In terms of health care lots of concerns. Mr. Speaker, I had a

chance this autumn to do some traveling and do my own little health tour. I went to Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and made it to places like Innisfail and Beaverlodge and had a chance in each of those areas to talk to physicians, nurses, people involved with agencies, involved with the mental health population. There were a whole lot of concerns I heard. One of the major ones is the concern we have with physician compensation. There's a very major problem in terms of the way we pay, the way we fund health care professionals, and I'm not referring only to physicians there. We've got major, major concerns.

We'll have to, I suppose, wait until we see the budget and the detail in terms of what Alberta Health is going to provide in this regard. We'll also have to see what comes from the ongoing fee negotiation, which I understand is some distance from resolution. I think it's important that the Minister of Health knows and I think it's important that the provincial government knows that there are some very serious issues that have to be addressed, that require I think a much fuller response than anything we've seen.

We talk about health care funding. I had the opportunity, which the Minister of Health perhaps did not, to go to the Calgary regional health authority news conference that was held immediately after the minister's announcement of \$106 million in health care funding. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Health that the Calgary regional health authority had in good conscience, in good faith prepared a modest budget which they believed recommended their core needs to be able to provide the kinds of services the people in the Calgary region required. To find that the provincial government's commitment was \$33 million short, \$33 million deficient in terms of what that Calgary regional health authority requires, is a major concern.

Fortunately, it will be a long session, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure I'll have further opportunity to raise some of the other concerns I have with the government's legislative plan.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to join the debate on the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Honourable "Bud" Olson. When I read the Speech from the Throne, I am very proud to be a member of the government that put our young people as a top priority. Our commitment to leave our children and our grandchildren with a province even better than the one that was left to us is reconfirmed through the Speech from the Throne. We begin by setting our goal: to build a strong foundation for the future generation.

5:10

I cannot help but think back to what a difference four and a half years makes. In 1994 when the Speech from the Throne was delivered, our government and our province faced a financial crisis. We had a serious deficit and a huge accumulated debt, and now, four and a half years later, with many hard choices and with a lot of hard work from all Albertans, we enjoy the highest employment rate in Canada and the highest forecast of economic growth in the country. Not only that, this year's surplus will be around \$2 billion. Because of this hard work and because of the success, where we as a government and all Albertans have stuck together, and because of the unexpected high revenue from oil and gas, we are now in a position where we can afford to spend more money in the high-needs areas, in the areas that Albertans told us

that they want to see more money being spent in.

Last September at the Alberta Growth Summit Albertans from every walk of life got together and built an agenda that they would like to see our government respond to, and that's exactly what we are doing in this throne speech. Developing people is set as the number one priority. Education is an important element, and I think it's the most important element of this developing people agenda.

As a government we are going to spend close to \$380 million more in the next three years. That is a 12 or 13 percent increase compared to what we are spending today. That is a major, major expenditure. This government will continue its commitment to have students learn through the use of technology, and for the first time we will outline a standard of knowledge and technical skills that we expect our students to acquire. This is very different from what has been done in the past. In the past whenever we threw money at technology, it was something considered as nice to have, but we did not have a clearly identified goal that we expected our students to achieve by learning and by using more technology. Now by doing this, we will see the benefit that this additional money we are going to put into technology will bring for our students.

In advanced education we are going to spend another 7.5 percent, or \$95 million, between now and the year 2001. It is a very important area, because as our economy grows, our young people need the skills and the education to take advantage of those opportunities.

In social services we realize that even in a prosperous atmosphere like we have today in Alberta, there are still those who need our help, and we are going to spend more than 5 percent, or about \$70 million, to handle growing caseloads in child welfare and handicapped children's services and to fund women's shelters and family and community support services. One important element of social services that we have to look at is not only the people who are on welfare today but the low- and middle-income families in Alberta, because these are the people who truly need the money so they can spend it on the children. That is where the Alberta family employment tax credit program kicks in, and I'm proud to say that every low-income family working in Alberta will receive a total of about a thousand dollars in the year 1998.

Health and seniors and community infrastructure, economic development, agriculture, science and research, and the environment: all these areas have been outlined as important elements of our agenda, and as a government we will continue to move forward in those areas.

I think that it is very important to distinguish between wise investment and blindly throwing money at a problem. We have heard many criticisms in the past few months that we are not putting enough money in our programs and that we should move faster at reinvestment in Alberta. It is very ironic to see that many of the same people who are criticizing us for moving too slowly today are the same people who criticized us four and a half years ago when they said that we moved too fast. They fail to realize one very important thing: you cannot spend money that you don't have. It's as simple as that. Four years ago when we were faced with the choice to deal with our deficit, we had no choice but to move fast. Today as we get out of the deficit financing era, we have to learn something from those mistakes in the 1980s.

If you just got out of bankruptcy and you just earned a huge amount of money, I bet you would be very careful in spending the extra money that you have today. As a politician nothing is easier

than spending money, because when you spend money, you make people happy, and you can win more votes that way. But we have made the hard choice we did in the past that we would put the saving of money that we have into building a strong foundation for our children. The key word that I think every Member of the Legislative Assembly today should always keep in mind – and I think all members from the government side do have this word in our minds – is sustainable. We cannot just develop a program and hope that it will work and hope that we will be able to sustain it. We have to have program spending that is sustainable, that we can afford not only in the good times but in the bad times as well.

Another very important difference between us and the opposition is that we believe that the government cannot be responsible for every aspect of people's lives. People should be allowed to make responsible choices for themselves. The other day I read in the newspaper about a woman who complained that she spent \$300,000 on VLTs, a highly educated teacher who spent \$300,000 on VLTs for the past three years. She appeared in front of the city council of Calgary wearing a borrowed suit from her sister. She still couldn't kick the habit and was asking councillors to hold a plebiscite, hoping that somehow the government or somebody will make the decision that she cannot make herself. That is very, very ironic.

I for one strongly believe that our role is to defend the weak, the ones who cannot fend for themselves, the sick, the old, and the poor, but I cannot for a minute believe it is our role to tell people how to live. We have to be very, very clear on that. If a woman decides to go and spend \$300,000 on a machine, knows that is her problem and does not know how to get help but is blaming the machine, then I feel it is not my responsibility, because everybody every day of their life has to make decisions. When we ride down the road, the car is a means to get us from where we live to where we work, but if we drive it carelessly, it can become a lethal weapon to kill people. By itself a VLT machine is just a machine. Today you can stack 10 million machines surrounding me, and if I don't want to play, I will not play those machines. It's as simple as that. And people who are blaming the machines and forget to do soul-searching and blame themselves for their own weakness or their own mistakes are just passing the buck. You can never correct the problem until you identify the problem and look the problem straight in the eye and say: "I'm going to kick my habit. I'm the only person responsible for my personal choices, and nobody can do it for me."

Another thing that has been raised repeatedly by many of the opposition members from last fall until now is that we don't have a fall sitting of the Legislature. I have never received one complaint from any of my constituents about that at all. We have to be honest with ourselves. This institution is a very, very fine institution. We can make it work as efficiently as we want it to. Unfortunately over the past several years, at least ever since I have been associated with this institution, I have never seen so many talented people wasting so much time as I see in this institution. That is the truth, and I can stand up and defend that in front of all my constituents because we have an opposition party that exaggerates everything – four and a half years.

5:20

MR. BONNER: That's the point of democracy.

MR. PHAM: One member from the opposition was right on when he said it is part of the opposition, but I think that we have two

ways of criticizing things. Being so negative about everything can easily lead to losing all our credibility. I saw that when we brought in the motion to adjourn the House and said that we may or may not come back in the fall, depending on the amount of work that the government has to do. I saw members of the opposition who stood up at that time, gave speeches, and said that democracy would stop in Alberta if we didn't have a fall sitting. Mr. Speaker, we didn't have a fall sitting. We didn't have a full fall sitting, and here in this House, to the best of my knowledge, the sky is still blue and Alberta is leading the country in every aspect of life.

I will tell the opposition members this. We may not sit in the House, but we don't have to sit in this House to work. Those people forgot that during that time. As opposition members they can go out, talk to their constituents, solicit their ideas, and then bring those ideas, channel those ideas into government. As government members we were busy preparing our budget for this year, preparing the three-year business plans. As chairman of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, we traveled across the province, listened to people. There were so many things going on during that time, and I tell you, I can achieve a lot more in those two months when we don't have to sit in this House than otherwise.

I want to move on to another topic that has been raised recently. It is the freedom of information issue and the MLA expense issue. After I witnessed MLAs from the opposition stand up and file their expenses, I understood why the public opinion of politicians is not very high these days. We have to remember one thing, one very important thing: you cannot win the respect of other people if you do not respect yourselves. When you see one member after another stand up and file the expense claim forms as a performance that they are proud of showing, it's beyond me. If they want to file them, get together all the forms, give them to the Opposition House Leader, file all of them at the same time. Why did you have to make a big thing out of it?

I think that everything has its due course. Later on this year we are going to have a review of the freedom of information act. If it's the wisdom of the committee at that time that MLA expenses should be released, then do it. We don't have to jump every time there is an issue in the media. When we do that, you will not gain any respect from the public at all. You have to remember that we are elected to run a province with over a \$12 billion budget. If you cannot manage your own expenses of \$55,000 or \$56,000, how can you expect the public to trust you to run a budget of \$12 billion? It's very, very sick to see people who take political opportunities to jump up and down grandstanding. I think that it is very, very sad to see.

We are having a very, very special time in Alberta today. Everything seems to go right for us, and because of that it is even more important for all of us, not only from the opposition but from the government side as well, not to forget those people who are less fortunate, those who may be falling through the cracks. People in this House know how important it is for me to stand up and defend those who cannot defend themselves. That is why the issue of WCB remains very important and very close to my heart. Many of the injured workers, especially the longtime injured workers, are falling into the category where they cannot fend for themselves. Behind every case there is an injured worker. Behind every injured worker there is a family of young children, a wife, a financial obligation. These things can be forgotten easily.

I appreciate the effort that the Minister of Labour has put into solving this problem. I can say this with a hundred percent respect. He has been very, very helpful and very understanding

in trying to get this problem resolved. For that I thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hopefully, with the new management team at WCB we can achieve a lot more and we can address this problem at the root. I certainly will do everything that I can to make that happen. I can tell you that we are having a very critical situation today at WCB because this organization is not truly accountable to anybody. On one hand, it's arm's length from the government, so no matter what the minister wants to do, there's not much that he can do. It is in our legislation. This was built that way across the country. Today if an injured worker has a problem, he has to take it to the CSR, the appeal commission, to the Ombudsman. After that the only thing he can do is take it to court. Even if the court finds that WCB is at fault, the only thing that the court can do is refer him back to WCB. Somehow we have to change the

structure. Somehow we have to change the situation to allow workers more input and give them more responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, I'm going to move that we adjourn debate at this time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose has moved that we adjourn debate at this time. All those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]