

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, February 27, 2002** **8:00 p.m.**  
 Date: 02/02/27  
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

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

Mr. Horner 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.

[Debate adjourned February 27: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's my understanding that when the House adjourned, a member of your party was speaking at the time. Is that not so?

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I'm happy to defer to the Leader of the Opposition.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. All right.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't know whose turn it was, so I thought that if two of us stood up, the decision was yours. I appreciate the consideration.

Mr. Speaker, it's a real pleasure to stand this evening and speak to the Speech from the Throne, that was delivered yesterday by the Lieutenant Governor. We've got a lot of issues that come up in the context of both the Speech from the Throne and what constitutes the proper mandate of government so that we can see how the proposals that fit within that speech and, I guess, the business plan or the initiatives that will be undertaken by the government over the next year fit within some of the mandates that we see for government and some of the planning and kind of the legal obligations that we as legislators have to the province that we represent and that we are to govern.

Mr. Speaker, I think all of us want to start by expressing our thoughts to the Queen, happy thoughts in the context of her celebration of her golden anniversary of ascending to the throne but also sad thoughts on the loss of her sister, Princess Margaret. I think it was very appropriate for that to be part of the recognition here in the Speech from the Throne.

The direction that we go from there is in the context of: how do we put together the policies that are important for the province under the mandate that we talk about? The Speech from the Throne in a number of places emphasizes the fact that the government is committed to recognizing and dealing with the priority areas that Albertans express again and again and again as being of great concern to them. We have to look at the history of what we've seen, Mr. Speaker, I think almost since the time I first came into the Legislature. At that point in time, the debt seemed to be a real issue, with health care and education following up. As the budget was balanced, we moved into an accelerated pay-down of the debt. The public's concern and Albertans' concern over debt and the role that

the debt plays in our province began to fade in terms of concern that Albertans had, and education, health care, and children have kind of risen now to the point where they are much more on the minds of Albertans in the context of: how do we manage the province and how do we deal with the issues that are important to this province in that context?

Now, we have to put all of this into the perspective of what we as a province have. Everybody in our province recognizes the blessings that we have in the context of the natural resource environment and also the physical structure as a place to live. We have to look at it from the point of view of: how do we make sure that the optimism that is part of being Alberta, the optimism both in terms of our individual futures and also in terms of our collective futures, gets a chance to grow and to be part of the next generation's heritage as well? If we look at the things that are coming out of this report, the Speech from the Throne, basically a draft of the government's business plans, more specifics of which we'll see when the business plans come out associated with the budget, we have to look at what we can take out of this speech and say: how does it apply to where we get a sense that Albertans are putting their priorities?

Mr. Speaker, I have traveled the province extensively since January 1, trying to get a sense of what Albertans are thinking, what Albertans want us to deal with in the context of this legislative session. We began the year with an awful lot of concern about health care and children. That was the question that came up a lot. Then as we began to get a sense of what was happening because of some of the adjustments that were being made in the budget, some of the discussions that were going on in the communities about what next year might bring forward, there were a lot of concerns raised about how we are going to deal with education. There were discussions at that time starting to come out about the possibility of strikes, about the possibility of not being able to settle with the teachers the way we had settled with the other public services during the year prior. Also, there was a lot of concern about how we deal with the things that are important to this province in terms of our planning ability, our planning horizon, and the associated interaction between the business community, the service community, and their government. What we were seeing was that a lot of them were saying: how do we plan as a community, how do we plan as an organization, how do we plan as a business when we can't understand or we can't develop expectations about where the government is going to go from one year to the next?

There's been a lot of concern expressed now about the need for stability in our province, the need for predictability in our province, so that they as community organizations, individuals, or businesses can effectively plan their future and deal with their decision-making in a context where the government doesn't catch them by surprise, doesn't provide them with a working environment that creates uncertainty for them. There are a couple of different areas that they really wanted addressed in that context, Mr. Speaker, and they were both in terms of the government's expenditure fiscal stability but also in terms of the program stability. They were really concerned about the kind of changes that were going on in some of the laws and some of the programs where they didn't feel that the changes that were happening did reflect the discussions that they had with the government. In other words, they felt that they were brought in for discussions, and all of a sudden there was a totally different idea coming out as the solution which hadn't been discussed with them, hadn't been brought up to them in that consultation.

I think that reflects the possibility that we have of decisions being made without an iterative process going on with the people that are being consulted. It's great to go out and say, "What do you think?" and get all the ideas together, but when you do come to a decision-

making time, what you need to do is take all of those ideas and go back again and say, "Okay; here's what the other people we talked to said," so that anybody then has a sense of: well, now we have a feeling of where that suggestion that's being adopted came from. When they're caught by surprise by not ever having heard about it, they end up saying: "Gee, who put that idea in? It sure didn't come from our discussions."

These are the kinds of things that we're hearing when we talk to the communities. A lot of the communities were very concerned about some of the cuts that went on last fall without consultation. They felt that there were adjustments made in the programs that could not be rationalized in the context of their perception of priorities for this government, and there were also changes in procedures that affected the business community. Some of them specifically were with the WCB. Others were with the rumoured at the time and now more substantiated but not final yet relationship the business community is going to have to play in the context of the reforms to public services. Specifically, the health care premiums is one that they keep talking about. You know, they see that in the end the business community is going to have to pay for that, whether it comes through their current benefit package negotiations with their employees or whether it's going to come through a greater effort by employees to get employers to pay their benefit packages or whether it's going to come through just the employees saying: "We can't make it anymore. We've got to have a higher wage so that we can pay our share."

8:10

You know, this is the kind of impact where the community is saying that they don't get a sense of participation in those decisions. They want to feel that they were part of it, because they were promised that they could be part of it when they were brought into the discussions in the first place. So we need to have that process put in place where when we do get a set of recommendations or a set of ideas that we're thinking about, there's a mechanism there to go back and deal with them so that they can effectively get a buy-in to those kinds of suggestions and comments.

When we go through the Speech from the Throne, the government starts off by talking about some of the different aspects, where they want to go. Commemorating the Queen's jubilee with the creation of the new student scholarships I think is a great idea, but it does help only a very small number of Albertans. In the sense that it does give the student a chance to set a goal – you know, the \$5,000 value scholarship is significant – it will effectively make sure that they are challenged to perform and to excel. I guess the thing that was missing out of the Speech from the Throne would be the criteria that would be used to determine who is eligible. Is this going to be just based on academic standing, or is it going to be based on a need criteria? Is it going to be based on some kind of a community designation? These are the kinds of things that would help Albertans to understand how that's going to, in effect, come and affect them in their communities.

If we look at the focus that the Speech from the Throne goes into after that, it talks about health care and then goes into some of the other departments, but I want to start first of all by commenting on some of the impacts that are there in the context of health care. When we look at the report that the Premier's Advisory Council on Health brought forward, they had a series of recommendations in there, 44 I think in total. The government within a very short period of time basically said: we're going to accept all of these recommendations. I guess, Mr. Speaker, I would have felt much more confident in the government's ability to deal with those recommendations if they had come forward and said: "You know, we've

considered all 44 of them. All 44 of them in some ways have merit, but this is the priority we want to put on them because these are the areas that we want to focus our limited resources on in dealing with trying to find solutions for our health care situation."

As members of part of the government, we recognize that nothing in a static situation is acceptable. We're always growing. We're always improving. We're always moving forward. So, you know, nothing can stay static, and this includes our health care system. New technologies are coming along, new organizational structures, new treatment methods, new drugs. All of these kinds of things have to be built into our decision-making process, and one of the fundamental things that health care has to be is a matter of creating priorities. You know, the doctors do that as they deal with you. Patients do it as they go into the system. Mr. Speaker, we have to look at how we deal with that in the context of our communication back to Albertans.

This report basically talks about health care in the context of a significant focus on revenue shifting, revenue generation. When you talk about health care with Albertans, revenue and revenue sharing, revenue alternatives were not really one of their first priorities. Their priorities were: how do we deal with waiting lists, how do we deal with access, how do we deal with the specialities? These things are mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, but they're away down the list. I guess I would've felt much more comfortable dealing with the government's intentions if they had been at the top of the priorities, because those are the things that Albertans speak about when they want to express concerns about their health care. It's not whether or not we're paying by health care premiums or paying by taxes or paying by cash. They want to know that they've got access to timely, adequate health care, and these kinds of recommendations and suggestions in the Speech from the Throne were at the bottom of the list. When we look at Alberta's position in expenditures in health care across Canada, we see that, you know, we are reasonably close to the top, if not at the top, of expenditures per capita in health care. So the dollars shouldn't be really that much of a concern. It's how we manage those dollars, how we make sure that those dollars are well spent.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked about a number of innovative processes and procedures that some of our health authorities have used to improve their effective use of our public dollars. I see nothing in here that talks about a process being put in place to expedite sharing of those cost-effective ideas from one health authority to the other. I know the minister has responded a couple of times when they've been asked about our suggestions, and he says: well, you know, the chairs of the health authorities meet all the time. But when I discuss health with some of the chairs of the health authorities, they tell me that the agenda they deal with has to deal with financing, has to deal with the relationship between the government and the health authorities. They don't have the time commitment in those meetings to deal with the lower level discussions that are going on about actual operational changes.

So what we need to do is put together a provincewide interhealth authority communication process where some of the operational managers, not the chief executive officers, get together and talk about how they're actually improving the delivery. One of the things that has been shown to be very effective is the Chinook health region's new program on transition into long-term care. Another one is the Capital Health Link here in Edmonton and how they're now expanding that a little bit into some of the other health regions. This is good, but why isn't it being opened up across all of the province?

I had a conversation with the executive here in the Capital health authority, and they were talking about how cost-effective it had been. I asked them: well, you know, if that Capital Health Link, that

call-in health advisory system, has been so effective for people who start at home and make the call, why is it that they don't have a bank of phones at emergency so that people who are sitting there for two or three hours in the emergency room . . . And, Mr. Speaker, I can go on: four and five and six hours as well, because there are a lot of people who have sat there that long. Well, why not have a bank of phones there so that they can call the health link and effectively get some support, get some ideas on how to deal with their ailment that brought them to emergency without having to go through the high-cost process of going into emergency care? These are the cost-effective things that we need to start looking at because we as a province are already spending more than most other provinces in Canada on our health care. So, you know, we need to make sure that we have cost containment, cost-effective discussions going on as well.

I was going to kind of skip over the discussion of health fees, health premiums, when I first went through this yesterday and started thinking about what I wanted to say this evening, but when I listened to the responses that we got in question period today when the issues of health user fees were brought up both by the opposition and by the government members, I just couldn't contain myself any longer, Mr. Speaker. I had to make some comments. They're effectively saying that raising health care fees will solve the dilemma, that it will make everybody aware of the fact that health care is expensive. Anybody who has had even a basic introductory course in economics knows that fixed costs do not affect consumer decisions. That's a given. User fees are a fixed cost. They are not part of a consumer decision-making process.

8:20

There's a lot of information out there also, Mr. Speaker, that when you deal with fixed costs in terms of consumption decisions, you in effect create an expectation of an entitlement. In other words, I've paid my health premium; I get something for it. You know, we have to make sure that this kind of decision process is not occurring in our health care system, and that's why I don't think that increasing health care fees is a proper operational tactic to deal with sending any kind of a signal to Albertans that our health care system is costly and has to be more judiciously used.

There are other ways that we can do it, like that health link program that I was talking about, having the phones in the emergency rooms, having the option there for individuals when they go to a doctor to certify that they have used the health link first so that they do know that they do need to go to see their doctor. You know, this basically gives a triage system to make sure that the people who are using the high-cost part of our health care system are the people who really need it. We in effect have that a little bit now in the sense that our general practitioners, our family practitioners are in a way a triage into the specialist system. Well, we may need to think about also having some kind of an entry signal sent to our general practitioners. There are a number of stories that run around about, you know, the social visit to the doctor: not the medical visit to the doctor; the social visit. Well, you know, we've got to make sure that that kind of use of our health care system is not there. We've also got to make sure, with one of the more rapidly increasing cost parts of our health care system, the prescription drugs, that we're starting to deal with those kinds of issues.

Mr. Speaker, I tell this story in a number of community meetings when people have said: well, Ken, give us an example. I don't know whether I'm fortunate or unfortunate, but I've had an ulcer for a large part of my lifetime, and I probably have used every treatment that's been available for ulcers, all the way from the original, you know, eat potatoes, eat rice, and drink milk and take a vitamin pill.

That was it. You know, what we end up with is all those, including the antibiotic treatment that's been tried.

The last time I had a concern about my stomach and went to the doctor, he prescribed a new prescription that I hadn't tried before. It was 30 pills, \$75. I couldn't believe it. I took them. It helped, but the next time I had a problem, I happened to be wandering around the drugstore and on the shelf was a now over-the-counter drug that I took probably 20 years ago under prescription. Mr. Speaker, \$12 for 90 pills. So in effect three months' worth for \$12 compared to one month's worth for \$75. The over-the-counter one worked just as well for me, and I'm using it now. That's the kind of decision we should be looking at in the context of what prescriptions and which drugs we allow and encourage physicians to prescribe for Albertans. You know, that's very cost-effective.

We have to look at some of these kinds of recommendations. I know that a number of other provinces have procedures that they recommend to physicians in terms of how they schedule prescriptions, how they decide which prescription to give. Maybe we should be looking at some of these, not necessarily to interfere with the doctor/patient relationship but to be there so that we in effect make people think about the cost, make them look at the cost as they make their decision. That way we in essence send cost signals into the consumption decision. That's good economics, Mr. Speaker. Fixed costs are not good economics.

We also have to look at some of the other things that we talk about in here. There's a recommendation on page 5 where they're talking about looking at access guarantees for selected services. In the same part of the report they're talking about basically putting the waiting lists onto computers so that people can come in and look at a waiting list and decide whether they want to go to this or that or that other location based on how long the waiting list is. The question that automatically comes up there is: will this choice that's being made include travel costs for the patient if they decide to go to someplace distant where there's a shorter waiting list, or are they making the choice of paying for that as part of getting treatment early? Well, truly if what we're going to end up doing is have them pay the transportation cost so that they can get the treatment early, we've in effect created a two-tiered health care system, because the people with the money are the ones who can travel, get the service quicker. The people who don't have money to make that kind of a choice about traveling are the ones who are going to have to stay home. They're going to have to suffer, and they're going to become disadvantaged Albertans.

I guess we have to look at it in the perspective of, you know: what are we as a society? Are we a society that says that health care is important to us, health care is important in the context of our community, or is health care truly a commodity that we buy and sell? If we can afford it, we get it and we get it a timely way, and others have to take what's left. Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's what Albertans perceive in their health care system. That's not what I've been hearing them talking about as I've traveled the province. So I would be very cautious in terms of how this part of the waiting list access guarantee package gets put together. There was reference in here to ambulance services as well, and you know, if that's going to be part of it, that the transportation and the cost of getting those services at a distance is included, that may be an acceptable process.

Mr. Speaker, many of us who live in rural Alberta accept the fact that we are not going to get timely health care, timely services the same way as someone who lives at a point of concentration, but that's a choice on our part. When we deal with it here, when we're actually legislating processes that do not allow for that kind of choice, that's not acceptable. If people move to a community accepting the fact that they're going to be disadvantaged, that's

different, but we have to make sure that we're not imposing economic hardship in the process of our legislative decisions.

Mr. Speaker, the next section that we get into in the Speech from the Throne looks at the focus on the learning system, and this afternoon we tried to conduct a debate on what constitutes a good learning system, what the government's role should be in that. We were shut down, saying we were supposed to do it in the response to the Speech from the Throne or in the budget debate. But the issue here comes out to be one of: this debate tonight is associated with the broad perspective of the government mandate, not an individual departmental focus. So we have to make sure that we get our comments on all of the aspects of government tonight, not just on education. So I was very disappointed in the way it turned out this afternoon.

In the other aspect here, what we have to do is look at how we develop our vision for the education system. I've often suggested, you know, that we have to make sure the school boards, the school community – the parents, the decision-makers, the teachers: all of the community – have input into defining what constitutes that community's delivery model. We can't have the government imposing criteria on that where they make conditions that are budget contingent. What we have to do is let them model their education system, and then through the negotiations that go on with the employee groups, whether it's the ATA or the support staff, they have to deal with how they staff the model that they feel would best deliver education in their community.

8:30

What we're also finding is that the government has announced that they're going to be putting out a new curriculum, and that's part of the material that's here in the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, I happened to be at a meeting last spring where the Minister of Learning made reference to how they were going to redesign the curriculum from kindergarten through grade 12, and the conversation that went through the room at that meeting was: where did this come from? We're basically seeing here now that that curriculum has been committed to, because it says "the government will share and discuss a renewed vision for the kindergarten to grade 12 learning system." But they've talked about it in these meetings as being already under way and being planned. I hope the government takes this sentence to heart and makes sure that this discussion about a new curriculum, a new process for learning is fully discussed with the communities before it is implemented. This is a good suggestion in this speech. I hope they carry through with it rather than the suggestion that was provided last spring, where it was almost presented as a *fait accompli*.

The only reference to advanced education that's in the Speech from the Throne basically talks about the government wanting to work with students and institutions to make sure that education is accessible. Well, that's a very broad, open statement. What are they thinking about? How are they looking at trying to decide whether or not education is accessible? How are they trying to decide whether or not education is affordable?

Are they willing to look at some of the investment share/return type of models that are out there for business? You know, students put some money into it; they get a benefit out of it. The public puts some money into it; we get some benefit out of it. How do those returns balance relative to the proportion of the costs that we are putting into it? Mr. Speaker, I think that from some of the rough work we've done on these kinds of models right now, we're asking the students to pay more than the share they should. We should be looking at trying to provide opportunities for students to deal with getting their education in a less costly way to them; in other words,

increasing the public component in it. Then we'll get a better output in some of these investment share model type of analyses.

But we've got to make sure that we look at advanced education. How does it work? How does it function in the context of providing equality or equity of access for students across the province? More and more we're seeing programs focus on one or two institutions. The government's commitment to this Campus Alberta idea hasn't materialized the way it should. It's still institutionalized in buildings in the major centres, because that's where the volume exists to, in effect, create the economies of scale that are needed to make education cost-effective. The only institution we have in the province that's really stretching out to the reaches of the province is Athabasca University, and it has a limited curriculum that it offers and a limited opportunity for people who want to specialize in some of the more challenging and advanced learning environments.

I guess the next section that the government goes into is dealing with the focus on the economy. This is kind of the section that a lot of people are talking about right now in terms of how the government's interaction with what's going on in our economy really is being questioned by an awful lot of the business community in Alberta, by a lot of the people who are buyers and sellers in that business community. They've seen the instability that's created by the changes in the government expenditure patterns affecting their ability to plan. The sense of uncertainty and, kind of, commitment of the government I think started last year with the electricity deregulation, when the government told them that there wouldn't be a severe impact and there was. You know, they lost their trust in the government to say that stability was important, and that kind of was the real hard kick that made them start to think about what was going on. They're now looking at a lot of the other things that the government is doing and saying, "Gee, that's destabilizing as well".

They're not providing support to the business community, not support in the context of dollars being given to the business community but support in the context of a stable business environment. They're telling me now that operating in Alberta requires more than just low taxes. It requires predictability. It requires stability so that they can plan, they can deal with a good relationship with their employees, they can deal with good relationships with their suppliers. When they don't know what the government is going to do in terms of the contracts they have with the government, or when they don't know what the arm's length agencies are going to do as they are affected by the government's decisions, how do these businesses deal with their suppliers and their employees? They don't want to be in a situation where they jeopardize the working relationship they have with their suppliers and with their employees.

The uncertainty and the volatility that is becoming evident in terms of the government's activities is really starting to cause them some concern. I think the government needs to recognize that the fundamental role of government in terms of its relationship to the economic community is to promote stability, to promote accountability, and to promote predictability. That is not occurring right now in the context of the actions of this government, and we've got to start working on it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to spend the next 15 minutes giving my normal talk about how the proper tools need to be put in place to deal with fiscal stability, because I don't doubt that everybody in this House has heard it at least once before. So I'll give everybody a break tonight and just go on to the next section instead of dealing with that one at this particular point in time.

I guess when we look at the financial management commission that the government promises to put in place to deal with the financial management of our province and where we're going, I would hope that some of those tools I talked about will come out of

there, because we've had a number of groups say that these are good. The Chamber of Commerce thinks it's a good idea. The Institute of Chartered Accountants have started to talk about it as well.

Mr. Speaker, I guess the thing that has come out in terms of some of the debate we've heard the last two days both in connection with the Speech from the Throne and this financial commission but also in terms of some of the other comments that have started to float out from discussions that are going on in the community about what the government's intending has to do with the heritage savings trust fund. I think it's really important that, in effect, if any change – and I don't think it's appropriate at this point in time to make changes in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the relationship it has to Albertans – is going to occur, it should only occur if a referendum were held to give Albertans a true say in it.

8:40

They spoke very, very strongly in the '95 review, when they said that they wanted the heritage fund kept as a long-term income source to support Alberta when our oil and gas revenues begin to decline and we have to look at having an alternative revenue instead of increased income taxes or a possibility of a sales tax or whatever else you wanted to call it. That was not acceptable to Albertans. They wanted the heritage fund kept to provide them with the income so that they could deal with their future in a certain way. If we're going to change that, we'd better make sure that that's what Albertans are saying and that Albertans recognize the fact that based on their requests at that time we changed the management style and the management structure of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund to the point that an unplanned, short-term liquidation of any of that fund probably creates a situation where we will, in effect, be net losers, and we can't let that happen.

Long-term planning in the context of the equity investments of that heritage fund requires a long-term decision-making process, not a short-term decision-making process, because we will lose because of the equity situation, the equity markets, and the role the equity markets is now playing in that heritage fund if we liquidate it at this point in time. So we can't deal with that kind of decision-making without Albertans fully being allowed to participate through some kind of a referendum.

The other aspects that we come up with here, Mr. Speaker – and I want to wish the government all the success in the world as they move to try and work with the government of Canada and all of the other things that are necessary to facilitate better access to the international markets for our producers and our processors in Alberta. This has to be a priority in terms of our economic growth, but we have to do it in a way that, in effect, sustains the kind of Alberta that's important to us as well.

I guess the one little part of the economic section of this Speech from the Throne that kind of brought a chuckle as I read it was the reference to "establishing formal ties in emerging markets." My first thought was, Mr. Speaker: is this a bunch more trade offices that we're going to be establishing? And isn't it only about five or six or seven years ago that we were shutting these all down, saying that there are better ways to do it? I guess if that's really what that clause in this speech means, I would ask the government, before they undertake any more trade offices, to conduct a thorough analysis of the effectiveness and the benefits we've achieved from the trade offices that we have. Are they giving us an increase in trade with those countries that's above the trend for the countries if we hadn't had them there? There are a lot of model systems that would allow them to make that kind of a comparison. I don't want us to be putting in place just an assignment for somebody to go out and have a good time for a couple of years living overseas. That's not what we need to promote our economic growth.

There are a lot of options for us through the trade associations. You know, the Beef Export Federation has done a great job of promoting our activities in the international market in the beef industry. We want to focus probably more in the context of supporting some of these commodity associations and their efforts to reach out. They are the professionals, they are the commodity-knowledgeable people, they know where the market is for their product, and they have the resources and the knowledge to make sure that the information that's conveyed to the other side is adequate. Now, I'm going to put a qualification on that, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that I've worked internationally. I know how important it is in some countries to have a government tag along when you go into negotiations. You know, if those are the kind of justifications that will in a sense create the need for a trade office in those countries, we need to make sure that that is made plain to Albertans when we establish these. Custom and practice in some of these countries are such that if you don't have somebody who has political connections with you, you're not going to get a signed deal. If that's the country we're going into, that's the country we need to make sure we deal with, but we do it in the open. So that's why I'm suggesting that we need to have this full-fledged investigation of whether or not these kinds of offices truly bring us a benefit.

The last comment on the economic section there is that the government wants to make sure that they work to have open access for our softwood lumber. This is really important to us in Alberta. It's important to a lot of our northern and rural communities. I guess, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I'd like to throw out here is that I heard a suggestion coming from Ottawa where they were going to enter into negotiations with the U.S. something similar to what they had in the previous agreement, where they would impose a national export tariff on softwood lumber and the U.S. government would drop their 32 percent countervail duty. Somewhere in my mind – I don't whether it's just open tonight or what – I have a recollection that we as a province have control over our resources. If that is really true, why is it that we are not dealing with trying to collect the appropriate tax to offset the U.S. rather than letting the feds do it? That would be an appropriate strategy for us. After all, those are our resources, and we need to deal with it. If that means entering into discussions with our lumber producers about changing the harvesting fees that they pay or the stumpage fees or the access fees, that may be a way to do it, but we should be getting that 13 percent, not sending it to Ottawa.

There are a lot of issues here that we come up with in the context of the agriculture sector when they talk about what we're dealing with in the context of rural Alberta, how we have to go into dealing with some of the new strategies. Mr. Speaker, I guess if there's one thing that's been coming up very, very frequently in my contact with the rural communities over really the last four or five months – it started to trickle in last summer – it was: what is the government doing when they're trying to reorganize the ag offices? What kind of focus are they putting on this value-chain reorganization? Where do we fit into it as small producers, or where do we fit into it as a community?

I guess, Mr. Speaker, if there's been a failure on the part of Alberta Agriculture, it's been to communicate clearly to rural Alberta what they mean by that reorganization, how it's going to affect them, how it's going to deal with them. I don't feel comfortable that the comments in here are going to help in having rural Alberta understand what's going on. A lot of people are saying that what this reorganization is doing is just putting in place a support system for industrial agriculture. It's got nothing to do with community-based agriculture. In fact, it's weakening community-based agriculture. It's going to take away from the communities any

say in what agriculture is. They looked to last fall's intensive livestock act, the confined feeding operations act, in effect as justification for that, because they saw in there the province removing from the local community the kind of say they thought they should have in the location of those intensive livestock operations. They're seeing this as another step in that removal of opportunity for community-based agriculture. So I think the government really owes it to rural Alberta to make sure that if that is the case, they admit it, and that if it isn't the case, they get out there and explain to them how the average farmer in Alberta, the average rural community can benefit from this reorganization.

The indication that runs around in the community is that 51 regional offices will be reduced to 18. That, in effect, has created a lot of concern about access to information. It's created a lot of concern about the kind of information they're going to be able to get. A number of farmers have called and said: you know, what we've been told is that now if we want agronomic or crop science information, we'd better go talk to a commercial supplier, because they have field men that promote their product. Mr. Speaker, what kind of objectivity do we get if we go to Monsanto and ask them what crop to grow? They're going to give us a crop that requires their chemicals, that requires their processes, that requires their input. They're not going to give us an objective assessment of what's good for our farm, for our community. They're going to look at what's in the best interest of Monsanto. I pick only on Monsanto because it's the easy name to say compared to some of the other ones. It's not that they're any more self-serving than any of the others.

8:50

I guess the issue that comes up next in the speech is the reference to healthy communities with the activities and the discussions that have been going on today about what we are dealing with in the context of safe communities when the government is talking about changing probation requirements. We've got to make sure that the communities out there feel that we as a government are looking out for their interest. I would ask: is it in their interest to have people out there who are now being given a less-supervised probation? That has to be really looked at. What data is available to show that moving from a three- to a six-month visit with your probation officer is adequate? Do we have the investigative analysis that shows that that still provides for adequate reintroduction of an offending person into the community? Is that adequate? I don't think we do have that, Mr. Speaker, and if we do, if the minister has it, I would ask that it be tabled in this Legislature and that it be circulated to Albertans. Every mayor, every reeve, every community leader should be given a copy of it so that they can have a sense that there is some degree of evidence behind this change. Safe communities is one of the major concerns of Albertans. Safe communities, the ability to go out into your community, the ability not to feel threatened in your community: that's important to Albertans. We've got to make sure our activities support that concern and provide for solutions to those concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just about finished, so we won't be going much longer.

I guess the interesting part of the Speech from the Throne is that one of the things that I probably have heard raised more than just about anything else as I've traveled the province is at the end of the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, if there's something that I think is a sense of what Alberta stands for, it's how we care for and treat our children, yet this is the second-last section in the Speech from the Throne. There have been so many concerns raised by groups from one end of the spectrum, from one age level to the other, about why it is we're reducing financial support for the

prevention programs in our children's services area. Why are we removing so many of those support programs for families that will give them a chance to bring their children up and make those children feel part of the community, give those children a chance to grow, to feel loved, to have a sense that they do have value, that they do have worth? People are really, really concerned about the perception in the community that that kind of commitment we as a public are making to our children has been removed, and I really think that if the government is going to move in that area, they've got to reinstate those prevention programs, and they've got to make sure that the communities appreciate the fact that children are important.

Mr. Speaker, we went through a process of developing mandates for our regional children's authorities where we had those consultations under the commissioner's office. They basically said that the communities were going to have a chance to deal with developing the programs for the youth in their community. Prevention and family support were almost at the top of the list of every one of these business plan developments. Why is it that we as decision-makers on their behalf have made a choice, set priorities that have removed those programs? We've in effect pre-empted the authority that we gave to the children's services authorities to make decisions that fit their community, that reflected their community's wish, that reflected their community's collective decision on how they should support and provide the necessary growth environment for their children. I think that's one of the worst things that we've done in the last year when we removed those kinds of programs in support of children in this province.

We also have to look in that same context – but it's not even talked about in this speech – at the relationship that we've had to removing support for persons with developmental disabilities. Mr. Speaker, these are disadvantaged Albertans who need community supports. A lot of them, with a small amount of financial support, a small amount of counseling support can become effective participants in a community. If we don't give them those supports so that they can live independently, they're going to end up being institutionalized and much more costly for us as a province. We've got to make sure that we keep those community support structures in place for these individuals. They're Albertans. They deserve dignity. They deserve to be given an opportunity to live in the community, and we've got to make sure that our resources are there for them. This is another one of the areas that really has been brought forward in the past four or five months as people have seen the cuts that started in response to the second-quarter update.

Mr. Speaker, I guess the comment that I'd like to make about the environment section is that as we look at expanding our output – and I know that a lot of our new electricity generators, as an example, are looking at building in Alberta with the idea of exporting their electricity – I would ask a question as much as anything. Has the government looked into the opportunity of working with these companies as part of their approval process that if their electricity is being exported, it has to be exported in exchange for greenhouse gas credits? You know, that kind of option should be looked at, because if we're going to allow businesses to establish here in Alberta with the idea of exporting resource-based energy, then we should be saying: why allow them to export into another economic market at the expense of an alternative business that wants to establish in our area that doesn't export those resource-based credits into another market? We want to have the growth in our community, not the growth in somebody else's community, when we get the debit of the greenhouse gas. So I guess that's a question as much as anything.

This is one area where I think we're in an evolving state of understanding for a lot of people, including myself. This is one of

the areas that I probably haven't kept up on as much as I should, but it's one of the things that I think we need to look at, especially when we're dealing with new energy suppliers. You know, these are not people that have been in the province, that have been growing in the province, or that are producing that energy source for consumption in the province. If they're going to establish here to supply a market somewhere else, then we don't want to become the source of location for other communities to come here, establish their greenhouse gas emitting energy sources, and then use the product without having to deal with the greenhouse gas that's emitted. I guess that's a concern that I've got when we look at some of the options now that are being speculated on in the context of some of our electricity generation options that are coming up or some of our new coal exploration projects.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other issues that need to be addressed, but more and more I'm getting into the area where some of the things I want to say deal with the actual expenditure patterns and the actual expenditure amounts. I would just serve notice that I'll make the choice right now to give everybody a rest from listening to my gravelly voice, and I'll pick up those specific items about the levels of funding and the priorities on funding when we get into the budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to express my concerns about this agenda of the government, provide some suggestions for them. We'll see over the coming weeks what happens to those suggestions and those comments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

9:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 29(2) we have a brief period for questions, comments, and responses.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, hon. members. It's a ruling that's already been looked into. If the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition had spoken right after the mover, then there might have been something different, but inasmuch as there have been others in front, then all people who speak subsequent to that fall under Standing Order 29.

There being no questions, we'll go to the next member. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Common sense and practical experience tell us that health, education, and social services are inextricably linked. This is especially true when we're considering the welfare of our children. In Her Honour's Speech from the Throne yesterday I was pleased to see the recognition that good health and a good life depend on much more than medical care alone. It's also about lifestyle, hard work, and having encouraging role models at home, at work, and at play.

I was also pleased to see the recognition of the fact that the more our children learn, the healthier they will be and the better lives they are likely to have. However, in my opinion, recognition of the societal benefits of early childhood intervention for at-risk children was not sufficiently emphasized in the throne speech. Today I'll try to make a case for why long-term, secure funding for early childhood intervention programs for at-risk children and families is in our enlightened self-interest. I'll try to show that it's ethically appropriate to identify and help those children most vulnerable in society who need and would benefit from our help in ensuring that they start life on an equal footing with their peers, and I'll demonstrate that it's

in our economic interest to make the investment in children early so as to mitigate against the negative influence of learned helplessness.

Albertans through the Future Summit process have in my opinion clearly identified the necessity of providing a foundation for education and learning upon which future generations of Albertans will enjoy the same opportunity our generation enjoyed. In a knowledge-based world economy achieving this objective will not be easy. As members know, we are no longer competing in a local or even a national market. We now compete in a world market against the best the world has to offer. To do this, we must be able to draw on the broadest possible base, not just those children born into the best circumstance. We often make the case that to be competitive in a world environment, we must have a competitive tax base. Does it not follow that we should also nurture our most important human resource, our children, through whom our future is realized?

Earlier I stated that health, education, and social services are inextricably linked. As we will see, when we neglect this fact early on in a child's life, we often see the effects of that neglect throughout the whole of his or her life, often manifested in aggressive behaviour, low scholastic achievement levels, juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems, and possibly criminal activity.

We know that the primary societal foundation that nurtures the child, ensuring that the child has the best opportunity to grow into a contributing member of society, is the family. The vast majority of children in our province are born into families whose prime consideration is their children. But what of those children not so fortunate? What of the child born into a circumstance over which they have no control, perhaps born of parents with little control because they were born into a similar circumstance?

It is in our enlightened self-interest to work with these children to ensure that every child benefits from the best possible start in life. Intuitively we know that a person on the wrong side of the law, perhaps dependent on drugs or alcohol, will eventually find themselves in jail or perhaps in the welfare system, a burden to themselves and society. How do we break the chain? How do we break the cycle? Isn't it better to do what we need to do early and to try to ensure that every child has the chance to develop into a contributing member of society? More and more professionals in our health, education, and social services field understand this reality.

I recently met with one such professional, Mr. Gabe Mancini. Mr. Mancini is the principal of Mayfield school in Edmonton's west end. Mayfield school serves a diverse population, including some who benefit from an early intervention program known as Early Head Start. Mr. Mancini sent me the following letter. I'd like to share it with you, slightly shortened and slightly abridged.

Dear Mr. McClelland:

The systemic problem of poverty is inextricably related to the cultural issue of learned helplessness. Kids coming to school from middle income families have been exposed to over 1000 hours of print pages. They have higher and more sophisticated vocabulary levels in comparison to children coming from poor homes.

The interaction with parents of a middle income family, is [often] significantly more sophisticated. Parents provide a rationale for their decision as well as providing alternatives to behaviour – this is not a good idea, try this and let's see if it works. In contradistinction low income families [sometimes and typically] provide direction – [do this, without the rationale behind the decisions] . . .

When lower income students [from time to time] come to school, [not all but some] they have difficulties with following directions, poorer and impoverished vocabulary, and more aggressive behaviours. They also have lower expectations for themselves and so on. This "sets" them up for failure.

To avoid [this], they need a great deal of stimulation (being read to, higher level of vocabulary presented to them, problem solving strategies, encouragement) as well as appropriate behaviour management techniques.

He also included some demographic facts taken from a United States sample but applicable here. In 1950 fewer than 20 percent of children lived in dual-income or single-parent homes. In 1995 66 percent lived in dual-income or single-parent homes. This statistic would indicate that our education system is now doing far more parenting than was the case in the past. This statistic also indicates that there are far more children entering the education system with specific needs to be addressed before they are able to keep up with their enriched peers. Does it not make ethical and economic sense to do everything we can to ensure that children starting school do so with the strongest possible foundation? This means health and social service professionals and educators need to work together to identify at-risk children and families so that the remedial work begins at the earliest possible time.

Local early intervention programs such as Success by Six, ABC Head Start, Clareview Head Start, and Atonement Home Head Start, among others, have proven records of success. The May 2001 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that a 15-year study of the long-term effects of early childhood intervention in Chicago public schools indicates a clear link between early intervention in at-risk children and lowered high school dropout and juvenile crime rates. Now, we don't have to travel that far away. In November of 1993 the University of Alberta completed an extensive analysis of the Edmonton ABC Head Start program and had similar conclusions.

All this to say that we should consider education and our human potential long before school starts. We need to start thinking about what we can and should do to ensure that educators start with children ready to learn in their classrooms so that they can teach and not parent. We need to consider the harm done to society, families, and especially to children by FAS/FAE, fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect, and consider it the great public health problem that it is tragically, 100 percent preventable.

9:10

I want to conclude by reading into the record a letter given to me by Mrs. Joan McDonald of the Mayfield Head Start program. The letter was written by a mother thankful for the program that helped her family and fearful others may not be so fortunate.

To whom it may concern

I would like to take you through a journey. A journey in which I hope to open your eyes to how important you really are.

My story began just under three years ago. I had reached the beginning of my end. Being placed on bed rest for the last two-and-a-half months of my pregnancy with my son, scared me. I already took a bad turn, when my two-year-old daughter wasn't being heard, due to a later diagnosed speech disorder. If that wasn't . . . enough, she also began a violent spell, later found to be aggression due to the speech disorder.

My husband and I, knew we were in big trouble when even we couldn't understand our child. We began the trials of looking for help. Everywhere we turned, it seemed like a wall of rejection was thrown at us. Whether it be a lack of income or space, we had lost hope.

In trying to find help, we would go to see our Public health nurse. Then one day she had news of a new program. She went on to tell us how it was for low-income families, who need supports. Well, if any low-income family needed support, it was us. So, with no hesitation, I accepted to go to the Early Head Start program.

Held by denial about my child, I was extremely anxious. I thought I was the world's worst parent. Although, as the day

arrived, to begin the program, we felt some form of relief. When we arrived we felt welcome, not so alone.

As the weeks went by, so many things became clear. My daughter had her speech looked at. Now we had a start. I began to realize that there was something I could do to help. When my daughter began smiling again, I knew we took the best first step we could have. With each step we took, we were closer towards our goals.

We had now found that my daughter had problems socializing with other children. Her speech problem was diagnosed as severe phonological delay. We also found that she had a chronic and organic behaviour disorder.

With the assistance of the staff of Early Head Start, we were geared to the necessary programs for my daughter. She was referred to a behaviour program, in which we saw drastic improvement. Then, my daughter was placed in a school, at the age of three and a half, for her speech. Once again, we saw extreme improvement. Her speech went from a severe delay to a mild delay in just five months.

Not only would I not have been able to get my daughter tested and receive a diagnosis, but I had no idea that her behaviour could be tested. I also had no idea about the programs that we had gotten into.

Now my daughter is five years old. My son is almost three. The pride they show every day is worth everything. My daughter is at the top of her kindergarten class, and my son has gotten over his anxieties.

In my heart, I know that my children's accomplishments are due to the help from people who wouldn't let me quit. These people are the staff at the Early Head Start program. Programs like this are so greatly relied on by both parents and their children for support. It would be a real shame if the families now and the families to come would have nowhere to turn.

I am hoping by sharing my story with you, maybe you could see just how important your contribution is. Through your funds, both of my children have good starts to promising futures.

If we lose our funding for this program, we will be losing a lot more than you could imagine. We would be losing hope for families just like mine, who would have nowhere to turn. All I ask is for you to continue contributing to our future by funding the Early Head Start program. Let another family take that first step to understanding.

Thank you.

Lisa Ferguson

Mr. Speaker, the experience Lisa shared with us highlights the importance of Head Start programs in our province. Just as the best first step that Lisa took was to enroll her child in an Early Head Start program, the best first step that we as a government can take is to ensure that every family like Lisa's has the same opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there any questions or comments with respect to the speech? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I couldn't agree more with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the importance of early childhood, and I guess my question to him would be: as a member of the ruling party in the province why are your concerns not reflected in the Speech from the Throne?

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, as a matter of fact, they are, on page 10 in the second paragraph. My purpose in emphasizing it was to make the point in the House that this is extremely important not just to one side of the House or the other side of the House but to all members here and that this kind of priority is not forgotten on this side of the House.



THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No further questions? We'll call for the resumption of the Speech from the Throne debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to respond to the 2002 Speech from the Throne, which was delivered on the 26th of February. We're all here in this Chamber as elected representatives. I think my job as an elected representative is to seek the opinions and concerns and issues of constituents, and I do that in a number of different ways. I have a web site that they can consult. There's information on it and ways for them to give me feedback. Certainly I attend a lot of events in the community so that I'm easy to approach and I'm aware of what the community is doing. All of us, I'm sure, have phone calls and letters and e-mails that come in that are raising particular concerns or areas of interest and also meet and chat with people in the bank lineup or the grocery aisles. As well, I think some of us take additional measures of holding town hall meetings or public forums of some kind.

I was very interested and anticipated this throne speech and had a shopping list of issues that had been brought forward to me by my constituents, so I was looking very carefully and listening very carefully to the Speech from the Throne as to whether the issues that were raised by my constituents were going to be addressed in it.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I just wanted to address the hon. ministers' debate back here. It's getting louder, so it's harder to hear the hon. member. It is her turn to speak, and she's the only one that's been recognized. So if you wish to carry on a lively debate, please do so outside in the chamber next.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### **Debate Continued**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was looking to see if those concerns that were raised would be reflected in the throne speech setting out the government's agenda for the 2002-2003 year. Some of the same issues came up, although based on the information I've collected from my constituents, not in the way they were looking for.

I'm going to go through some of those, sort of the top five, one of which was the Future Summit. I did hold a special town hall on that, so I got quite a bit of feedback. A second issue that's been raised a lot is teachers, education, postsecondary education. Third was housing, and that's including the issue of rent control and also the canceling of the private contractor housing subsidy program. Of course, health care is of enormous importance to the constituents of Edmonton-Centre, and along with that, concerns are increasingly being raised along long-term care. Finally is gaming.

When I looked at the Future Summit, it was interesting, because I couldn't find anything in the advertised government bills that was going to deal with anything coming out of the Future Summit or directly related to the Future Summit. I expected to see more around that or more coming out of this throne speech. I was a little surprised that there wasn't more of it, but perhaps the reasoning is that there's going to be a full-fledged report that will come out at some point in the future.

What I did was I held a town hall at my own expense. Although there was a direct request from the government for all MLAs to hold town halls, there was no assistance given. It was a choice that I had to make, whether I was going to hold a different kind of town hall on

education or health care or whether in fact it would be on the Future Summit. I advertised it in my newsletter and on the web site. I sent posters out to the seniors' residences, the seniors' centres, the community leagues, churches, that sort of thing. I had a very, very good turnout, an excellent group of very thoughtful, committed people and, interestingly enough, a really great mix that was very representative of the people that live in the riding. I didn't know who was going to be there until I walked in that morning, but it was a very representative mix of the people that live in my riding.

9:20

I'll just run through some of the major points they raised when we looked at the issues that were thrown up into the air from the Future Summit. We actually had a facilitator. No matter how the question was put, through the facilitator or working off the workbook, the constituents refused to be limited to a strictly economic vision of the future of Alberta. They just would not go there. They kept pulling in a different direction to say: "No. You have to consider other things besides a strictly economic model." They were making the point that if individual Albertans are going to have confidence in their future, it will be essential to define and make a commitment to the fundamental social values that will make the province stronger, a very interesting point, and much of the rest of their discussion sprang from that principle.

The group that met was firm in recognizing families as a significant stabilizer for the community, both an economic stabilizer and also a social stabilizer. They were particularly interested in the definition of family. I do understand and it is referenced in the throne speech that we will have an opportunity to look at the family law statutes, hopefully through legislation this spring, and that we can look at incorporating some flexibility in how and what we understand families to be in this day and age. Of course, for constituents in my riding different models of family are very important, including models that would include same-sex families.

Another issue that constituents were questioning with the agenda that was being put forward with the Future Summit material was the compatibility of the principles of democracy and market forces. In some ways they were anticipating the cataclysm that's been caused by Enron and its relationship with their national government and that whole question of government promoting the advantages of a business community or a market community over that of its individual citizens.

This is very interesting, looking back at my notes as to how strongly they felt about that, and they felt it was not just for government to be promoting a business interest or a market interest. Economics and values cannot be considered exclusively. They expected government to be a leader, not a follower, and that government should be taking action to ensure that values are protected rather than only reacting once they're endangered. Good point. Again, that's a concept of prevention.

There was a concern raised about the current state of government monitoring and evaluation and enforcement in a number of areas: job safety, environment, and a number of other areas. This is interesting, because I think people didn't understand that when there was a downsizing or smaller government, a lot of the areas that go first that people don't notice for a long time are the monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement sectors. So when things started to go wrong, then people said: "Who was watching for this? The government should have been watching out for it." Well, maybe, but there was nobody left to watch because those jobs had all disappeared. They were the first group of jobs to go. That was an issue they raised repeatedly, and they felt that it was a job that government should be performing because really government was the only one that could perform it in an unbiased way.

Constituents felt that the public-sector and the public-service

delivery of programs was still the best way to ensure maximum application of taxpayer dollars for services for Albertans. Okay. It's fair.

A lot of talk about prevention. My notes say: prevention, prevention; education, health care, social programs, et cetera. Therefore, it's with a great deal of concern that we look at things like the elimination of or cutbacks to children's preventative programs. We just had the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford make a passionate plea for restored funding into preventive services for children. Again, I think a penny of prevention is worth millions of dollars' worth of cure, and it's very shortsighted to cut those prevention programs.

My constituents were very clear that they didn't want tax refunds. When we started to look at the economy and that boom-and-bust economy from Alberta, they actually called the tax refunds bribes and were quite insulted. They also raised the point that business should shoulder their fair share of the tax burden. There were additional points raised about government spending a lot of time attracting businesses to Alberta only if the money is coming back to Alberta communities, which is interesting because what they were getting into was that they were troubled by nonresident ownership and the corresponding government policy, and they felt that Albertans were not the chief beneficiaries of our own resources. Good point. We should be. They're our resources; we should be gaining from them.

Moving on to another section, the section on teachers and education, postsecondary education. Out of all the phone calls and e-mails and letters that I have received around the concern for education, the teachers' strike, and those issues in the last six months, I have only had two that were not entirely supportive of the teachers and for a stronger, better supported public school system. Those two were against the teachers and in favour of the current government action. Everybody else supported the teachers and supported stabilizing education.

I had a very interesting experience a year ago when we were out door-knocking for the election. I have a lot of young teachers that live in my constituency, and some of them were very articulate and made it crystal clear to me. One young man said that he would not be the next generation of teacher martyrs, which is very strong language, but he meant it. He very clearly said: "Look. Other people value our degrees and our experience more than our own system does, and I will not pay my dues and put in the time. I'll take my degree and go somewhere else and make a heck of a lot more money." So we run the risk of having exactly the same situation down the road with teachers as we currently have with nurses, where we discouraged them all, we shooed them all away, and they left, and now we're having to spend enormous amounts of money to woo them back again. So he was very, very articulate about that.

There are strong connections with prevention programs in education, healthy lifestyles, and better futures for children, and I wasn't clear from the throne speech what exactly government would look to be changing. It doesn't seem to be indicating that those eliminated prevention programs for children were going to be restored. Are we looking at having hot lunch programs expanded into junior high schools or expanded into high schools? After all, what is the difference between the last day of grade 6 and the first day of grade 7? You don't get a hot lunch in grade 7. I'm not seeing anything that's indicating that that kind of understanding of the underpinnings of what youth need is forthcoming from the government. [interjection] Yeah. What is the real difference there? Is the family any better off now that the kid is older? No, the kid is just hungrier.

When we look at postsecondary education, again I've got a lot of students in the riding and their concerns about their carrying that

intergenerational debt. We hear a lot of talk from the government about: we don't want to pass the debt on to the next generation. These people feel very strongly that they've already had the debt loaded onto their shoulders when they're walking out of university with \$20,000-plus loans that they have to pay back. That didn't happen 10 years ago, five years ago, but under this government, with the changes and the increases in tuition, they are walking out of university with that kind of debt. That's what they're saying. So the intergenerational debt transfer is complete. It's already happened.

9:30

Housing and rent control and the private contractor housing subsidy program are huge issues for me. We've got a lot of private owners. [interjections] The rest of you can engage in this as soon as I've finished talking. A lot of people have brought up the issue of rent control. I've approached a number of different ministers about what they're anticipating and if they are looking to do anything to assist people who are looking at rent increases every three to four months, rents going from \$600 to \$900 for a one-bedroom. Thus far I haven't had any indication that there would be any consideration for that.

I think the last issue – and I know I'm out of time here – is health care and long-term care. These are closely tied to the housing issues. Constituent feedback has not been very keen on the Mazankowski report. They look for the future to be better, and what the Mazankowski report is saying is that the future is going to be worse. The report is not improving the system. It's not restructuring. It's just figuring out how to get Albertans to pay more.

I've run out of time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there any questions to be offered with respect to this speech? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member. You mentioned the government's support of Enron. If you could just give me some information as to what government supported Enron, at what time and in what country and to what degree. I'd be curious, and I'm sure the Senators south of the border would be curious too.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. Well, if the member is really interested in it, I'm sure there's a good deal that's been written in the major American newsmagazines that are examining this. There's no question that there was promotion of Enron through the Bush administration, and it's not a problem for him to look that up. I'm sure he can do it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Centre in her response to the Speech from the Throne talked a lot about the future. Now, she was fairly broad and nonspecific. Most of her comments were negative. Our government, while planning prudently for the future, must also deal with the realities of today. So my question is: what part of Her Honour's speech does this member opposite support?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I would be supporting all of my speech. I don't know what else he could be referring to. [interjections] Oh, to the entire throne speech. Well, I think I spoke for 15 minutes. If the member was listening, it should be pretty clear to him what issues I support and where I have concerns.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You have a second question, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar?

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively for the last 15 minutes, and I did not hear any support, unlike her colleagues who were very supportive of Her Honour's speech and at least attempted to offer some solutions. I'm just wondering if the member opposite can outline anything that she supports, as many of her constituents have also done.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm aware that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar asked a very similar question to my colleagues who spoke this afternoon, and truly it's not my role as a member of the opposition to be doing the work of the government.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: No further questions.

We'll proceed to the next member to enter into the debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MS DeLONG: I'd like to move that we adjourn debate for the night.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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

