

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 11, 2001** 8:00 p.m.  
 Date: 01/04/11  
 [The Speaker in the chair]

### head: **Government Motions**

#### **Easter Recess**

5. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:  
 Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 12, 2001, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned for three sitting days, until Monday, April 23, 2001, at 1:30 p.m.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

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

Mrs. Tarchuk 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.

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

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and privilege to rise this evening and reply to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the constituents of Banff-Cochrane. I am also very proud to move acceptance of the throne speech presented by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor opening the First Session of the 25th Alberta Legislature on behalf of our hon. Premier, my caucus colleagues, and our government.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is one of the more important documents that we as members of the Legislature address in this House. It highlights our government's plan for the coming year and reflects the hopes and dreams of Albertans. Our job is to turn these hopes and dreams into reality.

As mentioned in the speech, we are beginning a new session with a new group of legislators recently chosen by Albertans to represent them in this Chamber. We have been given a solemn responsibility and a duty to honour the trust that has been placed upon us by Albertans, and yesterday we were cautioned to respect that trust and to remember that first and foremost we are here in service to the people of this province. I believe we should seriously heed this advice, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate each and every member of the Legislature and sincerely wish them well in carrying out their duties. Regardless of party affiliation we all love this province and are committed to its success and its betterment. While our future is full of challenges, it is also full of opportunities, and working together we can find what we as a province are capable of.

Two months ago Albertans were presented a vision for our future which included low taxes, no debt, a strong economy, new jobs for our young people, sound infrastructure, good health and learning systems, stable and safe communities, and reliable social programs. This vision and our plan to implement it have been strongly endorsed by Albertans. They have told us to stay the course and to do so in a balanced manner that is both bold and thoughtful. Alberta

is in the rare and fortunate position of being able to respond to many of the public expectations that exist in the fiscal area, in the human services, and in the quality of life domain.

The Speech from the Throne lays a framework for moving forward with confidence as we attempt to successfully turn our potential into reality. After four years of working with the constituents of Banff-Cochrane and their issues, I can respond positively to the speech and the course it sets for the province as we aim to ensure that Albertans benefit from growth and prosperity and from quality, responsive, and affordable public services.

Mr. Speaker, geographically the constituency of Banff-Cochrane extends from the Calgary city limits to the Saskatchewan River Crossing. We incorporate parts of Bearspaw, much of Springbank, the hamlet of Bragg Creek and surrounding acreages, Cochrane, the Tsuu T'ina and Stoney reserves, the MD of Bighorn with Harvie Heights, Exshaw, Waiparous, and the Ghost River areas, Canmore, Banff, and Lake Louise. Without a doubt this constituency represents one of the most beautiful, vigorous, and vibrant parts of the province.

Our greatest assets are our natural surroundings and our people, and most of our challenges are related to growth. Within the constituency we have logging, oil and gas development, big and small industry, a growing number of small businesses, and some of the most spectacular ranching country in the world. We are one of this country's most popular tourist destinations and offer a wide variety of recreation in our many growing communities. All parts of the constituency are viewed as very desirable places to live and visit, and more people are wanting to call it home. Residents are there by choice. They love the mountains and the rolling hills and are passionate about their quality of life. They want to be there. They want to recreate there, raise families, do business and yet be close to the big city with its amenities. It's considered ideal 'rurbanville' with its proximity to Calgary and countrylike living.

But like many other parts of this province increasing demands for expansion do cause us to struggle with growth management, sustainable development, and controversy over land uses. Our growth puts pressures on schools, health care services, and infrastructure. It is precisely these challenges and others that the Speech from the Throne addresses.

Like this government plan Banff-Cochrane constituents recognize that a strong economy is not an end in itself, rather a means to achieve the things that matter most to Albertans. Constituents agree that a strong economy begins with a sound fiscal plan. We know it's our fiscal position that now offers flexibility to Albertans in terms of future choices. A deficit and debt-free Alberta is one of the greatest gifts that members of this Assembly can leave our children and their children. Government's commitment to keeping taxes the lowest in Canada and ensuring that spending is responsible and affordable will lead to a future with endless possibilities.

While the speech touches on a multitude of industries, I would like to comment on tourism. 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 of the government. Tourism is this province's fourth largest industry and deserves our attention. Visitors to the province last year generated approximately \$4.2 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 speaks of the benefits of our participation in a free energy market and our need to ensure Albertans have access to a reliable, ample, and affordable energy supply within the

province. On behalf of the constituents I welcome both the proposed legislation to help protect consumers from high natural gas prices as well as the creation of the Government Advisory Council on Electricity to address electricity price concerns. Acknowledging the public interest in this area with strong action will help us maintain the Alberta advantage.

Agriculture holds a historic and important place in the province. The speech speaks to the viability of farms and rural communities as another priority of this government. With one in every three jobs depending on agriculture, we need to support Alberta farmers in times of need. Safe, affordable food production cannot be taken for granted, and long-term strategies based on the insights of Ag Summit 2000 are critical.

I've had the wonderful opportunity over the last few years to represent and get to know constituents who are involved in agriculture and have learned much about their many challenges. Organizations like Action for Agriculture, which consists of farmers, ranchers, and acreage owners, have kept me informed on issues like the inherent conflict between farming operations and residential development. The loss of agricultural land due to urban sprawl is only one issue, but it becomes larger, much broader, and more complex, particularly as Alberta's economy grows. I'm sure the initiatives set out in this speech to ensure the long-term sustainability of this diverse industry will be received well by these constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I can strongly support the significant part of the speech committing to government's desire to show their leadership in preserving and protecting Alberta's environment and with it Albertans' health and quality of life. A number of new initiatives will enhance environmental stewardship and ensure economic growth is responsible. The government will continue to strike a balance between preserving Alberta's natural heritage and sustaining its use as a contributor to outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and development.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere in this great province will you find residents that better understand the concept of striking the right balance than those of Banff-Cochrane. It is a reality of our daily lives. While we benefit from Canada's first national park, provincial parks, and Kananaskis Country in our backyards, we are also charged with their preservation and good management. We know that both the environment and the economy affect our quality of life. We must not sacrifice one for the other but rather must sustain both in a complementary way. Our success will always depend on how well we are doing that. We can with thoughtful planning and a balanced approach leave a legacy of our children.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, as well as a clean environment the speech speaks to government's strong commitment to a responsive and publicly funded health care system. Consistent with the recent expressed views of Albertans, priorities next year focus on health service access, illness prevention, and public accountability. While health care issues are shared across the country, I do believe we have the greatest ability of successfully meeting these challenges. A greater emphasis on home care, environmental health and prevention activities, while ensuring access to needed emergency and medical services, is evident among health regions. As well, we are working with health authorities on long-range plans for continuing care services that will help meet the future needs of aging Albertans in a co-ordinated and versatile fashion.

Like health care, education continues to be a top priority for this government. We all know the greatest returns are made from investments in learning. Albertans expect and deserve a system that will nurture the minds and skills of Albertans of all ages from every

part of the province. We have all recently had the opportunity to discuss education issues with many constituents, and I believe support is there for a government plan that involves lifelong learning that begins well before kindergarten and continues long after formal education. The speech lists initiatives ranging from increased funding to school boards for improved student learning to enhancements for a more accessible and affordable postsecondary system. There is no reason why we cannot and should not maintain Alberta's learning system as one of the best in the world.

Over the past two years I had the privilege of serving as chair of the standing policy committee on health and safe communities. I know firsthand the importance of focusing on many variables that support safe and strong communities. We must start with children, youth, and families that are at risk, but we must not stop there. Programs that will protect and enrich the lives of Albertans of all ages and all circumstances will help ensure a high quality of life tomorrow. As a society we are judged by how we take care of our less fortunate, and government must continue to do its part to support the truly needy and create a safety net with more self-reliance.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne speaks to Albertans' ability this fall to participate in charting a course for this province's debt-free future. The recently announced Future Summit will harness ideas and give us all a voice in crafting the vision that will carry us forward into the future. Unlike many jurisdictions we have real options. We have real choices. The opportunities created by freedom from debt go beyond simple economics. They are about choices for the kind of province that we all want to live in, a province where all citizens share in the prosperity and optimism and where opportunities become limitless.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share a quote from the speech.

The government's plan for Alberta's future reflects the values of Albertans themselves, values of community and family, hard work and caring for others, creativity, confidence and innovation, and excellence in all endeavours.

These values have guided us through history and, rightfully so, continue to guide this government. The government plan as presented in the Speech from the Throne bodes well for Albertans. It demonstrates our interest in improving an already strong province and sets the stage for raising our current levels of success. It considers both young and old and provides opportunities for Albertans to enjoy the many benefits of living and working in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to represent the constituents of Banff-Cochrane, I am proud to be an Albertan, and I am very pleased to move that this House accept the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to second the motion for consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech. Yesterday's throne speech reaffirmed a strong, confident direction for Alberta, and I believe this government will continue protecting Albertans through energy rebates, environmental stewardship, a responsive health care system, and a strong education system.

I would like to begin by congratulating all the new and returning MLAs. We're here because the people of Alberta believe in us and have put faith in our abilities to keep this the best province in Canada. Needless to say, I'm honoured and very happy to be part of this government. It is exciting to be a member of this Legislature that will continue to build on the incredibly strong foundation laid down under three decades of Progressive Conservative governance.

I would like to take a minute and introduce you to my constituency, Edmonton-Meadowlark. It is diverse and special. In fact, I

think I'm representing the best constituency in the province. The constituency spans neighbourhoods in west Edmonton, from the older communities of Meadowlark and Elmwood in the east to the new, expanding community of Lewis Estates. It is home to one of the wonders of the shopping world and an attraction that draws tourists from around the world, West Edmonton Mall.

The old town of Jasper Place has been a part of Edmonton since the early '60s. It has a long, rich history, and in many ways the old town of JP still exists. The roots go deep. Part of the old town is in Edmonton-Meadowlark, and in many ways the old town has stayed intact, with three or four generations of families still living there. Many of the young people moved out after high school to attend a postsecondary institution, work elsewhere, or visit the world, but they came back and chose to live in the community alongside family and friends. I was reminded of this while campaigning. As I door-knocked my way through the communities, I recognized familiar faces and met again with old friends. I met with second and third generations. It was a great reunion. So many people remembered me as their teacher or their children's teacher. Frankly, it scared me spitless. Thankfully, they remembered me fondly. Do you think it's this ample figure perhaps?

Mr. Speaker, my single greatest passion has been education. I've been at two wonderful schools: Jasper Place and Vic. Many of today's Vic students are from Edmonton-Meadowlark. I've been principal of Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts for 16 years. It's my pride and joy. It has changed from a high school with a tough inner-city reputation that had been on the list of schools to be closed. Today it's a K to 12 school that includes IB and the arts at all grade levels. It is now considered a provincial centre for excellence, and we've been called the Julliard of Canada. Our students receive an education through the arts, but not many will be artists in their own right. They will be the future business and political leaders, et cetera, in this country.

A lot of time is spent on ensuring they understand this global village that has evolved. Just after the provincial election I led a group of 39 students, teachers, parents, and community members to China on an education mission. We traveled to eight cities and visited two schools, building relationships with Chinese students and teachers. China is a second home to me after more than 30 visits since 1984. Some of the people we met there will be visiting Edmonton for the same reason we went to China. At least 60 students will attend summer camps in July here in Edmonton as a result of this visit.

I cannot say enough about the importance of sharing educational experiences and skills with people from other countries. Forging partnerships with other nations can only help young people in Alberta. They learn tolerance and understand different cultures, but they also learn that the world is not as big as they think it is. This government through Minister Oberg's department has done a wonderful job of encouraging and promoting opportunities for students and teachers to participate in international exchanges by providing a large and strong languages program. I look forward to working to continue to further develop these opportunities.

While in China I was reminded of how strong we are at home. On the return trip, when I was preparing to leave from Hong Kong, I was pleasantly surprised to see an advertisement for West Edmonton Mall. Here I was halfway across the world and I was reading about my home constituency. So you see, Mr. Speaker, it's not just about reaching Albertans or Edmontonians anymore. No, I believe we're becoming the world's worst kept secret. The partnerships and programs this government has forged with other nations have made Alberta a force to be reckoned with around the globe.

I believe we must continue our hard work in making Alberta the

best place to live, especially in the field of education. Yesterday's throne speech reaffirmed this government's recognition and support for a strong lifelong learning system. Strong education for our young people increases our ability to compete globally in all areas.

8:20

As a rookie I'm going to share a little about myself. I'm proud to say that I'm a fourth-generation Albertan. Hard work and opportunity are why I'm here today. I had a mother that was abandoned when I was in grade 5. You know, in the 1950s a young woman from the Sangudo area with about a grade 8 education, raising a family on her own, was a rare thing indeed. I think my sister and I were the only students in our school that were part of a single-parent family.

I was also working before it was legal to do so. I worked at a bakery from grade 7 all the way through high school. When I graduated from Victoria high school, I remember the principal scolding my mother because I was not going on to university. It hurt my mother deeply, but at that time there was no financial support for postsecondary education other than that from the family. Attending university was not an option for me. Mr. Speaker, Premier Klein and this government have ensured that the support is there for all students who wish to pursue a postsecondary education.

After high school I went to work for the Northern Alberta Railways as an executive assistant. That was in the days when males were taking shorthand and typing for senior CEOs and so on. For 10 years I worked at the NAR in the daytime and worked full-time at the bakery in the evening six days a week. It seems like it's much like the life of an Alberta MLA, I'm beginning to think already.

I tell you all of this not as a poor-me story but because my dream to become a teacher had to wait until I was 29 years old. By the time I went back to school to get my education, I had a wife, a dependant, and a mortgage. I am thankful for my university degree as it has enriched my life beyond belief. I have loved every minute of my years at Jasper Place and Vic as a teacher, as a principal, and I've always thought about how proud my principal at Vic would have been seeing me sitting in his chair. I have forgiven his thoughtless comments to my mother.

I started teaching in 1969. You know, when you've heard already baker, railroader, teacher, principal and look at me, I know you are going to find it hard to believe that I've been teaching for 32 years. Through my 32 years of experience I have witnessed many changes to our education system. When I started teaching, it was usually six rows of six and maybe two or three sitting on the windowsill or on chairs in the aisles. I've shared many of the concerns of my colleagues in education, but yesterday's throne speech addressed these concerns with increased funding, including funding to ensure teachers are equitably compensated.

The road to success in Alberta is beating adversity through hard work and opportunity. Premier Klein through his visionary leadership has ensured that Alberta is Canada's strongest province. We have taken advantage of our resources, natural and human, and have made sure not to waste opportunities to build on our success. The Speech from the Throne outlined the Future Summit as a great example of this government's commitment to increase Alberta's potential. I think this is a great way to secure success for our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I will bring my strong work ethic, my experience, and the support of my constituents to this Legislature. I would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Meadowlark for the privilege of representing them in this Legislature. I'm excited about the vision of this government and look forward to this first session.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the honour of speaking today.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise tonight to speak for a few minutes in response to the Speech from the Throne. I promise not to use the full time allotted tonight because we've got a lot of people who would like to get a chance.

I guess the issue is that when we look at this, my first reaction to it was: well, this is kind of a short Speech from the Throne. But when you look at it on a per page basis, I think there were probably more initiatives in this Speech from the Throne than there have been in many of the previous ones. With a couple more pages and the appropriate number of initiatives, we probably would have had a good, rounded agenda for this session.

I guess the thing that we see that's really missing in here the most is the commitment to people in Alberta that are truly in need, that have no united voice that can speak for them. We've got all kinds of options in here to provide for additional remuneration, additional incomes for individuals who are organized in any kind of a number of ways. Yet when we look at individuals that don't have that kind of organization or a voice that can speak for them, we don't see any kind of support for them other than kind of a little comment that we're going to review the basic needs for individuals that are on support programs or fixed incomes.

So what we need to do is start looking at it, and I hope that this will show up by the time we get to the budget on the 24th, that we'll see some kind of a commitment to provide dollars for individuals that are on fixed incomes: AISH, SFI, social welfare. These individuals need to have some mechanism built in so that they can develop long-term plans for their livelihood and basically be in a position where the income that they receive from the public does have a degree of indexing or a degree of equity in terms of their ability to have a sustained living.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through the speech, what I want to do is kind of touch on some of the issues that were brought up in some of the areas. The strong economy section was quite well covered, and we talked about some of the infrastructure needs, but there was no reference in here to the kind of studies that will deal with the role that the public transportation or the potential rail links between cities might have. These are the kinds of things that we have to start looking at now if we're going to deal with long-term growth in our province so that we can have programs that will allow both efficient and cost-effective transportation of goods within our province. We've got a lot of development now that's going on, say, in the corridor between Calgary and Edmonton, and we need to look at ways to service that in a cost-effective and economic way.

I think this comes up, Mr. Speaker, quite regularly. I could tell you that a year or so ago, when I was coming up from Lethbridge, I could go to the airport and get a ticket for about \$480. A couple of weeks ago I went out to the airport to get a ticket to fly from Lethbridge up here, and they wanted round-trip \$890. Well, I don't see how they can double the price for an airline ticket in the matter of about a year. So we've got to start looking at options that will give good transportation within this province, and some of the high-speed links that are possibly out there need to be looked at as 10 or 15 years into the future.

MR. McFARLAND: Fly Integra.

DR. NICOL: The Member for Little Bow suggested: fly Integra. This is a great airline – two of the owners of it were former students of mine at the university – but they're so full in the morning that if you don't get out there at least three or four days in advance, there's no chance to get on them. When you have to deal with a short-term flight, you have to pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, we want to talk about these kinds of things, and we see that the reference here to the kind of infrastructure that's needed to give us a strong economy is outlined and talked about. The suggestion also at the bottom of the page talks about the commitment to sustainable, reliable, ample, and affordable energy. This basically makes reference to the natural gas program that's coming forward. No reference in here to what we're going to do with electricity. We've got to start looking at how that kind of utility fits in as well, not only the natural gas component. This basically looks at our situation from a really short-term perspective.

As we try and look at the concept that we have now in our electricity market, we're basically going to be subject to the price fluctuations and the stability of the entire western grid. As we export power from this province, anytime there's a shortage somewhere in the western grid, our generators will have the capacity to ship into that market, and we'll be subject to that price fluctuation and that price at our margin or at our spot price, just like we were with natural gas last year. What we've got to do is put in place processes that will allow for a lot of stability in terms of the pricing and the availability for our utilities.

8:30

These are the kinds of things that provide a real incentive for our small businesses to come, to establish, and to stay in this province. If we don't have that kind of stability, what we see is that a number of them look at options when it comes time for them to make a major investment. They look at other locations as the best site for them to expand, and if they can go somewhere else where stability of their input costs is predictable, they will look very seriously at doing that. We heard of a number of cases in the past winter where individuals have said they were contemplating this. You know, we have to make sure that kind of stability is here for us so we can actually have a sound basis for companies that want to come in here.

The interesting phrase here is that we talk about in terms of we want to commit to, I guess, the free market for energy instead of a free energy market, as it's written up in the Speech from the Throne, but what we also then have is in the next paragraph we're talking about providing government subsidies, which is an intervention in that free market energy system. We've got to look at how we can support the price or develop a price within Alberta that is competitive and doesn't have market intervention strategies attached to it. This is why we in the Official Opposition are trying to encourage the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to look at the possibilities of dealing with long-term contracts or hedges as part of their approval process when they accept the price regime from the marketers that are providing us with our natural gas. If we don't have that kind of stability, we end up with the kind of crisis that we had this last year.

So I guess the thing we'll have to watch for in the Government Advisory Council on Electricity is whether or not they actually come in with good suggestions and are able to bring us a really stable type of future. If they're going to leave us attached on a spot-market basis to the western grid, anybody new coming into this province will always be subject to negotiating new contracts for supplies that are contingent upon what the generators can get by selling into that western grid. Until we see stability in California – Texas is now talking about deregulation – we're going to see this kind of uncertainty prevail through our electricity sector for as long as it exists. We'll have to make sure also that as we do that – because of that uncertainty and that short-term market potential that exists in those export markets, the generators that do establish here will be calculating a very quick return on their capital investment, which in essence will make our prices here also more costly if that becomes part of the calculation system.

The next section of the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, turns to stable agriculture communities. I think it would be really appropriate if we started to look at the whole aspect of what constitutes a rural community. Agriculture plays a very important role in establishing the economic system for those rural communities, but it's no longer the sole component of those rural communities. We're seeing more and more small businesses being established in rural communities, and they're now wanting a voice, wanting part of that decision process that we see in that rural community as they decide the kind of community they want, when they decide what type of growth, what type of investment activities they're looking for in those communities.

I guess that's why it was really good to see the references in here to the new policy dealing with intensive livestock operations. Mr. Speaker, you know I've been a strong proponent of these provincial-level standards for intensive livestock operations for a couple or three years now. What we need to do is look at also providing the local governments with broader flexibility in their land-use planning and their zoning options so that they can, in essence, deal with some of the conditions they want to incorporate in terms of their siting requirements that are over and above the environmental and minimum distance requirements that are included in the draft proposal that we've seen for intensive livestock. We want to make sure those local communities do have some say and some final control over the kind and the location of the types of livestock enterprises.

We also have to look at how we deal with the issues that come up in terms of the support structures that are put in place for farmers. The agriculture community in the last three or four years has really been faced with a lot of issues between a lot more variability in the weather, kind of a depressed world price being caused by the subsidies in the U.S. and Europe bringing forward more production, which drops the price available to the Canadian farmers because of our basic reliance on a free market, a competitive market, in the delivery of our agricultural products.

So we've got to look at how we can basically restructure some of our programs that provide the assistance. It was good to hear the minister of agriculture on the radio this morning when she was talking about and recognizing that a lot of these programs that we do have in place now haven't probably turned out to be as good as they originally were thought to be in terms of the ability to support farmers when they have conditions that are ongoing. The FIDP program, the farm income disaster program, basically is an excellent program for a one-year downturn in farm income, but when we get these longer cyclical downturns, we're getting into a position where farmers are not being served appropriately by that kind of program, which was designed for one use, and we're trying to put it into application in a different way.

The crop insurance review process, that has been ongoing under the former federal minister of agriculture, Charlie Mayer, I think has brought forward some really good suggestions in terms of how that program can be improved. But what we've got to do is look at: can we bring the crop insurance, the farm income disaster program, and the net income stabilization program at the federal level together and combine them into a single program that will probably provide a service to the farmers in stabilizing their income that is better than each of the programs operated separately?

The next thing I want to do is basically put a little caution out when we talk about efforts to provide Alberta farmers with market-choice for their wheat and barley. The farmers in western Canada vote for a board for the Canadian Wheat Board, and we should be working through those members to bring change to the Wheat Board or to bring openness to the Wheat Board, rather than

us as a provincial government trying to create changes in that institution that are not consistent with the wishes of those elected representatives here in our province. If we believe in a democracy, we believe that the people who are elected to serve within an institution should have the ability to have input from their constituents, and we should be supportive of them rather than competitors with them in terms of setting the agenda for that kind of institution, especially an institution like the Wheat Board, that's not under our jurisdiction or our legislative development. So this is just kind of the approach we need to start looking at in that rural community area as we go through it.

The next section deals with a clean environment. What we see here is, I guess, a real lack of a long-term statement of vision for the environment in our province. We've seen some real initiatives that have come up in the past to deal with the economic growth and the stewardship issues, but when we look at how it comes together, I think we see this a little bit again in the agriculture community with the delay that went on with the intensive livestock. The questions we saw in question period today about the Spray Lakes, that there's no real public review of the process for that forest management agreement. These are the kinds of things that we have to start bringing into a more open public discussion. I think the end result will still allow us to have a good, sound tourism industry and also some economic activity that spins off through the industrial sector. But we've got to make sure it's consistent with the kind of programs that the community and Albertans as a whole support.

8:40

The next section on health care I think focuses on the right kind of issues: access to health care, illness prevention, and effective regional government. It was great to hear the commitment that two-thirds of the board members will be elected. Still, we need to have a rapid movement on this by the government to get the parameters out where we can see what kind of regulations will be in place, first of all, for developing the wards or the zones within the health regions, how we can get eligibility determined for the individuals that want to run, all these kinds of things, so the people can start planning. When you get ready for an election, especially a new election that doesn't have any kind of history to it, we've got to make sure that both the supervisory agencies and the individuals that want to participate as candidates have the time that's necessary to make sure they can get well versed and well prepared for these kinds of elections.

I guess the only thing that we need to look at in terms of the health care is what kind of targets or what kind of end expectations we have in the context of our health care system. I guess we would like to see some kind of initiative put in place that would give us some target measures that we could use for performance. Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking here that we say: okay, everybody gets, say, an MRI in 24 hours. I think the suggestions that came out with the announcement were quite appropriate in that area, but we've got a lot of other areas within the health care system where we've got to be able to provide a standard so that we can talk about the delivery, so we can measure the delivery, and then we can also get on to dealing with the cost-efficiency and the cost-effectiveness of our delivery. If we don't have any kind of perception of a target or level of performance that we want to achieve, then we don't have the means to deal with cost-effectiveness and to make comparisons, say, within our health regions or between our health regions and between our province and other provinces or other jurisdictions.

The issue comes up in terms of – well, we heard one of the chairmen of the health authorities talk about how much better the American system was. Well, I guess I question the wisdom of

having an individual that questions those kinds of alternative systems as being so much better than ours unless they're willing to make specific statements on what it is about them and how we could change our systems to make them better. Just to make blanket statements like that I think, Mr. Speaker, leaves some sense that we need to have a commitment to some kind of target.

I think the education part of the Speech from the Throne is one of the better. The only issue we see in there is that with the advanced education institutions there's no reference in here to the support that might be needed if we're going to deal with potential wage settlements. We make reference to the fact that there will possibly be wage settlement supports for teachers' salaries in the public system.

I guess in this area, Mr. Speaker, what I would do is encourage the Minister of Finance, when she prepares the budget, to make sure these are not put into the departmental budget at the start but are put into a contingency fund, because once you put it into the departmental budget in any of the areas when we don't yet have a wage settlement, what you end up doing is effectively biasing the negotiation process. We can't have that perception from our level. We've got to make sure that the dollars are there, and if we put them into a contingency fund, that doesn't create a commitment that a certain number will be available for any one group that starts a negotiation, but within our debate here and our discussions we will know we've got the money earmarked that we can use to meet those kinds of commitments as the negotiations proceed.

The safe, strong community area is quite good. The crime prevention area, the victims of crime support: these are good initiatives. I think they're really the kind of statement that we as legislators for this province need to make in terms of support for the communities.

I guess the kinds of questions that will come up are, as I've mentioned already once, the reference to the income support programs. These need to be dealt with quickly, need to be indexed so that people can plan their lives.

It's interesting. I know the Member for Edmonton-Centre made a comment on the last paragraph on that page when she said: well, you know, arts and culture is more than just film development. There's good support here for the film development industry, but there's not much of a statement about the rest of the parts of our arts and culture industry. So we need to see basically some kind of commitment to improve our relationship with the rest of the arts and culture community.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, that kind of gives a sense of where I see the Speech from the Throne going in terms of the agenda that's there. In the end I would say that what I want to do is encourage the government as we go through these kinds of programs to make sure that the accountability is there, that we can go out to our constituents and say clearly: this is what we wanted to put the money into, this is how we're going to measure the success of those dollars, and you can count on us to make sure we did it right and did it wisely on your behalf.

This accountability, you know, goes quite well into all the issues that we discuss in our debate on our legislation but most specifically when we start dealing with the budget allocations, because we've got to have measurements that are effective. We've noticed in some of the past years that we continually revise the performance indicators a little bit so that we in essence don't get much of a time series, data on them. I know this is part of refining the series, but we have to be able to make some comparisons on them.

I guess the other thing that's missing out of the Speech from the Throne is any kind of commitment to the conflict of interest issues that are being raised around the province. There were a number of people during the election who asked questions about the process the

government is using, who the beneficiaries are, how these people are involved, and I think what we need to do is make a commitment in this session to better outline and have better guidelines because perception is as much of a detriment as actual conflict in itself. We've got to make them strong statements so that we can improve and develop confidence with Albertans that the perception is not going to lead to reality in terms of conflict of interest.

I guess the last issue I want to address this evening is the fact that we have to be open with the discussions that we have. We have to talk about the issues so that they are understandable to Albertans, and we have to be in a position to make sure we relate to them some issues in a way that they can see what's happening.

I'd like to give an example on that, Mr. Speaker. We keep hearing and reading and even constituents out there talk about how they're getting support and subsidies and government input in terms of their energy rebates. But when you look at it, the \$40 they're getting on their electricity bill is not a subsidy. It's actually a return of the dollars they already put into their electric bill in past years. We recaptured that when we sold those contracts at auction, and we're returning that to them now. It's not a subsidy. It's their own money. It's not money that came out of our general revenue fund or out of our royalty funds. This is money that came out of selling something that they had already paid for. Yet most Albertans see that as a government subsidy, government support for them. So this is the kind of issue we have to start thinking about in the way we present our issues to the people of this province. We've got to present it so that we're telling them the fact as it is rather than as we want them to hear it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I would just sit down. We're going to be hearing a lot of the debate as we get into the budget. Some of the legislation that's coming up we'll be addressing. We're going to have a lot of comments to make on the issues of Bill 1 as we get into it, talking about it. I noticed the news release that came out today. It's given me a whole other speaking period that I can talk on, so I'll wait till we deal with Bill 1 rather than make those comments at this point.

As we go on to look at this, I just want to, I guess, congratulate the government on the initiatives they're taking. I hope they listen to some of the suggestions we are making as opposition – some of the backbenchers have already made good comments tonight – and that we deal with some of those issues as we complete this session.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Visitors?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased tonight to introduce someone from Medicine Hat. We don't often get guests from Medicine Hat up here, especially one who sat in the Assembly for so many years. He sat in this Assembly from the early '70s till 1993, held a number of different ministries under both the Lougheed and Getty years. Some of you old-timers, not to insult the Speaker's age of course, will know Mr. Jim Horsman personally. He's a fine friend of mine and well respected in Medicine Hat. He's presently chancellor of the University of Lethbridge. He also sits on the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research and continues to make a very valuable contribution to Alberta. So,

Mr. Horsman, thank you for coming to observe us tonight. Please stand and accept the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: As it is most uncustomary for an hon. member to refer to the Speaker in any way, shape, or form, let the Speaker just say to the hon. Minister of Environment that yesterday an overview was given of the average age of the citizens in this particular Assembly and the chair indicated that the average age was 51, and the chair also said that the range, then, from the most youthful member to the most seasoned member was 35 years. All hon. members should know that the one that was at the top of the 35-year list was the hon. Minister of Environment.

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

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and make some observations on the Speech from the Throne delivered on Tuesday, April 10, at the opening of the First Session of the 25th Legislature of this province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday is very much like the speech that was delivered in February. There is very little that is new in it. This speech and the one delivered in February both, of course, used very, very general and abstract language in defining what this government chose to call its vision for Alberta, the vision of the future of Alberta as the 21st century unfolds before us. The more vague and more general the goals a vision statement may include, the more difficult it becomes to disagree with that. It's a lot easier for everyone to say: yes, I agree. So given the very, very vague and general nature of this statement about this government's vision, it's difficult to agree with its broad thrust.

All of us clearly would like to pay taxes that are as low as possible so long as important social programs are not compromised. We certainly ran our campaign in the last election on orderly pay-down and elimination of debt and providing sound financial support for our social programs. But, like anybody, a government must be judged on its actions and not merely on its words, this being a truism with which all of us can agree, I guess.

Let's ask: what was the first major initiative of this government after the election was safely over? The first major initiative after the election was to significantly expand the size of the provincial cabinet. When the Premier took office eight years ago, he cut the size of the cabinet to 17. Now we have a bloated cabinet of 24. I don't recall the Tories running on a platform of increasing the size of the cabinet during the election. While the members opposite like to claim that the best government is the government that governs the least, this clearly doesn't apply when it comes to the trappings of power like fancy ministerial offices and fancy cars. [interjections] At the same time, Mr. Speaker . . .

**Speaker's Ruling  
Decorum**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, the long tradition of the House is that only one member at a time is rising and speaking, and when the time comes for the Minister of Environment to speak, we'll all hopefully give him the courtesy that we expect him to give anyone else.

Hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your intervention.

**Debate Continued**

DR. PANNU: At the same time that the size of the cabinet has gone up by 40 percent, the number of frontline staff has gone down by 30 percent. This is something that we need to ponder over, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech continues to talk about prudence, the responsible management of our affairs, yet the actions of this government taken since the end of the election begin to speak I think a bit loudly about where this government might be headed. The throne speech tries to justify this bloated cabinet by talking about needing a new configuration of ministries to address priority areas. I wonder where this government has been over the last eight years when it felt and claimed that it could do everything that needs to be done, address its priorities and the priorities of Albertans, with a smaller cabinet.

Clearly, the claim that's being made in the throne speech about why the cabinet had to be expanded is just not persuasive, makes no sense. The expansion of cabinet has nothing to do, in my view, with good governance. In fact, it may impede good governance. Do we really need a Revenue minister separate from the Treasury Department? Do we really need a Solicitor General separate from the Justice ministry? At least make the Solicitor General responsible for gaming and liquor board policy rather than having a separate ministry of gambling.

Let's look at a few other elements and commitments in the throne speech. The speech says that the government is committed "to reduce and stabilize electricity prices by streamlining the approval process to bring new generation projects onstream." Well, first of all, let's be clear about what caused the prices to rise: this government's bungled deregulation policies. We have wasted billions of dollars of public funds over the last little while to deal with this crisis created thanks to the policies or lack thereof of this government. Now we are trying to find ways of reducing and stabilizing electricity prices.

Well, isn't this interesting? First we get skyrocketing prices with the government's deregulation scheme. Now we get environmental degradation through lowering environmental protection standards, as being promised in the sentence that I just quoted, Mr. Speaker.

9:00

So dividends of the deregulation of electricity are beginning to be paid out: high electricity prices and, most likely, rising air pollution. In other words, the environment and Alberta communities become the latest casualty of the electricity deregulation scheme. By any measure the government's deregulation scheme has been a disaster, Mr. Speaker.

First, Albertans were told that deregulation will result in lower prices. Prices skyrocketed instead, and now even the Premier admits that they are unlikely to drop as low as they were prior to deregulation. Deregulation was supposed to encourage green power, and now the government is prepared to sacrifice the environment in its desperation to lower power prices. But will they come down even if the environmental standards are lowered? Let's wait and see. I doubt it. If it's private companies' profit that drives them in terms of their investment, why would they generate so much electricity that that generation will cause a drop in their prices and therefore in their profits? This makes no sense.

So, Mr. Speaker, the government's bungled deregulation scheme is well summed up by the following quote from Dan Macnamara, executive director of the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association of Alberta. Mr. Macnamara said: I could

have picked three monkeys from the Calgary zoo, and they could have done a better job of deregulation than this government. By quoting Mr. Macnamara, I by no means want to approve the deregulation scheme. All I'm saying is that even those who are allies of the government are now disenchanted with the manner in which this government has proceeded and risked their industries and their competitiveness as a result.

Another feature mentioned in this throne speech. Specific mention is made, Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech that a new policy dealing with the intensive livestock operations will be introduced. Such a policy – this is dealing with the rural communities and their agriculture – is clearly long overdue. Residents of rural communities directly affected by the intensive livestock operations' growth in the countryside have been speaking loudly and clearly, seeking ways to limit the risks that they see associated with this development. They're seeking assurances from this government that it will put in place regulations, arrangements that will ensure that their health and the quality of life will not be sacrificed in this blind pursuit of the growth of these industrial farms.

This growth of huge hog factories and megafedlots is causing a growing backlash in rural communities. Concerns about these huge facilities have to do both with their environmental impacts and their social impacts. People are rightly concerned about the impact of these huge facilities on rural land and water quality. They are also concerned about the impact of these new industrial developments related to livestock, the impact of vertically integrated hog factories and megafedlots on the future viability of family farms.

Mr. Speaker, in reading through the speech, I noted a certain absence there, not a single reference to the family farm and its future and how the government is committed to developing policies to make sure that the family farm, as an institution, as a hub of rural life, as an important feature of that life, remains sustainable in this province. Not a single word. The term "family farm" is entirely avoided. It is simply not used, and that to me is certainly worrisome.

Another matter related to the growth of these large factory-type operations is related to the agricultural industry in general. The words "agricultural industry" are used by this government in its speech, yet as these agricultural activities take the form of industry, increasingly becoming larger and larger operations employing large numbers of employees, there's no reference here that the time has come for this government to consider the application of employment standards to a certain size, that when agricultural operations move beyond a certain size, they will be subject to the requirements of employment standards. Not a mention of that.

Moving on to the area of health, Mr. Speaker, mention is made, of course, in the throne speech that RHA elections will be held, and two-thirds of the RHA boards will now be elected in the coming fall. This was followed up earlier today with an announcement of a few more details about the arrangements that will have to be in place before these elections can take place. However, many important details are still missing. For example, defining the total districts in which prospective RHA board members will be elected is still up in the air. It is indeed unfortunate that the government has failed to lay out the ground rules for elections that are scheduled to take place only six months from now. It's getting late.

RHA boards should, in our view – and we have always taken this position – not have members only two-thirds of which are elected, but these boards should be fully elected in order to be fully accountable to the residents they serve. By continuing the practice of directly appointing one-third of the boards, the government would appear to want to continue to control these boards and use them at its own will.

In terms of health care and education, I want to remind this

government that during the election the government talked about its reinvestment in public health care and public education. The government has no mandate to engage in further privatization, yet I fear that while Bill 11 now is law, this is exactly what Albertans will get: privatization. Just before the election was called, a few days before that, the government took another unprecedented action, and that was to approve a for-profit, postsecondary institution, the DeVry Institute in Calgary, and allow it to sell degrees for profit. This is another, in my view, extremely dangerous step this government has taken without consulting anyone, without any public debate, without allowing this House to have an opportunity to debate this extremely important and significant step. The New Democrats will oppose efforts to expand for-profit involvement in postsecondary education and in our hospital sector. Silence in this throne speech about the government's plans with respect to the future growth of private, for-profit postsecondary institutions should be a matter of worry to all of us.

Specific mention in the speech that the budget will contain more dollars for teachers' salaries: another interesting and, I guess, promising, in a sense, statement. Yet when you look at the statement in the context of nothing being said in terms of a commitment to reduce class sizes in elementary grades, particularly from kindergarten to grade 3, you wonder what the government is pointing to. Is it attempting to play the boards against teachers? You get either a better salary or you get smaller classes or what? I continue to worry about the real intentions of the government on this score, Mr. Speaker.

There's no firm commitment to reducing class size. The government has already spent \$500,000 on a study which tells it that it delivers the goods if you reduce class sizes, yet the government is not willing to make that commitment.

9:10

The throne speech contains a vague reference that the government will review income support programs to determine whether they continue to meet clients' needs. There's no recognition that there indeed is a problem of poverty in this province, that the policies of the government indeed create conditions where lots of Alberta children live in conditions of poverty. To acknowledge a problem is the first step to addressing a problem. Nothing is said on that. When it comes to reviewing these programs to determine whether they continue to meet clients' needs, Mr. Speaker, the time for review is over. The time is for action. There's no promise in this speech that action will be forthcoming. Existing programs are clearly not adequate. What's needed is action and action now.

Social assistance rates were cut by an average of 11 percent in 1993 and have barely increased since then. Since 1993 the number of child welfare cases has increased by more than 60 percent, Mr. Speaker. Children are poor because their parents are poor. We need to look at a number of measures to reduce poverty levels, not continue to review programs without taking action. Social assistance rates and shelter allowances need to go up. Thereafter we need to develop a formula to link future increases to increases in living costs, but this is not enough. We also need to increase income support for the disabled through the AISH program.

We need to increase the minimum wage to provide a better living for the working poor. Unfortunately, in this growing economy there are also growing numbers of people who are working and yet remain poor. We need to make further improvements to the family employment tax credit program to eliminate health care premiums and to improve health and dental benefits for lower income working families.

Another matter, Mr. Speaker, that I want to put on record, on



which I see absolutely no reference made in the throne speech, has to do with the freezing of tuition fees of postsecondary students and ultimately reducing those tuition fees. Silence on that one again.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to conclude, then, by saying that this throne speech is certainly a start. We'll have to judge the government as it takes actions and presents a budget in a couple of weeks.

Thank you.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your kind permission, before responding directly to the Speech from the Throne, I would like to spend a few moments on the recent election in my constituency. For the last four years it has been my honour to represent and my pleasure to serve the constituents of Calgary-Fort. I'm thankful to have received the continued support and solid trust of my constituents and to be back among my hon. colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. You can count on my continued serving of the Calgary-Fort constituents and all Albertans to the best of my ability.

To my new colleagues, my congratulations for your honour of representing and serving your constituents. To all my Legislature colleagues, I have a great confidence in each of you doing your best for Albertans, and may the coming term be the best part of your life.

To our Premier, my congratulations on your election leadership to a greater majority. May your outstanding leadership continue to make Alberta a shining star.

To you, Mr. Speaker, my congratulations and may your exemplary chairmanship continue to guide us in high-quality parliamentary work.

For sure I am here thanks to the valuable help from many others including my family members, friends, and their family members. Our democratic election has taught me to be humble, to be ever alert to who my bosses are. They are my constituents, the ones who sent me here to represent them.

Mr. Speaker, yes, we won a large majority, a landslide by the normal standard. In us Albertans entrust the leadership that works to improve their lives. Also, they entrust the implementation of their aspirations and choices. I never believe that they entrust in us to impose our own views on them.

In defending Calgary-Fort, our team fought off a seven-front attack. Just like in a track-and-field event, our athlete raced in our own lane along with seven others, the highest number in a single riding, and our athlete is by far the fastest. With my track record and our dedicated campaign team we won the hearts of around 70 percent of voters. We received three and a half times the number of votes of the second highest. We won at every poll. Mr. Speaker, do you know why we won the Calgary-Fort constituency? Definitely it is thanks to the solid support from the large majority of voters and dedicated PC teamwork during the campaign.

There is another secret. It is our name, PC, which also stands for pick CAO, and CAO stands for caring about others.

It was a big win, but it was not just my win. Each of our team did their part very well, from casting their votes to carrying out campaign tasks. There were people who participated directly and openly, but there were so many who provided assistance behind the scenes and indirectly, such as making contributions, lending their telephones, telling their friends and neighbours to go and vote. The amazing part is that we did all of this on a voluntary basis, and we had the participation of young children, seniors, and our friends from all walks of life, even the participation of many whole families.

Our Progressive Conservative programs and policies as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne are in good accord with the feelings

of a large majority of Albertans. The outstanding leadership and the collective wisdom of our government caucus will continue moving Alberta forward strongly into a brighter future. Yes, it is the truth of a proven leadership for a positive future.

During the years of my first term and over the recent election, I visited many homes and talked to many constituents. I met people from all walks of life in various professions, in different states of health, in various stages of life. Many can trace their roots here for generations, some just arrived from other provinces or other lands, but they all are very proud to be Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, they all need the assurance of the availability of our excellent health care system, learning system, and social assistance system whenever their personal needs arise. They want to live in a safe and healthy environment for themselves and their future generations. They want a continuation of Alberta economic development so they can make their living and show the pride of their productivity, abilities, and skills.

Mr. Speaker, besides the residential areas our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial and business park in Calgary. There are a large number of manufacturing businesses, and they contribute to a high percentage of our Alberta economic growth and diversification. Their businesses compete in the global market, enriching Alberta's reputation for excellence and bringing back economic benefits to Albertans. As Albertans are dynamic and progressive, my resident and corporate constituents accept some short-term pains for long-term gains. They are always ready for continuous improvements, but they want the assurance of smooth transitions and assistance during the transition if needs arise, especially in the areas outside their control such as energy costs.

Mr. Speaker, during the recent election some of my constituents asked me: why did you decide to enter politics? To them my honest answer is that I decided to enter politics for a combination of reasons. First, I was brought up in a community-minded family, and I became a community-minded person myself, even during my professional career in my younger time. I'm always motivated and inspired by the ability to assist others. Certainly I have received great support and encouragement from my family and friends.

Thirdly, in my life I've reached a stage where I could do public service without worrying about personal gains or losses. Fourthly, our family had a past painful experience in the old country of standing by and letting others run the country, and they ruined it. My family members, friends, and many others suffered as a result. Lastly, I believe that I can take on any challenge to work giving back to the society that has helped me in the past.

9:20

More serious constituents asked me: what do you feel are the major issues and goals for the province? To that I answered that the real, major issue is how to maintain and enhance the Alberta advantage, which keeps Alberta on the leading edge and differentiates it from other jurisdictions. We need to develop conditions and programs that continue generating public wealth and balancing it with the needs and demands of Albertans. Just like in a family, Albertans pay close attention to their health care, education, rising costs of living, taxes, safe communities and so on, and how we can afford those.

A tougher question constituents asked me was: what is your stand on the issues that matter most to Albertans? To which I replied that I will continue to be accountable to Alberta taxpayers, with affordable spending based on Albertans' priorities and needs. I am committed to protect the much valued Alberta and Canadian system of health care, education, social programs, and a safe and healthy environment by encouraging innovative approaches and appropriate

and affordable funding. I'm committed to protect Alberta consumer businesses by enhancing the Alberta advantage. I'm committed to a debt-free Alberta with a low tax climate to enhance the Alberta economic advantage and enhance the quality of life for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in almost all of the cases my constituents asked me point-blank questions such as: what will you do if you win? How will you best represent our riding? These are very meaningful questions. They helped me to envisage what work I plan on their behalf. My answers to that are that I will focus my work on people, prosperity, and preservation. I shall strive for programs that promote Alberta human resource development, early childhood development, early prevention of problems, and equity for hardworking Albertans. I shall continue to be an effective voice for all Albertans, especially seniors, children, people with special needs, injured workers, hardworking families, and businesses. I shall continue seeking out and bringing new ideas from constituents to the government. And I shall continue to promote the vision of Alberta as the best place to grow up, to work, to raise a family, and to retire.

Mr. Speaker, with that, with what I heard from my constituents and what I told them, I am very pleased with the government programs and policies expressed in the Speech from the Throne. They reflect the needs and the wishes of those who elected us. I recognize the priorities of Alberta now and in the future. They subscribe to the fairness of assistance based on priorities and levels of need.

However, I would like to emphasize the realities we must face. One reality is that our public purse is finite and limited to the revenue our citizenry agree, reluctantly if I may say so, for the government to collect. May I say that our public purse is just like a pizza. Pizzas come in different sizes. Regardless of the size of a pizza, a bigger slice for one means smaller slices for the others. If one contemplates or demands a bigger share, one must consider what's left for the others. That's the type of table manners I heard from Alberta constituents.

I wish for a scenario where all those special interest groups who demand a share can sit down among themselves and make their sharing decisions at the same time. Maybe the government should facilitate this scenario to take place.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw our attention to another important point: the notion of surplus in government finance. The so-called surplus amount, if there is one, is already earmarked to be spent 75 on debt payment and 25 on onetime programs, and it is in the law. To me there is no surplus amount to put aside, so to speak. This amount is tied to ever fluctuating prices and sale volumes of oil and gas. We cannot base our important ongoing operational programs on a fluctuating amount.

Mr. Speaker, seeing the growing public expenditure, my constituents worry. As personal and corporate taxpayers we worry about the sustainability and affordability of such growing expenditure. We see that our current majority mandate opens up a unique and necessary opportunity for implementing the vision I call triple E government: efficient, effective, and economical government. I believe it is time we should look further for least cost opportunities: removing duplication, sharing of common services, terminating less effective programs and replacing them with more effective ones. Our canoe would sink if we kept loading new cargo without off-loading some of the existing ones. We can keep the same rowing crew, the same equipment but unload less valuable cargo and replace them with more valuable ones. In order to arrive safely at our destination and with the most valuable cargo, we cannot just fill our limited cargo space with any and every cargo.

The triple E focus should be promoted not only within government services but in all other publicly funded organizations, and I'm

more than ready to help in promoting these triple E initiatives. I believe that this triple E implementation of efficient, effective, economical government is the key to maintain a self-built strength and leadership of Alberta internally and externally.

Before I conclude, I would like to extend an open invitation to my constituents, even of different political inclination, to address with me issues of importance to them. Through open dialogue and understanding the problems facing Albertans, we are better able to address the issues most important to all of us. So please feel free at any time to come and talk to me of your proposals and solutions to making Alberta even better.

To conclude, from the bottom of my heart I sincerely thank each of you, my colleagues here in the Chamber and my friends and constituents, for your valuable support in important democratic practices. Your voluntary participation, contribution, and valuable guidance always make a difference for Alberta. May God continue blessing Alberta and Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before taking the next speaker, I wonder if the Assembly would consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of our hardworking and dedicated Crown prosecutors in the city of Calgary, someone who has served the government and the people of Alberta well in that capacity. As people in this House will know, Crown prosecutors are at the front of the line when it comes to safe communities, protecting our communities, and making sure the justice system works well. I'd like Mr. Gary Belecki to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and get a chance to say a few words about the throne speech that we heard the other day. But before I start with those remarks, I would like to formally congratulate all hon. members of this Assembly for their election victory, and I would also like to congratulate their family members as well, because I would feel that each and every member of this Assembly had a lot of help from their families in order to be successful. Over the next four years, particularly for those members who are coming to Edmonton from other areas of the province, I would encourage each and every one of you to patronize not only the fine business establishments in Edmonton-Gold Bar but some of the finest restaurants in the city. You're very welcome to just go five minutes east, and you will discover some of the most delightful dining in the entire city.

9:30

I would also like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar for placing their trust in me. It certainly is an honour and a privilege

to represent them in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I plan to continue to do the job that was given to me on election night by those constituents, and that's to hold the government accountable. It's very important in a democracy that we do not lose sight of the role of opposition in maintaining openness and accountability to a government.

Now, I've heard from media outlets, from hon. members of this Assembly about the extent of the win on election night, and it was a large victory. There's no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker. But I would caution everyone in this province about this victory, because it reminds me of the surface of a slough after the first hard frost, when the ice is everywhere but is very, very thin. That's what I think this large majority is. It's a large majority, but it's a thin majority, and I think we're soon going to see cracks in it. We're going to see cracks in that majority. Lots of them.

We heard from an hon. member across the way earlier about the three Es of this government. One of them was an economical government. I believe that is how it was described by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. But this is a government that has gone on a reckless spending spree. It has reinvented the special warrant, which led to this fiscal problem in the first place. Happy days are here again. The citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar asked me to describe at a recent meeting the new government, and I used two words to describe it: Cadillacs and champagne. Cadillacs and champagne, the best. But, Mr. Speaker, have they worked for it?

Now, I came to the Assembly, my first visit back. I went to my parking spot. I saw in the Annex parking lot in spot 639 a black Cadillac, a new one from Edmonton Motors: two-door, smoked, dark windows. [interjections] No, the expanded cabinet. It had no plates on it, Mr. Speaker, and it is symbolic of this government. It is dark and it is secretive. It is only going to be a matter of time before we discover which hon. member is touring the province in that car. Happy days are here again. We have this incredible sense with the current government that the province is theirs. Well, it is not. It belongs to the citizens. It belongs to the taxpayers.

An hon. colleague of this Assembly who left and went on to greater things in the nation's capital used to wear on his lapel that sweat-soaked loonie. Sometimes I think I would be doing the province a great benefit if I were to take maybe 70, maybe more loonies and give them to each of the Conservative members . . .

DR. TAYLOR: There are only seven loonies in this House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You will get your turn, I'm sure, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, relevance. I'm planning on saving this government a lot of money, but the whole idea of this would be to remind each and every one of you of the sacrifices that were made so that this economy is as robust as it is.

You're all of course going to take credit for the robust economy, but market forces that are beyond the control of this province – and I'm grateful to live in this province; I'm grateful to have the opportunity to raise my family in this province – international market forces that have driven commodity prices high have had a lot to do with the prosperity. The concept that Progressive Conservatives are managers of public money is fiction, not fact. [interjection]

It has been proven, hon. member across the way, that the government is just trying to spend its way out of the problem.

The electricity crisis. To all new members of this Assembly, three years ago we had a debate. The electricity issue was first initiated in 1995, but we had to make amendments with Bill 27, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act. I heard during the campaign from so many sources that you had to elect government members because they would stand up for you. What did one of the most distinguished members on the government side from the city of Edmonton do in the middle of that debate? He stood up and moved closure. That's all this individual had to say on the entire bill. Another hon. member, a cabinet minister who has since retired, stated that we would only waste the Legislative Assembly's time if we were to continue debate on the electricity bill.

What has happened three years later? Three years later we are giving the citizens back their own money – their own money – because of our mismanagement. It's \$2 billion, and before five years are out, it will be billions and billions of dollars. I'm sorry, but the voters are going to notice next year when they have to pay a \$22.75 a month extra charge on their bill to make up for what they did not pay in election year.

Now, we look at this and the symbolism of the closure on Bill 27, and that was roughly three years ago. A year ago we used closure on Bill 11. Things are just fine in public health care now. Absolutely. But where will they be, Mr. Speaker, in three years' time? Just like our electrical deregulation scheme. It was flawless. In fact, the originator of the bill couldn't stand the heat, so he left the Legislative Assembly. He knew. That cabinet minister, that hon. member, knew the consequences. He did not want to stay here. However, Mr. Speaker, that is just one example of the chaos that has been created by a party and a government that thinks they know what is best always.

We need to look at this document, and it certainly is a light document. We look at the pledges. I don't see a pledge in here to stop reckless spending. I don't see a pledge in here against the special warrants. I don't see a pledge in here to somehow stabilize our natural gas supply. We are looking at a change, Mr. Speaker, in 10 years from a supply that was over a 19-year supply of current production rates in the ground. We've gone from there to an eight-year supply of natural gas. We have gone from industrial facilities in my neighbourhood, which had a reliable, cheap source of ethane as their main feedstock, to an enterprise that is now worried about the cost of that ethane. I ask all members of this Assembly, is that long-term planning? It certainly is not.

One of the greatest follies that any provincial government in the entire history of this country ever accomplished was not so much shipping natural gas to America via the Alliance line. I had no problem with that. But allowing the ethane, allowing the liquids to stay in that natural gas stream was a major policy shortcoming of the past Progressive Conservative government.

9:40

We all talk about the rise of political power in western Canada. I am convinced that political power will come as the population increases, and the population will increase as the economy develops and diversifies. But it's not going to develop and diversify if we sell ourselves short by shipping the ethane from the Peace River arch through to Chicago, and that, Mr. Speaker, is unfortunately what we have done. Are we going to see any more petrochemical developments in Ponoka? I don't think so. Are we going to see any more in Fort Saskatchewan? I don't think so, because the ethane is now going south of Chicago.

MR. LUND: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order has been called. The hon. minister.

**Point of Order  
Questioning a Member**

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne* 482, sixth edition, I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has asked whether you'd entertain a question. You don't have to give reasons. You just have to say yes or no. If it's yes, we get the question. If it's no, then you continue your speech.

MR. MacDONALD: No, Mr. Speaker, but I do admire the hon. member's persistence. He's been trying.

**Debate Continued**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, we have to look also at medicare. Medicare is a wonderful way of delivering health care for all Albertans. I asked earlier where the medicare system will be in three years, and that is the question. That is why the ice on the slough after the hard frost is so thin. It's because the jury is out. The sky is not falling. The sky is not falling, but where will we be? We have lots of money going into the health care delivery system. Lots and lots of money. We have a shortage of staff. Those staff shortages were identified three years ago. What happened? We mismanaged the study. We squirreled it away in the Legislature Library during collective bargaining negotiations. If the government had acted on that publicly funded survey, perhaps we would not have to spend the money we do now to recruit staff.

The MRIs. The trumpet sounded. The money was delivered. We're going to have MRIs for the citizens, which is fine, but are we going to have the technicians to run the machines? This is another example of the mismanagement, Mr. Speaker.

Now, by the government's own statistics, the number of dollars going into health care is increasing. Monthly the Alberta Human Resources and Employment department releases statistics, and incredibly the number of health care professionals or workers is either decreasing or remaining stagnant. Now, you have to wonder where the money is going. Where will we be three years from now with this government? It certainly will be full of itself, and it will be at the point in its term where it will be looking certainly at getting re-elected. Their centennial year will be coming along, and there will be monuments, so to speak, to be built, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I would like to suggest that for centennial year, if we're going to do this, this city consider building a permanent home for the archives of this province. I think the capital city is a logical location for this. I'm willing to work with all members of this Assembly, and I understand the Progressive Conservative caucus in Edmonton has a caucus chair. I think this would be a worthwhile project. It's just one project. Even if it's just in the planning stages, it would be a worthwhile project for the citizens of this province. [interjection] All sorts of papers could be stored in there. You've got that right.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to have to also show more respect for Alberta's seniors. The cabinet certainly expanded. People asked me to describe it, and the only thing I could think of was that it was a make-work project. One of the things that I really liked, however, was the idea of having a stand-alone ministry for seniors. This is a very good idea, because if we plan now with this Seniors ministry – and long-term planning is not in the grasp of this government currently, but I'm going to encourage them – we can avoid a lot of the problems not only other provinces are having but other jurisdictions.

I would advise the hon. minister to take a close look at what is

currently occurring in the nation of Japan. They have a high percentage of seniors, and they are managing very well. It is a financial burden on the treasury because they're not doing that well economically, but they have had long-term planning in place and they're coping. I would encourage the new minister that's responsible for seniors to have a look at just exactly what the nation of Japan is doing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, education is also an issue that was foremost in the minds of the voters in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The idea that class sizes should be reduced was one that they endorsed. The size of a class and the ability of a student to learn, particularly in the lower grades, is increased. The more individual contact between the teacher and the student, the better the education is. In the lower grades, where we're looking at a sound foundation and getting off to a good start, I can't think of a better way to invest in the future of this province.

But, Mr. Speaker, was this accomplished? I don't know. We will have to wait and see. Hopefully the Minister of Learning in due time will take a close look at class sizes and, as the former Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Percy Wickman, would say, finally do the right thing. It is very important that we have a system of education that is for all Albertans.

I'm very disappointed that my time has run out, Mr. Speaker, but I'm looking forward to the remarks from the hon. Minister of Environment.

9:50

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and as they say, now for something completely different. First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the other chair occupants for your elections to the responsible positions that you hold.

As I start this, through you to all of my colleagues here I would like to tell you how very pleased I am to be among you. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was speaking, he was talking about the area of the city that I grew up in, Jasper Place. I can recall the first time ever that I was in this building. I looked up and thought, "My goodness, what a massive place this is." In my past life as a Member of Parliament, very often I would be driving past this parliament. As often as I went into the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa and as much as I respect and love that Parliament, this is home. This parliament, because I'm an Albertan, is my home. I share with you just how thrilled and happy I am to be here.

I didn't get here by accident. I got here because a lot of people worked very, very hard. The people in Edmonton-Rutherford in the campaign organization accepted me and supported me, and I wish now to publicly thank them, particularly Dick Flis and Cliff Downey, a name that many will remember here, who worked tirelessly in helping me win the election in Edmonton-Rutherford.

By extension, I know that politicians don't always have an easy ride in the media, and sometimes we don't always deserve an easy ride in the media, but behind those of us who are on the front lines, there are thousands of people who work without recognition, without any hope of reward but because they're citizens and because it's the right thing to do. They're the ones that are the reason we're here. I wish publicly to acknowledge that and to thank the people in the constituency association of Edmonton-Rutherford for giving me their support.

I'd also like to thank and recognize the past member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Percy Wickman. Percy and I have been

friends for many, many years. He's a friend to many of you in this Chamber. Although we may differ on how to achieve our goals, I think we probably share common values, and that can be said of many of us. So I as the member who will be filling his shoes will keep his legacy in mind respectfully.

The voters of Edmonton-Rutherford entrusted me with the responsibility to represent them in this Chamber, and I take that responsibility very, very seriously. Edmonton-Rutherford is much like many of the constituencies in Edmonton. It has a mix of seniors and of younger people. It has a mix of some people who would be considered to be very well off, and it has quite a number of people who are struggling to get by. I think I have to be particularly cognizant and aware of that.

I know that the people of Edmonton-Rutherford did not elect me to be one more voice. They expected me to represent them, and I will. Sometimes that may brush up against some conventions. I hope my colleagues will understand that anything I say or do is in the intent to represent the constituents who entrusted me with that great honour and in no way should be construed as in any way detrimental to the interests of this great party that I have been embraced by.

So, then, why did I choose to get involved in provincial politics? Why did I leave federal politics to get involved in provincial politics? Well, the answer is because in my experience – and it's been shown to be true thus far – provincial politics is where the rubber meets the road in governance. For instance, in the last two Parliaments in Ottawa when the reductions to transfer payments for health, education, and social services were being debated, it was an academic exercise. We were debating shifts in tax points. We were debating the amount of money that would be cut from provincial budgets, which would cause all provinces to have to live with a much reduced budget. But it was an academic exercise.

At the provincial level, where the services are delivered, it's real. Health, education, and social services, which encompass the most critical and the most important and the most immediate services to our citizens, are all provincial in application. So the new ideas that come in governance to our country are not going to come out of Ottawa. They are going to come from the government that is closest to the people, which may in fact be the municipal governments, but will be embodied here in the provincial governments who are responsible for the municipal governments.

So I think that the opportunity we as legislators have and I as one of this wonderful body have is to provide innovation and new ideas in governance. If these ideas start here in Alberta and find a voice here in our Legislature in Edmonton, it won't be very long until these ideas find themselves in the national consciousness. That's one of the reasons I hoped to get involved in provincial politics.

The debate, for instance, during the election on classroom size. I'm sure virtually everybody in Alberta for the price of a cup of coffee could have come up with a report on classroom size. It would have said that smaller classrooms are better. It's intuitively true. I mean, we all know that to be true. But that's not the answer. That's a gross oversimplification of the problem. The problem is not necessarily strictly classroom size, as the Minister of Children's Services knows so well.

If a certain percentage, let's say 15 percent, of the students in a classroom consume 80 percent of the teacher's energy, 80 percent of the teacher's efforts, and still aren't going to be able to get by because of socioeconomic conditions or fetal alcohol syndrome or any number of things which prevent them from learning, then maybe it would be a good idea for us to address some of these problems. If we were to make that investment in nurturing the next generation, the payoff down the road in one generation is 10 to 1. That's 10 to

1 proven, for instance, with Head Start programs. If we as a province were to decide that nurturing children would be our number one objective and made the investment in Head Start programs, for instance, so that Head Start programs . . . [interjections] Well, wait until I get to electricity. You won't be clapping then. If we were to make our investment in Head Start programs, we would see that investment repaid within one generation 10 times over.

So some of these ideas that would be important to our country nationally can happen here in Alberta. We can do it because we've got that cohesive nature. If we do that, we'll be doing something wonderful for our country. So I hope to be able to contribute along some of these lines.

Now, I just briefly mentioned electricity and natural gas. It's something that has come up quite a lot. Natural gas has pretty much looked after itself. Bill 1 is going to put a legal framework around it, and intuitively we know that as our resource revenue comes in, we have the luxury of being able to shield consumers from spikes in the price of natural gas. It's pretty straightforward, and I think most people understand it pretty easily.

10:00

Electricity is a far more complex and far more difficult consideration. When we're talking about electricity, it seems to me that we need to keep in mind three separate and three distinct considerations. They are these. Every decision we make needs to ensure that there will be more electrons in the system, because if there are more electrons in the system, we'll have more supply, and if we have more supply and a constant demand or more supply than demand, the price is going to go down.

The second thing that we need to do is ensure that every decision we make will promote conservation, because conservation, both with electricity and gas, is cheaper and better for the planet. We really have the opportunity here to do something really worth while for our province and for the planet as we're going through this electricity, to really think about the conservation that's inherent with paying a real price for the commodity that we're using.

As we will of necessity move to a realistic price for whatever commodity it might be, it's going to encourage conservation, just exactly the same as the spikes for gasoline caused us all to drive smaller and more fuel-efficient cars. I don't know about you, but you can sure see your breath when you get up in my house. I mean, that thermostat is turned down. If we do that everywhere and are more conscientious, we'll be doing something good for our pocket-books and for our planet.

The third is: will what we do result in the lowest possible price to the consumer? The answer is, in my opinion, yes, if we proceed with deregulation. The reason for that is this. If you give yourself an opportunity and just cast your mind and think about it for a minute, what entity, in anyone's imagination, that is owned by the government, financed by the government, and managed by the government has ever been a low-cost supplier of anything? It just doesn't happen. Energy is so critically important to the Alberta advantage, to our competitive advantage that we have to do what we have to do to get a market discipline into the manufacture of that essential commodity. So if we provide for a market discipline in the generation and the manufacture of electricity, we will end up with a better product at a lower price more consistently. You either believe in the market and have faith in it, or you don't. A market economy has served us extremely well in the west.

Now, if I may, I'd like to just touch on one other issue very briefly, and that is that it's likely in this Legislature that this parliament will be charged with some emotional issues surrounding human rights. I want to be on record right now as saying that human

rights accrue to us because we're human beings, for no other reason. They're inalienable, and they accrue to us because we're human beings. Tolerance is a two-edged sword; it works both ways. You can't have one group crying for tolerance and the other group not receiving it no matter which side of the fence you have to be on. So when we're charged with that debate, I'd ask members to remember that there are always two sides to every story and that tolerance is in fact a two-way street.

We are going to be charged soon with the Future Summit, the summit that is going to for at least our lifetimes chart the economic and perhaps the social path of our province into the near future. I'd encourage all Albertans, not just those of us in this room but all

Albertans, to participate in that, to have a voice, to be part of the governance of our great province.

I'd like, again, to finish as I started: to thank you and through you, Mr. Speaker, all members here for the great privilege that you have afforded me by bringing me into this marvelous Chamber to be able to participate and in some small way to contribute to the governance of this great and beloved province of Alberta. Thank you very much.

Since I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, may I move that the House do now adjourn.

[At 10:07 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]