

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 1, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/03/01

[Mr. Clegg in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 10 Land Titles Amendment Act, 1999

[Adjourned debate March 1: Ms Olsen]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Ready for the question?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say a few words on Bill 10, the Land Titles Amendment Act. I listened with interest as some of my colleagues discussed this bill. I believe we're going to, as I understand it, abolish the duplicate certificate of title. We are going to permit registration of plans of subdivisions in digital format, and once again cabinet can establish criteria for searches through regulation. All lands subject to or benefiting from a registered instrument must have titles, as I understand it, under this act.

Now, Bill 10 is a maintenance bill to deal with four problems affecting the registration system. I spoke earlier, Mr. Speaker, about the regulations, and I've spoken often in this Assembly about the whole idea of government and regulations. The use of regulation as a means of governing is not an idea or a trend that I would like to see continue, but if we were to abolish the duplicate certificate of title, I believe some persons might lose security interest in land as a result of this bill. It's something that we should be very, very careful of.

I have read *Hansard*, and I have read what other hon. members have said about this bill, but I think we should have a brief history, Mr. Speaker, of land registration. Once individuals held their own title documents and presented them to purchasers for examination on transfer. Eventually someone came up with the idea of having a public office where all title documents could be registered, stored, and produced for examination at the convenience of the public, either people selling or purchasing a small property or a large property.

Alberta's land titles system I understand is based on the Torrens model, and this came from Australia, but the vast majority of titles in the province are guaranteed by the government. Unfortunately, due to some errors in the land titles office in the 1930s, certain mineral titles do not have the government guarantee. As I said, these mineral titles are on or adjacent to railway right-of-ways.

Now, an owner can obtain a duplicate certificate of title. This, as I said, is a paper which looks like an ordinary title search result but has the words "duplicate certificate of title" on it. In the old days they were printed on a large piece of parchment. Once an owner applies for and receives a DCT, the DCT must be produced to the land titles office each time certain changes are made. It must also be produced for the cancellation and the sale of the property.

Now, what if we do away with this? Is this in the best interests of everyone? I'm sure there are a lot of people who do not even bother with the DCT, and there are other people who are proud to possess it. So we have to do what's right for everyone, and unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, people misplace -- they move -- or they destroy their

DCTs. Executors maybe cannot find them. As a result, the Land Titles Act permits the individual to make a statutory declaration attesting to the DCT's loss or destruction. As a result, some properties may have more than one DCT floating around.

Now, Saskatchewan follows a procedure that's very similar to Alberta's for lost DCTs. Manitoba, meanwhile, requires a dispensing order, which must be signed by all persons having a registered interest in the land. British Columbia is the most stringent jurisdiction. When a DCT is lost, one has to swear an affidavit that it is lost, and you have to take out an advertisement in a newspaper, the *British Columbia Gazette*, or both. The reissued DCT is referred to as a provisional DCT. It refers to the fact that it has been reissued and references the affidavit attesting to the loss of the original DCT. We must note that a DCT in British Columbia is called an indefeasible certificate of title, and this is what we will not have in this province. I would caution all members of the Assembly to look at this very, very closely.

With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to another colleague. Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments about Bill 10, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 1999.

If you look at the principles that underlie the bill, there seem to be at least four that are fairly evident. One is to reflect technological change to bring the registry into the use of modern technology and the advantages that technology offers. The second is to abolish some anachronisms, the titling system that reaches back to those days when landowners and property owners carried with them deeds for their property and used them directly in transactions, buying or selling or putting them up for collateral for loans.

The third principle seems to be to make sure that all interests are registered so that on any given piece of property purchasers or owners can be assured that anyone with interests in that property is registered and that there are no surprises for purchasers. The fourth I'm not sure is a principle, but the effect of the legislation I think is going to be to increase the reliance on the land titles registry. Now every transaction will have to take place with that registry unlike past practices. We've already heard about equity mortgages, how those were carried out by borrowers simply handing to the lenders a copy of the deed. That became part of the bargain and part of the loan agreement. So those four principles or purposes seem to undergird the bill.

I think the part that is going to be most troublesome -- and I think of my own family and how proud my parents were when they acquired title to their property and had that duplicate title in their hands and took it and put it in the safety deposit box at the bank, how important and symbolic an act like that was -- is that under this legislation those certificates will disappear.

The other thing that was interesting on many of those certificates was the history that they carried. All of the transactions, all that had transpired with the property was there for certificate holders to read and to see.

8:10

Again, I guess the fear is that the date on this, the enacting is too quick to really allow all of those who have used titles in equity mortgages to become aware of the legislation and to take the appropriate action. I think the plea from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was one that should be heeded, and hopefully at committee stage we'll be subject to an amendment extending that time and

putting in place some mechanisms to make sure that Albertans are made aware and knowledgeable of the changes that are contained in the act.

I think the move to automated records is one that we all would support, but we always are reminded that those records in the past, at least of other government agencies, have been known to go astray. Hopefully the measures that are in place to secure this technology won't allow that to happen.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd await further debate at the committee stage on this bill. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard the suggestions several times. I'll duly note them, and I will discuss them in the committee.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

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

Mrs. Fritz 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 March 1: Ms Leibovici]

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this evening on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry . . .

MR. WICKMAN: And a pleasure to listen to you, sir.

MR. BONNER: Well, thank you.

. . . to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I, like many other Albertans, looked forward to hearing this speech. Striking the right balance between continued fiscal responsibility and maintaining Alberta's high quality of life was the theme of the speech. But on closer examination I must say that, if anything, this speech lacks balance. There are inconsistencies in it that I intend to address throughout my response. As one retiree said to me: it reminds me of my last job, Seymour & Doolittle.

Mr. Speaker, it was quite predictable that the government would discuss the fiscal affairs of this province. No Albertan wishes to return to the time of the huge deficits that the province faced in 1993, but this government appears to have no new plans except for debt reduction. Many people in this province have made huge sacrifices for the past six years, and they were hoping to see a new direction, a plan or a vision that would take us into the new millennium.

While the throne speech talks about balance, I see no plan on the part of the government which would commit them to reinvest in

education and other social programs. For many Albertans this Speech from the Throne provides no new direction and no plan of action.

In my address this evening I'd like to outline at least two inconsistencies that I see in the throne speech and how they are tied to issues of concern for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to have balance in this province when we continue to face hidden budgets and human deficits that are not addressed in this throne speech. Parents with children in school are starting to say no to any more fund-raisers. Parents and schools are not spending increasing time fund-raising for frills and extras. The moneys they are raising are going for computers, textbooks, and other learning materials which should be the responsibility of this government. It is estimated that parent groups in Alberta schools raised in the neighbourhood of \$120 million last year. This is the hidden budget I referred to earlier. Where would our schools be without these funds? How much more can we expect of our parents?

Perhaps even more disturbing is the widening of the gap between different demographic regions of the province. Middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods have parents who have the time and resources to participate in bingo, bottle drives, casinos, chocolate bar sales, and any number of other fund-raising initiatives. Thus the dollars being spent per student do not remain equitable.

This year's address could have been made much more specific on the intended investment in education. Often we hear in this Assembly that our children are our greatest resource. How are we treating this valued investment? I would suggest that they are not being well served.

On a recent visit to a newer school in Edmonton-Glengarry, I had a very good discussion with the principal concerning funding woes. The conversation started with how tight the budget was and how there was no money to cover hidden costs such as wiring the school for the new computer lab, unexpected repairs, and the increase in heating bills. The particular design of this new school allowed for a great deal of natural light, resulting in greater heat loss and greater heating costs.

The school is running a deficit this year. It will have to make some very hard decisions in order to minimize the effect of wage increases in a new contract with its teachers. Her comments were: "The very first cuts took more than just the fat, but now we're down to the bone. In order to meet my shortfall, I'll have to lay off much-needed support staff. The staff realize this, and morale is now at an all-time low. Further, I'm fed up with people in government telling school administrators that the problem lies in our fiscal mismanagement but not in the inadequate dollars they supply to run our schools." She continued, "Teachers deserve this raise, and if their salaries are not competitive, then what quality of person are we going to attract to teach our youth?" I could not have agreed more.

Mr. Speaker, another problem is also emerging in our schools, and that is with our administrators. Since schools have gone to site-based management, principals are being asked to do jobs that they were never trained for, plus they are being asked to do these extra duties on top of their already heavy loads with administrative chores. We find, particularly in our big school districts here in Edmonton, that the attraction administration once held for teachers has certainly diminished greatly. So it is that our larger school boards here in the city of Edmonton and I would suppose all over the province are having a great deal of difficulty filling their administrative needs. This is particularly a big problem when we think that the majority of our principals and administrators in this province are in that golden age group where retirement is near at hand.

We continued talking, and the principal told me that this was the first time in 25 years of teaching that she'd been kicked and bitten

by a student. She also informed me of the great difficulty in getting all students reading by the end of grade 3. There has never been a greater disparity between the abilities of students when they start kindergarten. In order to reach this goal, more not less resources are required to assist the students with difficulties.

In talking with other teachers, Mr. Speaker, they tell me that at grades 3 and 4 levels they have absolutely no trouble in picking out those students who are limited to the 200 hours of kindergarten and those students who did have the benefit of 400 hours of kindergarten. Again, we are placing some of our students in a deficit position.

Under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, Mr. Speaker, funding for education was severely cut. The performance of students who were affected by these cuts was traced, with these results. The students in elementary school did better when compared to international standards. When the students went through middle or junior high school, they scored as well as the international standards. When these same students were compared to the international standards in high school, they scored below international standards.

8:20

Alberta students continue to be funded below the national average. At this rate, how much longer will it be before our enviable results in math and science begin to fall below national or international levels? Have we already started the wheels in motion to create a human deficit in education with this continual underfunding?

The next issue I'd like to look at in the context of hidden budgets and human deficits is health care. I do not have a figure as to how many millions of dollars are raised in this province by hospital lotteries. This hidden budget has saved this government many millions of dollars over the last six years.

A question I must ask is: from where did the \$192 million suddenly appear to match the federal contribution? All these dollars are greatly welcomed and needed by a health care system that has been badly underfunded for the past six years, but how much human suffering could have been avoided if these moneys had been committed earlier? With many of our regional health authorities running deficits, why doesn't this government commit to matching the federal grants for the next five years instead of just matching dollars for the first year? This type of commitment would allow our regional health authorities to plan effectively how to fix and improve a health care system that is spending more dollars than it did in 1992 but supplying less services. We currently have about 4,000 fewer beds than we had in 1992, 8,000 fewer nurses, and fewer doctors and hospital facilities.

Two constituents recently talked to me about their experiences with our health care system. Both talked about cancer. One is a patient, and the other is a health professional working with cancer patients.

The first constituent was diagnosed last October with breast cancer. At that time the method of treatment chosen was a lumpectomy. Due to long waiting lists she waited a considerable amount of time before this procedure could be done. After her surgery she returned for checkups only to find the cancer had spread, and now she required a mastectomy. This surgery was completed in February. In a recent consultation with a cancer specialist he made two comments that she will always remember. The first was that after she was diagnosed with cancer, she should not have had to wait any longer than a week for her first surgery. The second statement he made was: even though she would sleep, cancer cells never sleep. She said to me that her entire experience could be summarized as: hurry up and wait. This constituent certainly falls into the category of a human deficit. Hopefully the new funding in this budget will eliminate these types of horror stories.

The second constituent was also extremely upset when she spoke to me. She informed me that not one full-time nurse has been hired to deal with cancer patients at the Cross Cancer Institute since 1992. As a result of this policy, there is a revolving door where nurses stay only long enough to find a job that will give them full-time work and benefits. This creates an added burden on the permanent people in the facility to constantly train new people, realizing that these new recruits will soon be moving on. Once again, we have an example of staff and patients who fall into the human deficit position.

Mr. Speaker, 50 percent of our seniors in Alberta live in Edmonton and Calgary. Here, we are far more fortunate in having long-term care facilities, but the waiting list is extensive. Too often in other parts of the province seniors requiring long-term care facilities are forced to move from their towns. The families must drive one or two hours just to visit them, the seniors removed from all the supports they have known: their families, their communities, and their church.

The government committee on long-term care submitted its report to the Minister of Health in August, but he has not released it. We have been told that they're going to release it in 1999, the International Year of Older Persons as deemed by the United Nations. This review was begun in 1996, and for aged people waiting in those acute care beds with long-term care needs, three years is a very long time to wait.

There is no other group in this province, Mr. Speaker, who has been studied more than our seniors population. There is probably no other group who was hit so hard by all the cutbacks since 1993. In the International Year of Older Persons perhaps the government will make some progress in redistributing some of their wealth to seniors who continue to experience tough times even though they are receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit and the special-needs assistance program.

There are other groups in this province who are not sharing in our wealth. I was particularly interested in the study outlined by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora which indicated that using the low-income cutoff, 17.9 percent of Albertans are considered to be in poverty. If the new measure is used, the market-based measure, we find that 9.2 percent of Albertans are in poverty. Even this lower limit is unacceptable in this rich province. If indeed we do have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada today and one of the strongest economies of all provinces, this level of poverty is extremely troubling. We now have more families and children living below the poverty line than when this government was formed in 1993, Mr. Speaker. I would have hoped to see some concrete initiatives to address this crucial issue.

If the objective of this throne speech is indeed to strike the right balance, then more focus must be given to those policies which will support human growth. It is time to focus on appropriate strategies to deal with the widening deficit within our human development sector. How can we expect those Albertans who rely on programs like AISH or the Alberta seniors' benefit to continue on programs where thresholds are too low and inflationary pressures incurred by our thriving and expanding economies have not been taken into consideration?

We would expect that in these good economic times the demand on our food banks would lessen. Just the opposite has happened, Mr. Speaker. Our problem, then, does not seem to be one of creating wealth but rather in distributing some of this wealth to all sectors of the population. In talking with some operators of food banks, they also believe that this service they are providing to Alberta's poor is part of a hidden budget that this government is dependent upon.

There's another group in this province that also falls into the category of the human deficit. This group is the Disenfranchised

Widows Action Group. They have been in negotiations with the Workers' Compensation Board for four years in an attempt to get some resolution to the issue of lost pensions. There have been settlements in British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and more recently Saskatchewan. The Alberta group was led to believe that a settlement was imminent last fall, but negotiations appear to have come to a grinding halt. How much longer must these widows wait before they can say that they are no longer part of the human deficit in this province?

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne addresses striking a balance, but it is severely hollow when we look at programs affecting the quality of life for many Albertans. The constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry as well as all Albertans are forced to watch their quality of life decline and put at risk. As a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I must continue to do my best to prevent erosion of those extremely essential people-oriented programs and services that define quality of life in Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

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

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and add some thoughts and comments on the Speech from the Throne. I would like to congratulate His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for his fine delivery of the Speech from the Throne.

I'm pleased to respond in support of the speech and the course it sets for Alberta. Our direction remains on course to ensure that the people of this province continue to benefit from the Alberta advantage through positive growth and affordable, quality public services. I would like to express my unwavering support for the vision and the principles rooted in the Speech from the Throne. It has been made clear to us by Albertans that we must continue to strike the right balance, a mandate which will be carried out by good management on the part of our government and by responsible and sustainable maintenance of Alberta's enviable wealth and resources.

While this government has committed to continue its focus on fiscal responsibility, I'm pleased to hear that through careful and targeted reinvestment we are addressing vital areas like health and education. In doing so, we are recognizing the important impact these issues have on the quality of life for Albertans. This province is much more than a balanced budget and low taxes. While these and other responsible fiscal policies provide a solid foundation for a growing Alberta, it is encouraging to know that this government has not turned a blind eye to the many other areas that are our responsibility as well.

In striking the right balance, this government will not ignore the needs and the concerns of Albertans. Areas of health, education, social services, and infrastructure, to name a few, are very important to Albertans. Our books are in good order. No longer are we spending more than we can afford, and a short time after the net debt is paid off, we will no longer owe more than we own. Now that we have struck a fiscal balance, it's the appropriate time to give something back to those who gave so much, the people of this province. It's because of their tenacious spirit and willingness to sacrifice for the good of future generations that this government was able to lay a foundation of strength to ensure for generations to come that Alberta remains the best province in which to live. Wise and cautious reinvestment targeting priority areas in a responsible manner will maintain the Alberta advantage by providing the most efficient delivery of quality services and maintaining the lowest taxes.

Of the areas discussed in the throne speech, in my remaining time

I would like to touch briefly on some of these items which are of particular interest to my constituency of Calgary-Bow. Calgary-Bow is one of the northwest constituencies. In fact, the Trans-Canada highway is the northern border, and if you're traveling to Banff, you're going through my constituency. The beautiful Bow River meanders throughout the length of Calgary-Bow. Calgary-Bow is made up of nine communities: West Hillhurst, Briar Hill, Hounsfield Heights, St. Andrews Heights, Parkdale, Point McKay, Montgomery, Bowness, and Valley Ridge. Most of the business in the community consists of small businesses and shops.

The largest employer in Calgary-Bow is the Foothills hospital. There are a large number of health care professionals living in my constituency. Health care, the number one interest of all Albertans, naturally has a very high level of interest among my constituents. The Foothills hospital is the major trauma centre for the city of Calgary and also has centres of excellence in the neurosciences, neonatal, ICU, and cardiology. I've visited the hospital on numerous occasions and also worked very closely with the administration and the health professionals while I was on the committee to review provincewide services. I have the greatest respect for the dedication and the expertise of the professionals and staff who deliver services not only to Calgaryans but to patients across southern Alberta.

During our research for both the provincewide services review and the recent funding review of the health care system, I can assure the members of this Legislature that the needs of our constituents, Albertans, were in the forefront. This is a government that listens, as can be seen by the holding of the health summit this weekend and the work of the long-term care review committee.

Last spring I attended the gaming summit held in Medicine Hat. The recommendations of that summit have been, or are in the process of being, implemented. This is truly another example of a government that listens.

This is the International Year of Older Persons, and I would like to pay tribute to the seniors of Calgary-Bow. Many of our communities are older, and one of the wonderful things about Calgary-Bow is that many of the founding members still live in those communities. The stories they tell about the early days of West Hillhurst or St. Andrews Heights, which started out as a golf course, or Bowness, which was a separate village, provide a rich tapestry of the history of the area.

Mr. Speaker, in the communities of Calgary-Bow there is a deep sense of community and caring for each other. Many of the seniors' centres, in addition to being a meeting place, provide outreach services to the communities' frail seniors. Snow removal, lawn mowing, house cleaning, rides to buy groceries and for medical appointments are all important outreach services that assist seniors to stay in their homes and in the West Hillhurst community. The West Hillhurst Go-Getters volunteers have been providing these services for frail seniors in the community. Parkdale Nifty 50's is another example of a group which is closely knit. They provide programs at the hall. Volunteers visit seniors who are housebound and hold events to provide seniors with the opportunity to socialize. These pioneers have renovated and built a beautiful addition to their hall. They did receive a CFEP grant but raised most of the funds themselves. Much of the work was done by the seniors, and the workmanship was exquisite. I know their skills would be much desired and appreciated by the construction industry of today.

I would also like to mention the Bowmont Seniors Assisting Seniors group. These are 164 senior and 20 nonsenior volunteers who assist the seniors of Bowness, Montgomery, and Greenwood Village. This seniors' organization has three professional staff who co-ordinate the volunteers and do health assessments and monitoring. They co-ordinate services for seniors, provide information, and

assist them with completing their forms. The senior volunteers provide shopping trips, handyman repairs, visiting, transportation, telephone calls to isolated seniors. They host tea and conversation events, assist with office work, and organize a June picnic for 450 seniors which is the highlight of the year for most seniors.

These wonderful community seniors' networks are an example of what the community can do. The seniors' excellent contribution to their community is a true reflection of the spirit of 1999, the International Year of Older Persons. This is another demonstration of striking the right balance, as mentioned in the throne speech, the balance between community and government.

In closing, I would like to commend the Lieutenant Governor for his reading of the Speech from the Throne. The ideals and the goals that it shares with Albertans are indeed a true reflection of where this province is going and how it is that we will arrive there. As we approach the new millennium, Albertans can rest assured that the balanced approach to governing and living in this province is sure to serve them well. This is the approach that Albertans have asked us to take, and this is the approach we are proud to take. I would like to personally thank Albertans for sharing their views with this government, and we will continue to listen to your good advice.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's almost seven years since I first had the privilege of representing the residents of downtown Calgary, Calgary-*Buffalo*. I had occasion to find something that was kind of interesting. It's a publication that was produced by the community of Calgary 114 years ago. What's interesting in going through this publication is that most of what was then the community of Calgary was within the current geographic boundaries of Calgary-*Buffalo*.

It's interesting to go back 114 years and note the comments made at the time. I quote:

We may safely and conscientiously say that no district in the Canadian Northwest offers better inducements to the poor man as well as the man of capital than does this banner district of Alberta.

The publication, which was produced by Burns and Elliott in March of 1885, went on to say about Calgary:

That there will be another great city in the far west of the Dominion, rivaling Winnipeg, has long been a favorite opinion of old time nor-westerns. Where this city would be was the question which at first was not easily solved, but time has furnished the answer. Calgary, which has already been nick-named the "Canadian Denver," is the embryo from which the future metropolis of the far Northwest is to develop into commercial greatness. Let us see what are its prospects, and if it possesses those conditions without which metropolitan greatness cannot be attained.

Mr. Speaker, 114 years ago the population of what is currently Calgary-*Buffalo* was about 1,000 people. There were 248 buildings. There was a single school with all of 50 students. There were four saloons, five churches, five lawyers' offices. My grandfather had one of the three blacksmith shops that existed. This was just a couple of blocks off Stephen Avenue. The mayor was a George Murdoch, and he had all of four councillors.

8:40

The city of Calgary now, of course, has a population in excess of 800,000. The Calgary board of education alone has a population of 100,000 students. From the 248 buildings that originally existed in what would now be Calgary-*Buffalo*, there are now in my constituency 3,750 businesses. Those range all the way from street boutiques on 17th Avenue and 4th Street to major multinational oil firms. The total assessment value of properties in downtown

Calgary is now \$6 billion, with the second largest number of head offices of any Canadian city.

In Calgary-*Buffalo* there are a number of very active communities, including Chinatown, Eau Claire, Sunalta, Scarboro, Connaught, Lower Mount Royal, west Victoria Park, the downtown area. There are three business revitalization districts in Calgary-*Buffalo*: 17th Avenue, the 4th Street BRZ, and the downtown business association. Of three schools, St. Monica, Connaught, Sacred Heart, what's interesting about each of these schools is an amazing kind of multicultural representation. Connaught school, the one closest to my constituency office, has students present speaking some 26 different first languages. Parents send their children to these schools simply to be able to enjoy the richness of the multicultural makeup. Two excellent academic high schools are St. Mary's and Western Canada. In terms of advanced education institutions there is the former AVC, now Bow Valley College. Mount Royal has a downtown campus and a very large number of advanced education students. Students in university, SAIT, and Mount Royal reside in Calgary-*Buffalo*.

A very large number of seniors, many of them living alone, many of them in low-income households, one of the reasons why the Kerby Centre is so popular. This is a very large facility in Calgary-*Buffalo*. An exciting new development is the project now nearing completion. It's a facility for abused seniors, and this is one very exciting initiative that grew out of the Synergy II project that had been done some five or so years ago.

A very large number of recent immigrants live in Calgary-*Buffalo*, served by agencies like Calgary Catholic Immigration, Calgary Immigrant Aid, agencies like Calgary legal assistance.

A number of wonderful historical sites, including the Beaulieu mansion/ Lougheed Building and the old St. Mary's school.

Mr. Speaker, one would wonder what sort of reaction we would get if we could talk to one of those gentlemen that was carrying on business or one of the women that was living in Calgary 114 years ago and they could see the changes that exist in Calgary-*Buffalo* today and, for that matter, changes in the city of Calgary.

When we look at health care -- and it's instructive that while government acknowledged this was a first and foremost priority in the throne speech, the reality would suggest that this has been no priority of the government at all. There are over 12,000 Calgarians awaiting surgery. We're short approximately 300 hospital beds, ironically the size of a large metropolitan hospital. There is an urgent need for long-term care beds. In the meantime, adult emergency departments in the period from late December to mid-January that would routinely see 195 people per site per day were seeing as many as 260 people. There's an absolute urgent need for what in Europe are called convalescent beds, the notion where people are awaiting discharge from an acute care facility but don't need to go into a permanent long-term care facility. What they need is a convalescent care facility, an intermediate point. There's a huge need for that, and I'm astonished that we don't have it.

We have a real problem with Calgary Laboratory Services. They may not get the international accreditation they need to be able to do the very specialized and sophisticated work they do there because they're not able to operate from a proper facility. Currently they're operating from trailers behind the building on 10th Avenue, trailers inadequately heated and designed.

The Calgary regional health authority is running a deficit of between \$17 million and \$25 million. In addition, the region needs another \$40 million just for equipment and capital repair and replacement. What happened to the promised new veteran care facility to replace the Colonel Belcher? We've seen, of course, the most amazing proposal, where the CRHA is talking about a bond issue to raise money for hospital renovation.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at education and some of the issues there, the Calgary public school board has a number of immediate needs. They're currently looking at a deficit of about \$35 million. This government has told the Calgary board of education they must eliminate the deficit over five years. Now, I challenge any member in this Assembly to tell me how the Calgary board of education is going to eliminate \$7 million a year for each of the next five years without prejudicing, without compromising the quality of instruction to those 100,000 school children.

MR. WICKMAN: Sixty students in a classroom.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my ever resourceful colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford says: 60 students in a classroom. Mr. Speaker, that may be what it comes to.

It isn't good enough. We have needs not currently being met, including learning-disabled ESL students, gifted students. In addition to inadequate grant amounts, the number of students receiving the grants have been capped. The concern is that Calgary would receive an additional \$121 million if education funding were based strictly on a per capita basis. Now, there may well be adjustments. The Minister of Education always argues that we're not looking at a straight per capita basis, that there has to be funding for local characteristics. But the reality is that for the provincial government to suggest simply closing more inner-city schools is preposterous. That's not going to be able to solve the problem in terms of education.

Amazingly, at the same time that we see this crisis in public education in the city of Calgary, what we see is the kind of increase, the very major increase in funding from public coffers to private schools that was so ably identified and so skillfully presented to the Minister of Education by my colleague the Liberal Education critic and Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

In the area of municipal infrastructure, we've got some really major problems there. The recent KPMG report prepared for the cities of Edmonton and Calgary notes that the city of Calgary would require 7.1 million additional dollars just to reflect the growth on a per capita basis. So what we've got is now the prospect of higher property taxes, more user fees for the people in the city of Calgary. Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe Calgarians deserve much, much better.

In terms of the environment, it's clear that Calgarians value their proximity to Kananaskis and to the mountains. I note, Mr. Speaker, that we have a problem now with the special places program. You know, one of the things that Calgarians and certainly people in my constituency value is the proximity to the mountains and the amazing kind of wildlife we have, whether it's in Kananaskis or in the Bow corridor or closer in the Cochrane area. There's enormous concern that what we're seeing with the emasculation of the special places program is tragic. The fact is that Alberta really has an historic failure in terms of its special places program; it met 5 percent of its own targets for completion of the protected areas network. In fact, I see the Alberta Wilderness Association has suggested it ought to be renamed special stumps 2000 rather than special places, a not inaccurate characterization at that.

8:50

The problems of advanced education are enormous, and when the government talks about economy, I think most Albertans are thinking of high-skill, high-paid jobs. That's what they want to see for their children. That's what they want to see for young people throughout this province. But when we look and we see what's happening here, advanced education may be the cornerstone of Calgary's high-tech, head-office economy, but the impact of the 20 percent cut to Calgary postsecondary institutions has been brutal.

The University of Calgary has seen a 62 percent reduction in library acquisitions and an 8.6 decrease in full-time faculty at the very same time, Mr. Speaker, that student enrollment has increased by 10.3 percent in the same six-year period.

Mount Royal College tuition has increased 128 percent in the last 10 years while inflation has been 36 percent for the same time. SAIT full-time equivalent enrollment increased 29 percent between 1991 and 1994 while the number of faculty dropped 28 percent. The most staggering statistic on top of that is that the age group in Calgary between 18 and 24 years is expected to grow by 31 percent by 2005, and this at the same time that per student grants at the University of Calgary have been cut by 27 percent since 1988.

Mr. Speaker, there are huge problems with housing, and finding affordable housing in downtown Calgary for low-income citizens continues to be the number one issue I hear about in my constituency office, with one caveat: that was before the property tax announcements came out the other day. The concern over rising tax assessments in the downtown Calgary communities seems to have displaced housing, but housing continues to be a very, very big problem. We simply have a case of not enough new housing coming onstream. The new multifamily housing that is being built is targeted either for condominiums or for high-end apartments, so it's of very little help to a lot of the people that I represent.

The whole business of primary health care continues to be a problem. The 8th and 8th health centre, that you will recall, Mr. Speaker, was part of the answer when the Bow Valley and Holy Cross hospitals were closed, initially had projected they would see 18,000 patients over the course of a year. But in fact they're now projecting on a year-to-year basis something in excess of 46,000 people, and that's without having a psychiatrist on the 8th and 8th site. In fact, the promise when the 8th and 8th clinic was created as a substitute or at least an alternative when we lost the magnificent psychiatric facilities at the General hospital and at the Holy Cross was that the 8th and 8th clinic would be able to handle many of those needs. Well, the reality is that there is only mental health assessment, that there's no mental health treatment provided at the 8th and 8th clinic, so that presents a lot of difficulties. That's a major disappointment.

There are some other problems with the throne speech, some things that I noted when I went through it. The freedom of information and protection of privacy select special committee has been grinding along since, well, for the better part of a year, and it has made a number of recommendations, recommendations that respond to concerns of schools, universities, postsecondary institutions, municipalities. It's curious to me that there's no mention of bringing in a new Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act amendment. One would have thought that those universities and schools, colleges, and so on were looking for some relief, some remedial action being taken, and there's absolutely nothing in the throne speech, at least nothing that I've been able to see.

You know, I sometimes wonder, Mr. Speaker. If we were to go back 114 years and put through the time machine W. J. Compton, who ran the Elbow Bridge Saloon and Brewery, or G. E. Jacques, who was a pioneer watchmaker and jeweler 114 years ago, drop them into downtown Calgary-Buffalo today, what would they think as they looked around? Once they got past seeing the high office towers and the number of people on the streets, I expect one of those people or all of them would start asking about the quality of life in Calgary now.

I think they'd be astonished if they could have been at the Friends of Medicare meeting a few weeks back when the Kerby Centre made a presentation on behalf of the thousands of seniors that access and use the Kerby Centre. It was interesting to hear the concerns expressed by Sherry Perry, who's president of the Kerby Centre.

These are some of the comments she made at the time, and I quote:

The restructuring of the health care system over the past five years has greatly affected the ability of health care workers to provide quality care. Shortages of emergency staff in hospitals endangers everyone's health -- our nurses are burning out. The lack of support staff in nursing homes is creating serious situations for the frail elderly who have no voice and fear to complain.

She goes on to say:

The waiting lists for health services are alarming -- the actual waiting [lists] for urgent services are at least three times greater than the reasonable wait as defined by medical specialists.

Mr. Speaker, I can't help wonder what Mr. Compton and Mr. Jacques and people who saw all of the promise that existed in Calgary and in Alberta 114 years ago would say about how we had succeeded in so many areas and achieved such an enviable level of prosperity for many citizens while at the same time having over 100 people on a Sunday afternoon lined up to get into St. Mary's church hall for a free dinner. If they saw the huge number of people trying to find accommodation . . . [Mr. Dickson's speaking time expired]

Mr. Speaker, lots more, but we'll pick it up on the next throne speech.

Thank you.

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

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in the House today and add my comments to those already offered by my colleagues in consideration of the Speech from the Throne, outlining the government's agenda for this session of the Legislature.

In responding to the challenges of further economic growth and the needs of Albertans, the speech focuses on initiatives that strive to strike the right balance between remaining fiscally responsible and maintaining a high quality of life in our province. It continues to set a course that aims to ensure that Albertans benefit from growth and prosperity and from quality, responsive, and affordable public services. It also speaks to working with Albertans on their priorities, especially in the areas of health, education, the economy, and the environment.

Mr. Speaker, with the expressed views of constituents in mind, I am pleased to respond positively to the speech and its overall direction. The vibrant and diverse constituency of Banff-Cochrane continues to be one of the fastest growing areas in the province, facing many challenges accompanying this rapid growth. Communities like Canmore, Cochrane, Lake Louise, Banff, Bragg Creek, and Springbank struggle as they pursue acceptable growth management strategies as well as deal with the growing pressures on services they deliver to their public.

9:00

Our residents are passionate about the issues that affect their lives and possess a strong commitment to successfully meeting these challenges, and it is their spirit that is the core of our community strength. Like most Albertans, they want access to quality health care services, an education system that meets the needs of our youth, and a responsible commitment to sustainable development and management of our environment. Ultimately, they want to participate in optimizing the Alberta advantage.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that nowhere in this great province will you find residents that better understand the need for striking the right balance than those of Banff-Cochrane. It is a reality of our everyday lives. Increasing demands for expansion in environmentally sensitive areas necessitates striking a proper balance that addresses economic concerns while maintaining environmentally sound practices. This balance is critical if we are to protect our natural resources and our quality of life. Living amongst our

majestic mountains, rolling hills, and ranchlands, we take great pride in our rich, natural heritage and are intent on protecting and maintaining these treasures.

In the Speech from the Throne I was encouraged to hear the message of strong government commitment to the environment. Protection strategies and responsible stewardship requirements are welcomed by Banff-Cochrane residents, who agree that this government can and should play a positive role in harmonizing competing agendas of public and private interests as well as balancing economic ambitions with environmental capacities. A strong partnership between our municipalities and the province will go far in meeting these objectives.

Mr. Speaker, while Banff-Cochrane constituents indeed care about where they live, they also care about how they live and how social issues affect their quality of life. Alberta's financial plan, the health care system, education, and tourism are other areas extremely important to our area. Constituents would like this government to remain fiscally responsible, address health care priorities, support education and people development initiatives, and remain focused on the economy. The directions outlined in the Speech from the Throne in each of these areas reflect these wishes and I believe serve well to build a vision for Alberta and promote an agenda for opportunity.

In matters of fiscal policy we can be proud of many distinguished accomplishments. Both government and citizens of Alberta have worked hard to put ourselves in an enviable position of enjoying the highest credit rating and lowest taxes in the country. We will be introducing our fifth straight balanced budget, and with the deficit eliminated, we have turned our attention to retiring our net debt by next year, making Alberta the first province to reach that goal. In addition, we will follow the advice of Albertans and introduce a new debt repayment plan that will rigorously pay down our gross debt on a schedule that will ensure that we are again the first province to accomplish such.

As government continues its leadership role in taxation, it has committed to innovative initiatives that ensure Alberta's taxes will remain the lowest in Canada. However, with substantial increases in property assessment, Banff-Cochrane residents also encourage the province to review education taxes, considering changes that are deemed fair and affordable in the current market conditions.

Mr. Speaker, our fiscal accomplishments were not easy to achieve, but the sacrifices that have been made will not have been made in vain. It is because of everyone's hard work that we are presently in a position to offer increased support to key priority areas where needs have been identified.

In the area of health care this province will see spending increases and a predictable funding base that will not only help address identified pressure points within the health care system but also help address the changing needs of Alberta's growing and aging population. In following our principles of open government, the health summit has given Albertans an opportunity to provide recommendations on how we can best maintain a health care system that ensures Albertans will continue to have access to high-quality health care that is affordable and publicly sustainable.

Ensuring that our young people receive a quality education is a priority for Albertans and an area of high importance to Banff-Cochrane. Targeted reinvestment to date has been well received, and I expect the same with this year's focus on literacy and computer literacy. It is encouraging to see this government expanding the capacity and options for the rising numbers of high school graduates entering the postsecondary institutions. We must provide a solid foundation for our next generation for continued successful growth in this province.

The tourism industry in Banff-Cochrane continues to be among the top economic engines that drive our economy. Locally it is

responsible for many livelihoods while at the same time providing a solid base for other ventures. Therefore, I am pleased to see this area highlighted as a priority for government. Tourism is one of Alberta's largest industries and deserves our attention. Visitors to the province generated an estimated \$3.75 billion for businesses and tourism operators, and concerted efforts are needed to retain our competitive advantage as an international travel destination.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne demonstrates Alberta's interest in improving an already strong province with a plan that goes beyond the scope of financial matters. The speech provides for opportunities that set the stage for raising our current levels of success so that Albertans can continue to enjoy the many benefits of living and working in this province. Alberta is the place for individuals and for businesses, and our entrepreneurial spirit is strong and thriving. Our future is full of challenges, but it is also full of opportunities.

I look forward to working on behalf of the constituents of Banff-Cochrane and with my esteemed colleagues to ensure that being an Albertan means living in the best province in the best country in the world.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to speak tonight. I thank you for your consideration. I realize that you told me to go out and have some pie and ice cream out there and watch TV, but I came back in for you.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to make a few remarks about the throne speech read by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on February 16. I'd like to begin by saying that these past few years Albertans have achieved a standard of living that is the envy of our nation. Our budget is balanced, our financial house is in order, and every Albertan should be proud as each one of them did their share in making that possible.

We are strong, and we are growing. We have the basic infrastructure to build on and to keep Alberta the envy of the world. That is why 50,000 people and 1,200 businesses moved out of B.C. and came to Alberta: to take advantage of the 57,000 new jobs available, where unemployment is only 5.7 percent. It's been said many times that if you find a job you love, then you'll never have to work a day in your life, and that's exactly what people are coming to Alberta for.

They are also coming because they know that we have \$46 billion worth of projects under construction or ready for tender. They also know that Alberta has moved into second place behind Ontario in head offices. Alberta is the land of opportunity. This growth has created infrastructure problems, but these are problems that every province in Canada would love to have. Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is a blueprint for the same in the future.

There is concern with health care. There are bed shortages and there are waiting lists and different things, but, you know, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things right about our health care system too. Eighty-six percent of the people who used the system said in a survey that they were treated very good or excellent. That's 86 percent. And these were folks that actually used the system in the hospital, not the press, not the opposition, and not the unions. All of the people that are keying on the negativity and the doom and gloom and the sky is falling and everything is drastic cuts . . . [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Addressing the Chair

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I don't think you should

be turning your back to the Speaker and talking to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Just address the Speaker. I don't like the look of your back, so please look this way.

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that. You're so good-looking; I don't know how I could have made that mistake.

9:10

Debate Continued

MR. FISCHER: Mr. Speaker, I want to re-emphasize that the 86 percent that actually did the survey used the system. They were in the system; they were in the hospital. We're not looking at fear mongering, like we see happening in today's world with our press and with different people. We're looking at the positive things in our system. I have to say: if you were sick, what country would you sooner be in than Alberta? I don't think there's anywhere else you would go, and I have not seen anyone handing in their health care cards and going elsewhere for health care.

Yes, we do have some growing pains. We have the aging population problem, but don't forget that we are keeping people alive much longer. Myself, as a member getting near that magic age, I'm very happy about that. I think I've got a lot of living left to do, and I'm glad we're keeping people alive a lot longer. Mr. Speaker, I think probably you can agree with me as well.

Mr. Speaker, our constituency does have a shortage of long-term beds that overcrowds our acute care system. Do you know what we're doing about it? In Daysland the community is putting together a project: aging in place. This is a 40-unit complex that will accommodate lodge and long-term care patients. This is a project that will be built by the community and operated by the community. The only government help that will be involved in that will be the home care; the rest of it will all be self-sustaining by that community. The seniors will buy a unit when they go in there, and then they will sell it when they're done with it and move it on to the next person. Construction is to begin in June.

There are other areas of this province that are doing the same thing. When you think of it, maybe people do have to not depend on government quite as much for their housing as we get into our golden years. As we get more and more people into that age group, certainly somebody has to come forth and help fund some of these things, and it's happening. I think it's wonderful that in this province people can have the foresight to make that happen. Provost has turned some of their active care beds into long-term care beds. That's helped them out tremendously in that area. They have a lot of people that come from Saskatchewan, and there's a high percentage of seniors in that area.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne indicated that there will be more emphasis on preventing illness and injury. We will continue to review and monitor long-term care. Certainly we have just finished the health summit and got some valuable input from all the people in this province. We're going to be building something great in our health care system in the future. We are spending \$4.3 billion on health care, a 20 percent increase in the last three years. That's \$12 million a day on health care for almost 3 million people. The numbers of surgeries have increased dramatically: 36 percent in heart surgery, 27 percent in cancer, and 144 percent in organ and bone marrow transplants. Waiting lists have been cut. It was just last week in the paper that there's been a big cut down on the length of waiting time. So we are improving.

In the throne speech we are addressing growth problems in education as well, and I'm glad to see we're maintaining a strong funding commitment to education. We want our young people to be the best educated that they can be.

I want to mention just how well they are doing. I heard somebody from the opposition earlier on a very negative note, but there is a study regarding the third international math and science comparison results. Alberta with their grade 4 math is significantly higher than the international average. Grade 4 science is higher. Grade 8 math is higher. Grade 8 science is higher. Grade 12 advanced math is higher, and grade 12 math and science and literacy is higher. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't think we need to dwell on the doom and gloom all the time in this province because we've got something to be very, very proud of.

MR. WICKMAN: A good opposition.

MR. FISCHER: Well, that could be true, but we haven't seen them yet.

Mr. Speaker, that is a happy story in our education system. I can say that in my own constituency we struggle hard with some of our school closures, with our capital upgrading funding, the sparsity and distance formula, and our transportation formula. Sometimes we question very seriously whether those are fair. Certainly we're not unique. Everybody has their little problems, but thank goodness they're just little problems.

One thing else -- and I just wanted to get a little plug in for this -- that's causing us a bit of a problem, and that is the standardizing of the school age for our grade 1 students. That has been an ongoing problem, where you transfer students in and everybody has their different ages. I would like to get some support around this table for that particular bill, and, Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition would support me on that one.

Mr. Speaker, on agriculture just for a second. I would like to say that the agriculture industry is still very vital for this province. It still creates a third of the jobs in this province. This year and the last couple or three years we've had a lot of problems with weather. We've had drought the last three years in some of the areas, and that has made some of our farmers, not all of them either, very dependent on our farm income disaster program and the crop insurance program. We're very thankful in our area that our government is committed to these programs and to the enhancement of our industry.

We can also look at what else we're doing in agriculture, and you think of all the efforts we've made in the transportation infrastructure, the harmonization of the trucking regulations, the building of our Canamex highway, all the efforts they've made in our free trade, and also the encouragement of the acting on the Estey report. I know everyone in this House would support us on that. Also, the

strong commitment that they have to the value added.

Just for a minute. I happened to get out there to Forestburg the other day. We have a beautiful value-added strawboard plant that is built, and the machinery and equipment is going in. It is a \$14 million project that can produce up to 2,000 sheets of strawboard a day. This is a renewable resource, it's great for rural Alberta, and you're going to see some more plants around operating in the very near future with that. We're looking forward to the spin-off benefits from that in rural Alberta.

9:20

Also, I want to just say that our government has done a good job in marketing, and I want us to do more in marketing. I think we need to put maybe not so many resources to some of the other departments. I'd like to see us increase our funding and be more proactive in the marketing. We have to improve competition for our producers, we've got to have a higher price for our product, and we've got to have lower input costs. There are a lot of ways that we could do that as well.

I really believe that small business has to be encouraged to compete with big business. The big businesses can get along and do a lot of things on their own, but it's difficult for the small ones, who provide that valuable competition to the big people. It's difficult for them to get started and get going.

Mr. Speaker, there are many good plans and directions in the throne speech. This is a very successful government, and the growth in this province is wonderful. I'm just confident that the same government that has taken us this far is certainly capable of doing some great things in the future. Thank you.

I'd like to adjourn the debate as well, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Wainwright, all those in favour of adjourning debate, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[At 9:24 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

