

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, February 4, 1998 **8:00 p.m.**

Date: 98/02/04

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Second Reading**

Bill 7

Rural Gas Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate February 2: Mr. Strang]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think when I adjourned debate, I had covered all the points that we had on Bill 7. So at this time I would pass it on to the members across the way, because I think we've discussed a lot of it with them, and if they have any comments, if I don't have the answers, I'll get back to them on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening I have a few comments and a few questions regarding this bill. Hopefully, the members across the way can help me out with some of my concerns.

The privatization of the rural gas distribution system that was originally thought about and brought forward by the Lougheed government was a very good idea. This gas distribution system allowed many farmers and rural landowners in isolated communities to have the advantages of natural gas on their premises.

I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, more about the low-pressure distribution pipelines. Are they consistent across the province? Are there different pressures in different distribution systems? We all know the accident that occurred in southern Manitoba two springs ago. We all know that soil conditions play an important part in the aging of an underground pipeline system. This pipeline system that we're talking about this evening in some circumstances is 35 years old. Who is to do the maintenance on this? What form of maintenance is to be done after the two years are up? Is it by the co-op, or is it going to be by the private owner of this? Safety cannot be compromised in this province in this gas distribution system.

In the new section, 31.1, allowing the minister to enter into an agreement with persons – this includes corporations – to give them all the ministerial powers, duties, and obligations under section 28 of the act as well as the related assets, the powers of the minister are all the powers needed to purchase, sell, exchange gas and to maintain a rural gas utility, including establishing prices. I hope this doesn't develop into a monopoly situation. I hope that the price of gas becomes affordable for everyone in this entire distribution system throughout the province, because this act will in essence privatize Gas Alberta, that will henceforth be Gas Alberta Inc.

I understand that a new board will be put in place made up of two members from the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, two members from the government, and four members directly from the co-ops. Elections will be held for positions on this board after

the term of each appointee has expired. This claim will ensure that the suppliers of the gas will continue to sell their gas to Gas Alberta for at least two years. The original intent of this setup, as I said before, was to ensure that Alberta farmers could receive gas.

I don't know what to think of all these safety standards that obviously are going to be loosened up. I refer to the Auditor General's report last summer, where he expressed some concerns in recommendations 22 and 23 regarding the self-monitoring of a lot of these safety issues and the self-monitoring by enterprises other than the government. I do have my concerns about this, and I certainly hope that members across the way can answer those for me.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a couple of concerns about Bill 7 that I am hoping members will address. Particularly I'm looking for members from the Grande Prairie and Peace River regions to address this, because this is where I have heard concerns from Albertans.

Certainly, even still in this day and age there are some farmers in remote areas of this province that have a hard time accessing gas, and they continually have difficulty dealing with some of the companies and getting lines in to their farms. I don't see where this bill is going to be improving that situation. So if there is something that is going to be specifically addressing those users in the province who have trouble getting access now and who so clearly, then, will in the future, I would like to see those addressed. The instant you privatize it, the companies of course look at the cost-benefit ratios, and there is no benefit to supplying gas to remote regions of the province. I could be missing it, but so far in this bill I don't see any particular area that addresses that. So I'm hoping that when it gets to the committee stage, we will see the members from Grande Prairie and Peace River addressing that specific issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, then, to close debate.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and answer some of these aspects that they have before me. I guess just to answer the last ones first, what we're really doing here is getting out of the business of being in business. So basically there's no change.

I guess on the aspect of access to farmers that are in the Peace River or Grande Prairie area, we're not changing anything. This new Gas Alberta Inc. is going to be a corporation that is a brokerage system. Therefore, you have your federations and you have your gas co-ops still that are going to service the area. Basically that's the only change on that.

On the standardization of the low-pressure gas, there is no change on that whatsoever. It's all going to be monitored under the standardization of the Z 662. Basically that's the standard all across Canada. It looks to the Canadian Standards Association code, and that is for the standard of the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of gas distribution systems. So I feel strongly that all we're doing here is letting the people in the areas handle it themselves. That's why we've got the makeup of the board so that we're sunseting it for two years. Therefore, then,

that gives them the viability and the confidence within.

Then the other aspect is that if the people that are buying from the gas co-op don't have the price, well, they can buy from another area, from another brokerage firm. So actually it's a form of brokerage. But as you know, when you have the two from the federation, two from the government, four from the co-op, they're all going to be working together. You're going to have your long-term buying, your spot-market buying. It's going to be an average factor-out, and then it's going to be self-administered, so there'll be actually an administration cost in there.

So I don't see that there are going to be any problems or any safety factors, because they have to answer the codes on that, which I just explained.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

8:10

Bill 5
Canadian Airlines Corporation
Amendment Act, 1998

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, tonight I wish to move second reading of Bill 5, the Canadian Airlines Corporation Amendment Act, 1998. The thrust of the proposed amendments contained in this bill is to the Canadian Airlines Corporation Act, and the purpose is to repeal the existing 10 percent ownership cap that now restricts the level of ownership by either a group or an individual to no more than 10 percent of the corporation's voting shares.

These proposed amendments contained in the bill are the result of a request by Canadian Airlines Corporation to have this ownership cap removed, and approximately a year ago the request was made to Alberta Transportation and Utilities. Because the request is in keeping with the government's regulatory reform approach, this bill was brought forward and is before the House now. This ownership cap is one of the few remaining provisions of what was the PWA corporation act, which became the Canadian Airlines Corporation Act in 1996. The original act that I referred to, the PWA corporation act, was passed in 1983 when Pacific Western Airlines was privatized.

Over the years there have been a number of amendments to the legislation which have removed various restrictions on the company, not unlike the contents of the bill before us today. I think it is important for members to know that with the adoption of the amendments contained in Bill 5, what will then remain in the act are the requirement that the head office for the corporation remain in Calgary, Alberta, also that the company not be permitted to continue outside the province without the permission of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and perhaps most importantly the regulations passed under this act which comply with the Canada Transport Act, which restricts foreign ownership to no more than 25 percent. The corporation wants to retain what is left of the act as it needs these regulations under the Canada Transport Act to be in compliance with that act. That is an important point to keep in mind.

The main reason the corporation wants the ownership cap removed is to allow it to attract significant new equity investment, and the corporation is of the view that the current restriction is a real inhibitor to attracting new private investors.

Now, Canadian has put in place a four-year operational restructuring plan for the purpose of ensuring that the corporation attains and maintains profitability, and on a positive note in that regard I can advise that in the third quarter of 1997 the corpora-

tion announced a net profit of \$106 million. This is a 24 percent increase over the same quarter in 1996. It marks the first time in eight years that the corporation may actually make a profit. So the next step in the restructuring plan, which is well under way as you can see from the net profit that has been posted, is to recapitalize the company through the attraction of new equity. This is really the cornerstone of the third year of the plan which will allow Canadian to pursue its main goal, which is to increase its fleet of airplanes in the fourth year. In order for Canadian Airlines Corporation, as with any other airline, to increase its revenue, it needs to have more planes and better aircraft, so this is the first step in achieving that main goal.

The corporation believes that the removal of the ownership cap is in its best interests, and as I've mentioned, it is in keeping with this government's approach to regulatory reform.

Mr. Speaker, those are my remarks addressing the main areas of change which would be achieved by the amendments contained in Bill 5.

THE SPEAKER: I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but prior to doing that, I will also draw to the attention of all Members of the Assembly Standing Order 33.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 5. The bill I view as a remedial one that responds to the proposal advanced by the corporation in December of 1996. The bill in fact directly responds to that company request.

The bill is of enormous significance to the almost 1,700 Alberta employees of Canadian Airlines Corporation and Canadian Airlines International. This is a major corporation in the province of Alberta. I think the view of my caucus would be that we support a strong and competitive Canadian-owned airline industry in Canada. The transportation infrastructure, especially our airline industry, is an important component of our future economic growth in investment in this province. It adds value to our products and services as they're exported abroad.

We recognize and acknowledge that removal of the 10 percent ownership restriction for Canadian resident shareholders ought to improve the financial bottom line for Canadian Airlines Corporation, ought to make it more attractive to large-scale investors. There is an anticipation that the Canadian Airlines balance sheet will be better leveraged as over time debt is converted to equity. This ought to put Canadian Airlines in a more favourable position to be competitive in both the domestic market with Air Canada and with regional carriers such as WestJet, and then of course the international market with Air Canada and foreign carriers.

Mr. Speaker, the change resulting from section 4 of Bill 5 I think clearly will encourage equity participation by larger Canadian investors. That's certainly the expectation of the airline as well.

There are two concerns I want to identify at this stage. The first one would be this: my caucus is very anxious that the removal of the 10 percent restriction for Canadian residents in Canadian Airlines Corporation does not signal a reduction in the influence of Canadian Airlines' employees, who have taken significant wage concessions to enable the carrier to survive. There's a concern that removal of the 10 percent limit may dilute the input that employees have been able to bring to the table over the last four years, since large investors would be encouraged to acquire a significant block of voting shares. So I think my caucus colleagues are anxious for some assurance that employees will

continue to have a very major role in the future direction taken by Canadian Airlines.

8:20

The second concern, Mr. Speaker, would be this: there's a hope on the part of my colleagues that removal of the 10 percent ownership restriction for Canadian residents in CAC is not a prelude to a majority takeover bid by AMR of Canadian Airlines International through 75 percent ownership in Canadian corporation in the future. The current share base is widely diversified and provides a measure of takeover bid protection. The consolidation of Canadian Airlines Corporation share base among a much smaller number of large institutional investors over a period of time certainly has a potential for 25 percent of the shares being acquired in CAC by AMR. That continues to be a concern, I think, that my caucus is very much alive to.

I think that in taking the position we have in supporting Bill 5, albeit with the two concerns that I've identified, we're very hopeful that this will allow Canadian Airlines to be sustained and to grow in Alberta. I think it reflects our recognition that to be competitive in the commercial air carrier industry and in business, it requires a large and world-class infrastructure, and we think this particular bill will enable that or at least make that much more likely. We're hopeful that this bill, Bill 5, will ensure that Canadian Airlines International continues to be a viable player in the airline industry. We think that's critically important.

I think I'd be remiss if I didn't mention, Mr. Speaker, that my caucus had recognized as far back as 1992 that fundamental changes were required to respond to the issue of competition within the domestic airlines sector in this country. We talked at that time about a long-term strategy being required to take advantage of the challenges and opportunities of global competition. My caucus did not believe then – that is, in 1992 – and doesn't believe now that stopgap measures such as government loans and loan guarantees are an answer to sustaining a viable, competitive airline industry in Canada. I'm going to suggest that Bill 5, I think, validates or confirms the position that my caucus had taken in 1992.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that my caucus has pointed out since 1992 that a number of provincial government policies had acted frankly as an impediment to competitiveness within the domestic airline industry by failing to provide a favourable tax environment. I remember the number of times that this caucus had advocated, lobbied for a 5 cent per litre aviation fuel tax on all domestic and international flights. The tax was raised from 7 cents per litre in 1987 and by 1992 was the second highest in the country. My caucus has pressed the government to lower that aviation fuel tax on domestic and international flights from 5 cents per litre to 2 cents per litre. The government wasn't interested at that time. It took the government some five years before they understood that the aviation fuel tax was a very significant impediment to competitiveness, and it was only effective January 1, 1997, that this government adopted our recommendation to reduce the aviation fuel tax from 5 cents to 1.5 cents per litre.

I think members will be familiar with and appreciate the significance of the bilateral air services agreement, the open-skies agreement, which became effective on February 24, 1995, and the opportunities that created. Then in December 1994 and March 1995 the federal Minister of Transport announced the new air transportation policy applicable to international scheduled services by Canadian air carriers. That also had a major effect on what's currently happening with commercial carriers. Then of course there's the federal government commissioned study to examine the

competitive practices in the domestic airline industry, and the committee to review airline policy, as it was known, had been formed with members consisting of representatives from the federal government and industry, including Canadian Airlines' management and union leaders.

This is I think an appropriate time, Mr. Speaker, to commend Canadian Airlines, employer and employees, for working together to put in place strategies and visions that will put this corporation in a position where it can compete more effectively with its competitors and make it more attractive to Canadian equity investors.

For all of those reasons, Mr. Speaker, my caucus supports the intent of Bill 5 to remove the 10 percent restriction on Canadian ownership, because we recognized that our airline sector competes in a global economy and because it's important that Canadian Airlines not be hamstrung by rules that unduly restrict its ability to raise equity in Canadian financial markets.

I look forward to perhaps some response from the government to the two concerns I've identified that are of particular interest to members of my caucus. With that, I'll allow other members to participate in the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to express support for Bill 5, the Canadian Airlines Corporation Amendment Act, 1998. The purpose of the bill I think is very clear, and that is to remove the 10 percent ownership restriction and the penalties that are outlined in the current act for anyone who should exceed that 10 percent ownership. So the bill is straightforward.

If you look at some of the underlying principles that the bill supports, I think they're principles that most in this House would endorse. I think we all realize that it's in our own best interest and the interest of the country to have a competitive and Canadian-owned airline that is based here and a Canadian airline industry that is competitive in the global economy. This bill moves Canadian to that position.

I think that because of the size of our province, because of the geography that we enjoy, we're all aware of the need for having a very strong airline component as part of our transportation infrastructure. If you're going to move high-priced commodities and people quickly, then airlines are certainly the way we have to be able to go. So that strong airline industry is basic to the province's economy, basic to our future if the kind of diversification of industry that we all want and hope for is going to be encouraged and allowed to take place.

A further principle is the one that we've heard so often that it's become a cliché in the House, and that is that the government shouldn't be in business if it's at all possible for it to operate in any other way. This particular amendment will possibly allow the repayment of the \$12 million plus loan that is guaranteed by the provincial government at this time. That's something that's to be encouraged, and this amendment makes that possible.

I think, as my colleague for Calgary-*Buffalo* pointed out, we do have a couple of questions and concerns about the bill. I assume we'll hear answers to the questions from the mover of the bill or government side. Because employees have tried to act responsibly in keeping the company viable, we would be really very concerned that they are not disadvantaged by this amendment and that any power, any position they hold as shareholders is not diluted

by large corporations or large blocks of the stocks being taken up by other shareholders, putting them in a position where they would be disadvantaged in any kind of bargaining that went on.

8:30

That leads to our second concern which is: will this amendment make the airline more vulnerable to takeover bids by other large corporations? By possibly centralizing or cutting down the number of shareholders, is it going to make it possible for an outside company, particularly American, to come in and take the company over?

So we do have those two concerns, Mr. Speaker, realizing that you don't make probably many economic moves that don't bear some risk. The major one here has to be the concern of the employees, because as I indicated before, they have acted extremely responsibly in keeping the company operational.

So with those comments, we support the bill and look forward to answers to some of our concerns. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. However, I'd like to just take a moment and compliment the company for their responsible process that they've been using in working their way through some difficult moments in their history. We're dealing with a company that has a lot of history and a lot of roots in this part of Canada. They really were the first airline that flew to the far north. Wop May was one of the founders and certainly developed a lot of history in the building of our western part of Canada.

The company, I consider, should be commended for their responsible way of trying to deal. They didn't come to government with their hand out. They didn't come to government asking for a loan. They came to government with a responsible way of dealing with an equity situation whereby they want to continue to build and grow. The point that I really want to make is that it's to the employees' benefit to have a strong company, and that's really the essence and the critical part of this.

When the company first came with the suggestion that they wanted to have some minor changes to the legislation, I asked them: why do we need the legislation at all? Why not just have government exit from the legislation, operate as a free company, and carry on with life? One of the reasons they pointed out was that they wanted to stay under the provincial legislation, which moves it – a control under the federal legislation, which restricts to 25 percent foreign ownership. So really when we're talking about another foreign airline taking over, the company itself wants to stay a Canadian entity, and I think that's a responsible action and one that we want to compliment and commend.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So overall I think that we want to work with the company. The company has shown a real progressive way of dealing with some of their issues involving the employees, and the employees themselves have shown very, very responsible actions as well in coming together, in keeping this company viable, keeping this company strong, and really allowing us ongoing opportunities for competition in the airlines business, something that we want to be proud of. This a very proud company, a company that's got a long history, one that we want to continue.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 5.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 5. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

**Bill 8
Agriculture Statutes (Penalties)
Amendment Act, 1998**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to move second reading of Bill 8, the Agriculture Statutes (Penalties) Amendment Act, 1998.

Back in 1993 a regulatory review noted that a number of penalties in legislation administered by this department were dated. Of course, since that time we were busy directing our efforts to other needed legislation. However, we're now ready to act on their recommendations that came forward then.

The purpose of this bill is to update the penalties for offences under the following acts: the Animal Protection Act, the Dairy Board Act, the Farm Implement Act, the Fur Farms Act, the Livestock Diseases Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, the Meat Inspection Act, the Soil Conservation Act, the Stray Animals Act, and the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act. The penalties under the Dairy Industry Act and the Irrigation Act are also dated, but they will be updated as part of the planned reviews of these acts.

Mr. Speaker, you may be wondering as to how we arrived at new penalty levels for offences already identified in this legislation. After consulting with Legislative Counsel, we determined that there are several principles, and they are as follows. The penalties need to be significant enough to act as a deterrent for the offence that's being addressed. Since many of these penalties have not changed in 25 years and are not likely to be reviewed again for some time, the penalties need to be adequate for now and for some time in the future.

We want to remove minimum penalties and set maximum penalties rather than have a range of penalties. We believe it's a judge's responsibility to assess the severity of the offence and assign the penalty accordingly. We do not believe there is a need to have different penalties for first and subsequent offences, and it is up to the judge to consider how much of a penalty would be a deterrent for subsequent offences.

Mr. Speaker, we recommend a uniform maximum penalty level of \$5,000 for all offences for impeding the work of an inspector or officer. This level is consistent with what's already been established in comparable legislation in recent years, such as the Agricultural Pests Act. We believe that similar offences could carry similar penalties. As well, where large companies dominate the structure of an industry, there should be higher penalties for offences related to safety codes, environmental damage, and animal welfare to act as a deterrent. I'd also like to point out that departmental staff reviewed the penalties under many agricultural acts in other Canadian jurisdictions as well as some other Alberta statutes to help establish the proposed levels.

During the drafting of the changes industry was consulted, and apart from two vegetable growers industry is in agreement.

Referring to the two vegetable growers in question, one questions whether there have been enough instances of offences under the Vegetable Sales (Alberta) Act to justify increasing penalties. The second grower believes that inspections under this act are now redundant because industry wholesalers have standards that exceed those in the act. I'd like to point out that both of these concerns are separate and not really related to changing the penalty level. If the standards are exceeded by those in the business, there shouldn't be any concern about increasing the level of the penalty.

I'd also like to point out that initially some members of the livestock advisory committee were concerned that some of the proposed livestock penalties are too high. After giving the livestock advisory committee detailed reasons and background to the proposed changes, we haven't heard any further concerns, and the original concerns of the group seem to have been addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I now ask for the support of this esteemed Assembly for Bill 8. Thank you.

8:40

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to talk to the principles of Bill 8, the Agriculture Statutes (Penalties) Amendment Act, 1998. This bill really makes a lot of sense. It's a housekeeping bill. This is about setting maximums. This increases the penalties for contravening 10 different agriculture acts.

It also removes the penalties for selling a commodity under the Dairy Board Act at below the minimum price, but there is still a penalty for failing to comply with the AEUB regulations. To remove the penalty for selling milk and milk products below the set minimum price, this brings the legislation in line with current situations. There has been no minimum resale price for some time. The AEUB still sets the price for the purchase of milk from farmers, and there are still penalties for failing to comply with the AEUB orders or regulations. Thus this change should not affect the price paid to the farmer, which is negotiated based on the cost of production. There is nothing changed with respect to the price the farmers receive for the milk which I can see in here.

There are four companies processing dairy products in the province at this particular time, with sales in the billions. So the previous fines, to my reading, were somewhat of a joke. The fines are comparable with other provinces, although Manitoba has \$60,000 for maximum fines. B.C. and Saskatchewan are currently revising their figures, and they are expected to be a lot closer to Alberta's maximum fine of \$25,000. The AEUB sets the price for liquid milk, but dairy boards set prices for excess milk that is issued for processing, but compliance with orders and regulations from these bodies is ensured.

Many penalties are relatively low, so it makes sense to bring them in line with current prices. Note that although the maximum penalties have increased dramatically in some cases, this is sometimes associated with possible imprisonment. It's important that the fines are high enough to act as a deterrent. While the maximum fines are given, there's usually no lower limit, so the fine will not necessarily be higher than in the past. With respect to the Dairy Board Act regulations, the Dairy Board Act sets prices for milk products that are paid to the farmer by the processor. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board sets the price for subclass 1a milk. In the past the board set the price at which processors could sell to retailers. This was dropped from the regulations several years ago, but the act is only now being brought in.

We believe that this is sensible, housekeeping legislation that brings the penalty in line with current prices and ensures that they remain a deterrent.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, I am saying yes to this.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent opportunity to make a couple of observations about what is, I suppose, something in the nature of a housekeeping bill, Bill 8.

It's interesting in terms of looking at the approach the government has taken in terms of dealing with a whole range of penalties. I mean, obviously penalties that haven't been revised for a very long time end up having ridiculously low amounts, which are going to serve as a deterrent to no one, so it's certainly appropriate that penalties be adjusted. I think one of the things that happens with penalties: like all laws there's supposed to be an educational component to it. I think that when we attach a penalty to an offence, we're signaling the degree of importance that we as a Legislature, we as a province attach to a particular offence.

As somebody who's far removed from the ag industry, it's interesting to me. I'm not going to try arguing tonight that because the Calgary Stampede is in my constituency, I've got a strong rural connection in my constituency. The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Grounds have been redistributed out of Calgary-Buffalo, so I'd have to stretch even further than I'd be willing to do, Mr. Speaker, to try and make that point. Nonetheless, it is interesting to me the representative values, the different values that the government has put on different kinds of offences, and I expect there are probably very compelling reasons and explanations in different cases why that would be the case.

Mr. Speaker, in looking at Bill 8, for example, one thing jumped out at me: the Soil Conservation Act, where we have a daily offence. I can think of few matters that would be more important in a province like Alberta than soil erosion and irresponsible practices that wouldn't address soil conservation aims. The fine is now going to be a fine of "\$500 for each day or part of a day that the offence continues, to a maximum fine of not more than \$10 000." I would ask: why limit it at \$10,000? One would hope that the provincial government wouldn't want to countenance a serious soil erosion problem that went so long that it would warrant a \$500 per diem fine, that would aggregate more than \$10,000. But just to be logical, I don't know why we would cap it at the \$10,000, why the \$500 per day fine wouldn't continue for a longer time period.

The provision in terms of the Livestock and Livestock Products Act and those provisions . . . [interjection]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order?

MR. McFARLAND: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow is rising on a point of order, I can anticipate.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member entertain a question on the soil erosion?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member may entertain a question or not. You don't have to give a reason.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd never avoid a chance for some enlightenment, so I'm happy to entertain the question.

Debate Continued

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member. I appreciate your concern about the soil erosion. Would you, when you're making your comments, also elaborate a little bit on the so-called theft of soil as our urban centres continue to expand onto prime land?

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much. I should remind the member that I represent the inner core of one of our largest urban areas, not a suburban area. So we're not part of urban sprawl.

But, Mr. Speaker, I did grow up in a farming community, and I appreciate the frustration that farmers are experiencing, particularly in southern Alberta, where you have this enormous population growth. One has only to fly in and out of the city of Calgary and look at the incredibly rich farmland that's being converted and taken over by acreages. I think that if I were a farmer, I'd be mighty resentful that we're taking so much agricultural land out of production and with seemingly so little consideration. One has to wonder if this is another one of these things where we're going to look back in a number of years and say: where was the farsighted thinking of MLAs, and where were the initiatives to put some brakes on that and to ensure that urban sprawl in fact is policed and regulated and things are done to respect the importance of the good productive land, particularly in southern Alberta?

8:50

The other question I had, Mr. Speaker, in going through this was the Fur Farms Act. It seemed to me that the fines there were unusually modest. I'm not sure what the reason for that is, because once again there may be some natural industry standards that would sort of determine areas of higher priority and greater importance, but it's not apparent to me. If we look at the fur farm provision, it seems to me that what the minister is saying with this is that these regulations and breach of them is considered a whole lot less serious, and I'm not sure why that would be. I would think that removing a quarantine notice by a fur farm operator would be a pretty serious matter in this province. Exporting a skin or a pelt without an appropriate permit I think would be a pretty serious matter. Allowing a furbearing animal on a fur farm to run at large with some of the problems we've had with cattle disease – and we see what's happened in the U.K. and places like that. I think that some of these items would be more important and would warrant a significantly greater penalty than what's imposed even in the amendment package comprised in Bill 8. So I'm hopeful the minister would at some point before the bill finally leaves the House offer some clarification relative to that.

The other matter, of course, that I suppose all MLAs will be particularly interested in, is the provision that relates to the Dairy Board Act and the removal of the penalty for selling milk and milk products below the minimum set price. I understand that this is in effect a ratification of what's sort of a status quo practice anyway and isn't a particularly significant change. I understand that the AEUB still sets the price for the purchase of milk from farmers, and there's still a penalty for failing to comply with an

AEUB order or regulation. I suppose we can assume from that that this shouldn't affect the price paid to farmers. It's still going to be negotiated based on the cost of production, but that's something that I still have some uncertainty about, at least in my own mind, in terms of looking at it.

The other thing I noticed and in fact I have had a little limited experience with was the Farm Implement Act. In my previous career I had a chance to litigate a couple of cases for a farm implement dealer. I initially thought the penalty was only a maximum of \$10,000, but I see for a corporation it's \$25,000, and I think that's an appropriate change.

So those are the comments, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make relative to Bill 8, but on the whole clearly I'm going to be supporting it, because I think it's an appropriate remedial piece of legislation.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, to conclude debate.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite pleased that the hon. members across are supporting the principle of the bill, and perhaps in Committee of the Whole we can further discuss some of the questions that did come up.

With respect to soil conservation and the question related to the \$500 a day, when soil is drifting, it's imperative upon the municipality and upon this minister to seek remedial strategies almost immediately. So there may be a fine applied in that instance for two or three or four days, but we will certainly, either through the municipality or through this department, be following some remedial strategy almost immediately. We would then, of course, charge the owner of that property all of the costs of the remediation. So generally speaking it would be, I think, not wise for us to watch soil drift for more than five days and undertake some strategy immediately.

With respect to soil conservation – and this is an added fact – we are much further ahead in this province in soil conservation and the respect for soil than any other province in western Canada. We presently have more than 7 million acres that are under either reduced tillage or zero till, and all of that retooling, buying new equipment wasn't in some way supported by this government through grants or incentive bonuses. This retooling all came out of the farmers' pockets, and for that we all in this House should be grateful, because they are preserving one of our most valuable resources.

With respect to the livestock act and back to the fur farms, this is all with respect to animal welfare, and again in this province the SPCA and the department of agriculture and our producers are working very closely in this particular area. So I really appreciate the support, and certainly in the next opportunity, during Committee of the Whole, we'll get this discussed further.

I certainly move and call for the vote on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 9 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 1998

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 9, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 1998.

This amendment, Mr. Speaker, came forward to us in the last session under miscellaneous statutes. Our hon. members across the way and the Official Opposition agreed to it; however, I wasn't able to get to the third party to explain this particular piece of legislation, and as a result they weren't quite sure. They thought it had some effect on the Canadian Wheat Board, which it doesn't. This is Alberta legislation. As a result, it didn't go through miscellaneous statutes last time. So we're introducing a separate bill.

We're proposing to insert the words "continue" and "revise" into the appropriate sections of the act. Again, this is something that our agricultural marketing commodity groups have asked for, since revisions and changes to present marketing plans do require considerable resources, and this is just one way of stepping aside and allowing the industry to do its work and do it more efficiently. So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate on Bill 9.

Thank you.

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

9:00

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and talk to the principles of Bill 9, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 1998. Yes, we do still look forward to the meat. We're accepting this as a proposal. This allows marketing boards to continue or revise their marketing plans, whereas previously they could only be amended or terminated. This saves a lengthy review process every time the government's sunset policy requires a review.

What I see as the objective is to make it possible to continue or revise a marketing plan. A large number of regulations under this act were revised at the end of 1997. In the past a plan could only be amended or terminated. Now the government has a policy to impose sunset clauses. The plan needs regular review. By being able to continue or revise a plan, it will not be necessary to undertake a lengthy review process.

I do have a question as I read this. It's really more for clarity. What is the difference between "amend" and "revise"? It would seem that if the plan is revised, it would be necessary to amend it. I'm going to leave it at that and ask for an explanation. According to the shorter Oxford dictionary, "amend" means to "correct . . . To make alterations . . . To improve." "Revise" means "To go over again . . . in order to improve or amend."

This is another piece of housekeeping legislation that makes sense. I accept this and look forward to the committee for discussion, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister to close debate.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that this has come forward from some of the legal minds within this Assembly and want it to cover all possible changes that may occur to these plans. That's why they put the words "revise" and "amend." Other than that, I think you gave a very good explanation in terms of the definitions in the dictionary. But I'll seek further consultation, and if there is something more serious that comes out of it, I'll certainly discuss it in Committee of the Whole.

With that I move second reading of Bill 9. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very simple amendment to this act. Specifically, the first one is housekeeping, and that is simply a clarification that the act is the authority by which the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation is established and continues to operate. Under the previous wording the concept of continuing authority of the act was not explicitly stated.

The second proposed amendment is contained in section 2(1). Currently the legislation requires that an MLA and a department staff person sit on the board of the ASRPW, if I may use the shortened version. Under the proposed amendment that requirement would be removed. The rationale for this is simple. We have four foundations operating. We, as you know, have streamlined the administrative and financial functions of those, brought them into one area. None of the other foundations have that requirement, so we are recommending to the Assembly that that recommendation proceed and that we remove that requirement from this act.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise tonight to speak to Bill 11 on second reading. The minister is right. It's a very short amendment act.

I'm pleased to be able to do anything I can to support the Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I think the foundation has as its objectives to develop and maintain programs, facilities, and services for sports, recreation, parks, and fish and wildlife. So this agency is very instrumental, I think, in providing high quality of life for Albertans. It's primarily known, obviously, for disbursing grants and also for the Percy Page Centre, which gives many of these nonprofit agencies a home and also shares it with some of the arts and cultural groups.

The minister has already mentioned the two changes. I was wondering why the change in the meaning of foundation. To make it clearer that it's entrenched and the continuation of it, the authority for it rests underneath the act: I accept that. I had wondered if it had something to do with the sunset clause in the Financial Administration Act and that this would therefore be continuing it, but I'm being told no, that's not what's happening here.

The second thing is removing the requirement that an MLA and a government employee be on the board. For that I commend the minister for having taken the suggestion put forward by the Liberals some time ago. I think it's a good idea. [interjection] Yes, indeed it was, several years ago. I think that's important. I think there is an intention that these are arm's-length agencies, and I think removing the requirement for an MLA and a government employee to sit on the foundation is a good one in that it does protect both the government and the agencies underneath it from any accusation that there's undue interference or influence taking place there, and it does allow the agency to operate as more of an arm's-length agency.

That concludes my brief comments, slightly longer than the minister's but nonetheless brief given the brevity of the amend-

ment bill. At this point I'm happy to say that I support it at second reading.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few short comments on this bill. First of all, I'm wondering in these cleanup amendments that have been brought in whether or not the minister has had time to review and has considered breaking apart the Alberta sport and recreation part and the parks and wildlife part. I know that consolidation saves money, and that's a commendable action, but I believe that in this instance those two areas being together is not always compatible. Perhaps she can comment on that.

I do believe that all of these departments that are in this foundation do an excellent job, and I would like to commend them on that. I'm wondering if the minister could comment on what the cost savings are by not having an MLA or a government employee on the board.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development to close debate.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just make a couple of brief comments and appreciate the support of the hon. members opposite for these foundations that do, I think, provide a tremendous service to our communities across the province and to our volunteer groups.

I can tell you that the amalgamation of Alberta sport, recreation, parks and wildlife in effect has been working extremely well. I think any incompatibility is not seen because Environmental Protection operates the parks and the wildlife reserves that are environmentally sensitive. We have found that there's some good opportunity for co-operation and working together with recreation, parks, and wildlife. That hasn't been considered at this time.

The costs associated with having an MLA on this board: I can tell you that our savings are nil because the MLA was never paid, at least wasn't paid during my tenure, for sitting on this board. So I don't believe there will be a lot of change. Obviously, a government official who sits on the board is not paid for that service, because they are already being paid as part of the public service. So other than the expense of having them present at the meeting and perhaps having a coffee or juice, there won't be a lot of change there.

I appreciate your support for the foundation and look forward to any questions that may arise when we reach the committee stage.

Mr. Speaker, I would move second reading of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Amendment Act, 1998.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

head: Consideration of His Honour
head: the Lieutenant Governor's Speech
9:10

Mr. Coultts moved:

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 3]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this evening to rise in this Assembly to speak to the Speech from the Throne that was delivered on January 27 by the Lieutenant Governor. This is the fifth speech of the Klein government since the election of 1993, and it's an indication of where the province is today and where this province is going and what our priority areas will be in the future.

I believe it is quite clear that over the past five years this government, with the sacrifice of many hardworking Albertans, has set the stage for a bright future. We have tackled our deficit and have run budget surpluses over the last three years straight. Our government is now smaller, it is more efficient, and it is more responsible to the people. As a result of a healthy economic and business climate, Alberta has enjoyed the highest employment rate in Canada and the highest economic growth forecast for the country.

Mr. Speaker, under the strong economic environment, with our government deficit eliminated and our net provincial debt under control, we are now in a position to invest in what Albertans have identified as priorities. Albertans have told us to stay the course. They've told this government to spend responsibly and to continue paying down the debt. In doing so, Albertans have identified areas that we need to focus on in this growing and ever expanding economy in this province. As outlined in the Speech from the Throne, the government has set out and targeted reinvestment in these areas that Albertans consider very important. I am pleased to note that we are continuing to look after the needs of Albertans and have placed our priorities in children, education, and low-income families.

Education has been identified as a priority, and we have targeted spending to our most valuable resource: our children. Mr. Speaker, the government will increase funding from K to 12 to allow the school boards to meet the demands of increased enrollment, to allow the boards more flexibility for technology infrastructure, and to hire staff to assist in English as a Second Language and also in special-needs students.

Mr. Speaker, another priority that was identified by Albertans is low-income families, which invariably involve our children. The government has targeted spending in this area to handle child welfare, disabled children, and women's shelters. In addition, the government has outlined steps to combat teenage prostitution and to assist children in low-income families with the Alberta family employment tax credit. I am pleased with this provision, which provides Albertans with the resources to help themselves. I am also encouraged that the government will continue to move family services to community-based areas, which will be able to deliver services more effectively and efficiently at the local level.

The government has outlined a commitment to maintain the course and target our fiscal dividend in priority areas, some of which I have identified. The government realizes that with the climate of economic growth there comes a strain on existing infrastructure, such as the schools and hospitals in addition to roads and the shortage of skilled employees. The government is

committed to working with various stakeholders, including municipalities, the business community, and universities and colleges through apprenticeship programs to meet the challenge of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, we are living in a strongly competitive international marketplace. I feel strongly that Albertans are up to the challenge of tomorrow. With any challenges come opportunity, the opportunity to succeed and to flourish. We have an opportunity to pay off our net debt by the year 2000, to pass on to our children a debt-free home. Albertans have an opportunity to live in the most competitive jurisdiction with the best educated workforce, an efficient and effective public sector, and with the lowest tax of any other province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we have many challenges ahead, but I along with the rest of this government feel very confident in Alberta's future. We will work hard with all Albertans in the next years of our mandate to ensure a vibrant and sustainable Alberta into the next century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand in the Assembly to speak to the Speech from the Throne.

As I sat in the House on Tuesday, January 27, 1998, listening to His Honour Lieutenant Governor Bud Olson, my immediate response was: here we go again. This Alberta provincial government is not speaking to all Albertans. It does not speak to the poor, to seniors, or to the people who want VLTs removed from their communities. It ignores the increasing incidence of child and family poverty, the continued downloading onto the municipalities, and the educational tax.

I had great hopes when I witnessed the strong representation of the people of Alberta who gave their time in the 1997 Growth Summit forum and was very impressed by the input and the outcome and the compiling of information that arose from these discussions. However, what I see in the Speech from the Throne is that this government has failed yet again. They have paid lip service to the Growth Summit forum but haven't reflected the ideas and suggestions that the participants contributed.

This government has clearly shown that they have no vision or plan to include all Albertans in their agenda for opportunity. This throne speech is nothing less and nothing more than a tired old recycled promise from previous years. Albertans need a vision and a road map to sustain growth and competitiveness in the upcoming millennium. What they received instead was admission that the road traveled over the last five years has led to a dead end and is now coming to a screeching U-turn.

It is painfully apparent that this government still defines growth and reinvestment strategies solely on the basis of financial statements and the bottom-line input rather than on achieving a sustainable and complementary balance between the fiscal and economic and the people or their quality of life or outcomes.

The Growth Summit forum clearly demonstrated to the Premier that a sustained and balanced growth into the next millennium means broadening the growth agenda to include investment in the potential of our greatest resource: the people of Alberta. However, this government still seems determined to sacrifice the priorities of people development, as enunciated in the Growth Summit, on the altar of an ideological crusade to eliminate an unmaturing and secured debt.

As I read the paper today, there was a heading in it. It says, "Conservatives' habit is 'say one thing, do another'" over the past five years. During the 1992 leadership campaign now Premier Ralph Klein vowed to end the trend of downloading responsibilities to local governments without providing an adequate revenue source as compensation. However, in office he has done the exact opposite. Major grants to municipalities have been cut substantially over the past five years, and with the province seizing control of the school property tax base in 1994, municipalities have been forced to turn to hikes in business property taxes and user fees in order to compensate.

9:20

We continuously wonder about this divide-and-conquer political game: northern Alberta against southern Alberta, Edmonton against Calgary, rural Alberta against urban cities, et cetera. As I travel Alberta meeting many councillors in cities, towns, villages, municipalities, and MDs, I hear the same common theme and/or questions that they are asking this government: are they listening to our request regarding extremely necessary infrastructure moneys? Albertans have identified that many of the major priorities for them are the ever increasing demands for roads, buildings, bridges as well as the technology required to meet the challenge of economic development in this province. We must work and plan toward a revenue-generating sharing with these municipal districts. These small centres are the backbones of our province. The importance of this sustainability and stability cannot be emphasized too much.

As the Liberal opposition Municipal Affairs critic, I suggest that, number one, municipalities in the province should work as partners. For example, municipalities should not only be consulted when decisions are made that impact them but should have an active role in the decision-making process. Number two, a formal declaration outlining the roles and responsibilities of the two layers of government should be written and signed by the province in conjunction with the municipalities. Number three, a three-year rolling grant funding framework should be provided by the province for all municipalities to plan in advance their infrastructure and other funding requirements. Such a framework will have been developed through negotiations between the province and municipalities where both parties take an active role in its development.

I support the need for targeted reinvestment in our physical infrastructure at the provincial and local level. It should be noted that the Alberta government has reduced major grants to local municipalities by \$138 million, or 30 percent, over the past four years while downloading programs and responsibilities onto municipalities. In fact, total grants to the municipalities were reduced by 56 percent between 1992 and 1996. This is unacceptable.

We must recognize that our physical infrastructure is the key to Alberta's future, not only providing the means for value-added product and service exports by Alberta abroad but improving the quality of life for all Albertans as well. Unfortunately, I do not believe that a onetime grant for physical infrastructure improvement addresses the fundamental issue. This issue is a necessity for development of fiscal strategy for infrastructure improvements that is secure, stable, and predictable, reflecting the priorities of the municipalities. This would allow local governments to plan more effectively, both long and short term, as well as support economic growth.

As I read the news release on infrastructure by our minister and tried to read between the lines in the Speech from the Throne, it

does not illustrate anything more to Albertans than a simple quick fix. As our cities, towns, municipalities try to engineer plans to build or repair roads, freeways, bridges, et cetera, they must be asking themselves: does this government realize that there is such a small window in time to actually perform construction work? They ask: what must it take to get a commitment from this government so they can plan for these projects for three years? Onetime infrastructure grants do not meet these criteria.

I have heard from many municipalities that have already assessed their infrastructure needs. This information should form the basis for a comprehensive strategy for all Alberta. Service providers at the community level must be able to define their own needs and priorities by being directly involved in the future planning. The province cannot perform this assessment in total isolation.

As I read the AUMA president's perspective message, priorities for 1997-98 range in the following manner – and this is what I'm hearing in all towns and municipalities that I'm going to: number one, transportation infrastructure; number two, response to the Growth Summit; revisiting our first guiding principle, the educational tax; number four, social infrastructure; number five, co-operation and collaboration in rural/urban relationships. Number six is environment.

Mr. Speaker, I could be here for a very long time conveying the concerns of many districts, villages, towns, and cities in the province around the 1995 MGA and what the educational tax means to them. As I listened to the people from areas of our province where education tax is of the most concern – and to those of you that represent the government that actually live out there, I hear it, and I'm wondering whether or not you actually leave your constituency office or this dome.

I listened to and read comments from Calgary-Montrose on the Speech from the Throne. Well, Mr. Speaker, I visit Calgary quite often, and I speak to many concerned Calgarians. Humbly, I would like to stress that I am and have always been known as a good listener. People feel free to share concerns and suggestions with me. So I suggest to this member that he throw away the Ralph's team signs now that he has been elected, become his own person and listen, really listen, to his own constituents.

DR. TAYLOR: You were on Grant's team. That's why you've got 18 members.

MR. GIBBONS: I haven't gone down to Medicine Hat, but I'll be down there soon.

I really believe this member should speak to his constituents. I'm sure he would be surprised at what he might hear.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to participating in this session as it is our duty and responsibility to represent this great province with wise and thoughtful vision. We can all fervently hope that this government takes off its blinkers, or where I grew up called blinders, discover its own wisdom and vision and begin to seriously consider the well-being and quality of life of all Albertans rather than merely have its own balance sheet be the bottom line.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to address the throne speech this year, because for me it was the

same speech as last year and the year before that, simply dusted off and fluffed up, but in light of the remarks that we've heard in the Legislature this past week from the Premier on the topic of hypocrisy, I simply can't pass up the opportunity.

Certainly there's no doubt that in this throne speech we have many, many examples of the government once again saying one thing and in actual practice doing something quite different, and I think it begs the attention of the people of this province to realize what is going on here. We've got the Premier many times saying that communities know what's best for themselves and then unilaterally making decisions which impact them in a major way, like the crack cocaine of gambling, VLTs, which has been a big issue in this Legislature over the past week and a half.

The Premier has many times spoken – and addresses it in the throne speech – about having the best education system not just in Canada but throughout the world, having the education of every child and student be of paramount importance. Yet what have we seen this government do? We've seen them eliminate kindergartens in some sort of social experiment that didn't work, that they then brought back in. We see stopgap funding being put in, nothing taking a look at the fundamental principles of what's required in education to make sure that the students coming out of this province are really, truly going to be world-class citizens that can compete in the global marketplace. Those discussions have never been had. We've never had the opportunity to fully debate that, yet this government time after time slashes money and then throws a pittance back in to try and just please people with short-term gaps. That, Mr. Speaker, is hypocritical.

We have the Premier talking about putting health care basics before health care buildings in this province, yet what do we have this very Sunday in this city but a situation where anybody wanting to go to hospital emergency rooms couldn't get access. Now, you tell me where the emphasis is there. It isn't in putting in funding to the people services that are required. That, once again, is very hypocritical.

9:30

Then we get to the issues of the environment, and that is I think the biggest example of hypocrisy that we have ever seen in the history of this province. They make feel-good statements in the throne speech that are completely not sustained by the actual actions that this government is carrying out. They talk about streamlining and clarifying “decision-making structures and processes regarding natural resources.” In fact, all the streamlining that has been happening and the clarifying that has been happening has been facilitating industry moving into protected areas, into areas that this government has in the past unconditionally guaranteed will be protected environmentally for the future of this province, but in fact that hasn't happened at all.

They talk about harmonizing environmental management and meeting “the reductions for emissions of greenhouse gases.” In fact, the government has done nothing in that regard. Industry has tried to move along at as fast a pace as possible. They had every opportunity – they had been prevailing upon this government to participate in that – yet we don't see that happening. From that document that was tabled today in the House, what we do see is a spitting out, a rehashing, a regurgitating of what industry has been moving forward on. We do not see any firm commitment from this government to be addressing that situation. There are a series of very easy measures that they could be instituting which would really move Alberta first and foremost in terms of a strategy on greenhouse emissions. We have to get there sometime, Mr. Speaker. We can do it behind every other

country in the world and be left behind technologically, or we could be in the front-running of that particular situation, but this government's not prepared to do that.

There are all kinds of things happening here that talk about the hypocrisy of the government when they're making a decision on the one hand and then making a decision on the other hand which completely counteracts that. I'll use an example that just happened here not too long ago when we talk about Special Places 2000. If we go up to the Fort Assiniboine wildlife provincial park just north of Barrhead, we see that park nominated in the Special Places 2000 category, which is supposed to mean that it is protected from any kind of invasion by industry or further development forever. Yet what happens, in fact just days after it being nominated and accepted in that process, is that the same department, the Department of Environmental Protection, extends leases in the very park.

What we had there was a situation where there were drilling rigs and gas wells and a pipeline that had a lease that was scheduled to expire. Given the Special Places nomination and acceptance, it would have been natural for Environmental Protection to just allow those leases to expire. No. What happens? Immediately what they do is they extend the life of those leases. Now, tell me, Mr. Speaker, how can you protect an area, keep the environmentally sensitive nature of the land, of the park and its integrity protected and still allow this kind of

exploration and development to be going on within its perimeters? It does not meet the mandate of Special Places 2000. It does not meet the mandate that the Premier himself, when he was the environmental minister, stated he would protect and ensure happened in this province. It is the same department on the one hand saying one thing and on the other hand within a matter of days doing something completely opposite. Now, if that isn't a hypocritical situation, I don't know what is.

I would like the minister of the environment to explain exactly what the rationale was behind that. He clearly has no expectation at all of meeting the original mandate of Special Places 2000, which would have given us protected lands in this province that were there for the future generations' use and for maintaining the viability and the integrity of both wildlife and vegetation habitats in this province, both of which are very necessary. We had the agriculture minister tonight standing and speaking about how important it is to maintain the viability of agricultural lands. Well, I say it's equally important to maintain the viability of those lands that need to be protected for their environmental viability. So I would ask that this government explain that kind of a situation to us.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments for now on this particular issue, and I look forward to getting some feedback on them.

[At 9:35 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

