

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 23, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/23

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated. Before we begin tonight's deliberations, I wonder if we might get unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening on behalf of Pamela Paul, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 16 visitors from the 180 Cumberland Scouts who are in the gallery. They are accompanied this evening by Mr. Ray Hamilton, Mr. Garry Erdmann, Mr. Harold Petrich, and Mr. Rick Morrison. They're also accompanied by one parent helper, Colin Hamilton. I would ask all scouts in the party and their leaders to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Haley moved:

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

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate February 22: Mrs. Nelson]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this evening to have an opportunity to respond to the throne speech 2000, and I have to start by congratulating the speechwriter, the individual or individuals who crafted the speech that was delivered in this Chamber by the Lieutenant Governor. I think reaching into the past and using an agricultural metaphor was really an important reminder of our roots, and having read some of the material from that First Legislature of Alexander Rutherford and having looked at some of the election materials from that era, the Speech from the Throne rang true. I think it was also a tribute to the background of our recently appointed Lieutenant Governor.

In recent days we've heard two speeches from Lieutenant Governor Hole. In the first she very eloquently at some length expressed her passion and her concern for the young people of our province and in particular for education, and that's understandable given the Lieutenant Governor's background as a parent and as a long-term school trustee.

In the second, the speech where the content had been structured by the government, the reference to education is much briefer. In fact, in looking for the references to the K to 12 education system, there are but 10 lines, and even though the reference is brief, the items that are raised in the Speech from the Throne are very important. Two of them are extremely important.

Let me deal with the first, and that's the issue of class sizes. Last evening the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and I attended Education Forum 2000 in Fort Saskatchewan. It was sponsored by the ACE parent group. ACE is a parent group dedicated to working at improving school conditions and in particular class size. After the panel members had made presentations, we heard from six schools, and again from each of those six schools we heard reference to class size.

We heard of a grade 1 class with 28 students. We heard of a grade 1/2 split class with 27 students. We heard of a grade 3 class in Win Ferguson school with a size of 32 students. Later in that evening when the microphones were opened for comment from the audience, we heard from a kindergarten teacher with a total of 52 kindergarten youngsters in her two classes. So throughout the evening from the schools and from the parents that spoke, the theme was the same: classes are too large, too large to do the kind of job that they felt needs to be done in working with their youngsters and making sure those youngsters reach their potential.

The information from those parents echoed what we found in an informal survey of class sizes that we conducted across the province. We sent a survey to 1,800 schools, and we are pleased that 5,201 teachers responded to that survey, sending us information about their class sizes. The interesting thing was that those responses came from 245 different communities across the province. So from north to south, east to west we had responses.

Because of the nature of the survey, the way it was done – all we did was fax out the survey to the schools and say: share this with the teachers on your staff, and fax it back to us – some may charge that all we got back were the responses from those teachers that had large classes. That may well be true. We wouldn't deny it. We have no evidence that that's not true. But having heard from 5,000 teachers from those various geographic locations, I have some confidence, when you couple that with the comments we heard from parents last night, the comments we've heard from parents at other forums, and the comments we've heard from the SOS petitioners, that the information we received accurately reflects the picture in terms of class sizes across the province.

We were primarily interested in three questions. We were interested in what percent of kindergarten through grade 3 classrooms have 17 students or fewer, what percent of grade 4 through grade 9 classes have 25 students or less, and, finally, what percent of junior and senior high school teachers have classes which total less than 80 students. So those were the three questions.

We chose those numbers – 17 for the primary grades, 25 for the intermediate grades, and 80 for the junior and senior high schools – because those are the standards used in part by the Pew Foundation and Education Week in the United States. Those are the standards that they use to rank American states and their effort in terms of class size.

It was interesting. Were we being ranked by the Pew Foundation on the basis of the results that we received, about 20 percent of our kindergarten children are in classes of 17 or fewer. So from our sample 80 percent of kindergarten children are attending classes that are larger than 17. In grade 1 the results were rather startling. Less than 5 percent of grade 1 children are in classrooms where the population is 17 or less, 95 percent of them in classrooms of greater than 17. In grade 2 about 6 percent of the sample were in

classrooms of 17 or less, and in grade 3 only about 2 percent of students were housed in classes of 17 or less. For grades 4, 5, and 6, when you move up to 25 students as a standard, in grade 4 about 43 percent of the students were in classes of 25 or less, in grade 5 about 40 percent were in classes of 25 or less, and in grade 6 about 37 percent of them were in classes of 25 or fewer. When we heard from the junior high and high school teachers, only about 25 percent of them handled less than 80 students.

8:10

I think the usefulness of the survey is to give us a snapshot, if you will, of class sizes in the province. That's why when I saw the Speech from the Throne and class sizes were mentioned, I was delighted. We have to move past the position that was held by the previous minister of education – and I think the government has moved past that position – that class size didn't make a difference. We know now that it really does.

I think the early research in the '80s was somewhat inconclusive. Some of those early research studies were studies that were not done in controlled situations. There were not control groups that could be measured against experimental groups where class sizes were reduced and student achievement tracked. But that's no longer the case. We have some very good evidence from some very large studies south of the border that class size makes a difference. Students in class sizes of 17 and less in K to 3 in particular do better on achievement tests than do their counterparts who are in larger classes. We know it makes a difference in terms of how those students perform.

In 1985 Tennessee's project STAR, the student/teacher achievement ratio, was a four-year study that involved over 7,000 students each year in over 300 classrooms. It was an exceptionally well-designed study, and the results were positive for small classes year after year, kindergarten through 3rd grade, in all subjects, in all settings: rural, inner city, and suburban. The results were similar for both boys and girls. So it didn't matter which group they came from, what their gender was; they made the gains. The results were greater for those in smaller classes. The results were greater for children attending inner-city schools, and the benefits that they were able to track lasted through at least grade 7. So a very large study and one that has been matched by others elsewhere.

The SAGE study in Wisconsin in 1996 and '97 compared youngsters in small classes. They actually varied the classroom arrangements, one teacher to 15 students, two teachers with 30 students, and then four other different arrangements. They tried different configurations and then tested those youngsters on achievement scores to see what made the difference, and again the differences were attributed to class size.

So given that kind of research, the Americans have moved heavily into class size legislation. If you look at the reviews of class size legislation, you'll find that states like Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, and Wisconsin now have or are actively considering class size legislation, and that legislation varies in the way it's written. Others have moved to spending massive amounts of money. California began a massive class reduction program in 1996-97. In 1997-98 their program provided school districts with money to reduce class size to 20 students per teacher for 1.9 million children, and it required 18,000 new teachers. So south of the border they're taking class size reduction very, very seriously.

We don't know what Alberta is going to do. We've had it foreshadowed in the throne speech that something is going to be done. I'm not sure it's going to be as ambitious as the Californians;

in fact, I'm quite sure it won't be. I hope that whatever we do, we learn from the things that have happened there.

One of the first things that I think we have to address is the whole business of standards. What is the class size that we would like to have for our young children in K to 3, 4 to 6, and in junior and senior high schools? I would urge that we adopt an independent measure, not one that's homegrown, that most people can have confidence in.

I'd also urge that we suggest some targets. Class size reduction is a very, very expensive proposition, and I think we would be well served to look at targets, much as we did in the early '70s, when the government of the day decided they wanted to move teacher education and accreditation from one year, as it was for most elementary schoolteachers, to four years. If you recall, at the time there was a great outcry that the province would never be able to afford it, that it was going to be too expensive. The target was set, and a year at a time the requirements before you could enter a classroom were increased until it arrived at the point where we are today, where a hundred percent of elementary school classroom teachers have at least one university degree, and many of them have two or more. So I think it's that target setting, as we've done in the past, that's an important first step.

I think that target setting allows the kind of planning to go on that hasn't occurred south of the border. They have run into an acute teacher shortage, and there are many teachers in classrooms now in California without teaching credentials. They've run into a space shortage. They created so many new classrooms they don't have the space to house those youngsters, and the pressure on building and infrastructure is really quite incredible. By setting targets, I think we could avoid that kind of difficulty.

I think it's also important, and I heard the Learning minister at a parent forum agree, first of all, that small class sizes K to 3 were very important, and I was delighted, as I think most parents there were, to hear him make that statement. But he followed it up with the observation, when someone asked where the money was going to come from, that that money might be taken from grade 4 to 12th grade classrooms by increasing sizes there and redirecting that money to primary grade classrooms. As parents last night at Fort Saskatchewan reminded us, that's not acceptable. Class sizes need to be reduced across the system.

Last session I had Bill 222, the class size reduction bill, on the Order Paper, and I was very excited about it, but the session was short. I wrote a note to the Minister of Learning suggesting that he might want to support Bill 222, and this is what I got back from the Minister, Mr. Speaker: "If it comes up this session you can count on my support!!" signed by the minister. I saved that note, because this session I have another class size bill, Bill 215. The targets are the same. The only difference is that it calls for full funding for kindergarten. I'm going to suggest to the minister that he might want to write me a similar note about 215, because I'm sure that it will be raised.

I would like to leave class size and briefly dwell on another issue that arose in the throne speech, and that was the reference to parent fund-raising. The previous minister of education was very dismissive of the concerns raised in this Chamber about parent fund-raising and constantly reassured us that that fund-raising was only being done for frills, for extras, and that it wasn't being done for essentials. Last night the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and I heard again about parent fund-raising fatigue. Parents are tired of fund-raising. I think one of the fathers at that meeting expressed it very well. He said: how many chocolate almonds do I have to eat to keep our school running? It was greeted with applause from the 150 assembled parents who agreed with him. They also were very

clear that they were not raising money for extras. They were raising money for basics.

So the reference to parent fund-raising in the Speech from the Throne I hope is not going to result in some regulations that will govern the behaviour of parents but will lead to some substantial funding of the underfunded K to 12 system so that parent fund-raising can again return to those extras that parents like to supply the children in the schools they work with.

8:20

The third thing and the thing that's missing is any kind of long-term plan. We see the two references to class size, to fund-raising, but what is missing is any kind of long-term planning for education, any long-term vision, and it's what's been missing since the very day we walked into the Chamber in 1993. I would commend to the government the efforts of the school boards, teachers, and the superintendents of the province and the school business officials in their A Vision and Agenda for Public Education. These people have taken the task of putting forward a vision seriously, and again I commend to the government this publication, because I think it points the way one might expect a responsible Department of Learning to move.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been echoed in the Chamber, it is a privilege to speak on behalf of the government in response to the Speech from the Throne. A number of accolades have been given with respect to the content and the delivery and also, I think, for the promise of the future with the new Lieutenant Governor, who was sworn in a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus a few of my comments on what I believe to be at the heart of the Speech from the Throne. It's not a question of a range of issues and items that are at random. It's not about 17 or 18 ministries. It's not about half a dozen task forces whose work comes to the fore at a formal time in our legislative work. This is about the fact that the government chooses to look at a range of issues with an integrated strategy, and I'm very pleased to see that we don't talk about fiscal reform at the expense of our children. We don't talk about higher education at the expense of agriculture. We are looking at the relationships of a healthy workforce. We are talking together about the impacts of a quality education system. We're talking about an economic strategy. Its focus is not simply on job creation but about market development, about international strategies, about where Canada and Alberta places themselves in the international marketplace.

In some of the highlights that the Lieutenant Governor spoke to, which are referenced early on in the speech, she uses about three or four key phrases. One is when she talks about Albertans in the sense of their confidence and the fact that they're an entrepreneurial group of people. That is not a quality that is exclusive to the wealthy. It's not something that is owned only by the young. It is a cross section across all ages, genders, and spectrums of our society. People are confident that if they apply themselves to where their tasks might be, be that education, be that in their seniors' centre, be that in communication on behalf of someone who's less fortunate, the goals and objectives they're trying to achieve will be met. They are entrepreneurial, and that's not seen as simply an economic strategy that people use. Entrepreneurial does have in it a context of innovation, people who are prepared to try and risk different strategies, so therefore I think we have to look at being

entrepreneurial as a quality of our human nature and not something that's strictly looked at as an economic element.

The whole concept of self-reliance: you know, it's very interesting that we look at people who are in need and offer them the supports that are available both as a community and as individuals, but the concept of being self-reliant is also about how to access and find ways for our own situations to be improved upon and being resilient in the face of adversity, not necessarily adversity that is caused by someone else but even personal challenges that individuals take on.

We also make note of the fact that we are spiritual people, Mr. Speaker. I think the fact that this Legislature commences every day with a prayer and a hope that as governors of the province of Alberta we will be able to use the spiritual wisdom we have on behalf of our community is something that is worthy of note. I am very pleased to see that in the Speech from the Throne.

The whole concept of looking at our natural environment and some of the environmental and heritage issues that face us as a province. We are a young province, but some of our heritage dates back centuries, thousands of years. Whether you're talking about some of the forest landscape, whether you're talking about its rivers, whether you're talking about newly discovered mineral opportunities, we have incredible resources. There is a commitment within this province to protect those and use them to the advantage of all Albertans.

I think the reason those highlighted comments stand out for me as something worth noting is the fact that we are taking those qualities of individuals, qualities of our systems, qualities of our organizations and applying them on a broad base of policy development. We definitely do have a reputation and a responsibility to continue to lead this country on our fiscal responsibilities. We will be delivering a budget tomorrow that continues to landmark and showcase and identify for all of Canada what can be done when you have your fiscal house in order and the innovation that can come from having discretionary income, the opportunities that arise for individuals when they have resources for their own purpose and not for the needs of government.

The concept of equity: we have a recognition within our financial system and within our supply of programs and services that we have to be fair to all citizens and for all causes in a way that is consistent with the responsibilities we hold as a province. We have to recognize that gender and race and age, areas where your fiscal impact can be compromised or have a different advantage, is not something that we should neglect. We have to be attentive to it. When we look further on in the Speech from the Throne at some of the issues around support for our seniors, some of the support for education, which my colleague just spoke so passionately about, the equity of how we spend our funding and how we collect our funding is a component that should not be lost.

The fact that there has to be a balance between revenues and expenditures: you know, a statement the Premier has been making since he came into power in 1992 as the Premier is that the spending problem is something that we are responsible for and that managing our revenues is at best a situation, with Alberta and its energy resources, that can sometimes be a little bit sporadic but that when you have your spending under control, when you have your priorities in place, and when you have a process to balance the two, you are on track and you're not at risk of falling back into some of the past strategies that have been used.

I want to comment a little bit about the focus that was given to the agricultural community, and needless to say, coming from an urban riding one treads carefully when you start talking about farmers and agriculture, but I have been schooled. I have a few colleagues in the Legislature that remind me what my agricultural limitations might be.

I would like to suggest that what is recognized in the Speech from the Throne is not specifically limited to an agricultural philosophy that is about the prairies. It's not simply about the crop. It's not simply about whether or not the community can deliver on the promises they hope for with respect to their farming commodities. It has to do with the fact that there are real frustrations between this province and our other provincial trading partners with respect to barriers. We do have work to do across international marketing strategies. The value-added component of our agricultural product is integral to our integrated economic strategy. It's not simply about farming and about agriculture as much as it is about the future of the economy of this province and giving it the prominence that that deserves, whether it's the technology of the machinery and the equipment, whether it's the biotechnology with respect to different strains of grain and products that can be harvested, whether it has to do with trade barriers with the European Union. That is the range of issues our agricultural community expects us to speak toward and expects us to champion, and I'm quite excited about the fact that that holistic approach to our agricultural economy was featured and showcased so well in the Speech from the Throne.

Again, as I spoke at the beginning about this integrated strategy, I've had the privilege to do a little bit of work on behalf of the minister of economic development and tourism over the last several months, just completing the tourism destination review report. There is no doubt that in traveling around the province and meeting with the various regions and communities, marketing our tourism strategies, marketing our tourism products, and showcasing what we have to offer in Alberta are keen concerns for many of our communities. Whether it's the Chamber of Commerce, whether it's a local outfitter, whether it's our national parks and our ski organizations, we have a responsibility in our economic strategy to look at tourism in a comprehensive way, and it speaks similar to what I mentioned in agriculture.

8:30

It's not just about having visitors come to this province, though they come in droves and they love what they see. It's all about fair exchange rates. It's about having high-class and quality accommodations. It's about programs that they can become involved with. It's about the quality that their tax dollar is being spent on: programs and tourism opportunities. So I'm pleased that some of that tourism work is being recognized and given the showcase that it should in the Speech from the Throne. We are a beautiful province, and we have boundless opportunities when we collectively market that strategy well.

In addition to that, as the House is more than aware, I was recently named as chairman of the MLA liaison for the Alberta Film Commission and last week appointed to their board of directors. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to work on behalf of the film industry in liaising with the various departments within government and on international issues to recognize this emerging industry for all its potential. Again, it's bigger than just location shooting. It's about technology. It's about employment. It's about finance. It's about culture and development and those aspects, and I'm pleased the government continues to recognize this as an emerging issue and part of its overall economic strategy.

Some conversation has already been tabled in the House with respect to the endowment fund, the \$500 million and that whole area of initiatives in biosciences, health, and forestry, to name just a few of the areas of technology and research that we'll be exploring. Alberta can be very proud of its track record with the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, that was put in place decades ago and which has returned on its investment significantly

for Albertans from a cash point of view and helped to stabilize some of our financial picture.

More important than that is how it's given us the leg up on the biotech industry, on medical research, and carved out a name for Albertans, shared among its postsecondary institutions, shared among its leading teaching hospitals, shared among its colleagues who provide leadership in the areas of research. So we can only expect that a similar marketing strategy and the similar guidelines in this new area will return results for this province to the same extent if not greater.

What's very interesting in the Speech from the Throne is that if you follow it through, not only do we talk about the financial support for these research issues. What you get also is the sense of a recognition of our young people in the employment field, not simply as students but also as young people who are looking for creative ways to be employed, who have to take what they have learned through their education and transfer that into meaningful employment. So the competition for a good-quality employee who is well educated and has skills and assets that an organization can utilize is recognized in the expanded programs to help youth entering the workforce.

This is a very unique initiative to the province. It's been pilot-tested, as you may be aware, over the last couple of months in the larger centres. It's being expanded over the next few days in another announcement. We know that our young people are reaping the benefits of a quality education and an economic environment in which they can participate fully, and the good news about it is that the choices they're making about their employment are targeted and focused to meet their own needs. It's not the job creation model that comes out of Ottawa. It's very much focused on matching a young person's employment interests with the skill sets they have and supporting them to bridge those two issues if there is a gap.

We continue in our financial picture to review the cost of doing business in Alberta. There's no doubt that we have to remain competitive. That was one of the hallmarks of both our Premier and our Treasurer, that we will be the most competitive tax regime in the country. The fact that we have undertaken to review our business taxes to see the implications of that on our employment opportunities, on our market share, on our ability to attract head offices and corporate entities to the province is very important. The review of the provincial fees and charges is another way to look at the cost of doing business in the province and ensure that we continue to be competitive.

In addition to that, we are looking at the component of deregulation on a range of issues. It's consistent with what we've been doing since 1993: what the core business of government is, who should be doing it, and what regulation should be in place to ensure that whatever is provided in the private sector is well monitored and meets the expectations of Albertans on behalf of their government. I think that's an appropriate strategy to have in place, because deregulation is an option we have to move toward. We have different global initiatives, whether it's in energy, whether it's in electricity, whether it's in natural gas. We have a whole range of deregulatory components that have to be considered, and what you need from the government is an appropriate strategy and framework under which that can transpire and an appropriate oversight system so that as you move into that and as you implement, you are not off track.

So those are some of the initiatives that I find very, very important, that I want to highlight for a few minutes in this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne.

I also have a few comments I want to make with respect to Alberta seniors in that they have definitely been a part of the Alberta

advantage. They are contributors. They are supporters. They have, like every Albertan, carried the burden of the deficit reduction and debt elimination component. The ability to renew and review the issues that affect them as the aging population changes is something this government can be incredibly proud of. The seniors that I talked to and continue to receive information from have concerns not only about the quality of their health care but about their quality of life. Quite frankly, you can't separate the two.

There are so many other opportunities and options being made available to them that they need to have a comprehensive understanding of what this government is prepared to look at in terms of their needs: some of the work being done in the long-term care strategy, some of the work that's being done with respect to enhancing home care, the community supports and resources, the Alberta Seniors Games, some of the education communities that are developing. I have a large group at Viscount Bennett Centre in my community that is exploring opportunities for seniors, looking at family violence with respect to seniors.

When you look at issues with respect to fiscal dependency and how they will transfer wealth and a whole range of issues that seniors have asked us to look at in a comprehensive way, if any group of people will suffer if we do it in on a piecemeal basis, it would be seniors. So I'm pleased to see that they, too, are recognized specifically in the Speech from the Throne and that they are seen as being an integral part of our community and are quite prepared to assist us in shaping policy for the next generation of Albertans.

I want to just close my comments by making an observation with respect to the children at risk opportunities that are spoken to in the Speech from the Throne. Definitely, healthy families are at the core of our ability to be a healthy society. Some of those initiatives have been spoken to. The work that's been recently done with respect to the Children's Forum, the resiliency campaign through AADAC, some of the issues we're dealing with with respect to fetal alcohol syndrome and that whole early risk and early identification model will reap benefits. Those are not just financial benefits, although those will accrue, but the stability of our communities and of our society. When you have healthy children, it just goes without saying that you are building a very strong foundation.

In the work I have done on family violence, the unspoken tragedy of those domestic disputes deals with the fact that the children are the ones who have to witness and endure not only the horror of some of those circumstances but also the terrible uncertainty of being in shelters, having to flee, dependency on different adults for their economic support and support from an emotional point of view, and how damaged those children can be. Our programs must identify those children who are at risk and do everything possible to bring them in to some sense of normalcy. This is where the resiliency campaign that AADAC has undertaken has a very strong basis in research and support, because when given the needed support at a young age, some of these horrors that our young children have to endure can, fortunately, be turned around, and they can be brought into more productive and healthy lifestyles.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, I am very, very proud of the fact that we have a Speech from the Throne that addresses in a comprehensive way a range of issues meeting the needs of Albertans, that because of our monitoring of our financial situation we are able to deal holistically with a range of issues that Albertans expect us to. We are past the piecemeal stage of knee-jerk policy. We are looking at the impacts of the education system on a whole range of departments. We are looking at the success of science and technology across a whole

range of sectors. We are looking at public policy. We're looking at deregulation to maximize what we can offer to our community. We have the support of Albertans to continue to proceed in that direction.

So in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just encourage all members of the Legislature to share this document with their constituents. We get criticized some days that there is no plan, and I find that as kind of a shallow comment to make, because when you read the Speech from the Throne, you see the range of issues, the articulate way in which they are laid out, the expectations for implementation. That indeed is the plan, and it's a good one for Alberta.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered on February 17 by Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor, in the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature.

It was a pleasure to see the new Lieutenant Governor take her seat and radiate dignity and a sense of compassion and affection that she certainly symbolizes for all of us. I want to compliment her for her readiness to accept this important public responsibility after having spent long years of her life in different public positions serving the people of Alberta.

I've known the Lieutenant Governor for many years. I got to know her even more closely over the last three years during our frequent meetings on a variety of occasions. I've been most impressed, and I think we're all very fortunate to have her in the position she occupies today.

Mr. Speaker, this certainly is a throne speech which presents a sort of framework or a restatement, if you wish, of this government's commitments to Albertans with respect to the values that it subscribes to, the values that guide its programs, and it certainly sets the stage for the deliberations of the new century for Alberta. Alberta will soon be 100 years old, and certainly at the turn of the century it's important to re-examine, revisit some of the basic fundamental values and principles that undergird our society, our programs, our government institutions, and our policies.

Mr. Speaker, the speech, well written as it is, is as significant in what it says as in what it doesn't say. The silences, the absences are as important as what's been stated quite clearly and well.

I find on page 2 that baby Micheal was ushered into this Assembly to show our commitment to the children of Alberta, baby Micheal being the millennium child and representative of Alberta's millennium children. The reference that is made there is to the birthright of baby Micheal and his cohorts to "economic opportunity, personal freedom, clear choices, and safe communities."

All well and good, Mr. Speaker, but baby Micheal and others of his age need economic security before they can have economic opportunity. They need strong and caring families before they can learn to exercise personal freedom. They need to have secure schools. They need to have secure guarantees of nutrition and other things that are needed for growth as children before they can exercise clear choices, and certainly safe communities are the context in which our children have the right to grow. That certainly is a precondition.

So the statement on birthrights in my view skips certain other important conditions and important guarantees that we as adults, that we as the government of this province, that we as the Legislature of this province need to give to our children. I find that those are

missing here. What we find are sort of nice and pious announcements about economic opportunity and personal freedom and choice but nothing about the economic security that children can have only if their families have that, no guarantees of hot lunches for children who come to school every morning without being fed at home. I had hoped that at least in this new century, when we're trying to renew our commitment to our children, there would be some concrete indication of the way in which we will commit ourselves and our resources, which are available in abundance, to our children and particularly to those children who are in the greatest need. That, I find, is missing in this speech.

Mr. Speaker, again talking about the principles. The principles are very nicely stated here, but there is also a distinction that needs to be made between words and deeds. Any government, including this government, must be judged by not only what it says but what it does. That means its policies and its programs, and I'll come to those in a moment. The principles, the administration of the principles, will have to be judged in the course of the year to see how they translate into concrete policies, be those policies about education, about health, about hospitals, about seniors, about our children, about our environment, or about our economic and development policies in general.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn to these matters in some more concrete ways, but one or two other statements should preface those remarks. The throne speech in many ways is self-congratulatory in tone. There's not even a modest recognition of the problems we need to address in the area of health care: waiting lines, emergency room problems, and the general inability of the health care system to respond to the legitimate and pressing health needs of our population. It would have been nice if, along with some of the accomplishments and some of the statements about what we have achieved, there was some recognition that there are problems to be addressed so that we can then begin to have a public debate on how to address those problems.

8:50

There is a certain degree of smugness which seemed to pervade the pages of the throne speech. There's certainly a statement about our growing economy, increasing provincial revenues, but there is no commitment here, as I see it, to achieving a reasonably shared prosperity. The economy may be prosperous, but there have been lots of people who are poor. We know that persistent poverty, endemic poverty, is a major problem, a major challenge that we as Albertans must address together and not leave it to individuals who suffer from the conditions of poverty to be responsible all by themselves for their poverty. So there is this lack of commitment to reasonably shared prosperity as a provincial goal, and that's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, particularly in light of the health of the economy, the general wealth that's being created in the province. The problems are with its distribution, where this wealth ends up.

Turning to some specific themes, Mr. Speaker. The Speech from the Throne is not by and large a forward-looking document, despite all the feel-good rhetoric. The initiatives in the throne speech are throwbacks to the past bent on destroying the valuable social institutions Albertans have worked so hard to build. Public health care, public education, labour rights, and fair taxation: all are on the chopping block in this government's 21st century Alberta.

The government likes to brag about all the money being put back into health care. I urge the government not to waste this money on costly privatization experiments. There is a real danger that if this government proceeds with the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals and then authorizes the RHAs to contract out to these private, for-profit hospitals, this is precisely what will happen: we

will waste public funds without achieving the results that we are promised will accrue to us if we move in this direction.

The evidence from Alberta and elsewhere is overwhelming. Private, for-profit hospitals cost more and deliver less. The government would get a bigger bang for its health care bucks if they went into public facilities rather than being drained away by those looking to profit from our health care system.

Here I want to very quickly draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the conclusions of an important report just released three weeks ago from the University of Alberta, from the Parkland Institute. The title of the report is *Private Profit or Public Good*. It poses certain questions related to the government's proposed initiative and comes up with the following answers.

1. Are private hospitals cheaper and more efficient than public ones? No. Almost invariably they are more expensive and less efficient.
2. Do market forces work with health care like they do with products such as food and consumer goods? No. Health care is widely regarded by economists as a case of 'market failure.'
3. Will for-profit health care raise costs to the public system? Yes. The inefficiencies, conflicts of interest, and other problems inevitable in for-profit medicine drive up the costs of the public system.
4. What effect will private hospitals and surgical clinics have on waiting lists? They will likely make them longer. Public health care systems are more efficient than private ones, and dollar for dollar, the more efficient system will have the shortest waiting lists. Increasing the flow of funds to the private system can actually lengthen waiting lists if those funds could otherwise have gone to the public system, because an efficient provider is being replaced by an inefficient one. Alberta's experience with cataract surgery confirms this

I could go on, but time is limited. Let me quickly move on to some other issues here.

If privatization were the way to go, the U.S. would have the least expensive health care system in the world. We all know the opposite is the case. The U.S. has by far the most expensive health care system in the world, with per capita health care costs 50 percent higher than those in any other western industrialized country. Does the U.S. at least have healthier citizens? The answer again is no. By every major health indicator, the U.S. ranks near the bottom of the heap among the industrialized countries. What the U.S. does have is the most unequal health care system, where access is determined by ability to pay and more than 40 million people, close to one and a half times the population of Canada, at any given time have no access to health care insurance. Will the government's scheme to legalize private, for-profit health care reduce waiting lists? Again the answer is a clear no.

A recent survey by the Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, has clearly shown this. They recently studied waiting lists for cataract surgery in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. In Calgary the surgery is all done in private clinics, and the waiting times are the longest. The next longest waiting time is in Edmonton. Lethbridge, which has all cataract surgeries done in the public system, has the shortest waiting list. If the government scheme will cost more and won't reduce waiting times, why are we still pressing ahead? It's a good question and one that many Conservatives who value our public health care system are asking as well. The only explanation I can find is that they're caving in to the pressure from a few squeaky-wheel private business interests.

Earlier this week I made public information about the murky world of private, for-profit health care. The information shows two things: one, that these special interests are fierce lobbyists, and second, that the only way they can make a profit is by feeding off our public health care system.

What do we need? The New Democrats propose an outright ban on private, for-profit hospitals. Bill 201, which unfortunately didn't come before this House, was an attempt to do precisely that. I would invite Albertans to look at that bill to see that there is an alternative, a better alternative than the one that's being proposed from the government side. We haven't had them in the past, and we don't need them in the future.

The New Democrats also advocate an independent cost-benefit analysis of existing day surgery contracts. If, as expected, the study shows that contracting out day surgery costs more and delivers less, tighter controls would be imposed.

A progressive tax system is the hallmark of a civilized society, Mr. Speaker. The flat tax that the government is proposing to legislate during this session of the Legislative Assembly threatens this. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member. We appear to have several people who want to enter into debate on the Speech from the Throne, and we would invite them to take their turn. Right now it is the turn of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you will give me an extra minute as a result of this interruption.

The government's proposed flat tax massively shifts the tax burden from the wealthy onto the middle class. The flat tax is an issue which has not received the scrutiny it deserves. The fact is that the only reason the government may be able to get away with it is because Alberta's fiscal good fortune has allowed the government to hide the regressive redistributed effects of the flat tax behind other tax cuts. The fact remains that those with yearly incomes above \$100,000 will receive a financial windfall while middle-class earners will receive little or no benefit. A much fairer way of providing a comparable amount of tax relief would be to abolish costly and inefficient health care premiums. This would save every Alberta family, regardless of income, \$816 dollars a year.

The Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, says that the government will improve financial assistance to postsecondary students. Providing a little bit of relief for student debt loads is a clear example of treating the symptoms rather than the underlying cause. The underlying cause is skyrocketing tuition fees guaranteed by this government. So what we need to do is roll back the tuition fees, change the base funding formula for the universities and colleges so that they get larger financial assistance from the government so that the universities and colleges can move to reduce tuition fees and roll them back.

9:00

Treating the symptoms rather than the underlying causes also applies to the children's initiatives from the throne speech. As I mentioned before, there are lots of children living in poverty. They need immediate action. Every year lost in poverty by a child is a year that cannot be recovered, and it does irreversible damage to that child. Therefore, we need immediate action, and nothing is promised in this throne speech.

It also fails the homeless. Instead of directing dollars to community agencies to build affordable housing, the government keeps looking for private-sector solutions in an area where there's a clear-cut case of market failure. The real estate market serves 80 percent of the housing market well but not the bottom 20 percent.

Without government leadership and involvement the ranks of Alberta's homeless will continue to grow.

The throne speech fails Alberta's environment, Mr. Speaker. There seems to be a clear retreat by this government on the environmental front. Bill 15 was withdrawn from the last sitting of the Legislature. There's no indication here that the government is willing to take any legislative measures to protect our special places and environmentally sensitive areas in the province or to do something about gas flaring, which is a major problem.

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. Are there any positives in this throne speech? Yes, if you search hard enough for them. The legislation to set up the science and technology endowment seems positive and so is the legislation to return sacred artifacts to First Nations communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I intend to speak for a very brief time and address some of the concerns that have been mentioned by the hon. members speaking opposite, specifically the last speaker, from Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Speaker, within the throne speech there is a reference not only to the forum but to the task force for children at risk. There is a reference to the reviews that are under way for both the caseloads and also the other things that we are doing for children. Further, there are references, I know, from other colleagues about supports for children. Because so many times we think the sky is falling on the children of Alberta, I want to quote from the Canadian Council on Social Development, who have the following observations as they portray children and youth. They state in fact that "most children live in two-parent families," that "more than half of all Aboriginal people in Canada are children and youth," and that "more young Canadians live in families that speak a language other than English or French." They finally talk about what contributes to child and youth well-being.

Mr. Speaker, here is the point that I want to stress most of all. The best contributor to a child and to the welfare of youth, the best possible contributor is the parent. In fact, government, with their Children's Services ministry and with any other positive support mechanism, does not tend to take the place of a good parent.

"Family life is positive for most children" in Canada. "More families are having trouble balancing their work and family responsibilities." Herein, Mr. Speaker, from this quote, I would contend, lie some of the social difficulties we have today.

More youth are delaying leaving home . . .

Only one-third of Canadians say their financial situation has improved over the past two or three years . . .

Child poverty rates remain high

not only in Alberta but elsewhere. In fact, if there's any consolation, over the last two years we have improved better than most other provinces in decreasing child poverty. However, it does remain on the incline.

Children and youth are safer from crime . . .

Fewer youth are killed in car crashes . . .

Dangerous chemicals in food, air and water still pose poorly measured risks to Canadian children.

So it's not all bright, Mr. Speaker, but clearly it's no worse in Alberta than it is in other places.

The majority of young teens feel safe [at home and] at school most of the time . . .

Public spending on education rose by about 3% between 1992 and 1996, but it fell as a proportion of gross nation product.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the record in Alberta in public education – and I remember when my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and I were similarly involved as trustees.

We had probably quite a different environment than we have today, but the technological influences today, I think, have grown to provide even a more enhanced education than we had then.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, infant mortality rates continue to fall, and in Alberta we show the highest rate across Canada for breast-feeding, one of the positive indicators of healthy starts for children. While more teens are smoking and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases among teens is worrisome, throughout our review at the forum and also from the Task Force on Children at Risk, we are finding what seems to be true across Canada, that in fact youth crime rates are declining and more is being done by parents on behalf of their children, not only low-income parents but all parents.

Mr. Speaker, so much of what has been stated in this Assembly about children over the past two and a half years in my experience sounds as if Alberta is neglecting the children, but quite the opposite is true. In closing I want to just give credit to two models. The child help model in the city of Edmonton, developed by the local police, and the community conferencing model in the city of Calgary will, I think, gain great benefits by co-ordinating police, volunteers, medical personnel, directors of social services, mental health, and prosecutors together in assisting children.

Mr. Speaker, raising a child takes a village. It takes the commitment of parents, teachers, child welfare workers, and indeed the government. If we are to provide fully integrated teams with a community focus, we will lend our support, our advocacy to those groups, and I am very proud indeed of the references in the throne speech to what this government will do for children.

On that note, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 1 Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start my comments by saying that knowledge is our most important renewable resource. Today as I proudly move second reading of Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act, this government, our government, my government . . .

MS HALEY: Mine too.

DR. TAYLOR: . . . and the member opposite's here too, makes a very clear statement to Albertans and to the rest of the country and indeed the rest of the world. I'm just going to take a few minutes, Mr. Speaker, because this really is a momentous occasion. We have to realize that this is Bill 1 in the new millennium, the first bill of a new millennium, the first bill of the year 2000.

Alberta is the home of innovation. Yes, we are the home of innovation, and that is because Albertans are not afraid of challenges. We embrace challenges. We do not see obstacles but opportunities. From my own personal experience—and I know other members were in business during the 1980s, and there were many challenges during the 1980s, but if we saw those, as we did in our own personal businesses, as opportunities, we survived. Others survived because they didn't see the glass half empty; they saw the glass half full.

Albertans are bold entrepreneurs. We are forward thinking, and we are innovative. This Bill 1 of the new millennium is another example of Alberta as a trendsetting province. Alberta is a national leader, Mr. Speaker, in policy and in good government, and I can tell you that we are the envy of other people across this country and across the world. In fact, once we announced what Bill 1 would be, once we announced the \$500 million heritage foundation for science and engineering research, colleagues from universities were telling me that they had their colleagues from around North America phoning them and saying: "Is this really true? Is this really happening?" So we are the envy, Mr. Speaker.

9:10

With the launch of Bill 1 we embark as Albertans, as a government on another bold plan which will really launch Alberta into the forefront of global knowledge. It will launch us into the knowledge-based economy. What this does is build on our most important renewable resource, as I've said, which is knowledge, and knowledge is critical to our success in the new century.

Most certainly my caucus colleagues and I have worked hard to find ways to build on our strong foundation, to capitalize on the potential of the new millennium, to capitalize on the young people, provide opportunities for the young people in the province. To the Premier and to all my colleagues here I say sincerely: thank you for your support over this last period of time when we've been working on this.

Other individuals—and I want to mention just a few, and there are many of them. You know, you're not supposed to mention names, Mr. Speaker, and I know I'll probably miss a few, but I want to mention a few names that have been influential and have been a great help in developing this fund and also encouraging the government to make it Bill 1.

First of all is Dr. Bob Church. He's the chairman of the Alberta Science and Research Authority. He is a constituent of the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and is a great supporter of the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. Bob is truly a tireless champion of R and D in Alberta. Bob has been involved with science and research a long time. He's a former associate dean of medicine at the University of Calgary. He's a world-recognized figure in the area of medical research. He presently ranches just outside Airdrie—he's gone back to his roots—but is still intimately involved with science and research in this province. So to Bob I say thank you. I can tell you that he has been tremendously influential, influential on me. I respect Bob's advice. Bob, my cowboy hat is off to you. And for those of you who haven't seen me in a cowboy hat, I do wear one. You are going to have to come down to my constituency to see me wear my cowboy hat.

MS HALEY: I live for that, you know.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I see members are saying that they live for it, so by all means come and join me.

Another person that has been influential in this process is Eric Newell, president of Syncrude. Of course, we all know Syncrude is a strong Alberta company which has directly benefited from Alberta's investment in R and D. He's also the chair of the board of governors of the University of Alberta. He recognized early on the merits of a foundation such as this. He was and continues to be a strong advocate, and I very much appreciate Eric's support and help in promoting this fund.

Adding to really a large group of people are some others: university presidents and vice-presidents Rod Fraser, Terry White, Howard Tennant, Roger Smith, Len Bruton, and Sheamus O'Shea.

I say thank you to all of them for pursuing a brighter future for Alberta's youth.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there are others, and I won't mention — one I don't want to forget because he's sitting in the gallery is my executive assistant, Ken Faulkner. Ken has been very helpful and a tireless worker, and I know other ministers would desire an executive assistant such as this. I don't want to say too much in case they try and recruit him, but Ken has been very valuable and a very wise adviser.

To the rest of the people that have been involved in helping us promote this fund whose names I haven't mentioned, on behalf of my colleagues and all Albertans, on behalf of the youth of Alberta because they are the future of Alberta, I say thank you. In summary, Mr. Speaker, through their support and encouragement Bill 1 was born.

To fully appreciate the effects that Bill 1 will have on Alberta, I think we have to take a very brief look, Mr. Speaker, at the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, because Bill 1 and the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research model AHFMR — somehow, Mr. Speaker, AHFMR sounds better than AHFSER. We've got to think of a better acronym. Perhaps it can be AFSEER. So I'll refer to AFSEER.

Now, I won't go into a detailed history of AHFMR, but I will read a letter from Mr. Al Libin, who is a former chair of AHFMR. He was the chair of AHFMR for 10 years. Al says in his letter:

When I was appointed the AHFMR Board Chairman in 1990, I recall my amazement at what the Foundation had accomplished in just 10 [previous] years. With the creation of AHFMR in 1980, it was possible for bright young scientists, both Alberta born and from around the globe, to realize their dreams and ideas with long-term Heritage support. In a very short time, Alberta could boast of a top-flight research community that was increasingly lauded in national and international research circles. When my tenure began, it was clear that Alberta had yet another natural resource that was, and is, envied throughout the nation: a superlative repository of scientific brainpower.

Our province truly has a presence as a centre of research excellence in the scientific world. That this has been achieved through AHFMR's direct and indirect contributions to biomedical and health research successes, many of which have resonated throughout the world, is for me, as outgoing chairman of AHFMR, a source of immense pride and satisfaction.

That's just a quote from Al's letter.

I have a number of other quotes I could read, but I just want to read one from Susan Jensen. She's the professor and chair, department of biological sciences at the University of Alberta. Susan says in her letter to the Premier:

I recognize and appreciate that a very large sum of money is involved, and that you could no doubt have won greater political rewards by spending it on more visible programs. It is a credit to your commitment to the long term well being of Alberta and of Albertans that you have chosen to spend the money in this way.

I think that summarizes for me what the fund is all about.

This fund, like the AHFMR fund, like our science and research fund, will leverage other dollars from outside, and it will create great scientific advancements. To mention just two from the AHFMR, I'm sure all of you remember that last summer we had Patrick Lee at the University of Calgary with his discovery of the reovirus, a virus that can eat cancer. Folks, this virus is going into human trials this year. Now, can you imagine that difference if this actually works in human trials. That we have a virus that can cure cancer, can you imagine what that means to the world? It's a huge accomplishment, a huge endeavour. That was funded by the AHFMR, and that's the kind of thing that will be funded by AFSEER.

One other example I'll mention is Dr. Lorne Tyrrell. Some of you

may know Lorne. He's the dean of Medicine. Lorne has the first and only treatment, cure if you wish, for hepatitis B in the world. This product came on the market this year. It is a fascinating story to listen to Lorne talk about how he started with small research dollars. He had his parents on his parents' farm looking after the ducks he was using for research experiments, and Lorne and his wife and kids would go out to the farm every Saturday and clean duck cages. I mean, it is an amazing, fascinating story to listen to Lorne Tyrrell talk about this. You can see I'm getting excited about it, because I've listened to him. I'm excited about his story.

That research was accomplished through funding by AHFMR. Without AHFMR Lorne Tyrrell would not be in Alberta, the cure for hepatitis B would not be an Alberta cure, and Glaxo Wellcome, one of the biggest drug companies in the world, would not be in Alberta funding today Lorne Tyrrell's research and funding his research on hepatitis C. There is no cure for hepatitis C. Will Lorne discover it? I have absolute faith that he will. It'll take him some time but he will have a model, and there are some exciting things happening with hepatitis C. Once again, funding through AHFMR.

From 1996 to 1999 AHFMR funded \$108,277,772 worth of research. Just think of that: in three years over \$100 million funding for medical research. That's the kind of thing the science and engineering fund will talk about.

9:20

In fact, just today I was talking about this fund to a *Globe and Mail* reporter writing an article that she says will appear in the *Globe* probably this weekend, and when I explained some of the things we were thinking about as a government, the direction we were going as a government, her comment was, "Wow, I can't believe it." So we will be recognized as a leader in North America, Mr. Speaker, for the establishment of this fund.

In conclusion, there are just a couple of comments, and I'm going to read them again. One is, once again, Al Libin's comments. Al, as you know and I've already indicated, was the chairman of AHFMR for 10 years, and he said:

The growth in programs has been made possible by the parallel growth of the endowment. At March 31, 1999, the endowment from which grants and awards are made by AHFMR stood just below \$1 billion. That endowment, and the more than \$570 million invested in research excellence over the years . . .

Now, you'll remember, Mr. Speaker, that this fund started at \$300 million. It is now worth a billion, and they've invested more than \$570 million.

. . . exemplifies the sound stewardship of the Board of Trustees and the responsible investment management of Alberta Treasury. It is a perpetual resource for excellence in biomedical and health research in our province for our children and their children

And that's what this is about, a source of research excellence for my children, my grandchildren, your children, your grandchildren. That's what this is about.

I'd like to quote just for interest's sake as well from *Hansard*, November 9, 1979. This was when AHFMR was brought in. I think Premier Lougheed's comments are very valuable. In concluding his comments, he said:

Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, over the decades we've had a brain drain to the United States. I think we're changing a fair number of things in Canada. Certainly, that can get us into a number of other subjects as well, as to what we're changing.

The very same could be said today.

But one thing we are also starting to change is that whole concept of the brain drain to the United States. I think one of the very exciting possibilities I'll look back on, in terms of presenting this Bill to the Legislature, is that in a very clear and specific way it may reverse that, to the benefit of this country as well as to this province.

I believe that in medical research, Mr. Speaker – my comments now – we have a brain gain, and there's good evidence of that. I believe that once we do this fund, we will have a brain gain in science and engineering research.

Premier Lougheed goes on to say:

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude with my final references to the Bill. I've said what it's not. It is not a supplementary funding for universities, it's not to displace voluntary fund-raising organization efforts, and it's not to supplement the traditional funding available to researchers in Canada from the Medical Research Council and other government departments.

But what it is is very significant. It will be a major supplement to Alberta in making this a brain centre in Canada. I believe it will attract young Albertans into lifetime research careers in science. It will provide both the continuity and security so necessary for those researchers, with the lack of interference from government or the Legislature. It [will] enhance the quality of life of people everywhere. And it will in time, I hope and I believe, make Alberta an outstanding medical research centre in the world.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Premier Lougheed was right. His predictions of 20 years ago have come true. Alberta is an outstanding medical research centre in the world. We will become an outstanding centre for research in science and engineering in the world because of this fund, because of the future vision of this government, because of the commitment to this.

As Professor Susan said in her letter, we could have spent money on "more visible programs", short-term programs that might have reaped more political gains. But this shows us, Mr. Speaker, the future. This shows us the commitment of my government, of Albertans' government, to our children, to our grandchildren, and it is absolutely essential for our future.

One further comment I'll read is from the Leader of the Opposition at the time, Mr. R. Clark, and I'm sure most of us know him. Once again, this is in *Hansard*, November 9, 1979.

Mr. Speaker, in taking part in the debate on second reading of Bill 62, The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act, I want to say at the outset that it's the intention of my colleagues and me to support the Bill in second reading.

That was the opposition at the time. I trust the opposition at this time will be able to say exactly the same thing.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. I listened with interest to the remarks of the minister, aware that at second reading we're expected to speak to the principles of the bill. Although he didn't speak to the principles of the bill, he spoke with such enthusiasm that it was hard not to gain a little bit of the kind of hard work and the kind of consideration that has gone into putting Bill 1 in place.

I'm pleased to speak in favour of Bill 1 and to speak for the critic for Innovation and Science, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and to speak for our caucus. We will certainly be pleased to support this bill. The critic's advice to me when he was talking about this evening's presentation was: let's pass it and let's pass it now, as quickly as it can be done. That doesn't mean that he doesn't have a small amendment that he would like to see put forward when the bill comes to committee, but certainly there's great enthusiasm on this side of the House for it.

I think that because it is an important bill, we have the obligation to look at the principles and to make sure that those principles are

clear. Some of them of course are very self-evident from the text of the bill. One of the major principles, of course, is that the foundation will engage in a wide range of activities in supporting "a balanced long-term program of science and engineering research." That's very important: that it be balanced, that it be long-ranged, and that it focus on engineering research. That's a principle that I think is worth reiterating, because there are parts of the world where science research has been used by governments for ends that were not worthy of the human race. So the principle that this be balanced.

A further principle: that the new knowledge should improve our economy, our communities, and our environment. When you couple those two principles together, I think we have the assurance that the activities of this foundation are going to be those that all Albertans will be proud of and all Albertans and Canadians will benefit from.

The focus is rightfully on the discovery and the application of new knowledge. I've spoken before in the Chamber, and I know from the members, the personnel that the minister listed who have been involved in the creation of the fund and have given the minister advice, that there is a concern that between discovery and – basic research is not the word they use anymore; they don't use "basic research"; there's a new name for it – applied research, there's a balance and that all research, the kind of necessary research that has to go on that doesn't always have a gizmo in mind at the end of the project, those kinds of serendipitous things that happen in research are going to be allowed to happen under the auspices of this fund. So, again, an important principle is that it's going to focus on the discovery of the new and the applications so that they are separated out of knowledge.

9:30

The minister talked about the very successful Alberta heritage fund for medical research and that that model, that has been so very, very successful, is the model that is being used for science and engineering. Again, it assures us that the fund will be successful, that the heritage fund for medical research has set a precedent in the province for research and endowment funds.

Another principle is that the fund will be closely linked to our advanced education institutions and that it's not going to be used by the government in terms of funding of research, looking at the research of those institutions and cutting back or judging the kind of research money that they'll be given based on what is happening for this endowment fund. I think that's as it should be. This is a stand-alone, independent fund, but it's going to be rooted in our postsecondary institutions.

The principle that there shall be an international review panel of course is basic to quality research, and the manner in which that is set forth in the bill makes it abundantly clear how important this component of the research that's conducted will be. It's really the only guarantee of quality of research when we know that it's being overseen, being judged, being reviewed by the best minds in the world and that those minds are drawn from the international community.

A further principle is that the fund will publicly report. It's only as should be expected that there's going to be close monitoring and that there's going to be a very careful accounting of the activities of the fund. That's a principle that, again, all Albertans would expect.

There are a number of other principles that could be teased out of the bill, Mr. Speaker, but I think all in all we're delighted that the bill is here. I think our critic would like to take some credit because he has raised in budget debates in past years the need for funds such as this and was good enough to supply me copies of *Hansard* giving proof of that claim. But it doesn't really matter where the ideas came from. It's important that it's here and that it's in front of the

Assembly and that it's going to have the wholehearted support of both sides of the House.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech
(continued)

[Adjourned debate February 23: Ms Evans]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was interesting to me to see the government, through the agency of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, hark back to the first Lieutenant Governor of the province and quote with apparent approval a statement that had been made by the first Liberal government of this province.

I always appreciate historical perspective, but actually I was thinking of going a little further back. I think we might sooner take instruction from Girolamo Savonarola. That's about 500 years earlier. Mr. Savonarola was the courageous man who more than 500 years ago challenged the vices and the excesses of Pope Alexander VI. Savonarola was a Dominican friar who distinguished himself for his eloquent critique of the government of the day. He ended up being burned at the stake in 1498 so paid the price of his convictions.

The reason I think of Mr. Savonarola is that earlier this year the mayor of Calgary, Al Duerr – and, I might mention, the most popular mayor the city has ever had – delivered at a downtown Rotary club . . . [interjections] The numbers, Mr. Speaker, speak for themselves. It may be that some from outside the city may think that someone else succeeded in winning with the biggest plurality of any mayor and may not realize that in fact Mr. Duerr holds that special acknowledgment.

I think my point, though, is this: when Mayor Duerr was delivering his state of the city speech to the downtown Rotary club earlier in 2000, he talked about something that I think hearkened back to the days of Mr. Savonarola. He talked about wanting Calgary to be an ethical city. I thought that was really interesting and really instructive because at a time when we're so focused on jobs and money and balanced budgets, how refreshing to have the mayor of one of the two largest cities in the province talk about the importance of striving to be an ethical community. In fact, I'd mentioned today that the Sheldon M. Chumir foundation has hired an executive director, Dr. Hanen. It's a foundation that's looking to heighten the focus on ethics in our communities and in public affairs.

So when I come to the throne speech, I guess I'm looking to find some resonance, something in this throne speech that Mr. Savonarola would have been impressed with. Is there even a faint echo of Mayor Duerr's call for an ethical community? To be fair to the government, we see some glimmers. On page 3 of the throne speech we see a reference to "equity, which includes fairness for all citizens and respect for diversity of culture, age, gender, and other characteristics." This is cited as being one of the governing principles of the province.

Ironically, the first two bills we deal with in the Legislative Assembly are Bill 202, one to invoke the notwithstanding clause, and Bill 204, a bill specifically targeted to Hutterite colonies in southern Alberta. One can say they're private members' bills, but

when we see that that's the way we're starting out with the legislation we first look at, I have some problems with that.

Persons with developmental disabilities. You know, there's a large community of the most vulnerable men and women in this province, and what we find in the throne speech is that we're going to follow up on the review of the persons with developmental disabilities program to strengthen support for Albertans with developmental disabilities.

Has nobody cottoned on yet, Mr. Speaker, that the biggest part of the problem are the PDD boards? When the chairman of the Calgary PDD board left and there was some tension between Mr. Sparrow and the provincial PDD board and the Calgary PDD board, you know who advertised for the new chair of the Calgary board? It was the provincial board.

Mr. Speaker, we know the amount of money that has gone into the PDD boards. We know it certainly isn't going into the agencies and the services and the support for persons with developmental disabilities. It was disappointing. We not only have not seen the report that had been promised for the beginning of the year, but the Minister of Health and Wellness still has not stood up in this House and tabled that report, so that is a frustration.

9:40

We see a glimmer of an ethical consideration, I suppose. There's a reference to homelessness on page 9, and the suggestion is that "the government will work with public and private partners." I see that the Minister of Municipal Affairs was here speaking of this a moment ago. The difficulty is this. When this government talks about partnerships, Mr. Speaker, usually what it means is that we want somebody else to do the work and take the responsibility and put up the dough; the province will be there to pat you on the back. The federal government came along, and in no small measure due to the diligent work from the Member for Calgary-Bow, who has worked very diligently on the homeless situation in Calgary, the federal government has put a substantial amount of money available to deal with homelessness in the city of Calgary.

AN HON. MEMBER: Was that Jane Stewart?

MR. DICKSON: Oh ho. We have the Minister of Community Development, who didn't have the opportunity that the Member for Calgary-Bow and I did to go to McDougall Centre. The Hon. Claudette Bradshaw was there, and she was roundly applauded by the agencies, Mr. Minister, through the Speaker, that are providing services to the homeless people in Calgary. Now, the minister may think he knows better than the people representing CUPS and the Booth Centre and the Mustard Seed. Maybe the minister knows something those people don't, but they were delighted with the commitment of the federal government.

So what do we see here? We hear some talk about partnership, which, as I've suggested before, is usually fiscal off-loading. Where's the financial commitment from this province to address the number of homeless people in the city of Calgary?

You know, just the other day there was a little announcement in one of the Calgary daily newspapers, and it talked about yet another homeless person dying on the streets in Calgary. The Minister of Community Development may not know that last year we had about 12 people who died, 12 homeless people who died on the streets of downtown Calgary. I was disappointed to see an announcement of this other death just a matter of days ago. One person dying on the streets of this province is too many, and I'd want that minister to work as hard as his colleague from Calgary-Bow is to do something about it. Simply empty talk, Mr. Speaker, about working with private and public partners doesn't do it.

As June Callwood said when she was at the housing conference . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Face the chair.

MR. DICKSON: I can look anywhere I want as long as I'm directing my comments through the Speaker, Mr. Speaker.

I think that when June Callwood two years ago came to the housing conference in this city, she made the observation after hearing the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the private sector will provide low-cost affordable housing when pigs can fly. When pigs can fly, Mr. Speaker. I think June Callwood is absolutely bang on. I think she's right. What we look for in the throne speech is something more than simply vague talk about partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate. The Minister of Children's Services, formerly Municipal Affairs, has said that there's some good news going on, and we see that "the mandate of the office of the Children's Advocate will be reviewed to make sure the voices of vulnerable children and youth are heard." You know, where was this minister when the Dignity Foundation in this province held a conference two years ago off Macleod Trail in Calgary? They brought in the Children's Advocate from Saskatchewan and the Children's Advocate from British Columbia, and they told us what had to be done. What they told us was that we need a Children's Advocate office that's independent of the Legislative Assembly, much like the Ombudsman and the Auditor General. They told us that you need the Children's Advocate office to be able to do what the Saskatchewan office can do, which is investigate children in crisis whether they're in the care of the province or not. If you've got poor children in poor health, why does it matter that they're not a ward of the province, that it's not a child welfare file? Surely that should be the kind of thing this government is dealing with.

So I'm disappointed to see a review to make sure the voices are heard. I don't remember seeing one of those 20 Calgary MLAs or the minister at the Dignity Foundation meeting. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood was at it. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was there. There was good advice. We don't have to have a review. What we need is a commitment to legislative change and a commitment to make the office of the Children's Advocate work, full stop.

Mr. Speaker, I see reference here to the Alberta seniors' benefit program. Well, I have a heck of a lot of senior constituents in Calgary-Buffalo, and the single message that they would want me, I think, to communicate to my government and their government is: let's address the cutoff thresholds. Instead of simply putting more money in the special-needs assistance fund, not necessarily a bad thing, surely the more fundamental kind of reworking that has to happen is re-evaluate what are unrealistic and unfair and punitive cutoffs.

Now, the minister of intergovernmental affairs I know knows what I'm talking about, because when she was Minister of Community Development, she met with those seniors' groups at the Kerby Centre and the Golden Age Club and the Renfrew Sixty Plus Club. She knows what those people told her, and I'm hoping that she carried that message back to cabinet. I'm sure she did, and unfortunately there's no indication of that in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker.

Surely the province that we build for baby Micheal Tustin has got to be something more than high-bandwidth Internet access. It has to be something more than a competitive tax regime, and it surely must be something more than new roads and infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, when I look for some of the other concerns that my

constituents have, I think of the Broda report and the talk about what's coming from that. I also look and recognize that when it comes to standards, this province is probably one of the most poorly served provinces in all of Canada in terms of standards and regulations.

DR. WEST: That's a bunch of bunk.

MR. DICKSON: I'm looking forward to the debate later when we hear from the government defence. Mr. Speaker, I can't control the low outrage threshold of the minister of energy.

The concern I've got, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to address standards. We don't need more studies. Ontario has done a terrific job in terms of having some of the finest standards for nursing homes anywhere in Canada. We could replicate some of those in a flash, and we'd be vastly better served than we are right now.

In terms of homelessness there's still a concern. The biggest single issue throughout 1999 in Calgary-Buffalo was finding safe, affordable housing. The vacancy rate in Calgary forecast for 2000 is 2.3 percent, which is much better than 0.5 percent and 0.6 percent in 1996-1997. But, you know, we've got a real problem. In fact, there were 4,118 multifamily units started between October 1998 and October 1999. Only 234 units were slated for the rental market, and 142 of those were for a seniors' lodge project. Nobody is building affordable accommodation in downtown Calgary. It's a problem when I hear from people in Calgary-Varsity, from that seniors' complex just across from Market Mall. They're worried about it. They want to see that concern addressed in this throne speech by this government in this session.

Mr. Speaker, we see some talk here about efficiency of the courts, and this is always an area of particular interest to me. We're going to increase the efficiency of Alberta's courts. Maybe we could start with public legal education. You know, in this province the government provides virtually no support for public legal education. It comes from the Alberta Law Foundation, that the government has nothing to do with. I don't think a nickel comes from the Minister of Justice. I stand to be corrected on this, but I don't ever remember in any of the budget estimates where I asked what this province is doing in terms of empowering citizens to be able to use and access their own court system . . .

DR. WEST: Twenty-two million in legal aid, and you drew on the pot when you were in private business.

9:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Minister of Resource Development is reminded that he'll have an opportunity.

DR. WEST: He asked the question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, and it's a rhetorical question, and you're not the Minister of Justice either.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you know what's so frustrating? Before you worry about lawyers, if the Minister of Energy can appreciate it, if we empowered citizens by giving them more information about their legal processes, about their legal system, maybe they wouldn't always require a lawyer. Maybe citizens would be able to find remedies that they could utilize themselves. That's what we need in this province.

DR. WEST: Over 5,400 of them. Can't you get a job?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Order. Hon. minister, perhaps you would like to go outside and have a coffee and regain your composure. Then we can hear the rest of this speech.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, that's one down and 34 more to go.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to carry on. I'm happy to see on page 5 that the Alberta government wants us to be a leader in information technology. Well, that's wonderful. I do and my constituents want to be as well, but why is it that while we want to be leaders in terms of technology, we are at the end of the line when it comes to protecting the privacy of citizens? You know, with Bill C-6 in front of the House of Commons currently, other provinces have said that this is going to have a big, big impact on every business in Canada. In B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario they're holding public hearings. The government is going out and saying to citizens: as we embark on a high-tech program in each one of those jurisdictions, we want to involve citizens of those provinces to be current.

Well, I've been asking for three years, Mr. Speaker, when we're going to do something, and each time I'm told that we're doing some internal consultation, probably another one of those darn focus groups that's so easy to manage and so easy to control. We're not letting Albertans in, and that's what we have to do. So if we want those high-skilled, high-paid jobs from the kind of technological world our children are coming into, that means we've got to make investments, not only respecting privacy and building popular support for that technology but a huge investment in education.

The most positive thing in the throne speech is the \$500 million

endowment for research. I think that's an extremely positive item in the budget.

MR. JONSON: In the throne speech.

MR. DICKSON: In the throne speech. I'm sorry. Maybe there'll be some follow-up in the budget too, Minister of Health and Wellness.

But that's something I'm happy to applaud and encourage.

The other observation I'd make as my time runs out is that we're concluding our review of provincial fees and charges, and I still marvel – I absolutely marvel – at how the government can take something they've been forced to do kicking and screaming by the courts of this country and somehow turn it into a claim that this is some farsighted kind of revenue re-evaluation. The only reason this happened was because the Supreme Court in the Eurig decision left this province absolutely no alternative. There's a message there to the Minister of Justice through the Speaker that maybe we should try and for once get ahead of the locomotive. Maybe we should do a little better job in this province understanding the trends and issues that are coming and try to head them off instead of always reacting after the fact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

