

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, February 3, 1998 8:00 p.m.

Date: 98/02/03

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading
Bill 1

Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act

[Debate adjourned February 2]

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 1 this evening. I have a number of questions that deal with the principle of the bill that I'm hoping can be clarified prior to my making a decision how I will support this bill. When we speak to the principle of a bill that deals with doing something, moving some steps forward in terms of protecting children that are involved in prostitution, I think it's very important that we speak to treating the problem and not the symptom.

This bill and the Task Force on Children Involved in Prostitution have a heavy emphasis on dealing with the symptoms of the problem: the children in prostitution and how to get them out of prostitution and how to deal with it from that perspective. For me, if you're really going to be taking a look at a wellness model, which is where we as a society should be going, our first emphasis needs to be on finding out what it is that causes these children to leave the homes and fixing that problem.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in her comments stated that "many of these children come from a history of emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse." Well, what is it that we can do as a government and as a society to stop the problem before it gets to that stage? Clearly, that's what I see as the major role of many of these government ministers that sit in front of us in terms of working towards preventing exactly that kind of thing: taking a proactive measure to how they provide services so that we can become a well society from birth to death and not just deal with the symptoms of the problem, which in this case happens to be prostitution. So I'm hoping that the member who sponsored this bill will address that at some point in the debate.

Also, I have a real concern with where we're going with this on the money. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek says that the government has committed \$5.2 million over the next three years for this particular program. That equates to \$1.4 million a year. First of all, I would like to know if that is dedicated to training people, to initiating the program, to programming funds over the course of those years to such measures that will be required, such as secure custodial features. I'd like to see some sort of a breakdown where that money comes from. I'm a bit concerned by it. When I see the breadth and scope of what the task force recommendations are and where this bill goes to, I'm wondering how it can possibly begin to achieve what it set out to be with those kinds of dollars. I'm wondering how we can consider \$5.2 million over three years to be substantial dollars in this case when we have seen clearly over the last four or five years almost 36

percent of the Family and Social Services budget cut away. That's hundreds of millions of dollars. We put back in almost a million and a half a year for three years. What happens thereafter? Where is this program really going? Is it more than just window dressing? Is there some substance behind it? I'd like to see those issues addressed.

In her comments the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek talks about "one of the keys to prevention is awareness." So now when she talks about this in terms of prostitution, I'm wondering specifically: is she talking about the children or the parents or adults in general in society? So if she could specify that for me.

She talks, then, about providing "the tools for youths to understand prostitution and how they can defend themselves against becoming involved." Well, if you give people the vehicle to defend themselves, then the underlying assumption is that they have other choices. In this society as it is established right now, children in this kind of crisis have few other options. I'm wondering how she intends to build those options through the vehicle of this bill. I see nothing addressed in the principle of it that would say to me, really speaking to that issue, that there are going to be other options for these children to look at that are going to be publicized well enough that they're going to be able to access them.

Perhaps she's looking at further legislation coming down the chute later on this spring, or perhaps she knows something that we don't know about dollar allocations that are happening on the front bench in the budget. If so, we'd like to know that, because they're very important. She talks about significant funding being set aside. If she's only talking about the \$5.2 million that she talks about here, then that's not significant. At \$1.4 million a year it doesn't scratch the surface of what's required.

She talks about this bill now being in phase 2. Was the consultation process phase 1? Phase 2: I'm not completely sure what she means by that. Does that mean moving to the outreach of people in the community, of community members? If she could clarify that.

She also talked about the building of this bill and the process of providing outreach to the community as being a bottom-up process. So from that I would assume, when you take a look at it, that she would be talking about involving children who are prostitutes perhaps out of that particular profession now, parents who are people providing support, counsellors who are frontline workers in this instance, teachers who are the first line of exit for these kids from the system, social workers, but that isn't exactly what she means here.

If we take a look at who was on the task force, it does have a parent here involved from the community, but primarily they are not what I would really call frontline people associated with this problem. I'm wondering if there is another layer that we haven't heard about here that she could talk to us about in terms of who's working on this process, because really to make it work – you can preach all you want to these kids, but if they don't buy in, it isn't going to happen. Any of us who are trying to raise teenagers certainly know that.

I'd like to go back to the dollars here for a second in terms of education. I tried to cost this out from the perspective of: in principle, can you make this bill work with only \$5.2 million? When we just take a look at the education component that is addressed in the bill and is very well addressed in the report by the task force, we see that we're already running into problems with money. If you take a look at what it's going to cost to initiate an education program on child prostitution in this prov-

ince, we've got at least \$400,000 start-up fees that are just resource based: overheads, transparencies, CDs, films, books, stuff like that. That's a cost that is going to have to be renewed about every three years because these things wear out and have to be updated. There's an ongoing annual cost at a minimum of \$100,000 just for the teachers, the guides, their in-servicing, and other resource personnel that would have to be accessed to provide this service. Then there's an ongoing cost of about \$80,000 a year for administration.

Then if you're going to sell prostitution education in the school system in Alberta, you're going to have to have a public relations campaign to address that, and that's a minimum, just to get into the schools and to get out to the parents, of about \$200,000. So when we talk about the cost of getting this off just from the perspective of in principle can you do it for \$5.2 million, just on the education component alone there are some problems.

Now, surely when the task force addressed this and they looked at the different issues, they looked at how you're going to get sex education, prostitution education through the school system. For sure I would like the Minister of Family and Social Services to address how he would sell it to his parents' advisory council and to his school system in terms of taking a health component of the education system and focusing just on educating young children about prostitution. Perhaps the members from Red Deer North and Red Deer South would also like to address the issue of how they philosophically feel about promoting that kind of education within their school system. So that would be a major component that I think needs to be addressed there.

When I go through the recommendations that we see in the task force, I think they're just excellent. If you're talking about a reactive presence primarily so that you're dealing with the problem as opposed to heavily focusing on prevention, they've done an excellent job here. They've outlined recommendations that are very viable and certainly workable. But my question is: who pays? For sure you don't do this, everything, all of the recommendations that they've got here, on \$1.4 million a year.

Well, what traditionally happens when you come to an education system in this province is that the school boards or the parent advisory councils pay. They pay for the in-servicing of the teacher, they pay for the program delivery, they pay for educating the students and the parents.

8:10

AN HON. MEMBER: Baloney.

MS CARLSON: Well, we have a comment of "baloney" from the other side of the House, so I'm sure that he's going to be up to speak next, Mr. Speaker, on this issue.

Well, if that isn't true, if the delivery of the education service and these kinds of components are not downloaded to the school system and parent education to the PACs, then I would like the minister to stand up and address this issue and tell us exactly where the money for this education component, which is going to be substantial, is going to come from and exactly what commitment he and his ministry is prepared to make to this particular bill. I would love to see that commitment being made here. So that deals with that point.

Then when we get to the recommendations on professional awareness, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek alluded to educating teachers and social workers and parents in terms of a need to prevent prostitution and how to see the warning signs coming up. In the recommendations from the task force they also talk about "annually" educating other professionals, "nurses,

social workers, police, physicians, etc." Once again I'm asking: who's going to pay? Where's the money coming from in that particular situation? I think that's very substantial.

Once again, when we get to parent awareness, how are you going to do this? How are you going to get this to the parents? There's no delivery mechanism that I see in the bill or that the member has addressed in debate so far, so surely to get this this far along, they've got that addressed.

When we go to the health recommendations, again there is some cost associated with delivering the kinds of programs that they're talking about here.

When they talk about the social support recommendations, here's where I see the heavy bulk of the dollars being spent. You take these kids off the street. Yes, you can put them in custody for 72 hours. But what do you do with them afterwards? To bring the children off the street, to change their mind-set in terms of wanting to be there, to get them educated, to get them a job, to put them into a safe environment, to help them build a network of support is a timely process and a very costly process.

I just don't see where this money is coming from at all until I get to the recommendation in the funding discussion from the task force. The recommendation in terms of funding is

that community lottery boards identify child prostitution as a priority in making decisions on projects and initiatives for community benefit.

So I'm wondering if this is the recommendation that the member has endorsed and that the government is taking a look at. If that's the case, then we are not going to see, I would guess, any additional moneys coming from the ministries who are directly affected by the recommendations of this task force. Those ministries, to name a few that are most implicitly involved in this, are Justice, Health, Community Development, Education. Municipalities are involved in this, too, because there's a great deal of downloading here in terms of police costing and municipal costs associated with the kinds of social services supports that are in communities now which will have a greater emphasis and stress put on them as a result of this program.

So does the member know that these ministries are going to commit dollars? If they're not, do they expect all of the funding to come from the community lottery boards? If so, then I think they'd better let the municipalities and all of those nonprofit groups that are out there in the province right now know this, because I think that the municipalities and the nonprofit organizations that are looking to the community lottery boards for operating funds from this fiscal year onwards are going to be in for a rude surprise when they find that what's mandated is that a priority be placed on child prostitution.

Now, I'm not saying that that focus on child prostitution is wrong. It's the right focus. The wrong part of it is that the money is not coming from the appropriate source. This kind of funding should not be at the whim of any kind of a lottery board, for heaven's sake. What it should be is a line item program expenditure from the affected ministries so that they can take a wellness approach in this and start to solve the problem that originates in the home with these children and follow it through until we have them off the street and integrated back into society in a full-fledged citizen fashion. I don't see that happening through this bill so far, but it's just at the beginning.

I'm sure that the member can address these issues, and I'm hoping that every minister I have named here in terms of having some direct correlation and effect with this bill will stand up here and tell me that they're going to see some resources dedicated to solving this problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments on Bill 1. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward. I know her intent is sincere and that she has worked hard on this, and I commend her on that.

I want to speak about a few concerns and maybe questions generally on the bill that may be clarified in committee. I think I know where the member is coming from trying to address the issue of youth prostitution. In the fall we were most graciously given kind of a tour of the court system by the Minister of Justice, and it was very informative. We went to the remand centre, went to the youth detention centre, sat in youth court for a little while.

That was a truly sad experience because there was this young girl – she couldn't have been more than 15 – there on charges of prostitution. I thought to myself: now, here's the victim being charged; where's the pimp? Then I looked around the room and saw many youths that were up on charges. The other thing that truly saddened me was: where are the parents? You know, for all those kids there must have been only six parents there in the whole courtroom. So it was truly sad. I admired the judge because I think that must be a pretty depressing job sometimes. Some of these kids are back again and again. This young girl was put in the custody of her mother and had to stay away from a certain area of town unless she was accompanied by her mother. But in reality how do we enforce that? It's so difficult.

In a way it was a good experience for me because in every classroom I speak to, I mention the youth detention centre, I mention the young kids in prostitution, and try to do an awareness at that level about what's happening. Certainly we see it more in downtown Edmonton, downtown Calgary than we do out in the rural areas. So it was an experience that I will never forget and one that really made me upset with pimps – they're not there – and with parents that aren't involved or maybe have given up on their children. I don't think you give up on your children.

So I understand the motive behind this bill. I do. I support that, and I'm sure everyone does in this Assembly. I guess I have some concerns about it that maybe will be addressed in committee. One of them is: are we downloading this responsibility to the municipalities? If we do, then what tools are we giving them to deliver the programs? Maybe that will be clarified. I would appreciate that.

A couple of other things here. What resources will be put in place? Maybe that's to come, but then why are we putting the cart before the horse if we're having legislation that we can't implement? I would question that. I guess I'm wondering: isn't most of this covered under the Child Welfare Act. If there's something different or being added, why aren't we amending the Child Welfare Act? That's my other question.

If under this bill the child prostitute is held for 72 hours, the director may release the child if in the director's opinion "the child is capable of providing for the child's own needs and safety." Well, I would venture to say that if the child has been picked up for prostitution, she's obviously not capable of providing for her own safety. That's not an option under the Child Welfare Act. Under the Child Welfare Act the child must be returned to the guardian's custody or the government applies for supervision. Will this bill supersede the Child Welfare Act, or will that one still apply? I question that. Maybe there'll be an amendment to that. But I can't see giving the child back to

herself. It doesn't seem to make sense to me. That child obviously needs a guardian. She wouldn't be out on the streets and selling her body if she was capable of taking care of herself.

8:20

One thing in the bill that is not in the Child Welfare Act is the provision that "if a child is participating voluntarily in a program to assist the child in ending involvement in prostitution," that child or his or her guardian can apply for a restraining order against his or her abusers. That I think is good. Should we put that in the Child Welfare Act or add these two and have two pieces of legislation that complement each other? I guess I question that.

I know they're just brief comments and that it's an overview feeling about Bill 1. I understand the motive behind this. I support that motive. I share those concerns. But I have a bit of concern that it's a bit redundant and that maybe we should be amending the Child Welfare Act. I also have some concerns about a child being remanded into her own care. I guess at this point I'm anxious for Committee of the Whole to see maybe some more explanation from the member and maybe an explanation of how they are going to implement this program, where the money is coming from, and who will deliver it? Will it be under the department, will it be a responsibility of the municipalities, and how do we do that?

I'm in support of programs that would help keep kids off the street, and I guess my concern is: how is that going to happen? I don't see that in the bill as it is, but maybe there is an explanation. Maybe there's something else coming forward that we don't know about. I would appreciate that explanation. Maybe there are some written notes that the member would like to show us or give us before Committee of the Whole so that we can maybe speak with more knowledge that maybe she has on this that we don't have yet.

With those few remarks on Bill 1 I thank you for the opportunity.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I address this bill with mixed feelings. I would like to say that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is to be congratulated on the work that she has done. I know how important it is for MLAs to take an issue and drive that issue with great passion and commitment, and I feel that there is great evidence that she has done that in this case. She will make a difference. She has already made a difference, and I'm happy for her and for her accomplishment.

I think that this bill has some elements to recommend it. I am concerned that this bill is evidence of the government's effort to take less responsibility for the protection of children who find themselves in the circumstances of prostitution. I fear that rather than focusing directly on solving this issue in a rational, constructive way, there are elements of ideology that have obstructed that process and that will result in this bill being less effective than it might otherwise have been. I question exactly where or to what extent those ministers who are responsible for this bill have a firm understanding and a deep commitment to this issue and to solving this problem.

I was startled – I wasn't stunned, however – the other day when my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood asked questions of the Justice minister and the minister of social services on how the earlier amendments six or seven months ago to the Child Welfare

Act with respect to child prostitution had been pursued and what effect they had. Neither of these ministers could answer the question: how many pimps, johns had been charged under these amendments? Neither of them could say how many child prostitutes had been apprehended under this legislation. The minister of social services actually went so far as to say that the amendments six months ago didn't really mean much in and of themselves, that they were just designed to set up this piece of legislation.

Well, Mr. Speaker, for a government that wants less government to actually say that you would layer legislation on purpose for some snazzy strategy to build to this new legislation is naive, to say the least. But what's startling is that when two ministers who have such profound responsibility for this area and who went to the trouble of bringing to this Legislature amendments to the Child Welfare Act for us to debate and make a decision on can't even measure what they have done under that legislation, it says a whole bunch about their level of commitment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under 23(h), (i), and (j). [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Energy, I'm having difficulty hearing the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: The hon. member is making statements that I did not answer the question. Actually the hon. member was not in the House when I said the correct answer to the question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think if you're going to phrase this point of order, you ought to stay within the bounds. It may be that the hon. member that you're referring to did not hear you.

DR. OBERG: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's what I meant to say. The hon. member did not hear me when I said that the answer to the question was there had been none that had been charged since our last amendment to the Child Welfare Act.

MR. MITCHELL: That's a lot better.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order?

MR. MITCHELL: No, I accept his point of order, Mr. Speaker. He did answer it, and I was incorrect to have assumed that he didn't know. He did know.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: But I will say that his answer is far from improving the circumstance. Not only did one of the ministers not know how many people were dealt with under the act, the other minister, who knew, admitted that there was zero. So one minister doesn't have enough commitment to know what's going on, and the other doesn't have enough commitment to make it work. Six months ago we spent the time in this Legislature – and there's precious little time that we spend in this Legislature – debating a bill that this minister is responsible for that he doesn't

take the time to bother to implement. So we can debate here, Mr. Speaker . . .

DR. WEST: At least we're doing something. The federal Liberals just stick their heads in the Ottawa River.

MR. MITCHELL: I hope he's checked his guns at the door, Mr. Speaker. He worries me. Could we see his license before he shoots off?

8:30

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is, I hope, speaking to the bill. Interjections only invite more. We would ask the hon. Minister of Energy to put his name on the list, and we'll have him speak to this bill later.

MR. MITCHELL: So now we're being asked to redebate much of the same provisions that were amended last time – in fact, some of them are directly identical – at this stage in the Legislative Assembly with what clear new indication, Mr. Speaker, that the commitment of this government's two most important ministers has changed over the last six months? What I'm saying is that, yes, there is something to recommend this bill, but this bill isn't worth the paper it's written on unless that minister and that minister make a commitment to get something done with it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services rising on a point of order?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

DR. OBERG: Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Have you got a citation, please?

DR. OBERG: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member across the way has stated that there is no commitment, yet the hon. member knows that there has been a \$5.2 million commitment by this ministry to fulfill this legislation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order hon. Leader.

MR. MITCHELL: Jeez, I hope the minister isn't revealing something about the budget prior to the budget speech, Mr. Speaker. In any event as we know . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is this on the point of order?

MR. MITCHELL: No. I accept his point of order.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: I'm glad therefore that there is an indication of greater commitment. He's put \$5.2 million into this, so is he therefore saying that when he cut payments to welfare and social assistance and when he cut payments to certain kinds of [inaudible], and when he cut payments to certain kinds of police forces, when he cut payments to families, did that mean he was reducing his commitment to those different areas just as now he's saying that he's increasing his commitment because he's increasing funding? I don't think it's a direct line.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are we going to have a debate by

point of order, hon. minister? Do you have a citation?

Point of Order Imputing Motives

DR. OBERG: Yes, I do. Again, 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member has imputed motives, that we are cutting services to those people. [interjections] He said that. Mr. Speaker, what the budget will show and what has been the procedure in the past is that none of those programs have been cut in the past year.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on the point of order, please.

MR. SAPERS: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. This is going to take a minute I'm afraid. I want to read section 23: "A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . ." Then I believe the minister referred to (h), (i), and (j). "Makes allegations against another member." That didn't happen. "Imputes false or unwavering motives to another member." That didn't happen. "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." That didn't happen.

Mr. Speaker, this is second reading stage of a debate. The member, who is the Minister of Family and Social Services, was elected in the same general election that I was first elected in, 1993. In fact, because I've had conversations with him in and outside the Chamber, I happen to know that he is somewhat familiar with the rules of order and procedure in this Assembly. I find it therefore puzzling that he would continue to interrupt debate at the principle stage of a bill because he is so thin skinned that he can't withstand a little bit of debate. This is what happens when in fact the Legislature doesn't convene and these members aren't used to discourse.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services has risen on a point of order alleging that Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) have been violated and cites as his example for it that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has stated that there was a cut. In fact, he says that there was not a cut. Well, if that is the example, it doesn't hold that (h), (i), and (j) have been violated. The hon. minister is really rising on a point of clarification to explain to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that in his opinion the budget had not been cut. It's really a debating point at this point. He hasn't made the allegation against you, nor imputed somehow bad motives or false motives.

I'd ask the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to continue his speech, hopefully without interruption.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what's worse, a minister who thinks that a \$5.2 million fund increase, which doesn't . . . Sorry?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the bill.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, it is. This \$5.2 million is under the bill.

. . . which doesn't in fact reach the previous level of funding, represents a commitment, when clear cuts to social services levels, or whether his failure to acknowledge that he did cut levels of social assistance funding. I don't know what's worse, Mr. Speaker. But let me continue.

There are of course a couple of things that distinguish this bill and make it at least a step. One is that it makes it easier to apprehend child prostitutes. A second is that it makes it easier to hold them and hopefully break the cycle with the 72-hour provision. Thirdly, the increase in penalties, which are easier to impose because the conditions of them are less strenuous or rigorous than those required for criminal action, is an improvement as well.

But if we look at this act carefully, Mr. Speaker, what we see is an ideological theme or an ideological element which really obscures or diminishes the direct effectiveness that this bill could have. For example – I think this is very, very worrisome – if you read the preamble, not even necessarily between the lines, what we see is a great deal of emphasis on recognizing the responsibilities of families and communities to provide that protection. If families could provide this protection, their child wouldn't be a prostitute on the streets. If families that were perfectly responsible and had made every effort to provide that protection still found their children on the streets, then clearly they need and they deserve some help.

Mr. Speaker, this is so much ideological confusion, because this government wants to say that families have a responsibility and communities have a responsibility. We know they all do have those responsibilities, but they don't always work. It's not the family that necessarily suffers. It is that child who is now a prostitute who's being abused on the streets that suffers. Sometimes you have to set ideology aside and this obsession with it at a very superficial level and say, "What do we do that specifically will fix the problem?" One of the things you do is you don't dump it on families that clearly haven't been able to contend with the problem, and you don't dump it on communities and then recommend that the community group should go and get the money from the lotteries to deal with the child prostitution problem, which is exactly what was recommended. That was what was recommended in the task force report that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie just referred to.

So the government has done what it has done elsewhere in the child welfare legislation with the regionalization. They have begun to abdicate their responsibility for the support and the protection of children. They did it under the general child welfare restructuring, and they're doing it with this. That is very, very worrisome, Mr. Speaker, and it will disperse their ability and diffuse their ability to act with action and with effectiveness. In fact, the risk is that this bill won't improve the situation; it will make that situation worse.

What this bill is, Mr. Speaker, to go on further, is further evidence of downloading on municipalities, which are already pressured and don't have the money to solve the problems. It is further evidence of downloading to a police department which has had its grants from this province cut by 50 percent in any event. So they're asking them to do more, and they're giving them less money. More money, \$5.2 million, is an indication of commitment to this act, but the 50 percent police cuts and giving them more to do with that less money I suppose must be a lack of commitment to policing to enforce it.

8:40

MR. SAPERS: That makes sense.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. I mean, that's the logic. That's what the minister said. That's how he thinks. So I accept that his commitment increased by \$5.2 million. I have to accept that his real commitment to policing this has been reduced because his

government has cut police grants by 50 percent. You can't have it both ways. If you want to ask the police to do it, then give them some money and give them the resources to do it.

Seventy-two hours' holding is a great idea, Mr. Speaker, but the question that it begs is: where? Where are they going to hold these young people? When 72 hours isn't enough, where then are they going to hold them? Are they going to take them to the women's shelters? Well, that would be a great place, except they're full. So where do they go? So this is little more at that level than torment.

Some good people want to do some things. They've asked for some changes. So we get the changes on paper, but there isn't truly a powerful commitment to making those changes work. As much as I have congratulated the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, I feel a sense of sadness and a sense of disappointment. I can't speak for her. I don't know whether she feels that, but I feel that sense of sadness and disappointment that where this could have been good and where this could have been great and where this could have done something and recognized and celebrated the work of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, what we get is something that is half baked in many respects and doesn't have the financial commitment, the real commitment behind it that is needed to make it work and to save some of these children from a fate that few of us can even imagine in the despair and the destruction that it creates in their lives, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, when I was young, I was taught a lesson very early in literature that the kid who cried, "Wolf," ended up suffering because the real wolf came out some day. I've heard a lot about the sky falling, and it reminds me about a saying that was very commonly used in Africa: the ostrich buried your head in the sand. The ostrich buried your head in the sand. What that saying means is that there are people who choose not to address the real problems and bury their heads in the sand.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion is a good bill. It addresses a real problem, and we need to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Premier and this government for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, we are entering the end of this millennium. Truly, surely, can our children worry about safety, security, of being abused by family members, of being abused by johns? No. We need to find solutions for those problems, and we have to start somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the average age for a child entering prostitution is around 13 to 14, which tells me that there are some children who are as young as 11 and 12. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is pointing out nine fingers, meaning nine: nine year olds. I mean, I have a daughter who is 11. It hurts to think about a young child of that age being abused out on the streets.

Mr. Speaker, 80 percent of prostitutes have been abused at home by members in whom they had trust. What this says is that we as a society have to find true, honest solutions and not use partisan politics but try and truly find solutions that will meet the needs of these children. I believe that this bill will address some of those needs. The police and social workers will now have more authority to work with such young children. The 72 hours will be a good time to provide staff and people who are involved in these services, to assess and develop a case plan, and hopefully keep the kids away from these johns for a much longer period.

I think that if we were to really think with cool heads and come together, we should convince the Minister of Family and Social Services and everybody else in this Legislature – and I'm

referring to all 83 of us – to make sure that the needs of our children in this province are adequately funded, that proper resources are developed, and that they get the first priority to set up the agenda not only for 1997, '98, '99 but for years to come.

So with that, I hope that each one of us will pay attention to the debate that will follow in subsequent stages and try and find solutions that will address the problems that have been articulated so far.

Thank you very much.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise tonight to speak to Bill 1. I would like to join my colleagues, actually, in complimenting the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I know working on an issue like this over an extended period of time takes a lot of dedication and attention, and you've obviously stayed with this issue and worked with a lot of community groups and grassroots interests to come to this point. I have walked that road as well, and I know it's difficult at times.

I think the intent of this bill is okay, but I'm going to echo some of the other comments that we've already heard here tonight and before. What I'm really looking for is the commitment from the government and, more than a commitment, the actuality of working on prevention, of helping young women before they get to the point of needing assistance through this proposed bill. We don't seem to be able, as legislators and as a society, to offer the real goods on what is going to prevent young women and young men from getting into this situation.

Overall, it strikes me that a lot of the legislation I've seen this government put forward downloads onto the community and doesn't carry with it enough funds to actually get the job done. As a result, we have a lot of well intentioned programs which never quite succeed because there simply isn't the commitment and the support behind it, and by that I mean specifically dollars. That doesn't have to be a lot of money, but it does have to be money that's directed into the right places.

So what are some of the reasons why we have young people that end up in prostitution as young as 9? What are we doing in this province to address the issues around poverty? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek brought up several points about what the home life is likely to be like for someone who would leave it and then go into child prostitution. What is our commitment to eradicating poverty in this province? I don't see much happening there, yet that's one of the root problems that we know we're dealing with.

I see almost nothing being done for the image and the self-confidence of young women so that they wouldn't be turning to prostitution. How does our educational curriculum reflect that need? What are the other programs around a community life and a home life, a life in the community that would be offering young women other choices: mentorship programs, recreational opportunities, a number of other ways they go through life as a young person that is likely to give them an alternative? What about the educational opportunities that we put out to young women? They don't look that great. If you come from a secure family, perhaps a family with some money, you obviously have a much better chance of doing well in the educational system, and you might be able to get a job that is making better than 63 cents on every man's dollar.

8:50

What about the career possibilities that we're encouraging young women into? We know that we have a need for high-technology jobs now. Well, that's difficult for women, because not many of them have computers at home and they certainly don't have the resources to buy them. And it's certainly not safe for them to be going to the academic institutions at night to use the computers there because it's not safe for them to be on the streets. So looking at that, I guess in some ways I'm not surprised that we end up with young women and young men who find their way into a life of prostitution.

I guess the other point I'd like to raise is minimum wage. The minimum wage we have in Alberta puts us, I think, at the lowest in Canada now. [interjection] It is the lowest. It's very difficult for a young person with, as I've mentioned, very few educational opportunities, very few career possibilities. I'm looking at a minimum wage as a way to make their way through life. We know they would have to be working three jobs in order to be holding a family together, so how is that an incentive for someone? What kind of career possibility is that for them?

Why can't we put more time and attention and resources into these base problems? I appreciate what the bill is trying to do, but it is after the fact. I'm looking for how the money that is supporting this program is going to be used.

Another concern that I have – and I mentioned it briefly at the beginning – is the propensity to download onto the municipalities. Specifically, I noted in this act that it is up to the police to apprehend when they perceive that a young woman or a young man is underage and is involved in prostitution. It's not the director of welfare or any of the agents that would be working under child welfare; it is the police. I understand that there is some support from the police services in the province for this. I imagine they've been asking you, as well, what kind of monetary support would be going with that.

Also on the same topic: the community lottery boards. I am really disturbed to hear that there's a recommendation that the community lottery boards put as a priority the funding of this program. Is this to be given as a directive to these community lottery boards? Is this a part of the kit that's been going out in establishing these community lottery boards? My understanding was that this money was for a variety of quality-of-life agencies. It was to support arts and culture, recreation, museums, libraries, multiculturalism. I guess now it's supposed to be going to child prostitution. So that must be news to all of those other groups. I see this as unfair, to be putting that limitation or that curb on these community lottery boards. Again, those community lottery boards are made up of volunteers on a municipal level, so once again we've dumped it down onto the municipality.

When we talk about the money to support this program, the police and the frontline workers that I talked to about this bill asked about the money and where it was going to be directed. Would the money be going to support programs for young women? Would it be going to some of the things I've already asked about: education or better education or access to education? Would it be going to training? Would it be going to money that is subsistence money while they're in school or apprenticing in another job? I'm not getting any indication of that from anything that's been said.

We seem to be saying that the money's going to be spent in administration of a program that will pick up child prostitutes for a period of three days, and some sort of miracle is supposed to happen in that three days in which they will be assessed and

counseled and then released back in the community, hopefully cured forever. I think that's not going to work. We are not addressing the root problems of how they get there in the beginning, and we're not giving them anything to work their way out of it. But perhaps that's in there and I've missed something. If that's true, I'm sure the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek will enlighten me.

I'm also wondering if the money that's been mentioned will be providing any medical treatment that's required. We still don't support 16- and 17-year-old women. I'm sure the Minister of Family and Social Services will leap to his feet to correct me, but my understanding is that the supports for independence program since 1983 doesn't give the same support to 16- and 17-year-old young people as it did in the past. I don't know how we can be surprised that the numbers are rising here when we cannot support them on supports for independence, we're not offering training, and they're looking at minimum wage jobs.

On to another point. Prostitution is recognized as sexual abuse in the preamble. I appreciate that and I think it's a move forward. But we're still not supporting the sexual assault centres in this country. They're still out there fund-raising for better than 50 percent of their funds.

MR. MITCHELL: It's going to happen by magic.

MS BLAKEMAN: I guess so. It's supposed to happen by magic. But I know, having worked in the nonprofit sector, that it doesn't happen through magic. It happens through a lot of hard work and a lot of commitment from volunteers in the community, but we're expecting an awful lot from these volunteers.

With the 72-hour apprehension. This question has been asked before, so I guess we're all looking for an answer to the question: are the existing facilities equipped, certified, and ready to handle child prostitutes? Is there any counseling that will be going along with the assessment in the 72 hours? Is there additional support for the community supporting agencies that are likely to be involved at that point?

Those are a few of the questions that have come to mind as I look at this bill. I appreciate the intent that's been made to knit together or layer together this bill and the bill passed in the last session identifying child prostitutes as victims of sexual assault, but I think we have a long way to go as legislators and as a society to truly be of assistance in this area. Once again I see a band-aid solution being offered. This is not to denigrate the work that's been done by the hon. member here and the various committees she's worked with, but we don't seem to be able to get to the root problems of any of these issues that are being raised. I think we just cause ourselves many more problems and a lot more money. It will be much more costly down the line.

So I look forward to the amendments or adjustments that will happen in the Committee of the Whole, and hopefully there will be some answers to some of the questions that I've raised and others have raised. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been taking notes and listening to what people have to say, and I will be

pleased to answer some of the questions that they have in committee. I'd like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

9:00

Bill 2

Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998

[Debate adjourned February 3]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 1998, at this stage and to look at the principles of the bill. It was Rudyard Kipling that said that politics is a dog's life without a dog's decencies, and the Conflicts of Interest Act is part of that dog's life. I expect, that those of us who are in politics have to deal with.

I started off by asking myself: why do we need a Conflicts of Interest Act? What has given rise to the need for such an act? The answer, I suspect, to most people is fairly obvious, that there are examples of members who have somehow or other confused private interests with public interest, particularly in the area of finances. This has led to some difficulty, some unfairness, advantage being taken of information that a member might know because of the position they hold. So it's arisen because of the behaviour of some of our colleagues or some of the people that have preceded us in public life. It's unfortunate.

I think there are other reasons why we have to have an act such as this, and a great deal of it, I suspect, rests in the distrust that the public has for politicians. You don't have to read many polls that ask the public which groups in public life they trust to find out that politicians rank very, very low on those lists of trust, and again it may be our fault that that's the way we're perceived. Part of that may be because of the process we go through in being elected. It's at election time that we try to put our best ideas forward, our best policies. It's at election time that we try to paint a future of hope and a better quality of life, a better standard of life, and we raise expectations in the public's mind that, once elected and the realities of governing have set in, we very often aren't able to fulfill. So there's this natural building up of expectations that has to be in many cases tempered with reality, and people then look at politicians and the kinds of things we said and the kinds of things that happen and see a discrepancy. Again, I think that's the root of some of the distrust that we suffer.

There may be some other reasons. The party system that we're all part of, where parties put forward platforms, where they put forward ideas that they think are important – people subscribe to those ideas and offer themselves as candidates supposedly because they believe in what the party is promoting, and there is no screening or very little screening for candidates in terms of their integrity and their actual adherence to some of those principles. I think there are a number of reasons why the public and the people in this Legislature in the past and again today see the need for a Conflicts of Interest Act. It is designed to satisfy the public's concern about our activities, both how we act in public life and for a good part in this act our private life.

There were other solutions. Other groups, not just politicians but professional groups, have tried to monitor and to somehow or other govern the behaviour of their members. You think of those professional groups that have strong codes of ethics that they insist

their members adhere to, and many of the stronger associations have ways of enforcing that upon their members should they stray from what is considered ethical behaviour. So that might have been a route at one time but probably not in this case.

There are probably other things that could have been done: the more rigorous screening of candidates. I think we can all think back to examples of abuse that have hit the media. Had there been some mechanism for screening out those candidates in the first place, because their behaviour in the past had been clearly inappropriate and it didn't serve them well as a candidate for public life, they may not have been put forward as candidates and elected. Screening of candidates of course is mired in difficulty, given what it would say about how you behave in a democracy. So, again, we go back to the solution that was chosen here and one that we are amending in this act, and that's a conflicts of interest act.

I have a concern about how effective the act is going to really be in preventing the abuses that it outlines and the penalties that it sets forth for abusing the act. My questions rise out of being in a classroom and trying to make rules for youngsters. It seems that no matter how many rules I made, there was always someone who was creative enough to get around those rules and do what they intended in the first place. It goes back to my experience as a school trustee, where you're constantly bombarded by groups who would like to make rules for children and for teachers and for the behaviour of others. Again, you can go through policy manuals that are replete with such rules and yet seem to have little effect in deterring the kind of behaviour that they're aimed at preventing. So I have, I guess, some reservations about the effectiveness of the act if someone is intent on acting in a way that we would find unacceptable.

If we're going to have such an act, what should it comprise? I think that if you look at the act we have, the government initially, at least in the first part, has tried to respond to a request in the Tupper report that the act begin with a strong set of principles. The principles section has certainly been made stronger, and it sets out the ethical conduct of officials expected in a democracy. I really wonder if it's enough.

I look at what is expected in a democracy, and I think the first thing, the demand made on all of us, is the belief that our way of governance is time tested and it works and it's worth defending, and those who have gone before us have given their lives to defend this form of democracy. That's how highly valued it is by our society, by our community. I think it's unfortunate that there isn't some statement in there. As short as we can get with each other, opposition and government, because we aren't moving fast enough in the House or some members say that the opposition is – you know, the sky is falling. As short as we can get with each other in the momentary heat of debate, I think all of us – all of us – are staunch defenders of democracy. Again, I think there was an opportunity in the principles section to make some statement that would make that abundantly clear to people.

9:10

I think there's something else, and it's something that we preach to children, that we try to reinforce through education, and that's that as a citizen in this democracy to be fortunate enough to live here has some obligations. One of those obligations, if you can, is to offer yourself for public service, and that's key to the system working, that people feel that they should, that they have an obligation to offer themselves up for public service. It's an obligation that is taken seriously by thousands of people in this province as they offer themselves for positions on school boards,

as they offer themselves for positions on municipal councils, as they offer themselves for election to this Legislature and for election to the federal government. It happens year after year that citizens come forward and make that offer of their service to the public and to the betterment of our democracy. Somehow or other, instead of this rather punitive sort of principle about having to arrange your public and private affairs properly, as necessary as that is, it would have been nice to have something that talked about the obligations of citizens in a democracy to offer themselves for service.

I look at the responsibility, for instance, of the majority for the minority and minority viewpoints, how that's part of our way of life. Again, I guess, if there's a comment, the preamble was really a great opportunity for some rather eloquent language that supported democracy and the obligations and the rights of citizens in a democracy and then put in context maybe the obligations of members who are elected to avoid situations where they will be in conflict.

As you look through the bill, I think you'll find some notable omissions if we're going to use the Tupper report as the base from which we criticize the principles and in fact the detail of the bill. The principles about who should be covered are not extensive enough. I think what should be covered, the kinds of conflicts, the apparent conflicts are not included. I think the need to separate the functions of the FOIP office from the ethics office has been missed. I think the cooling-off periods, the time limits in the bills are things that need to be dealt with and hopefully can be dealt with through amendments. It's a needed act. It's a necessary act. I think it's unfortunate that we have to have this kind of legislation in a democracy, but if it's here, let's make sure that we do the very best job we can.

Thank you very much.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've often found that if all sides are clear in their expectations, you will end up with a happier situation. I think conflicts of interest or the understanding of what elected members are to be doing is one of those areas that has a lot of misunderstanding about it, both from people considering elected office – it's always different once you actually get in and know what the job is versus what the public's perception is of what they should know about you. [interjections]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carry on, hon. member. It's just the changing of the guard.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. I'll just carry on.

I think it's always, always better to spell it out, preferably in a written document obviously. But if we look at what the large corporations are doing now, they have very clearly not only written but posted agreements on workplace attitude and expectations. Sexual harassment policies, duties expected, the company's mandate or vision statement are all posted on their front walls now. That's another way of saying, "This is what we say we will follow, and this is what we tell you the public that we are to be following." I think that helps everyone.

One of my disappointments in this bill is that it does take a long time to work a bill through a committee and caucus and get

agreement and bring it forward and get the scheduling in the House and have it debated. I wish this would have been a more comprehensive consideration of the work that was done by the Tupper committee and the recommendations they made. In fact, as I look at it, there are not that many of the recommendations that appear to have been taken and really integrated here. I'm disappointed in that because it takes a long time to get legislation opened again, so it could be four or five years before we're able to reopen this and improve it. So I urge you now, as this goes into Committee of the Whole, to please consider strengthening what we're able to do at this time and what we understand to do at this time.

My colleague has already mentioned the four areas that I was interested in, but I think they were the areas that the committee that worked on the Tupper report were most clear about what they were looking for. I think they put an emphasis on these four areas. And again, that was a committee, I think, of volunteers from the community who worked hard on this, and I'd like to honour the work they did by indeed listening to them.

The area that I'm talking about specifically is the recommendation that

the Integrity in Government and Politics Act should state that Members of the Legislative Assembly and appointed officials will avoid both real and "apparent" conflicts of interest.

Good point. I think often it's the apparent conflicts of interest that cause the most problems, because members may not see them as a conflict of interest but the public certainly will. Yet the government, while accepting the recommendation, in fact is unable to develop any satisfactory wording that would address the issue of apparent conflicts, and therefore it's not in there. This was the second recommendation that the Tupper report made, so I think they place it fairly high on the list of things they expected the government to integrate into the amendment act.

The second area that I wanted to look at, and this is an interesting one, is including not only the members of the Executive Council but also the chairs of the standing policy committees, and in another section they talk about senior policy staff. They believed that the act should cover these individuals. I think they're correct, and I would have liked to have seen that done. I notice that the government does not accept that recommendation. These standing policy committees have become an integral part or appear to have become an integral part of what this government does. It's not one that is easily accessed by the opposition. I don't agree with that, but that's the way it is. I certainly think that the people that are chairing those committees are getting the benefit of more influence in policy-making, and that's important. I think those positions have been created and elevated to an important position inside this government, and therefore these restrictions in the conflict of interest rulings should be extended to cover the people who are chairpersons of those committees. That also would hold true for the senior policy advisers, as is recommended by this report.

9:20

The six-month cooling-off period being extended to one year: I think that's a difficult one for the members. We are involved in public service. The money, I think it could be argued or debated, is not grand, and people are put in difficult positions. I'm wondering – just a thought; I'd humbly offer it. The Tupper report did suggest that the cooling-off period be extended to a year, and I think I would have liked to have seen it included here, and it hasn't been. Perhaps part of the reluctance with that is that that makes it difficult for a departing member or a member of the

Executive Council to make a living, and maybe the remuneration needs to be increased to the same time period to ease that person's way back into the workforce.

The last point was separating the Ethics Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This has been debated a great deal, so I won't belabour the point now, but I think it was an important one. I think that, again, the public's perception of real and apparent conflict certainly shows up there, and it would be to all of our best interests to be able to separate those two positions.

So those are the few comments that I have to this bill in second reading. I look forward to continued debate in Committee of the Whole, and at this point I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 2 at second reading.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

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

Mr. Coutts moved:

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 2: Mr. Bonner]

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The throne speech, entitled agenda for opportunity – well, there's no question that this government has an agenda, although I don't believe it is one for opportunity, at least not for all Albertans. Certainly this speech offers little if anything new.

Oops; there was something new. This government decided it should tell Albertans about a plan to pay down the debt. "Debt?" you say. Yes. This government forgot to pay off the gross, or unmatured, debt. Most people were happy to see the debt reduced. It was an important task undertaken by this government, but they misled the public, because they never discussed the need to pay off the gross debt. The opposition spoke of this often, spoke of the need for balance, to get our books in order but in a balanced manner, one that allowed Albertans to pay their bills, eat, clothe their children, and pay down the debt at the same time. So now, fellow Albertans, by absorbing the cuts, you have helped this government pay down the debt – that is, the net debt. And boy, did you pay. Yes, my fellow Albertans, you took wage rollbacks, lost jobs, took low-paying jobs, unknowingly agreed to health care reform that ensured you lined up for surgery and were never sure that if you went to emergency at the hospital you wouldn't be turned away or wouldn't have to wait in a hall on a stretcher for a few days.

How about the introduction of delegated administrative organizations? These DAOs, as they are known, have the potential to erode the accountability and responsibility of government to the Legislature and its people. But that doesn't really matter, according to members on the side opposite. It's okay for the government not to be accountable to the public.

The Member for Calgary-Montrose noted yesterday in his response to the throne speech that he had not received one call about his government not sitting in the Legislature. I just want to quote that member:

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.

Well, indeed, I guess the erosion of democracy is okay for him. For his information, I received many calls, and people expressed their concern and even disgust because we were not sitting in this Legislature. I am a legislator and therefore anticipate doing business in this Legislature. That indeed was what I was elected to do.

As for the Member for Calgary-Montrose's comments about the opposition tabling expense claims, I just want to quote again from his speech yesterday in *Hansard*. He talks about:

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 . . .

Well, quite frankly, I am really proud of that performance, and I would do it over and over and over again. Well, again, I am open and accountable, a legislator that is open and accountable and feel the public indeed has a right to know what my expenses are.

You see, I not only think it's important to spend time in the Legislature. I also feel it's important to spend time meeting with people in my constituency office. That's where I'm accessible to the community and travel the province in my critic portfolio – yes, that is my critic portfolio – addressing issues in those portfolios, which happen to be Justice, and I can thank the Justice minister for allowing me to become so familiar with my portfolio so quickly; also, Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs. Let's not forget that as the critic responsible for these portfolios my job is to make the minister the best minister possible by holding him accountable for decisions and legislation that fall under his ministry. That's a huge job, and I've got a lot of work to do.

The Premier talks in his Speech from the Throne about people development. Well, let's see. He doesn't address the fundamental issue of inclusiveness so that all Albertans participate and have their voices heard. Those would be citizens impacted by poverty.

Speaking of poverty, what about women. My goodness, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, you know, yesterday in his comments – and I just really can't understand this, the comments from the Member for Calgary-Egmont in his throne speech last night chastising my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs for speaking about women's issues. Well, the comment was:

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.

Well, sorry that we think that's important. Obviously we do; you don't. I don't know. Talk about inclusiveness. I don't think so.

However, let's get back to business here. Seniors: nothing about seniors. [interjection] Yes, the unemployed, and, oh yes, don't let me forget those the province doesn't recognize. They

would be the voters and taxpayers of the gay and lesbian community. Inclusive? I don't think so.

He doesn't speak to the need for a provincial plebiscite on VLTs. Interestingly enough, as a police officer I have attended domestic disputes directly related to the addiction of one partner to the video lottery terminals. The government's addiction to VLTs doesn't exactly show the Premier's true belief in people development. You see, VLTs contribute to people underdevelopment.

9:30

Ah, yes, and about the getting-tough-on-crime initiative. The Premier said he would provide more protection to victims of family violence, but where's the bill? I don't see it on the Order Paper yet.

We are still waiting for the report on recommendations for the improvement of the maintenance enforcement program. Where are they?

I have to say this: I am hopeful that the Premier and his Justice minister will acknowledge that our judges are doing a good job. And instead of putting down those who work in the system, maybe – and I know this is a long shot – maybe he will do the honourable thing and support the system, recognizing that it's not perfect but accepting that it beats many other countries in the world and indeed is a system that we need to protect unless, of course, you're of the view that evil lurks within.

Oops. I can't forget to applaud the Premier for the Justice Summit. This is indeed a good initiative. I don't expect that it will be the PR tool the Growth Summit was. You see, I trust that the minister will appoint a strong, well-balanced group of people to participate, not just the strong right-wing friends but a real balance to promote good debate and debunk the myths he and others may have around issues within the system.

And poverty; yes, poverty. I don't see anything dealing with poverty. You know, as one minister refers to, the lower class: I don't see much assistance for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame, shame.

MS OLSEN: That is very shameful. Oh, we can talk about the child care subsidies, but don't forget that these folks will still be absorbing an increase.

What about the minimum wage? Oh, yes. The protection the minister alludes to in other parts of the speech doesn't apply here. You see, this government is reviewing the removal of the lowest minimum wage in the country. I just can't see that being a big help to the working poor. That's not what I would call progressive, but I certainly would call it conservative.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It is very, very difficult for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to speak tonight. I find it rather fascinating that a lot of it is coming from her own members. I would say, folks, that it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood who has the floor. If other people wish to speak, I'll be glad to add their names to the list.

Edmonton-Norwood, please remember that it is your own members that are doing this.

MS OLSEN: I'm not complaining, Madam Speaker. It's okay.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: To let me continue, this government has not yet made the link – and I know this may be a big leap for some members opposite – between this government bragging about the 60,000 people thrown off welfare and the rise in child welfare cases. It's good to see money aimed at managing the cases, but what about the rise? Prevention and early intervention programs are essential. I know these fly in the face of the government's fiscal management line, but, you know, I can't see why we wouldn't want to pay now. The cost down the line is much too expensive and not just financially.

And what about long-term plans for those most vulnerable in our society? Simply putting them to work just won't work. What about the support systems required for those who need them? You see, people development is not only placing someone in a school or work. It's assisting with transition, maybe even helping them develop a work ethic, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont alluded to yesterday, and maybe some life skills management.

Oh, yes. I don't see much in this speech about the gap between general unemployment and youth unemployment. Youth unemployment, ages 15 to 24 years, remains above the provincial average unemployment rate. Interestingly, this is the same group of people who are most susceptible to criminal activity. I wonder if the government has given that much thought. Well, maybe next year.

Fellow Albertans, this government's mission and commitment are not clear. In fact, it's very muddy. This government does not see fairness and balance as a way of doing business. It's economics first, people second. No vision, no plan. Reactive and not proactive. Today I would like to conclude by saying that I would not be in a position to support the motion for the throne speech.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege tonight to rise to address the Speech from the Throne. I would like to congratulate His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for a truly excellent speech and one which clearly sets the tone and agenda for this Assembly. I would also like to congratulate my colleagues the hon. members for Livingstone-Macleod and Calgary-Fort, the mover and the seconder of the throne speech. Their eloquence and thoughtful remarks set the standard for all of us to emulate in this Chamber.

The balancing of the budget and getting rid of the deficit was a personal goal and also the goal of many in this Chamber. It was very rewarding to finally achieve the goal and to see that we have savings from the paying down of debt which allows us to meet today's program requirements without further borrowing.

The next important goal I would like to suggest is the timely pay-down of the net debt. We can pass on to our children a debt-free province. We will have to make a significant contribution to building a better Alberta for all of us. This is a great province. Its beauty, its resources, and its people are assets that make Alberta unique and a province that has a much envied economy.

I would like to mention our Premier at this point, the hon. MLA for Calgary-Elbow. It was his leadership and dedication that inspired all Albertans to make the sacrifices necessary to get rid of the deficit and return to balanced budgets. We all owe the Premier a great vote of thanks for uniting all Albertans to tackle

our fiscal problems and to achieve our goal. Albertans have a strong tradition of being self-sufficient and paying their own way. It feels good to align once more with our roots.

At the Growth Summit and at the Calgary-Bow mini growth summit, education was identified as a key component in developing our people to meet the challenges of today and the future. The recognition of the important role that education plays in today's world was well recognized by the Lieutenant Governor in his speech and by the recent government announcements to increase spending to kindergarten and also to meet the enrollment increases resulting from the in-migration of people, which has put stress on the educational system.

I commend the government for the early literacy initiative for students in kindergarten to grade 2. As a former teacher working with upper elementary students, this early intervention is extremely important. It is important to intercede before students suffer from years of frustration and failure. In my experience as a former teacher I found many of the so-called behaviour problems stemmed from this feeling of failure. The adding of the teacher aide program will be a welcome initiative to the classroom. Teachers today face many demands on their skills and energy. The diversity of students, many with special needs, the children's different learning styles, and the wide range of social problems affecting children today make a teacher's role very challenging. Having a teacher aide in the classroom will greatly benefit the children, as the teacher and aide work as a team to address the needs of all the students, even the severely normal.

In our growing economy the need for skilled tradespeople has become very evident, and important projects are being held up through the lack of competent workers. In Calgary, with a vacancy rate of .5 percent, people who are having a new home built frequently scramble to find a place to stay when their present home has been sold and construction has been delayed by lack of skilled tradespeople. We all know families who have suffered great inconveniences storing their household goods and their family members in different places, often for several months. We as a society must recognize the importance of trades to our economy. There should be more enhancement of the opportunities for a career in the trades offered to our youth. Times have changed, and with today's advances in technology the trades are no longer seasonal and provide a very good lifestyle.

As the mover back in 1992 of the motion urging the establishment of career and technology studies, I am very pleased when I visit schools to see the start-up of this program. It's very important that the resources are there for these people to have a chance to explore their skills and to develop an interest in following this career. I think there also needs to be a societal change to get more recognition and status for the trades as a respected choice for our students. Parents need to examine carefully the current push to put children into university. Many students emerge with a large student loan and no employment opportunities. Alberta's apprentices are nationally recognized as the best, and with our vibrant economy there are many opportunities for employment for highly skilled tradespeople in Alberta.

9:40

In the area of Family and Social Services the movement of people to independence has been quite successful. The dependence on social assistance, except for those who truly are unable to work, is debilitating for the recipients. I remember my colleague from Athabasca-Wabasca saying that the welfare system caused the destruction of his people. The traditional way of life was lost, and the people had great difficulty finding their place in another

way of life. The work ethic is very strong in Albertans, and we've seen this as people return to work and become active members of society.

I would like to commend the minister for his focus on fetal alcohol syndrome, as mentioned by the Lieutenant Governor in his speech. This condition is devastating for the child born with it. Children suffering from this condition usually have things such as slowed growth, facial abnormalities, and brain damage. They have learning difficulties and often behaviour problems. I once taught a child with FAS. I taught him to subtract several times on a daily basis, and he knew the process at 3:30 only to come back the next day without those skills. I'm sure you can imagine how difficult a time these children have trying to learn and to survive. Unfortunately the number of children this preventable disease affects is growing, and according to AADAC, the latest estimate for FAS is one for every 3,000 live births.

The provincial co-ordinating council on FAS, led by AADAC, has members from children's services, Health, Education, Social Services, Justice, the AMA, the Alberta Association for Community Living, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, Health Canada, and Nechi. This committee has links with 17 local communities and has compiled a very comprehensive list of resources for each of the regions. The community resources cover services for health, addictions, social services, educational supports, as well as other community resources and information sources. The AADAC network of offices provides information and counseling services to assist those families who've experienced fetal alcohol syndrome.

Education and prevention are the most important strategies to combat this disorder, and I commend the ministers of Family and Social Services, Community Development, and the chair of AADAC, the MLA for Calgary-Currie, who've accepted the challenge of FAS and are working hard to develop preventative strategies.

As our aging population grows in numbers, there will need to be accommodations made in care facilities, housing, and programs to meet this growth. A quality health system is a major part of the services required, and the commitment made in the throne speech to continue the excellent health care all Albertans enjoy is to be commended.

The promised review of long-term care will be a major step in assessing the future needs of Alberta's seniors. Having served on the task force on the provincewide health programs, I can attest to the excellence of our health system and also the highly skilled, dedicated health care personnel in that system. Our health care system and our seniors' programs are unsurpassed by any other province in Canada.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for his excellent speech and for the setting of an exciting agenda for the Second Session of the 24th Legislature.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand before the members of the Assembly to respond to the Speech from the Throne this evening. I would like at the outset to express the support of both myself and my constituents for the themes and the direction of the throne speech. Alberta's house has been built on a sturdy foundation resulting from five years of

prudent fiscal policies. We have eliminated our deficit and are well ahead of schedule in terms of debt reduction. In fact, should our economy continue to grow as it has, our net debt will be eliminated by the year 2000 or 2001.

I must thank the people of Alberta for the effective policies and conscientious planning that have brought our province to this stage of success. This government realized the value of democracy and of consultation with the people and acted accordingly. We can see this in the extensive consultation that has occurred over the past few years. In the last year Albertans have been asked their views by a wide variety of committees and task forces. These consultations have included the RHA boundary review, maintenance enforcement, the School Facilities Task Force, the Private Schools Funding Task Force, the Agricultural Lease Review Committee, amongst many others.

But perhaps the most important consultations in the past year involved the Alberta Growth Summit. It was one of the broadest, most comprehensive public consultation processes ever undertaken in this province. The real pillars that hold up this throne speech are the people of Alberta who collectively and decisively spoke through the Growth Summit and the minisummits that took place across the province. It was the people, Madam Speaker, who provided the direction for our government, a direction that came through clearly in the throne speech.

Democracy is healthy when there is strong participation to solve problems and provide input by the people. Stronger ideas come forth when many minds work in partnership to solve problems and to plan. We in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency feel that we have had an important part in contributing to our government's plan for the coming year through our Growth Summit involvement. Our involvement included six public meetings involving close to 300 participants from across my constituency.

My constituents raised their concerns on the topics of agriculture, education, health, social services, community services, finance, and business. Summaries of the discussions were submitted to the main Alberta Growth Summit meetings. I am pleased to see that all of these topics are covered and addressed in the Speech from the Throne. As a result, Madam Speaker, we feel that we have had a part in the formation of this Speech from the Throne. But Wetaskiwin-Camrose is only one constituency that can claim some credit for this. All constituencies have had their input in their own unique way.

The recommendations coming from the Growth Summit are being taken very seriously by this government. They were addressed by the Premier in his televised address, agenda for opportunity, in the Speech from the Throne, and they will be addressed in the government's detailed response to each recommendation, expected to come out soon. They will also be addressed in the forthcoming budget.

Madam Speaker, the recent consultations on the Calgary declaration on Canadian unity were also very important to my constituents. Four meetings in my constituency and numerous questionnaires, over 500, indicated a strong emphasis on making Alberta a strong partner in this great country and a desire to work towards a renewed federation of all provinces and all territories. The Throne Speech reflects that. It reflects that same theme and direction.

Since the provincial election almost a year ago, this government has been going through a period of transition. We have been finding our way from an era of re-establishing our foundation through debt elimination and fiscal restraint to an era of reinvestment and growth. The Speech from the Throne and the Premier's

recent agenda for opportunity address clearly put us into drive but this time on a highway of fiscal and economic stability.

The throne speech is filled with optimism, vigour, and a strong emphasis on youth. It paints a future filled with hope. The real objective came through clearly: to provide a high quality of life for every Albertan, for the youth, for the adults, for the seniors, the underprivileged, the victims, the entrepreneurs, the health providers, the educators. Madam Speaker, all the people. That is the real message that my constituents delivered at the Alberta Growth Summit, and we are pleased to see it reflected in the speech.

We in Wetaskiwin-Camrose have many fine schools from kindergarten through to university at Augustana University College. Education is the most important factor in establishing the foundation for our youth. In order for them to have a bright and productive future, they must have a solid education from elementary school through to postsecondary. It is good to see that emphasis has been placed not only on the education of our youth but also on the importance of lifelong education. I am pleased that there is an acknowledgement that more funding must be channeled into education to maintain our high quality, but more than that, there is a recognition that what is taught is vitally important.

9:50

Throughout the Growth Summit consultations in my constituency many people stressed the importance of teaching values, values that have made us strong, values that give meaning and milestones to all other learning, values that give our children the foundation for life that they so vitally need. These values, including that of self-reliance, self-discipline, respect, honesty, and industriousness, are referred to in the Speech from the Throne.

Madam Speaker, whether through activities like the Alberta Growth Summit, the various task forces and committees, or numerous other initiatives it is clear to me that partnership and co-operative action are what really brings advantages and progress. In this partnership with our people a major role of government is to provide the right conditions so that our fellow Albertans can function creatively in their various fields of endeavour.

I know that my constituents are pleased that this government will be addressing and hopefully eliminating barriers to learning, barriers like family violence, abuse, early reading problems, and special needs. In addressing these needs we will enable our many fine teachers to do the work they do best; that is to teach. To our mature students I'm sure that efforts to co-ordinate education programs and job placement and student finance is good news.

In the vital area of science and research Alberta should be on the leading edge. The partnership approach with the private sector will surely open doors for our many innovative and creative students and indeed Albertans in all walks of life to our institutions of higher learning and centres of research.

In the fields of health and social sciences I applaud the efforts of this government and health providers to maintain stability after difficult years of restructuring and regionalization. I was pleased to hear that we will focus on wellness and prevention and on addressing mental health needs.

Many of the proposed programs outlined in the Speech from the Throne have been designed with children's well-being and quality of life in mind. These are well founded objectives. In my constituency there will be a continuing need for support for such programs as the Camrose Women's Shelter, family and community support services, and Wetaskiwin children's initiative. I must

say that we anticipate with optimism the establishment of the children's regional authorities.

Beyond the establishment of programs and authorities I applaud the plans of this government to address some of the very serious causes, real causes, of problems for our children, such as fetal alcohol syndrome, teenage prostitution, and violence. It's good to see also an emphasis on the needs of Alberta's seniors.

As our demographics shift and our population ages, it is reassuring to know that there will be a review of long-term care services in the province. In my constituency our facilities are bulging and our needs are substantive.

Madam Speaker, our province is only as strong as the prosperity and vitality of each of the individual communities of Alberta. Communities thrive when the people are meaningfully employed, well educated, and free to satisfy their own needs and creatively enhance the qualities of their lives. I welcome initiatives that help us to strengthen the uniqueness of our own communities and allow us to gain a sense of responsibility for our own programs. This I believe is happening through the decentralization of health and education and the encouragement of volunteerism and economic development.

The heart of my response to the Speech from the Throne is that this was a people project. The people developed it through their numerous responses, not least of all through the Alberta Growth Summit. This government listened and crafted this speech with their recommendations in mind. People development was what we heard, and the throne speech is a fine example of a people development plan. As an active constituency in the Growth Summit Wetaskiwin-Camrose has felt a part of the process from the beginning, and we say thank you for that opportunity.

It is always difficult to incorporate the many diverse and sometimes conflicting views of Albertans. We experienced that in the Growth Summit. It is difficult to balance the views and interests of the opposite views and perspectives: urban versus rural interests, central control versus local control, individual rights versus collective or group rights, privatization versus government control, and tradition versus reform. But the key to our democratic way of life is to balance and cross the various views and to discern the best path down which we shall travel.

The program set out in this Speech from the Throne is one of reason and balance, effectively building on a strong fiscal foundation. I believe that we will approach the new century and millennium on strong footing. It promises hope and a sustainable, bright future for our great province.

Madam Speaker, the people have spoken, and the people have been heard. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is as always an honour to be able to rise and address the Legislative Assembly of Alberta but even more so when we as MLAs have an opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to thank the Lieutenant Governor as well as my colleagues who moved first and second reading of the Speech from the Throne this year.

I believe this speech truly reflects what we've been hearing from Albertans through the election just 11 months ago, the Growth Summit last fall, and the dialogue that we have all been having with our constituents over the past year. Just over four years ago, Madam Speaker, I was very privileged to second the first Speech from the Throne after the 1993 election. The key

messages were clear to me then – that my government had to get control of its spending, that it had to work to eliminate the deficit and start paying down the debt – and I am proud to be affiliated with a government that kept its word.

In 1993 we were facing a \$3.5 billion deficit. Today we believe there will be a \$2 billion surplus, the third surplus in as many years, surpluses that have allowed the government to pay down a portion of our net debt and reduce the dollars going to debt servicing, which is in fact one of our larger departments, one that doesn't do anything for anyone, a department that provides no services and no employment. I am truly thankful, Madam Speaker, that this particular department of government is in fact being reduced. The less money that goes to pay down debt servicing, the more money that is available to benefit Albertans.

My constituents told me two distinct things during the past year. The first and most overwhelming message was to continue to reduce the debt so that more dollars can be freed up for programs that matter. The second was the need to address the concerns swirling around education. The Speech from the Throne addresses both of those issues. It reaffirms our commitment to attack the debt while at the same time emphasizes the need for enhanced funding for people development. With an increase of 13 percent in kindergarten to grade 12 education funding over the next three years I think we have done that.

I am especially pleased with the increased focus on reading development in the early grades right through to the enhanced programs for young adults, who will now have more opportunity to attend college, university, or enter the trades through the apprenticeship program. For too many years now the apprenticeship programs have not been highlighted for young people as viable alternatives to a university degree or a college diploma.

Coincidentally, not only will these programs benefit the people who take advantage of them; they will also benefit this great province of ours, where many of our industries are struggling to find skilled workers. We need educators and managers and doctors, Madam Speaker, but we also need welders, carpenters, and electricians. We need our young people to look at all industries as a potential job market.

One area that has long been overlooked and misunderstood is agriculture. We have many vibrant industries in this province, from energy, forestry, tourism, high tech, knowledge-based industries, health care, and education, but one industry that I was fortunate enough to be involved in for years prior to being elected was agriculture. It is one of those unique industries that is not only a renewable resource, but even in economic downturns it is an industry that must continue. People have to eat, and we are blessed in this province to have available to us some of the finest products anywhere in the world, grown and produced right here in our province. We don't just grow it, we add value to it, providing table-ready products for consumers here and around the world.

Jobs that spin off from the farm gate are everything from manufacturing and processing to transportation, retail, and restaurant jobs to research and development to international marketing. In recognition of this the University of Alberta is setting up a new MBA program for agriculture management. It is truly an industry whose time has come.

10:00

There are always new concerns raised by people, whether it's about education funding or more dollars for infrastructure. Many of these concerns have been addressed in this Speech from the Throne. But as I travel through my riding, one thing is abun

dantly clear: we are blessed to live here. There are jobs, and people are building homes or renovating older ones. There is a sense of optimism that I haven't seen in this province for years. People from other parts of Canada are moving here, not just young people looking for a job and a future for their children, but seniors are moving to Alberta as well. They are moving here because we have some of the finest seniors' programs anywhere in Canada, provided and delivered right here in Alberta.

It really is easy to get bogged down in negativity and to believe that every problem is unsolvable or insurmountable and that indeed Chicken Little was right in that old fairy tale that the sky was falling. Well, it's easy to believe that if you listen to some of the people who speak in this Assembly or listen to some of the media comments, but realistically, Madam Speaker, we live in the best part of the best country in the world, and I'm fortunate enough to represent some of the best people in this province.

I would like to thank the residents of Airdrie-Rocky View for allowing me the opportunity to try and represent their viewpoint here in the Legislative Assembly. It's a great honour, a huge responsibility, and a job I do with pride. I do miss the people that I had the privilege to get to know in my previous riding of Three Hills-Airdrie, but I am working hard to get to know the residents of our new riding of Airdrie-Rocky View as well as to have a

clear understanding of the concerns that they have.

We are working on finding a resolution to the problem in Chestermere between Chestermere, the city of Calgary, and the Western irrigation district. We're also dealing with concerns about sulphur problems in Crossfield and Irricana as well as the possibility of a level 4 sour gas well being drilled on Lochend Road on the west side of the riding. We are under constant pressure in all parts of this riding because of the growth expanding out of Calgary. This riding borders three sides of the city of Calgary and butts up against 16 other provincial ridings, so chances are that if someone in Calgary is having a problem, so are we in Airdrie-Rocky View. There will always be problems in high-growth areas such as this one. Just trying to develop the infrastructure that people need to go on with their daily lives creates problems. But as a friend of mine once told me, inside every problem is a gift. The gift here is the opportunity to work with some truly great people to find solutions. An awesome challenge, Madam Speaker, and one that I truly enjoy.

Thank you.

[At 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

