

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 2, 1998 8:00 p.m.
Date: 98/02/02
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 10 Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act, 1998

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, I now move second reading of Bill 10, being the Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act, 1998.

The Alberta airport authorities – Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer – have asked that Alberta Transportation and Utilities sponsor two amendments to the Regional Airports Authorities Act. The first change requested stems from the need to allow the appointment of federal government appointees to the boards of the airport authorities. In February of 1997 both the Calgary Airport Authority and the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority entered into agreements with the federal government to amend their leases. These changes will save the Calgary Airport Authority and the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority an estimated \$116 million and \$127 million respectively over the next 10 years. In exchange for these financial concessions, the two airport authorities are required to appoint federal representatives to their respective boards. Amendments to the act are required in order to do this.

The second amendment involves changing the act to make it easier for authorities to secure long-term financing for upgrading their facilities. Under the current act the airport authority boards are responsible for the general management of the authority, which includes the setting of rates and fees on loans. This means that if an airport authority defaults on a loan, receivers are not able to impose new rates or fees without the board's approval. This impairs the lender's ability to recover outstanding loans. As a result, the authorities have found that lenders are reluctant to extend long-term financing. Therefore, the proposed amendments include the repeal of those sections which limit a receiver's ability to recover an outstanding loan through the introduction of new rates and fees.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the major areas of change that Bill 10, the Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act, 1998, would address.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 10. Bill 10 is an instrument that I view as being wholly remedial, and in fact I know from my discussions with the Calgary Airport Authority that this has been a source of long-standing negotiation with the federal government. This business of what sort of federal government representation would be on the board has been negotiated at considerable length, and I think Bill 10 allows the Calgary Airport Authority to get on with the very successful business they've been operating there, and I assume the same benefits accrue in terms of the Edmonton authority.

It doesn't indicate in the bill how many provincial representa-

tives are going to be appointed. I understand the theory, and we see clearly that there's going to be provision for two federal government appointees. It's not clear from the bill how many representatives the provincial government . . . [interjections]

DR. WEST: What's wrong with you people?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo, continue. I'll put the minister's name down as one of the ones that is on the Speaker's list.

MR. SAPERS: Couldn't you just name him and get him out of here?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. I'll put your name down as well.

Calgary-Buffalo to continue on, and these other eager people can be on in their turn.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to say that I expect many members in this Assembly have had the benefit of a presentation from the Calgary Airport Authority, and I think anybody who's had the benefit of that presentation is impressed by the initiative and by the leadership shown by that authority, by David Dover, who's chairman of the authority, and Ernie Caron, the chief operating officer, and the very strong representation they have from the University of Calgary, from the business community. Most importantly, it really works. What you see is a very dynamic entity that has turned the Calgary airport into clearly one of North America's finest airport facilities. The economic activity we see in Alberta now is certainly reflected in terms of increased flights in and out of the Calgary airport in particular.

I think all members ought to support an initiative like Bill 10, which is going to help that airport authority to be able to more fully and properly discharge their responsibilities. I'm advised by the Calgary Airport Authority that they're very much supportive of Bill 10. They appreciate the government's responsiveness in terms of bringing this legislation forward, and I hope all members will support it.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise again today before you to speak this time to Bill 10, that being the Regional Airports Authorities Amendment Act. I see here a bill that will essentially make things a bit easier on a couple of fronts, so I would refer to this as a bill of facilitation. On first glance, looking at the gist of the bill and the spirit behind it, I don't see any immediate difficulties with it as brought forward by the hon. member.

I also noted as I was listening to the sponsor of the bill's comments that this follows on the heels of considerable negotiations, shall we say, with federal counterparts and in particular probably the Ministry of Transport, I would assume, at the federal level and with our counterpart here at the provincial level. As a result, I think they've managed to craft a bill that will move things forward in a very positive way, and I'm certainly supportive of that.

I don't know to what extent the research would bear out the conclusions they've come to, but I'm given to understand that it

has been significant and they've looked into all the possible difficulties that might arise between the federal government working in conjunction with the provincial government. I should say that it's nice to see that kind of co-operation take place through a bill like this which will result in a couple of things, one of them being the saving of significant amounts of money over the long haul. At least I believe that's what the member was referring to.

That, of course, isn't spelled out in the bill per se, but I'm leaping to a conclusion here on the basis of what the sponsor said, that it would result in something like \$110 million or thereabouts in savings over the long haul. The bill doesn't specifically give an amount, at least not one I could see, but if that's what they've calculated the savings to be, I certainly would support that, particularly insofar as these costs really would perhaps see themselves returned to benefit the regional airports authorities through their infrastructure program that is so gravely required. At the same time I suspect it will result in not only more moneys being put in, Mr. Speaker, but also presumably an upgrading to certain aspects of the airport service and perhaps quality of safety controls and that type of thing. So I'm impressed with that, and I can certainly support it.

The other issue alluded to in a broad sense here was with respect to board appointments. I note that we as a province would have the ability to appoint members to the board of directors for the regional airports authorities. I think that's a good suggestion and one that the province may well wish to take up, provided it's done in a fashion that is agreeable to this House, that being through the process of openness and accountability, which would be refreshing to see in this respect.

Similarly, on that same point, I believe it's also at the whim of the federal government to put in place some of their own members, and I think that is good too. Again, it shows some sense of co-operation there, which I can wholeheartedly support.

The other point that I alluded to with respect to the upgrading of the facilities is something that I would appreciate the member perhaps expounding on a little bit further when we get into the committee stage and we're looking at it blow by blow. I don't foresee any problems, hon. member. I just wanted to know what types of things we could specifically envision there and what these changes would be ushering in.

8:10

The final point, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to the setting of rates, which I think the member referred to. I'm not clear on what that means, and I'm not sure where specifically in the bill that is referred to and what types of rates they would have to address. I was looking through it rather hurriedly to try and catch up to where the member was going, because the bill itself is not that exhaustive, but he did refer to – unless I misunderstood him. I think you said the setting of rates, hon. member; did you not? That there was some capability in here to impact the setting of rates? Perhaps that's to do with the improvement fees. For example, we could say that setting a \$5 head tax or improvement fee or whatever is the setting of rates. Is that contemplated under this change as well? If so, maybe you could just expound on that, or as I say, perhaps I didn't quite register it accurately.

Nonetheless, I would say in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that there is good support on this side of the House, which I think is substantiated by the fact that the airports authorities themselves have in fact asked for these changes to be made, and that would include the amendments to accommodate the appointments I alluded to at the federal level and also at the provincial level.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would simply take my spot and pass on to another colleague, should they wish to comment on it. Unless I see anything to the contrary when we get into the details, hon. member, you can certainly expect to receive my support when the vote comes.

I would conclude with just a final comment, if I might, hon. House leader, with respect to the terms and conditions of leasing arrangements that are alluded to. It's not something that we have a great deal of information on, and if you have something you could share in that respect as impacted specifically by the bill and some of the amendments or the repeals that are in the bill, that would be appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 10 and to speak, in fact, in favour of the bill, having had some association with the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority in that I happened to be on city council at the time Mr. Peter Watson brought to our attention the need for such a service. He happens to be a Progressive Conservative and in fact had the ear at the time of a well-known western Canadian from Vegreville, a man we used to call affectionately The Maz. He had the foresight to see that there was some need to – I hate to use the word “privatize,” but in fact that's exactly what this case was: taking it from the public sector and putting it in a quasi private-sector mode.

The object of the exercise was regional co-operation and regional management. Having the foresight to do that was very wise indeed. It took a great deal of cajoling from the members of city council to give up a lot of the authority that they had over an existing airport and to combine the two. It was really a leap of faith on behalf of the council of the day, and I have to commend them for seeing the advantages of that and the persuasiveness of Mr. Peter Watson and the many others that carried the day in that case.

Now, this particular bill is of some interest to me in that it expands the horizons of the original authority. One of the limiting factors of the original authority was that the federal government held the reins, as it were, on no areas other than the finance. Bit by bit the reins fell off in all other areas, particularly air-side service, the emergency service and the provision of same, the provision eventually of air traffic control. All of those things fell by the wayside one by one independently. This is the last real vestige of difficulty that the authority will have with the federal government maintaining those reins.

Probably the most important aspect of this bill is it allows the authority to borrow money and to become an entity unto itself that has all the power to make good moves and bad moves, as it were, to invest in various capital works, and to do all those things that an authority was originally designed to do. That occurs in the United States of course.

I think a number of people at the present authority have a great deal of experience in management, and I point to the chairman currently, Mr. Sid Hanson. They have had a great deal of success through their management structure in reducing the costs of operation over time and increasing service, not just in the number of passengers going in and out of the airport but also in the style of service, and expect to do a great deal more. They have currently in the works a major expansion, including a hotel on-

site, a number of air-side improvements, which are the ramps, in order to facilitate larger jets as well as accommodate smaller commuter aircraft in having a faster turnaround time, and to be able to aid the airlines of course in managing their affairs a little better.

The federal appointments. I'm not sure whether that serves a great deal of advantage to the authority or to the federal government, but I guess that does maintain some link. The question of the number of provincial representatives begs the question of whether in fact they're required. When one spends some time and looks at the appointment structure as it is, it's fairly representative of the region geographically as well as of the business sectors in the region and in fact, in my view, needn't have any more appointments than there are currently.

One of the areas that is of particular interest is the repeal of section 15(2). In my view that was an error in inclusion in the original bill in any event, because it set out a lot of the articles that would normally be set out in bylaws or in articles of association that could be amended from time to time. Of course this section being repealed now allows much more latitude in issuance of securities and all those things that a corporate entity should have at their disposal.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak in favour of this bill, and I congratulate Mr. Klapstein for bringing it forward.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc wishes to conclude debate?

MR. KLAPSTEIN: I'll make a few comments in closing and attempt to answer a couple of the questions that were asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

The intent of removing the cap on 15 members is to allow for two members to be appointed by the federal government, and it's enabling the province to appoint a member or two if the airport authorities and the province believe it's advantageous for that to happen. It would allow the airport authorities the same opportunity that other corporate bodies have to add members to their board as they feel it's advantageous to do so.

With regard to the changes in 15(2)(i), that has the effect of allowing a receiver at some point to have control over setting fees and charges, if that should ever happen. That's the only thing that changes there.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

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

8:20

Mr. Coutts moved:

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 2]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure and an honour to speak again to the throne speech, that was delivered only days ago and spoke of many things. But the most important bit, in my view, was that it didn't speak about enough things. It left out a great deal of not just the detail but some fundamentals about what government is about.

I point to some areas in particular that were mentioned in the first few pages of the speech, and it's adult education. That same day that we opened for a full session in this House, we had a demonstration outside this building. I happened to be very close at hand and spoke to some of those young people that were there, and they do have a point: being able to afford a higher education is an investment in people. This government doesn't seem to believe that the investment is worth any kind of budgetary consideration when we look at the prospect of having a graduate being in debt the average of some \$20,000, I believe. Now, that's hardly the way to encourage one to higher education, when you give them the prospect of being in debt the day they step outside the hallowed halls.

I believe that one of the government's responsibilities is to have the vision to look to the future and to say: where will we be five, 10, 15 years from now? This particular area has sadly been neglected, not just insofar as adult education relates to university but certainly to the prospect of NAIT and SAIT of course. They have been sadly neglected to the point where we are currently today, right now, not next week, not next month, facing a very, very severe shortage of trained labour. I'm talking about from welders to carpenters to pipe fitters to millwrights. We simply are short in this province. We didn't do a darn thing in the last five years to encourage people to go into those, knowing full well that the tide would turn. We neglected that very sadly. That is a very sad comment on the operations of this House over the past four years, and I don't see anything in the adult education portion of the throne speech to give me any hope or in fact any reason to believe that anything will occur other than continue on the same path that we currently are on.

I'll move now to another area that concerns me, and that area is social services. I happen to come from a constituency that is below the norm in socioeconomics. Therefore we have considerably greater need for social services and, in fact, for government services entirely. In my office we find that the attitude of the social service providers is always upbeat and that they try desperately to serve and try to enable some people to move beyond their current position of relying on government largesse for their livelihood. We have these people trying very hard to do it. Unfortunately they have no tools at their disposal. They have a caseload that is unbelievably large. They simply cannot give individual attention to any one of the recipients of social service funding. They are unable to make the time available to do some actual life planning for these people. Consequently, they're running from pillar to post, not being able to help these people other than to give them money. The system is not geared for success; it just seems to be geared to sustain the current status quo. Those people that could be the next generation of social service recipients in fact often come from those homes that are currently on social assistance. We're doing absolutely nothing to show these children that there's another way, a better way to live, and we certainly are unable to do it in the schools, although the schools do the best they can.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Moving on to another area that I find is sadly lacking in the Speech from the Throne, that of health care, we have all of perhaps 15 lines related to health care. One of the fundamental questions being asked outside these doors and out in the streets is: how am I on my salary going to survive in my later years if this health care system becomes a two-tiered health care system? That seems to be the design of this government. There is no indication otherwise in this throne speech, and there have been no actions taken by this government to indicate that that in fact is not the case. People outside these doors are concerned. They're worried about: how do I provide for myself in those years? If I don't have adequate funds and it's a private system, do I fit in or do I not? There's nothing in this speech that gives those assurances. Absolutely nothing. It doesn't even go to the extent of saying, yes, there's going to be a debate on the subject, such that the average person can understand where this government is heading. There is nothing being said in these covers, and it's really a sad case.

The next area of concern is the five and a half lines on seniors. Five and a half lines. Surely this government cares more for seniors than five and a half lines. It adds nothing to create any kind of feeling of well-being in this society for them. There are two main concerns of course, and those of us that deal with seniors an awful lot – and I'm sure most everyone in this House does. For them it's the future. How are they going to get to their last days without having to dip so far into their pockets that they become paupers?

The previous discussion on health care hits them a great deal. They are worried about how they are going to survive in this society. There is nothing in this speech that gives them to understand that they'll be cared for should they need it. There isn't anything that says to them: we understand what your concerns are, and we would like to address them. It doesn't say to them: come and talk to us; if there are some areas of difficulty, we can repair some of the holes in the current programs that are available. There's nothing in it that says: we're sorry that we had to take a great deal of your security away from you. There's nothing. Five lines. It's certainly, Mr. Speaker, not enough to fill the need that they have.

There's some talk of infrastructure, and it's another eight lines. Well, any of those that happen to be in municipal government will know that this area has been sadly neglected in this era of downsizing. It was neglected to the extent that there are some major repairs required and required now. We can't wait any longer. Any more delays in road repair and building repairs – all of those items that have been put back in a maintenance schedule are now due. They have to be done. It says that there are going to be some moneys added through the municipal government. Yes, we've heard of that, and we've heard of highway 43 being upgraded, which is in my view four or five years late judging from the fatality rate on that particular highway. But there certainly isn't anything in it where one can say: this is a priority of this government. It just doesn't say that at all.

Economic Development. Tourism is sort of mentioned in the way of Team Alberta. That's about all it is. We've seen a major disruption in the industry at perhaps about the time of the writing of this speech. Nothing is mentioned in the body of the speech to tell those that rely on that industry for their livelihood, nothing says to them, "Yes, we understand where the problems are, and yes we can do something about it, and yes we shall be doing something about it." I'm sure there are members here, particularly those in this House that represent areas that have a very,

very strong interest in this, that would dearly love to be able to say to their constituents: "Yes, here it is. There's a paragraph specifically outlining where this government is going in the way of the tourism industry." But there's nothing. It's painfully, painfully lacking.

8:30

In the energy area, of course, it's not likely to say too much. I can't be too critical of the government's Speech from the Throne with regards to Energy, save and except that it's left out some of the areas that I would have liked to have seen. It perhaps is in another area or could be in one of two areas, Environment or Energy. Both should have in fact addressed one of the most critical junctures in the world's history right now. We're having to deal, as a producer of fossil fuels, with global warming and what the international community intends to do about it. I scoured the perhaps 16 to 17 lines in the report and found absolutely nothing about what the government intends to do in this area. It does seem to me that if one read this in isolation, one would say, "This government just isn't taking any action and doesn't seem to give a darn." Well, I sincerely hope that is not the case. I understand there is something transpiring in one or both of those departments, but certainly in this speech it hasn't been outlined at all what this government's position would be.

There is of course some glimmer of hope in science and research under one of this House's favourite and most colourful members. It does seem to indicate that there is some new legislation coming forward. I suspect he's been talking about it long enough and encouraging all and sundry both inside and outside the House that they should be looking to the import of science and technology, and in fact I happen to be one of those that fully agree with him. But it doesn't flesh out what the government's intention is at all. I would have liked to have a little better handle on what the government intended to do in this area and would like to hear a little more about that in the subsequent days and certainly hope we shall.

In the way of listening to Albertans, which is sort of the closing lines of the speech, it does say something about listening. Now, I was elected the year the Premier said that he was about to care and listen to all of those people in the province that had needs. I have been in this House now almost five years and am becoming considerably more cynical about the caring and listening that's going on from that side of the House, particularly in view of the caring and listening or the lack thereof on the major issue of the day, which this side of the House has been concerned about for some time, and that's the propagation of the video lottery terminals. I don't hear or see any effective listening going on out there on the government side.

There are communities all over that are crying out for the government to take their rightful place and say, "Yes, we will ask you people by way of referendum whether in fact you want to have video lottery terminals in your community." I for one don't understand how you can say you can listen and not hear what is being said in the barber shops, the beauty salons, the bakeries, and the coffee shops of our province. I can't understand how you cannot hear how these people are saying, "Listen; just give me an opportunity." It's not something that is so terribly difficult for me to understand, that I can't have an opinion, an informed opinion on. In fact, all citizens – perhaps not all citizens but the vast majority of them – believe that they have the wherewithal to make those decisions and should be given that opportunity. If that's listening, and if that's the manner in which this government decides it should be listening, if this is an example of it, then I

suspect you should really think about scratching that portion of the speech the next time a speech is brought forward to this Legislature.

It's a sad comment on a Legislature that it will not debate an issue of interest. We have five or six minutes of the matter at question period, and then it dies. We don't hear from that side again. I would have thought that the floor of this Legislature would be the place where you'd be able to discuss those issues. I had some students in today, and they asked me why it is that we only heard that much – they know about video lottery terminals – why people didn't talk about it here. It's difficult to explain to them how a democracy works and explain to them why that particular issue can't be discussed and won't be discussed here.

Likewise, speaking to an area that I know something about, municipal finance. It's difficult to explain to councillors and aldermen throughout this province why we don't have a debate about municipal finance on the floor of the Legislature. Why couldn't we individually and collectively understand the plight that the municipal governments find themselves in with the crunch in finance? This particular budget year they're going to be hit once again, and each and everyone of you will have, if not an increase in your municipal taxes, certainly some changes to it, and your friends and neighbours will as well, because they have squeezed as long as they can and the crunch is here. Yet there's nothing in this Speech from the Throne, absolutely nothing, that would indicate that this government is going to have some interest in speaking about their difficulty.

Madam Speaker, it's with great regret that I cannot and will not support this Speech from the Throne. I would dearly like to be able to have a document before me that would say, "This is our legislative agenda; this is what the government intends to do," and be able to read line for line and understand the intent of this government and be able to take it to the people that I represent and say, "This is what they'll do." As it is, if I take this document to them, as I have done – they spend some time reading it and have many more questions than they have answers. There is absolutely no meat in this throne speech to support.

Thank you kindly for your time. I will look forward to hearing what the other side of the House has to say in favour of this speech.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be the one that can respond in such a manner. It is a pleasure to rise in the House today and add my comments to those already offered by my colleagues in consideration of the Speech from the Throne. After almost a year of working with the constituents of Banff-Cochrane and learning their issues, I can respond positively to the speech and the course it sets for the province as we aim to ensure that Albertans benefit from growth and prosperity and from quality, responsive, and affordable public services.

Banff-Cochrane continues to be a vibrant, diverse, and complex constituency with many challenges. As well as being one of the country's most popular tourism destinations, we have some of the fastest-growing communities not only in Alberta but in Canada. That growth causes towns like Canmore and Cochrane to struggle with growth management, and sustainable development is an issue for all parts. Increasing demands for expansion in an environmentally sensitive area presents controversy over land uses, pressures

on schools and health care services, physical infrastructure, and substantial property tax increases. I very much view the provincial government's role as a partner with our people and our municipalities in meeting these challenges and support initiatives that are meant to strengthen our communities. I have sensed that most constituents take pride in what has been accomplished financially, see a redefined role for government, and share a renewed hope for our future and for our children's future.

8:40

Madam Speaker, by making our young people our top priority, our present improves. We have built a solid foundation for our next generation, and I have to emphasize the "we." It took the involvement and some sacrificing by all Albertans. I think the Growth Summit indicated an interest in building a vision for Alberta that goes beyond eliminating the deficit and paying down the debt, and the agenda for opportunity sets the stage for such a vision.

Overall, the Speech from the Throne is consistent with what I have heard locally: respond to the pressures of growth, develop our most valuable resource – our people – and remain fiscally responsible. Our biggest challenge over the next three years will be to successfully strike that balance.

Education remains a top priority, and government commitment through reinvestment has been well received. After meeting with school council, school staff, parents, and students, I can say that the targeted areas for improvement reflect the concerns I've heard. Similar support exists for expanding the capacity and options for the rising number of high school graduates entering our postsecondary institutions.

With respect to social services, it is important that government commit to helping all Albertans maintain or regain their independence. As a society we are judged by how we take care of our less fortunate, and government must continue to do its part to support the truly needy and create a safety net that promotes self-reliance.

This past year Albertans have stressed that high-quality and accessible health care must remain an important part of our agenda and that we must continue to address the changing needs of a growing and aging population.

Having Canada's first national park, provincial parks, Kananaskis Country, and pristine wilderness that millions come each year to visit and which many want to call home, you can imagine how environmental concerns top Banff-Cochrane's issues. Government's commitment to protection and responsible stewardship is not only welcome but seen as critical as we deal with often-competing agendas. It is becoming increasingly obvious that new approaches to planning are needed which balance private and public interests. We must bring our economic ambitions into harmony with our environmental capacities, and at the same time economic realities must be a factor in our environmental initiatives.

The well-being of many industries relies on the long-term existence of our natural and cultural resources. Our quality of life is affected by both the environment and the economy, and we need to link those two agendas if we are to see the benefits of either.

Madam Speaker, Alberta is the place for individuals and for businesses, and the entrepreneurial spirit is strong and thriving in Banff-Cochrane. While government is getting out of the business of being in business, constituents respond favourably to our commitment to continue to create and improve the climate for prosperity for all Albertans. As well as looking at reforming

Alberta's personal income tax system, residents also support the government reviewing aspects of property taxation.

In closing, Banff-Cochrane residents have told me that fiscal responsibility must continue to be a priority and that prudent management must guide reinvestment in areas mattering most to Albertans. The Speech from the Throne reflects these wishes. I think it's an interesting time to be an Albertan and even more interesting to live in such a rapidly changing and energetic constituency. Our future is full of challenges, but it is also full of opportunities, and opportunities are what drive Albertans to their highest potential. I look forward to working on behalf of Banff-Cochrane constituents with everyone here as we find what we in the province are capable of.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: All right, Billy; let's see what you can do.

MR. BONNER: Hey, I've got good stuff tonight.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would also like to relay to the Members of the Legislative Assembly some initial thoughts of one of my constituents who was present for the Speech from the Throne. I first met this constituent during last year's provincial election campaign. At that time he informed me that many years ago he had run unsuccessfully in a provincial election. He went on to explain to me that he wouldn't trade the experience for a million dollars but that he'd never run again for \$20 million. This senior citizen continues to have a very keen interest in politics. His summation of the Speech from the Throne was quite brief. As we were descending the stairs, he went on to say that the speech was all about brotherhood, motherhood, sunshine, and apple pie. He said that they have put on the cruise control and intend to coast through 1998. Time itself will prove him right or wrong.

Madam Speaker, our return to the Legislature last week was very interesting to me in numerous respects. The first was a decision to open on the occasion of the New Year in the lunar calendar. We heard from the Member for Calgary-Fort how this year is the year of the tiger, a year of roaring success and prosperity. I hope that for all Albertans he is correct and they will have success and prosperity in 1998.

Another area of great interest to me was the celebration of Eid, which marks the end of the monthlong fast of Ramadan. It is of great interest to me for two reasons. On April 19, 1997, I had the opportunity to attend a ceremony commemorating the completion of the Ismaili Jamatkhana Centre, situated in the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry. This year was the first opportunity the Ismailis had to observe Ramadan in their new and beautiful centre. They're justly proud of this centre, and I'm certain this year's celebration was very special to them.

The second reason of interest centres around a visit I made to the Edmonton Islamic school in December. This school is also situated in Edmonton-Glengarry. During my visit the principal, Ibrahim Arid, explained how the students were preparing for Ramadan and the importance of this monthlong fast in the Muslim faith.

It is for these reasons, Madam Speaker, that I was particularly

aware and interested in Ramadan. At this time I would also like to add my greetings and congratulations to all those Albertans who follow the Muslim faith and have celebrated the end of Ramadan.

Some people have referred to the Speech from the Throne as a blueprint that will take the province of Alberta to a certain place at a certain time. As I listened to the speech and later studied it, I wanted to be fair in my analysis of this plan.

Madam Speaker, this government received a very strong mandate from the citizens of Alberta at the end of the Growth Summit. There was no mistake that Albertans' number one priority was human development. I was therefore quite surprised that early in this Speech from the Throne this mandate was shoved aside and there was a very clear new priority to aggressively tackle the total accumulated debt of \$14 billion.

In all the sessions I attended at the Growth Summit the government was clearly not given this direction. The citizens of this province clearly understood that, yes, we had to get the net debt under control, but they also realized that this did not happen without a price. This price is generally known as a hidden debt, and each year that we fail to properly fund education, health care, social services, and municipalities, it continues to grow at an alarming rate. Having progressed past the government's plan for debt reduction, I look forward to hearing their plans for human development.

Early it became quite evident that major areas of concern had been identified correctly, but something was still missing. As I tried to put my finger on what was missing, I couldn't help but think of a story related to me by Jack Donahue when he was a coach of Canada's national basketball team. He had been for breakfast with a potential sponsor, and the sponsor asked Jack how committed he was to the national basketball program. When Jack fumbled with his reply, the sponsor gave him an example. He said: "You see those bacon and eggs you were having for breakfast, Jack? Well, the chicken was involved, but the pig was committed." After studying this document, Madam Speaker, I'm left with the question as to whether this government wants to be involved or committed.

8:50

In the year of the tiger, Madam Speaker, at a time when Alberta enjoys the highest employment rate in Canada and the highest economic growth in the country, this Speech from the Throne certainly lacks an aggressive approach to human development, which these indicators clearly show should be happening. We are now four years into the reform of the health services here in Alberta. The recent report released by the Provincial Health Council confirmed what a lot of us have suspected for some time: the only real reform to date has been administrative changes and spending reductions.

I'm further concerned after listening to comments made by the president of the Alberta Medical Association last week on CHED radio. He went on to say that the poor medical climate in Alberta continues to play a major role in the recruitment of doctors for our rural communities. It also is a major factor in that in the specialized fields of cardiology, orthopedics, and neurosurgery we cannot attract top-notch members of these particular specialized fields to the province. Perhaps the most alarming statement made by the president was when he referred to the loss of so many young doctors who were trained and educated in this province but have chosen to move to greener pastures outside the province. As a result, the average age of doctors in this province is not decreasing but increasing.

To get back to the report on health services, there are two Ms

in this report: money and management. This report gives us a most accurate detail of health spending in Alberta in the '90s. From 1992 to '93 through 1996 to '97 overall spending on health has decreased 17 percent. In inflation adjusted dollars that results in \$800 million. So while private spending went up 17 percent to try and deal with the health needs of Albertans, total public plus private spending went down 9 percent. The population here in Alberta grew at the same time. Overall health spending per person after inflation decreased by 14 percent.

The government introduced us to the 17 regional health authorities. These new health regions were to operate with business plans. However, several regional authorities are not clear on whether business plans are supposed to help them manage or help Alberta Health monitor their affairs.

Nurses tell us about patient loads, unusual job requirements, and workplace stress. They are tired of running their track meets every day they report to work. Doctors tell us of the decreased quality of care and the overall lack of confidence in the system. Doctors also feel patient safety is in jeopardy.

What we are experiencing is what the health care economists call the privatization creed. Other people call it two-tier, for-profit health care. I believe in fairness. It is not fair that someone with a fat wallet can get better, quicker medical attention than someone whose wallet is thin. It is a historical fact that two-tier, for-profit health care has been a failure everywhere it has been tried: in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and of course, the United Kingdom.

Many of you here remember the days in this country prior to 1965 when we had a much more efficient health care delivery system. Family budgets were always hit when people were ill and least likely to afford extra costs. Those who advocate for a two-tier, for-profit scheme claim that if the rich are allowed to pay for their health care in a private facility, this will ease the pressure on the public system. Not so. Public health has deteriorated in those countries where two-tier, for-profit schemes exist. As more dollars go to the private system, fewer go to support the public system. It is amazing that these same arguments, Madam Speaker, could be made for our education system as well.

Those who are not rich and cannot afford private health insurance or cannot qualify for private coverage are forced to go without needed care, depend on a crumbling public system, or suffer unnecessarily and even risk death. There is a chance that private health care providers can cherry-pick their patients. Those who may require more care can be rejected to save money. Private two-tier, for-profit health care is far more expensive than the current publicly funded health care. We only have to compare the American system to ours to prove this.

Alberta Health is preparing a list of core services. One must wonder what will be included on that list and therefore eligible for payment under the existing Alberta health insurance plan. If Alberta Health deinsures certain services and procedures, private entrepreneurs are free to offer those deinsured services and procedures and charge what the market will bear. In the immediate future we must keep a watchful eye on this list of core services and be ready and able to stand up against the deterioration of our health care.

I do not believe that Albertans want a two-tiered system. We know that we can afford and maintain a public health care system. We can't afford unwell citizens too ill to work. We can't afford to have unwell schoolchildren who are too unhealthy to learn at school. We can't afford to have further separation of our citizens based on the thickness of their wallets.

Here are three very interesting health care facts. Contrary to claims by some critics of medicare that Canada's health care system is among the most expensive in the world, Canada actually ranked 16th among OECD countries in 1994 in terms of public financing as a percentage of overall health expenditures. [interjection] I think we're doing very well in publicly funded health care.

The second point. Prescription drug prices in Canada soared by 93 percent between 1987 and 1993, a period during which the consumer price index rose by only 23 percent. It's quite a difference from 93 percent to 23 percent.

My third point. As a percentage of the total payroll Canadian employees spent 1.4 percent on health benefits compared to an average of 8.7 percent of the payroll that's spent by employees in the United States.

Now that the reinvestment announcements have been made for health care, Alberta will still be spending the least amount of its resources on health care of any other province in Canada and the least per capita.

We need to sustain our publicly funded health care system and ensure quality and accessibility. Finances need to be spent to stabilize the acute health care system, improve home care, promote public health, support rural physicians, increase the number of long-term care beds, increase home care for seniors, increase drug co-payments to seniors, and increase extended health care benefits to seniors.

Madam Speaker, one of the positives was \$380 million being reinvested in education. However, I don't feel this is a reinvestment. It is more remedial, to correct the wrongs that have occurred because of underfunding over the last five years. This increase of \$380 million will vault us from 60th position to 55th. We will rank right behind Arkansas.

9:00

In this particular Speech from the Throne I was hoping to see that this government would definitely make a commitment to public education. This is the type of education that ensures all Albertans equal opportunity. It is not based on wealth, but it is based on equal opportunity and on a system that has had a long and rich history in this province.

If we want to look at the problems in the charter schools of today, I think we can certainly look . . .

MR. MacDONALD: Some problems in the charter schools?

MR. BONNER: Definitely problems in the charter schools. And I would say that they certainly don't lack the years of expertise that our public system has enjoyed and has taken the time and effort to develop. We definitely need greater funding of technology in our schools.

On the other side there certainly is no mention in this particular Speech from the Throne of how we are going to address the situation where we now have an increase of 14,000 students but we have had a decrease of 720 full-time teachers.

When I look at social services, my colleague for Edmonton-Manning and myself did send a letter to the Premier requesting immediate action. It is required for Albertans on fixed incomes because they are caught in a rent squeeze, and our senior citizens, the severely handicapped, and those on social assistance require this move immediately. I was a little dismayed that I did not see a commitment to helping out these people at this critical time.

The precursory signals to this problem have been in place now for the better part of the past year. They surfaced originally in Calgary. They are now starting to hit the market in Edmonton,

as the amount of available housing for people is decreasing constantly.

When it comes to seniors, Madam Speaker, our government will address the needs of Alberta seniors through a review of long-term care services in the province. At this time I have had discussions with the minister responsible. She has outlined the process that she is following to identify these. I think it's an extremely good process. What will really count is when the rubber does hit the road and the moneys are put into those programs for our seniors who, again, are on fixed incomes and are certainly feeling the pinch to their disposable income from all the increases they have experienced.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that the Speech from the Throne does have potential. But for this potential to be realized, the government will certainly have to get out of cruise control. They cannot coast through 1998.

I would also now, Madam Speaker, like to move that we adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Second Reading**
(continued)

Bill 1
Protection of Children
Involved in Prostitution Act

[Debate adjourned February 2]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DR. WEST: Are you against this too?

DR. MASSEY: Hush.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member is right; he does have the floor. Certainly I've heard a number of discussions taking place over the last little while, so we know who the next speakers will be: some members in the front row.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As previous members have, I would like to join in thanking the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill. The kind of spirit she spoke about in her comments earlier today that prevailed in the development of the legislation is the kind of flexibility I hope will be sustained as it makes its way through the Legislature. I hope that flexibility will allow us to make it the kind of bill that I think we all would like to see, one that works in the best interests of children who find themselves in the unfortunate position of being involved in prostitution. I think additionally the bill joins some others that have been introduced this session. I think of the bill introduced by the Member for Red Deer-South

and its potential for making life better, for saving lives. So I see a group of bills coming forward that are designed to provide some remedy for some of the problems Albertans face.

Having said that, I really looked at the bill with renewed interest after having read the *Edmonton Journal* report of a press conference that had been held by the Edmonton Police Service. Rather surprisingly – at least I thought surprisingly – as I read it, there was not great support for the bill from that police service. They used terms like the bill being myopic. They called the bill redundant. They said it was going to be very difficult to enforce the bill as it was written. They further indicated that the bill turned police officers into social workers. I'm not sure I agree that that's a negative sort of thing, but evidently they felt it was. They indicated that the bill was going to create a new industry called a safe house industry.

I was rather surprised, not having yet read the bill completely, to find my introduction to it being rather a negative response from the Police Service. I'm still not quite sure how that negative response came about, because I listened to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek this afternoon, who indicated in her remarks that the Edmonton Police Service had been involved in consultations in developing the bill. So there must be an answer there why that involvement led to the kind of negative comments we see before us now.

I immediately started to look at the principles that seem to underline the bill, and those principles I think are really rather impressive if you take the ones that are outlined in the preamble of the act. It starts off with an indication that the "security and well being of children and families is a paramount concern of the Government of Alberta." What better way to start an act that is intended to help these youngsters? It does raise the question, however, whether that is in fact true. I go back to what happened to children in kindergartens, and I go back to the recent information that has been forthcoming in terms of children living in poverty and the number of children that live in poverty in our province. I wonder if that principle is really one that is acted upon or is more in the minds of the bill's creators than it is in the reality of the lives that many of our children live in this province.

The second principle is that "children . . . in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and require protection." I think that's a sound kind of principle to have put forward. It moves the prostitution into a situation where it can be dealt with, with children seen as the victims they truly are.

9:10

The third principle that is outlined is that "the Legislature of Alberta recognizes the responsibility of families and communities to provide that protection." I think this is really an important and probably one of the most important principles that underline the bill. It sets up a series of expectations that the bill is going to outline some ways that communities, some ways that families can be involved and can help protect children and help make sure they aren't led into lives of prostitution. As we work our way through the bill, I think it's an area in the bill that can be improved. I think there are much stronger roles for communities that could be defined and could be part of this legislation. There are much stronger roles for families than now exist in the bill that would either help youngsters from being lured into this sort of business or help them get out of it.

I think the definition of families and communities is really important. If we talk about the community being the broad community of Alberta, it's one thing. But if we talk about where I believe the solutions to these problems lie, in local communities,

in smaller units where children are known, where people who are involved in these kinds of activities are known, and if we're talking about empowering them, then I think it's quite different.

The fourth one: "the Government of Alberta is committed to assisting families and communities in providing that protection." I think that's again a sound principle. That's a proper role for the government, to provide that assistance for those families and those communities, and it's a role that I think has to be approached really, really carefully.

I give as an example that in our constituency we're looking at the whole problem of poverty. We unfortunately have a number of citizens and families in the constituency who are living in poverty, and their children are having a very difficult time. We've met on a number of occasions, involving members from the business community, involving the schools, involving social services, involving representatives from the school boards and the city of Edmonton, in trying to come to some resolution in terms of how we could help those people living in poverty. It wasn't until a recent meeting where we actually asked families who were living in poverty to come and to make a presentation to us – to talk to us about their lives, the kinds of lives they live – that we really started to see the problem in its true light and realized that assisting and supporting, not trying to impose our solutions on others, was really the way we were going to have to approach the problem.

I suspect that the problem of child prostitution is much the same, that we have to involve those people who are living the problem in the solutions. It's not good enough for those of us that are concerned, no matter how deeply we are concerned, to propose solutions for them, because the chances of those solutions being successful I think are rather remote. It's a hard lesson for some of us who are maybe labeled "do-gooders" to learn, and that is that we have to involve the people who are affected and, as I said, living the problem.

"The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring the safety of all children." I would imagine that's a principle that underlies a lot of government legislation. I'm not sure it's one that needs to be stated. I think it's something most Albertans assume without it having to be articulated.

"The Government of Alberta is committed to assisting children in ending their involvement with prostitution." Again, I think it's a principle that doesn't need to be reiterated in a bill, but I go back, and I think the most important one is the one that refers to communities and family involvement in the problem.

I looked at the number of people that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated had been involved in the process, and again I wondered what the role was of child prostitutes. Were those children involved in the deliberations, or was it through the kinds of agencies that were listed by the member? Is that where information about those children and their lives was taken? If it wasn't, I think that at some point before this legislation is passed or once it's passed and specific actions to enact the legislation are taken, somehow or other we've got to get those people involved. They have to tell us about their lives. They have to have some say in what should be done to make them better.

I guess the bill as it now stands is a disappointment because it seems to be – as I go back, I think the expectation was set up that it was going to talk about families and communities and ways of empowering them and helping them solve the problem, but the bill itself seems to be a list of procedures, some legal procedures, more a procedural manual than the actual kind of bill I expected on seeing the title and the initial preamble that was outlined in the act. So I hope that will change.

Again I go back to my hope that the member and in particular

the government are going to be open to amendments that will make the bill. As it sits right now, it seems to be a mixture of remediation, of punishment, of education. There doesn't seem to be really a central thrust other than the involvement of the police and officials and the role that the police and those officials will undertake. I think there's a real need to remain open and for all of us to try to shape this bill into the kind of bill that will make lives better for children who are involved in prostitution, to make sure it no longer is a way of life for them and that that will somehow or other change the behaviour of those citizens in our community who see the encouragement of that way of life as the thing that they should be involved in. It's a huge task, and like any social problem in our community it's a difficult task.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Again, as I conclude, Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that the government is going to be open and flexible and allow the changes to be made that will make it a more powerful, effective piece of legislation.

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

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am going to rise this evening to speak and just give my comments on Bill 1. First of all, I would like to echo the positive comments made by my colleagues this afternoon as well as this evening and also to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who took the initiative and went forward and implemented the bill and has worked very, very hard on its logistics and the way it has taken shape.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, the thing that I find with Bill 1 is the fact that it replicates a lot of the sections of the Child Welfare Act. The Child Welfare Act is a lot stronger in terms of giving penalties to johns and to pimps, so I think we have to be conscious of that when we are getting into the meat and potatoes, so to speak, of the bill later on when we are in Committee of the Whole.

9:20

Right now, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to address, as well, the principle of the bill. I think anything this government, this legislation can do to help children – children are our greatest resource, and children must be protected. We have to do our utmost to sustain a safe environment for children to grow and for children to be nurtured.

Mr. Speaker, when I was working as a crisis intervention counselor in a women's shelter, I encountered a number of young women who were working on the streets, and I found that with each and every caseload that I took on to counsel or to work with, there were just as many reasons why they were on the street as there were young women. I found that poverty was a big issue, but it seemed that a lot of the women or young people that were on the street who came to the shelter were there because they had no choice. They were not made aware that there were places they could go rather than working the streets to earn a living, living with a pimp, or doing whatever.

I found that education for young people in the public system, in charter schools, let's say, in Christian schools, wherever, has been lacking to make young women and young boys aware of what can transpire when they do hit the streets.

It's interesting that while I was working at the shelter, the young people that I ended up counseling took the bars off the windows of the women's shelter and escaped. I mean, this was

a real eye-opener for somebody that was trying to protect somebody from an environment. They were brought to the shelter by the police, social services had to admit, so to speak, the children into the shelter, and the two young ladies took the bars off the windows and away they went. They did come back the next day and said that they'd had commitments, they'd had work to do and they'd had to leave. So you work with all kinds of young people who are in crisis and who feel compelled to make a living on their own.

The reason why I am sort of alluding to the work I did in the women's shelter is that because while working there – the shelters are so overcrowded at this point. If the 72-hour holding period that young offenders are going to be experiencing through this bill – I would actually wonder who is going to police, watch, shelter these young offenders. For example, when I was on the United Way board in planning and allocations I did an agency review of the Youth Emergency Shelter in Edmonton, and they are full. They're full to the brim. So I have concerns that maybe we're sort of pursuing this a little quicker than is necessary. All the agencies have to be involved in deciding the 72-hour retention of the young people. Where are they going to go? Who is going to give them direction? Who is going to do follow-up? It just encompasses all kinds of thoughts, ideas. When you've worked in the system, you see what is happening.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the downloading aspect of the bill also has to be taken into account. The onus seems to be on the police. The police are saying that it's already under the Child Welfare Act. There are stiffer penalties when it is under the Child Welfare Act as opposed to this legislation. So you see both sides of it.

I know that a lot of work has gone into Bill 1, but I would caution everybody to really reflect on where the stiffest penalty is going to occur. Is it going to occur under this act or under the Child Welfare Act? I think that if we do look at the penalties, giving johns a stiffer penalty, up to \$25,000, I do believe, from \$2,500, jail time should be looked at as well. The fines are fine. I think we've all read what Manitoba is trying to do, and that is, if you're caught as a john or if you're caught pimping, they want to be able to take your car away. In my mind, I think that's a wonderful piece of legislation. The johns have to phone home and ask the spouse or some family member to pick them up because the police have incarcerated their car because they were trying to pick up a young prostitute. There's a lot of explaining to be done. I mean, we can still look at the merits of fines; we can still look at the merits of jail time. I think also we can start looking at other provinces and what is being done.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the role this province will play in initiating follow-through, doing research, finding out if this legislation actually works. We sort of start something, and it's wonderful legislation, and we all want to protect our children. We all want to bring them home and say that there's no bad or evil out there in the world, but the reality is, yes, there is. We have to be very conscious that we make the right decision. We do it with full thought, projection, insight, and long term. We have to sort of watch and look at what the federal initiative is right now. We can sort of work along those guidelines.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, during Committee of the Whole we'll get down to more of the particulars of the bill. I hope there is a lot of debate on what it means to be a prostitute on the street. Some comments have been coming up through the paper actually. A chap by the name of DeWayne Brown of operation Crossroads underlines the fact that juvenile prostitution is not a moral issue but one of child sexual abuse. I think that issue and those words conjure up different thoughts than a lot of rhetoric about just

being a prostitute. We have to look at the reasons why young people go on the streets. Is it poverty? Is it lack of education? Is it because of violence in the home? Is it because of, because of, because of? These are all questions that I think we as Members of the Legislative Assembly should be asking. We should collectively, all of us, work on this big issue, and it's child prostitution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise tonight and speak about Bill 1, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. This is a positive step by this government to realize and recognize that children engaged in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and require protection. We as legislators are responsible to provide protection and support to these teenagers. I would like to thank the Member from Calgary-Fish Creek for spending a lot of time and energy on this issue.

Teenage prostitution, however, is no different than any other form of prostitution. Somewhere there is a pimp in the shadows, be it a bus station, on a recruitment drive, or on the street after dark. There is a john somewhere ready to pounce on his or her victim. This bill will allow a pimp or john to be charged with wilfully causing a child to be in need of protective services. If convicted, they could be subjected to a fine of up to \$25,000 or two years in jail. Under the current Child Welfare Act the exact same offence exists and the punishment is \$10,000 or one year in jail.

If this bill can help one teenager escape from the grasp of a pimp, then I will support it. One teenager working as a mattress girl is one teenager too many. This is one form of prostitution that is happening in Alberta's major cities.

9:30

We read often of the exploitation of these teenagers. Violence towards prostitutes is neither encouraged nor condoned by the Criminal Code. The law views prostitutes and prostitution as a behaviour categorized as different. There is a general attitude that they are second-class citizens. As one prostitute bluntly put it: it is like we are strange, nocturnal animals that crawl out of the sewers at night. This bill, I believe, is committed to assisting children in ending and avoiding their involvement with prostitution.

We are all aware in this House of the global economy, global travel, and in particular, global tourism. Global tourism is a very fast-growing industry, and in many of the poorer countries child prostitution is a very large industry. Hunger is an aphrodisiac in these Third World countries. If we are going to try to eliminate child prostitution in this province, Albertans should not be going abroad and procuring children for their own favours.

Perhaps we should take this bill one step further and think of all children, not just the sons and daughters of Alberta. This sex trade in Third World countries goes on in the most appalling conditions, Mr. Speaker. Exploitation and violence go hand in hand. We should remember this: there is no difference between a child prostitute in Calgary or Medicine Hat or Calcutta. Human rights are the same no matter where we go. Physical and emotional abuse is the same. A person should expect a frosty reception upon returning to this province after traveling abroad and in their travels, it is found out, they had procured a child prostitute. They should face the consequences of their actions

here in this province of what they have done abroad.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, with interest to the remaining debate on this bill, including amendments if there are any.

Thank you for your attention.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of thoughts with respect to Bill 1. I know that we always try with the Speaker's firm guidance to avoid getting into detailed discussion at second reading, although there are a couple of elements that I think will require more specificity rather than simply talking in generalities.

What I wanted to do first was join with others in acknowledging the very committed work of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I've got, I think, as good a perspective as anybody in the House on how far we've come just in terms of focusing attention on the issue of prostitution. I remember that in the spring of 1992 there was a private member's motion talking about what role the provincial government could play in addressing street prostitution. It wasn't a question of specifically identifying teen prostitutes, but that was an element of the discussion. What was interesting to me was that there were certainly members on both sides of the House at the time that expressed support for the provincial government taking a stronger, more active role. There was a remarkable and all too apparent lack of interest on the part of the cabinet at the time and the government itself to take any action. So the issue, although people recognized it was a serious one, nothing further happened. The fact that the Member for Calgary-Fish-Creek was able to simply have this issue brought forward in the sense of being the Premier's flagship bill I think is a Herculean achievement.

I think it's important to recognize that this is actually an enormously complicated issue. I think it's so difficult to talk about solutions to prostitution regardless of the age of the prostitute without just recognizing how many different factors are involved.

You know, the Member for Calgary-Currie had said she wanted to debunk some myths this afternoon when she spoke to this bill and then promptly said prostitution "is not a poverty issue." My reaction when I heard her say that was: well, clearly, for a number of prostitutes poverty isn't the factor that put those women on the street, but surely it's equally fallacious to say that it's never a question of poverty. For a lot of young women this is a form of survival, and as has been pointed out by some other speakers, it is a contributing factor. So it's simply unrealistic to say that poverty is wholly unrelated to it.

I think in looking at what's happened here, it's important to acknowledge some excellent work that's been done but not heralded very much in our communities. I think of the exit program that's run in Calgary by the Woods Christian Homes organization as well as Street Teams, and I've had the benefit of doing ride-alongs with both organizations as well as the city of Calgary Police Service downtown. We're still in a situation, I think, of having to convince a lot of our neighbours and a lot of our constituents that this really is a significant issue. It is a major problem, maybe not in terms of the number of young people involved but in terms of the devastating impact it has on their lives.

I think that there's been some excellent work, and it's been acknowledged, both from the Safer Cities Initiative in Edmonton and the Calgary Mayor's Task Force on Community and Family Violence, that have been chaired by former Calgary-Buffalo MLA

Ron Ghitter. We saw subsequent to that in Calgary an action committee on prostitution that came out with some very concrete proposals. One of them had been the proposal to amend the Child Welfare Act, as in fact we did in the last go-round last spring. So we've had people in Calgary and in Edmonton and other communities who have been working on this problem for some considerable time. I'd just like to acknowledge and recognize the excellent work done by a lot of very committed people frankly working in the streets of our province to address the issue and for too long without any sort of public and political acknowledgment of the problem, never mind political support.

So now we've achieved, I think, a fairly major milestone, or landmark, simply the fact that the Legislative Assembly is dealing with this as the first bill of the spring session. But, you know, once we get beyond that point of acknowledging that it's a terrific thing that we're now discussing it, I think that as my colleague the Opposition House Leader had put it earlier this afternoon, it's our responsibility to look at this bill and look at it as thoroughly and as vigorously as we can and determine if really this is the full solution or the best solution and perhaps look at what other things ought to be part of the package, to follow through on what I think is a generally shared commitment to, if not eliminate child prostitution - I'm a realist - at least minimize it and ensure that there's as small a number as possible of teenage girls in this province engaged in prostitution and this form of abuse.

9:40

I think there are sort of two different tensions that surface in any treatment of Bill 1. The first one is the issue between Criminal Code remedies and provincial statute remedies, and we've heard some discussion about that this afternoon. Frankly, I'm not so concerned about that, Mr. Speaker, because of the difference in the burden of proof. I think all members appreciate that for a Criminal Code offence to be made out to result in a conviction, the Crown has to establish guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. It's a very high standard for the Crown to meet. By going under provincial legislation, we're dealing with a balance of probabilities, which means that the threshold, the burden of proof to be met by the state is considerably lower. When we're dealing with a serious social problem like this, I think there are some darned compelling reasons why we ought to look at not relying on Criminal Code recourse as much as provincial legislation and that reduced burden of proof. So I see some value in that.

The second kind of tension, though, is one that I'm still wrestling with in looking at and assessing Bill 1, and that has to do with the tension between the Child Welfare Act, a statute which we had amended just in 1997 to specifically and expressly recognize child prostitution as a triggering event for the director of child welfare to be involved, and this separate provincial bill, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. I think the question comes up: why two different statutes? Why wouldn't we simply take the Child Welfare Act, and if our amendment last go-around didn't go far enough, simply revise that, amend the Child Welfare Act so everything is incorporated into a single statute?

We do have in the Child Welfare Act section 1(2), which talks about:

A child is in need of protective services if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the survival, security or development of the child is endangered because of any of the following.

Then a whole series of different situations and circumstances are enumerated. Section (3)(c) specifically refers to "prostitution related activities." Under the Child Welfare Act the director has

the power to apply for a number of remedies including an apprehension order, temporary guardianship, permanent guardianship, and supervision order.

So the question I have is: why wouldn't we simply deal with the more comprehensive statute and make the amendment there rather than having this collateral, stand-alone statute specifically dealing with child prostitution? I understand that there are two arguments in terms of why we've gone this way. The one is that there's a belief that there will be more funding available by having a stand-alone statute than simply amending the Child Welfare Act, and I'll come back and deal with that in a moment. The other issue, I understand, is a feeling on the part of some government officials that it's too tough or too problematic to invoke the jurisdiction of the Child Welfare Act to meet the test that I quoted from a moment ago in section 1(2) of the Child Welfare Act.

Now, in terms of those two reasons – and those are the only two reasons that I've heard why we're not dealing with a more comprehensive amendment to the Child Welfare Act – I start from the position, Mr. Speaker, that I've always argued in this House that what we need is more consolidated legislation, more streamlined legislation. We don't serve Albertans well by simply having a whole lot of similar parallel statutes when one statute can consolidate a number of different remedies. It makes it easier for Albertans who want to find out what the law is. It makes it easier for people who have to police, enforce the law. That's my starting point.

When I look at what I believe are the only two reasons why we have the stand-alone statute, I have trouble imagining, Mr. Speaker, that when the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek made her pitch to her caucus and the pitch was then made to the cabinet, she would have got a message that there would be not nearly as much money available if this were simply part of the Child Welfare Act than if it were a stand-alone statute. I'd surely like to think that every member of this House would believe that this would be a major issue, one that requires adequate resources and that those resources would be available regardless of whether we're talking a stand-alone statute or whether it's part of the Child Welfare Act. I understand that concern, but to me it surely can't be true. It surely can't be right that this government wouldn't make adequate provision for children who are subjected to this kind of abuse simply because there wasn't a separate statute with a name such as Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution. Anyway, that's the concern I have on that count.

On the other concern, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the threshold test in the Child Welfare Act is too high, I've had some occasion to appear in front of Alberta courts on child welfare matters, and you know, it's one of those things where the definition of a child in need of protection or in need of protective services has been crystalized. It's been fairly clearly defined by courts, and it's not something that I see as something fraught with a lot of ambiguity and a lot of confusion. So if there are people who have that view, if there's that sort of opinion that's been expressed, I wish somebody would put that on the record and state it, because on the face of it it doesn't seem to me to be a particularly compelling reason why we have a stand-alone statute.

I just want to come back and say, in case my remarks would be misconstrued or misunderstood, that I support the initiative. I just have some questions in terms of why a collateral bill instead of an amendment to the Child Welfare Act.

Mr. Speaker, the other comment I heard this afternoon from my constituent that caused me some concern was the admonition to members that we shouldn't focus so much on treatment or services. We shouldn't get bogged down talking about resources. We're simply dealing with the bill. My reaction is that I think

every one of my colleagues always brings a certain amount of skepticism when we deal with a much ballyhooed government initiative, because we've seen so many showpiece bills that, frankly, are intended to convince Albertans that action is being taken, and we don't see the corresponding commitment in terms of resources.

Now, I understand that there's been a commitment in excess of \$5 million to address this problem. I'd feel more confident if I had a better sense in terms of how that money is going to be applied. Five million dollars sounds like a huge amount of money, but I have concern in terms of how that money is going to be spent. I would hope that before we get to the final stages of this bill, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek or the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Family and Social Services will give me and other members some greater measure of comfort in terms of adequacy of resources being made to assist these young people who are at risk.

The other issue I have is that a lot of responsibility is being taken away from the director of child welfare and is now being conferred on our police services. Police services do an outstanding job in this province, but I'm loath to see the director of child welfare frankly removed from the kind of residual responsibility that exists currently in our child welfare legislation. I think there's an important role for the director of child welfare, and I feel some unease with the fact that now provision is being taken out and turned over to the police service without some of the supports that we would have seen otherwise.

9:50

The other point I simply want to make, Mr. Speaker, is that in the Child Welfare Act we've got some provisions that I think could be improved. I like one of the suggestions in Bill 1, which is that "if a child is participating voluntarily in a program to assist the child in ending involvement in prostitution." Then the child would be able to apply for a restraining order against the abuser. But then I ask: logically, why would we restrict this very powerful and useful remedy to a child who is voluntarily in a program? Why wouldn't we say that any child who's in that position of being abused in this fashion ought to be able to access this kind of a remedy? To me that would be an even more positive step.

I think that if we amended the Child Welfare Act, the director would be able to apply for the order. What we've got here is that the child welfare director has no role in that. It's simply up to the youth or, I guess, some advocate for the youth to take that role.

The other problem is that after a child prostitute has been detained for 72 hours, then the director releases the child. But there's no provision in terms of releasing the child to a guardian or whatever. That provision does exist in our Child Welfare Act. Once again, if this were tucked into the Child Welfare Act, it would be what I think would be a positive provision which isn't found anywhere in Bill 1.

The other provision is that essential medical treatment can be provided under the Child Welfare Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, terrific to see this as Bill 1. I'm certainly not speaking in opposition to the bill, but I think we can do better yet. I guess I'm a greedy legislator. I think when we have the opportunity to deal with this, we want to simply make this bill as effective as it possibly can be, and I think there's a little more work we can do on it yet.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

[At 9:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]