

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 24, 2004** **8:00 p.m.**  
 Date: 2004/02/24  
 [The Speaker in the chair]

**The Speaker:** Good evening. Please be seated. Before proceeding with the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mrs. O'Neill:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour this evening to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 10 members of Toastmasters International who are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to acknowledge each of them by name and ask them to stand as I call their names. They are Gordon King, Judy Dunn, Kevin Wenger, Barb Williams, David Paré, Ron Chapman, Peter Kossowan, Sharon Ferguson, and Tina and Wiggert Hessels. As I said, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask everyone to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Mr. Speaker, my guests haven't arrived so if I can just wait a bit and then introduce them.  
 Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Okay.  
 The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone who is becoming very well known here in this Assembly, and that's Melanie Shapiro. She's here this evening along with two other people from Windsor Park school: the school council chair, Linda Telgarsky, and a parent, Scott Delinger. They are here because they're concerned about the quality of and funding for public education offered to their children. I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
**Second Reading**

### **Bill 1** **Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act**

[Adjourned debate February 23: Mr. Mason]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make some comments at second reading with respect to Bill 1, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act. It's a bill that I'm reluctant not to support. I'm reluctant for a couple of reasons. One, I think anything that will bring some additional resources into the cash-starved postsecondary system at least must be looked at critically, and I guess at another time and place I would have supported it. I think anything that will help overburdened students who are facing great tuition increases – we've seen the case of Red Deer College where since 2001 tuition there will have increased 24 per cent by this September – and anything that would

offer some relief to their parents and guardians who are trying to finance postsecondary education I suppose we should support.

We are in second reading, obligated to look at the principles that seem to rest under the bills that are before us, and one of the principles that seems to have been important in the drafting of Bill 1 is the need to encourage more high school graduates to go on to gain postsecondary qualifications of some kind. I think that's an admirable principle to have in place, but it seems to me that before we get too carried away with that principle, we have an obligation to make sure that the students we now have in high school finish that high school education, and our record with respect to that in this province, Mr. Speaker, is not going to be envied. There are a large number of students, a high percentage, 30 per cent plus, who never do finish high school, so any thought of them immediately going on to a postsecondary education and being able to take advantage of the provisions of Bill 1 I think is fairly remote.

Part of the problem, of course, is that we and our high schools have failed to really establish the kinds of standards that we want met and, secondly, to have one to put those standards in place, to adequately fund those high schools. I look at other jurisdictions and how they have approached the whole problem of high school completion, and it differs dramatically from the kinds of things that we're doing. I look at states like Oregon, Maryland, and Wyoming, and they have taken steps, very deliberate steps, to increase the number of students that complete high school and are thus eligible for postsecondary education programs.

The programs they have put in place have not been inexpensive. The Oregon model, which would have as a standard 90 per cent of their 12th grade students being able to accept a suitable standard on a reading test, has required that they put into place summer programs for students, that they hire students for high schools, that they hire additional teachers, that they work and put more resources into professional development, that they reduce the number of class sizes, but it's all in this effort to have high school students complete their programs. The state of Wyoming, south of us, has in place as their adequacy that every high school student must be eligible for a postsecondary program on completion of high school. So that would be a vocational program, an extended education program of some kind, a technical or university or college program. They have to leave high school qualified for that. As I said, we have a long way to go.

So as important as it is that we encourage more high school graduates to go on, as Bill 1 would purport to do, the prior program is to make sure that those high school students get out of high school so that they're eligible for some of the provisions that are found in Bill 1.

Another principle that I would think we would want to follow in any legislation that we propose in this province is that it needs to be fair to all Alberta students. In the year 2005 there will be 40,000, I guess the estimate is, babies born who will be centennial babies and eligible for the Alberta centennial education savings plan. That leave a whole lot of Alberta students who have been born in the last 20 years who are not eligible, and this seems to violate the principle of an act being fair to all Alberta students and treating all Albertans the same way. For a number of students and for their parents, for the pre-2005 babies, centennial year is going to, I suspect, be known as the year that they were left out, that there were provisions made for students born in 2005 that they were not eligible for. So in terms of a test of fairness to all Alberta students it seems to me that Bill 1 misses the mark.

We had discussed an amendment, Mr. Speaker, that would have made it retroactive to 1982 and thus made it fair so that all Albertans would have access to it. Of course, given the provisions of that bill,

that amendment was impossible for us to make, but I still think it is the kind of consideration that the government should give in terms of truly celebrating the centennial of the province, by making sure that whatever is done is fair and that all Alberta students are treated equally under the law.

The third principle that I think is important is that whatever is enacted needs to be open to all Albertans, and if you look at the history of registered education savings plans in the province, those plans are accessed primarily by parents and families that have middle-income or upper-income salaries. People who are barely getting by, who are at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, do not access these kinds of programs and for very good reasons. They don't have the kind of money that's needed to put away for the future of their children. Again, it seems to be a bill that is designed and targeted at a certain economic group in the province while excluding another economic group. So, again, I would suggest that in terms of fairness, Mr. Speaker, the bill has some shortcomings.

#### 8:10

I have fears that by making this proposal, there may be an attempt to substitute an action like we see in Bill 1 for properly funding postsecondary education in the province, that the more of the burden that can be shifted to parents and to students, the less obligation the government feels to properly finance and plan for the financing of those institutions. If you look at the history, Mr. Speaker, of the last 20 years of financing postsecondary education in this province, there's been a massive withdrawal of provincial government funds from the system. The president of the University of Alberta gave some figures that they reported to the public recently and indicated that 20 years ago a dollar that students put in in terms of tuition was matched by \$10 from the government and today for every dollar that a student puts in, that's now matched by only \$2.34, so a massive withdrawal of support for postsecondary programs.

I would really fear that by putting something like this in place, the message to parents is that you are going to pay more and more of the freight, so you better start getting ready for it now, and I don't think that is the role or the proper stance for a government that purports to support education the way that this government does. So, again, the fear that this not become a substitute for properly funding postsecondary schools and shifting more and more of the load to parents.

I looked at the *Hansard*, and I was disturbed. I guess I've heard it twice in the last little while now that today's problems are being described as potholes in the road. I heard it again earlier this afternoon, and I don't believe that the problems surrounding the financing of postsecondary education today can be called just a pothole, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a major rupture in the highway.

Mr. Speaker, I think the bill would have been looked on much more friendly had there been some attempt to put in place a long-term plan, and I know the provincial government shouldn't have to do this on its own. There's an obligation from the federal government to be involved, and it's not a problem that's peculiar to Alberta. Across this country provinces are all facing similar difficulties with funding postsecondary education, yet none of us seems to have come to grips with putting in place a long-term plan that would see adequate resources in place so that we don't have a yearly outrage with the kinds of tuitions that have to be levied against students and the kinds of cuts that are having to be made at institutions because they don't have adequate resources to carry on the programs and to accommodate the students that appear at their door. So, again, this would be much more palatable were there such a plan in place.

In the preamble the government states that "it recognizes the

benefits of post-secondary education," and that being true, Mr. Speaker, I wonder with the kind of emphasis we've heard from the ministry with respect to the individual benefits that students derive from having attended a postsecondary program if there might not be some more emphasis in terms of how the total community benefits from having students enrolled in postsecondary and being successful in postsecondary programs. It goes back almost to the kind of argument we often get in our constituency office by some people who insist that they shouldn't have to pay one or another of the taxes in the province, that you can treat democracy as a bit of a cafeteria and pick and choose those services that you want to pay for, but that's not true.

If the government truly did recognize the benefits of a postsecondary education, I think that they would be trying to underline not just the individual benefits for the students that complete those programs but how we as a total community benefit from that in terms of qualified health personnel, engineers to build our highways, nurses, teachers, qualified people in almost every profession, and that we're all the benefactors. To single out the students and try to somehow or other construe the situation so that students should be held accountable for financing education on their own I think misses the point of what it means to have an educated citizenry.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, that those are my major concerns as we look at Bill 1. I'm pleased that the government would look to education as a way of marking the centennial. It's an investment in the future, but I think that also we have an obligation to make sure that if the government is going to make that investment, it's done fairly and that it's done to the benefit of all students in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) now provides for a five-minute question and comment period if individual members would like to participate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've always had a great deal of respect for the hon. member that just spoke. He always brings some thought to what he says, and I want to thank him for that, because it's not just a bunch of political rhetoric that we've been hearing from some other members.

One of the areas that he seems to be concerned with – and I'll be very brief on these comments – is that there may be some exclusions or targeting at the middle and upper classes. I must say yet again that there are essentially a number of ways in which we can make sure that even the most disadvantaged people in this province can qualify for this. However, we do have to wait to see what the Prime Minister will do with respect to what he's announced, which is providing a grant for low-income children to be able to get into RESPs. So I can just assure you that there is no targeting to the middle or upper class, and I thank you for your comments.

**Mrs. O'Neill:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak to the bill.

**The Speaker:** Well, we're still under the Standing Order provision, so I'll have to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona first, but I noticed the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member mentioned early in his comments that we need to be sure that all Alberta students complete high school, and I think that that's a very reasonable and achievable goal. However, some of the numbers that he quoted are historical numbers. I had a question, and I wondered if the hon. member could elaborate a bit on whether or not it's been

a rather common practice for a reasonable number of young students to leave grade 10 or 11 to take up trades where they're qualified to enter at that level. Also, are there or have there been a reasonable number of returning students that upgrade in conjunction with their trade's entry so that, in fact, they are completing and getting a postsecondary education but perhaps not in the manner to which the member alluded?

**Dr. Massey:** I guess that the first point I would make, Mr. Speaker, is that I believe a high school education is now the minimum standard that we should expect from young people in the province. I can remember the time when leaving school at 10th grade and even at eighth grade in this province was acceptable. That bar has been moved up for a number of years, and in my mind we should be getting everyone to an acceptable level of high school graduation.

What the member indicates in terms of students leaving and going out and working or gaining a trade – I think that, yes, it has been a practice. I am not privy to those numbers. But having said that, I would still feel more comfortable with our goal of getting every student through high school with a diploma and then to set them into the workplace.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

8:20

**The Speaker:** Others? I had recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the most important bill for this session, Bill 1, Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act, introduced by the Premier of the province of Alberta.

The discussion of the bill must be put in the context of the challenges that public education both at the K to grade 12 level and beyond has faced on the watch of this Premier and his government. We have seen over the last 10, 12 years, Mr. Speaker, the underfunding of education in this province grow more severe, creating absolutely huge problems at the classroom level from kindergarten all the way up to grade 12. It's during this same period that we have seen the tuition fees in the postsecondary sector skyrocket.

Student debt burdens have become crushingly heavy for most of our students. Furthermore, many students who graduated from high school over the last several years now have to ask themselves if postsecondary education is accessible to them, not in terms of whether or not there are enough spaces in our institutes and colleges or universities but because of the amount of money that it costs every year thanks to the unending rise in the tuition fees and other associated costs of going on to postsecondary education. Many of those students, the high school students and graduates, have been turned away because of the fear of the debt loads, the enormous costs, the unbearable costs from their point of view, to go to school.

So that is the context, Mr. Speaker. It's also, I think, worth reminding ourselves that the crisis in our education system, caused by chronic and continued underfunding and the government's deliberate policy to not only allow but, in fact, encourage annual increases in the tuition fee rates across this province, has caused enormous, enormous problems and hardships. We had the spectacle of one of the largest teachers' strikes in this province less than two years ago, leading to the bill which returned them to work and imposed an arbitration settlement on them. It was the act of this Legislature, an act that was initiated by this government, which resulted in the arbitration award. Yet the government at the end of the day decided to walk away from accepting the consequences of the arbitration award that was mandated by its own legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that's receiving a great deal of attention across the province. I notice that even tonight there are concerned citizens, parents, students, and others who are sitting in the members' gallery and perhaps a few in the public gallery who are here to watch us debate the so-called flagship bill of this government. They also know that this is perhaps the kind of bill that one would only see in the final stages of the election cycle that's upon us now. Now the government is beginning to worry about the fallout of its three years of policies, which have meant, as I said, a great deal of hardship and denial of opportunity and accessibility for close to 50 per cent of the population of young men and women in this province who have to look at the bill associated with going to school every year before they make a decision. In many cases, unfortunately, they have made the decision to forgo the opportunity to go to postsecondary institutions because they have concluded that they can't afford the cost of going to school.

There have been campaigns run by college students, technical institute students, university students over the last year to convince this government that it's about time to put a halt to its regressive policies of substantial tuition increases every year, where postsecondary institutions, because of the manner in which they are funded year after year, are told – and there are clear signals that they read in the government's policy – that they must raise at least 30 per cent of their operating revenues from tuition fees and associated user fees that are the experience of students in postsecondary institutions from year to year, from month to month.

So there is public interest, a great deal of public interest, in this bill, because the hope was that at least during this year, the year before the centennial year of the province begins, the new century that the province will be entering, this government will take a bold step forward and first of all realize that its own policies have created huge barriers to open opportunity for all in this province. Therefore, they were expecting that this government as a matter of contrition and generosity would start the new century of this province with a clear statement that it's going to freeze the tuition fees because they're already beginning to discourage lots of young men and women who are Albertans, whose families have paid taxes in this province and continue to pay taxes, from moving forward.

We know that the next century, Mr. Speaker, in this province and in this country and in the world in which we live is going to be the century of those jurisdictions, those provinces, those societies, those communities which invest generously in creating opportunities for people who are going to transform our society into a creative society. By denying that opportunity, either inadvertently or deliberately – and the latter is the case in the case of this government's policies – to people to become more creative by taking advantage, to the best of their ability, of the opportunities that postsecondary education experience provides, regardless of whether it's in the arts, whether it's in the field of culture, whether it's in the field of sciences or humanities, that experience is absolutely essential to the production of a substantial proportion of our society's people who have the special creative ability on which the successful societies of the future, of the next century in this province, and other places are going to have to depend in order to remain prosperous, in order to flourish.

8:30

So, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is seen for what it is by people, including among them some who are sitting on the government side of the benches, as no more than an opportunistic move to do no more than make a symbolic gesture to give the appearance and to create the perception that this government cares about postsecondary education for young people.

This particular bill, Mr. Speaker, if passed by this Legislature, will begin to put some money in the registered educational plans of those students who have the good fortune of having families who have the economic capacity and the foresight to start some sort of registered education plans for their children, but only those who will be fortunate to be born next year and born only to families which will have that capacity to start the registered plans will be able to provide this advantage. Remember, we are talking about \$500 next year and \$300 over the next several years that a child who is born next year would get.

In the meantime, tuition fees at our universities increase by at least \$250 to \$275 a year. The so-called advantage that this bill creates, even for those who will be born only during the year 2005 and after, is an illusory advantage. The tuition fees by the time the advantages of this particular bill will begin to flow to the students will be – one will have to wait for close to 20 years. Eighteen years from next year, Mr. Speaker, is the first time that the provisions of this bill will in any way influence or help or assist students who want to seek postsecondary education in this province.

What happens to those who were born on December 31 of this year? What happens to those who are born on January 1, 2006, or the ones who were born a year ago? What happens to those thousands who are in kindergarten classes this year, who started school this year and will be ready to go to postsecondary schools 12 years from now? Why are they being excluded?

This bill is extremely discriminatory, Mr. Speaker: discrimination based on age, discrimination based inadvertently on family income and family capacity. We know that close to 45 to 50 per cent of the families in Canada and in Alberta I'm sure too do not start registered educational savings plans for their children. The reason is very simple. Why don't they do it? Because they cannot afford it.

So what happens to that 45 to 50 per cent of the families with children who are either in school this year or were born last year and the year before? As the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said, he is going to talk about the children who were born before 2005, and there are lots of them. To exclude them from any consideration shows how opportunistic this bill is, how flawed this bill is.

Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that also I think draws attention to the indifference with which this government, this Premier and his cabinet and his colleagues in the caucus, have dealt with the complaints, the requests, the pressure that comes from parents, that comes from students to make changes in their commitment to continued underfunding of our educational institutions. If a government that's using our taxpayers' money decides to underfund and withhold money from our institutions and then requires our students to pay more as they want to go to school and then turns around and for children starting next year says, "We're going to give you a little bit of money, the advantages of which will be cancelled in two year's time by the increase in tuition fees," I think it's making a statement which doesn't deserve our support. This is a bill that needs to be defeated; this is a bill that needs to be withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) goes into effect. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is a member of the opposition, and we understand that there is a valid role to play in opposition in opposing if for no other reason than that the member is in opposition. But I would ask the member opposite to reflect on Bill 1 and the capacity

that Bill 1 has to inculcate a sense within families that postsecondary education is an important element of life and of family responsibility. Is it not appropriate, whenever we can as a government and as a people, to look beyond the horizon?

It would have been nice if 18 years ago those of us in the Legislature had recognized this as a potential need, and the people entering university today could benefit from it. But would it not, Mr. Speaker, be appropriate that 18 years from now citizens of Alberta will look back and say: "My goodness. Am I ever glad that that Legislature had the foresight and the vision to look beyond the horizon to do what was right for future generations of Albertans?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, looking beyond the horizon is a matter of political will. In this province to wait for 18 years before delivering any benefits to anybody in fact makes a big statement about the lack of capacity to look beyond the horizon. To look beyond the horizon next year, in my view, would be an act of courage on the part of the government, and that would be, I think, demonstrated if this government said, "Starting next year we're going to freeze the tuition fees in this province," and that's where, I think, the horizon lies, not 18 years from now. It's next year, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona understands the inherent contradiction in the argument that he put forward with respect to this bill when he says that it was brought forward as an election ploy and talks about it being an election ploy and then says that it won't actually have effect for 18 years.

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, this government sort of relies on its ability to create illusions – to create illusions – and I never underestimate the capacity of this government to be able to do that. It spent \$4.2 billion just three years ago to create a similar illusion. It became very generous, opened the purse strings, won the election, came back into the Legislature; within weeks after the election was done and over with, it began talking about fiscal constraints again. It began to draw attention to the fact that we are at a very serious risk of running into fiscal problems.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's no contradiction as far as I'm concerned. It is an attempt to create an illusion that this government is now changing its mind, that it's changed its heart, that in fact it is committed to funding public education adequately.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no illusion in giving each and every child born in Alberta \$800 towards their postsecondary education.

My question for the hon. member is this: if he thinks it would be better to take this proposal off the table and not give the children any money towards their postsecondary education, then why doesn't he stand up and say that?

8:40

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, I stand up for freezing of the tuition fees starting with this budget, this year. I ask the member to consider the alternative, not to engage in empty rhetoric but in fact pay attention to the alternative proposal that I put on the table, and that is to freeze tuition fees for everyone. That will give a great deal of hope to

children already in school, young people already in universities and colleges, and parents who are planning to have a family.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, are you participating?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Somewhat.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of empty rhetoric, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in the course of his comments indicated that health care, among others, was chronically underfunded. At present, health care is funded to the tune of 36 per cent of the budget expenditures. It's been going up at more than twice . . .

**The Speaker:** I regretfully interrupt the hon. member to say that time has now expired on this segment.

Before I call on the hon. Member for St. Albert, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**  
(*reversion*)

**The Speaker:** Well, the hon. Solicitor General first, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand up and introduce three gentlemen who have given their heart and soul over the last few days working very, very hard. I understand that members of the Assembly have had the opportunity to meet these gentlemen and be prodded and needled by them, and they've done a really good job. Mr. Speaker, I know that this is an initiative that you've put forward from your office, and I thank you for that. I'd like to introduce to you, if I may, please, Gary Payne from the Calgary fire department, Dennis Tario from EMS Calgary, and Dennis Rabel from the Calgary fire department. I'll ask everybody here to give them a warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to members of the Assembly. I understand that in the members' gallery tonight is a lady by the name of Anita Sherman, who has two children at McKernan elementary junior high school. She's here as part of Education Watch, and her duty here tonight is to observe the affairs of the Legislature as it relates to education. Through her we want to acknowledge not just Education Watch, but the Whitemud Coalition and others who have done great service from a citizen perspective in education and do so on a continuing basis. We would ask all members to give them the traditional welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting with us today in the members' gallery are two friends of mine, an employee of Economic Development Edmonton, Mr. Chris O'Brien, and his sister visiting us from British Columbia, Ms O'Brien. I would like

both of them to rise and accept the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
**Second Reading**

**Bill 1**  
**Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act**  
(*continued*)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mrs. O'Neill:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand here this evening in this Assembly and speak to the merits and the strength of Bill 1, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act.

I'm going to speak to it as the representative, of course, of the community and the constituency of St. Albert, but first I'd like to profile for the Assembly a number of characteristics of my community. Contrary to the provincial average I would point out the fact that in St. Albert more than 80 per cent of our high school students complete their high school certification. That's a very nice number. We want to make it a hundred per cent.

Indeed, a good portion of those students who do graduate, the incredible number of them, go on to postsecondary education. So to speak to the benefits of postsecondary education, as is the first item in the preamble of this bill, I know that my community and those young high school students who work so hard to accomplish so much in high school by attaining a number of Rutherford scholarships, by earning a number of Jason Lang scholarships, by receiving a number of Louise McKinney scholarships, by being the recipients of a number of bursaries that they apply for, and by being attendees and active students in a number of our technical and community college institutions as well do see the value of a postsecondary education.

It was not so long ago that a high school certificate was considered sufficient to enter into the adult world of independence. It was truly appreciated as a ticket, if you will, to be able to gain and to work at a job that required that level of education. But that's no longer true. In fact, if you read some studies, you will find that it's not only one degree or one postsecondary certificate, but it's two and perhaps three that are the tickets that are encouraging people in the workforce these days to move ahead. When I speak to the benefits of postsecondary education, I must say that I'm very pleased that on the whole my community embraces the idea of a postsecondary education and its value in particular, of course.

I'm going to speak a little bit to the bias that I have. I am not a science major. I'm not an engineer, nor would I dare say even that my strength was in the study of math and science. But I do feel that there is a great deal to be gained by individuals who go to a postsecondary institution, take courses of a liberal arts nature, and learn further to hone their skills of critical thinking, of creative expression, and their ability to think beyond the traditional patterns or the skills that are required to practice certain professions. I do believe in this idea, this appreciation of postsecondary education, in whichever form it is.

I'd like to pay tribute to those who are engaged as apprentices, learning in particular and working alongside very skilled tradesfolk in our province. Indeed, they contribute not only to the economy and to the progress in this province and in this country, but they also contribute to the quality of life, to the strength of our communities, and to, I would say also, the volunteer aspect that so generously builds our communities either through the school communities or

through any of the other activities that we engage in.

When the bill highlights as its first preamble “whereas the Government of Alberta recognizes the benefits of post-secondary education,” it leads into the second whereas of the bill that says that the Alberta government also “wishes to raise awareness of the benefits of post-secondary education among children and their parents.” This raising of awareness of the value of it is exactly the reason why Bill 1 is so important to me and to this government. It is to raise the awareness among our families that this is a wonderful investment in the minds of their children, a wonderful investment in the economy of this province, and a truly wonderful investment in the quality of individuals whom we wish to lead this province right through this second century of our membership in the great nation of Canada.

**8:50**

Raising awareness also asks for a buy-in, and that buy-in is that the parents will establish an educational savings plan to which the people of Alberta will contribute along with the immediate beneficiaries, being the family of the children born in the second century of this province. That buy-in engages all of us in participating and engaging in building the future as we envision it to be or as we envision its potential to be. So that’s why I think this bill is a call – a clarion call, I’d even say – to those families who will become participants. In the case of my family when our children started earning a little bit of money, they were able to add into their education savings plan, and they were able to participate in what they would ultimately enjoy, and that is a postsecondary education and all that that brings with it.

Many years ago and perhaps many lifetimes ago, I taught a very dead language called Latin, and one of the pieces of poetry that I had the students memorize included that phrase “carpe diem.” Why I had them memorize that particular ode was simply: it expressed the willingness of the author, certainly the instruction or the exhortation of the poet to other people, to seize the opportunity of the day. I think that’s exactly what Bill 1 exhorts the people of Alberta to do, and that is to seize the opportunity to invest wisely, appropriately, and broadly in the future of this wonderful province.

Contrary to what other people like to think that I think, I will tell you what I think, and that is that this bill is genuinely directed to assist Albertans in planning for the future, and it’s doing it with our most precious resource, our young children, and building for their future and their children’s future. I commend the sentiments that have driven this bill to become an issue of debate, and ultimately I trust it will become an act and a statute of this province. It does not only dictate from the government to the people; it also asks the people to be involved in enacting the true spirit and intention of this bill, which is investing in our young people for the future.

Something else has been mentioned here tonight. In fact, it was mentioned too often that this is not a fair bill, so I’d like to speak to the fairness of this bill as I see it. Many years ago when I was younger, when I was griping about my brother getting something and I didn’t get it because he was older and I was younger, my mother said to me: you better remember that life isn’t fair. And it isn’t fair in many ways. It’s our responsibility to infuse so much of what we do with a sense of equity of opportunity.

So for those who dismiss it as not being fair in their minds, I would say that then they should take that to its logical conclusion and say that it isn’t fair that some of us grew up without the advantages of medicare, that it isn’t fair that some of the people in this land grew up without having a postsecondary education institution to go to. This whole question of fairness needs to be analyzed in the context in which we address issues today. Quite frankly, I’m tired

of this diatribe about this bill not looking after and not fairly treating children born before January 1, 2005. It just, indeed, is not applicable when we analyze the strength of this particular bill.

If there is any group of citizens whom this bill does address, I’m going to say that it is what some people feel is the forgotten group, the middle class. It addresses and asks the middle class, if you want to classify people, which I think is not fair and not right, but if you want to do that – this bill gives people who value education, who want to invest in it, the opportunity to do so for their children who will be born and will be learning in the next century of this province.

So I do feel that, yes, it does require the families and, I’m going to say, when they get a little bit older, the young people themselves to participate and be partners with the government in this investment. We will all benefit through that, but it does mean that they’re going to have to identify their priorities. For many of us, putting aside some money to contribute to the cost of postsecondary education is a very high priority within our family budgets.

This bill I choose to laud for its raising of awareness and for its responsiveness to the fact that the province, the people of Alberta, will be contributing to the depth and the breadth of knowledge and education of those citizens who will build this province for the next century.

So, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 gives us the opportunity to be there when possibly some of us didn’t have that opportunity. It gives us the opportunity now to look to the future and not cry over spilled milk or the so-called unfairness of other circumstances that people might have found themselves in.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. But, hon. member, you’ve already participated, according to my notes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Are we not on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

**The Speaker:** Oh, yes, we certainly are. Standing Order 29(2)(a). Please proceed. Absolutely.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you so much. My question to the Member for St. Albert, given her comments on Bill 1, is: how does she reconcile the comments that are made by her colleague the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that we heard in this Assembly the other day on exactly the same bill giving very much the opposite argument? How does she reconcile that from within her own caucus?

**Mrs. O’Neill:** Mr. Speaker, I speak for myself. As I said here when I rose, I am speaking as a representative of the people of the constituency of St. Albert and representing them. They are a very astute group of citizens, let me tell you, and I will continue to speak on their behalf.

**9:00**

**The Speaker:** There’s still time for 29(2)(a). Additional participants? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on the Standing Order 29 provision?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** No.

**The Speaker:** No further?

Then I’ll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to continue with the debate on Bill 1.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the activities that I partake in as a member of this Assembly that I particularly enjoy and find utmost intrinsically rewarding is participating in the

University of Alberta convocations, and I make a point of always attending as many convocations as I possibly can. What one notices when one sits on the stage looking at all the smiling faces of graduates walking by is that the group of graduates is getting older and older and represents all walks of life. There are really no trends any more to who graduates. No longer are they only young men and women who graduate from the University of Alberta, but we have, indeed, individuals who have returned to learning some time later in their lives. What it shows is that postsecondary education right now in this province is not something that you do right after you get out of high school, but very often many of us go on and acquire some life experiences and then return to postsecondary education. That is a fact of life, and that Albertans can enjoy this is a good thing.

Now, if one were to follow the train of thought that seems to be arising on the opposition benches, one would imagine that they would be proposing, as a matter of fact, never mind imagining, that we now make this bill retroactive and somehow retroactively apply the monies, the dollars, which are being now afforded to the children who will be born in 2005 to anyone and everyone who convocates from the University of Alberta, who can be perhaps 50, 60, or even 70 years old. I think any rational thinker would imagine that that is simply ludicrous. You can't go retroactively 50, 60, 70 years, but what you can do is make learning for the people who will be entering the University of Alberta more affordable and more accessible into the future. Indeed, if monies were not an object and if monies were not a finite number that this government has to deal with, we could make it retroactive to any time in history and simply give everybody \$800 and perhaps even the accrued interest that the children will enjoy in the future. Simply, that is not logical, and I hope that that's not what the opposition is proposing.

As someone who has had the privilege of obtaining postsecondary education and as someone who has funded his own education in the past, I can tell you that I would have been very appreciative to know that my government has invested in my future and has had the foresight, 18 years prior to my enrolment into school, to put some dollars aside so that I can not only enjoy the principal of the dollars but also the accrued interest to make my studies that much more accessible and easier into the future. Unfortunately, when I and many of my peers entered university, all the members of this Assembly, the governments of the past didn't have that foresight. This government does, and I believe 18 years from now when young adults are entering the U of A or the U of C or any technical institution in this province, they will be quite glad to know that this government right now has had that foresight and invested today's dollars into tomorrow's future, because let's face it. Our economy and the whole future of Alberta is based on learning, and it is based on knowledge.

I see a lot of skeptical faces across the floor, and I know that they're more than eager to criticize this bill. Somehow I have a feeling that most of them will be voting in favour of this bill when the vote drops, but I stand to be corrected. Perhaps it will be an interesting exercise to review the *Hansard* less than a month from now.

One thing that is missing, Mr. Speaker, is even though the members from both of the opposition parties are so eager to criticize this bill – they say: lack of foresight, unfair, it's not equal. I know that the NDP feels that everybody should be equally poor. I'm not sure about the Liberals, but they definitely believe in this intrinsic value of equality. Whether it's good or bad, it has to be equal. I have yet to hear one comment that would be constructive and tell us, if they were the government, which, granted, probably won't happen, will never happen, what they would do. What amendments would they bring to this bill to make it more fair, more palatable, and even

better for Albertans and the young adults of the future? I haven't heard one thing. All I heard is that it is not fair, and if it's not fair, say how you would correct it.

Indeed, any legislation that has passed through any Legislature may have some intrinsic unfairness, and our role as legislators is to minimize that unfairness to any degree that's possible. It would be absolutely Utopian to feel that we can pass legislation in this House that is patently fair and can stand any test of fairness and then satisfy any Albertan no matter what walk of life they may come from or whenever they have been born.

So I challenge the opposition that if they honestly feel that this piece of legislation is so patently unfair, either (a) come up with constructive criticism or (b) stand up, go on the record and say that we oppose this and we don't want Alberta's children born after January 1, 2005, to receive the \$800 from this province. Perhaps the opposition will do so.

I thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** To speak, Mr. Speaker, not for questions.

**The Speaker:** We still have provisions, though, for the questions and comments sector.

Then the hon. Government House Leader. Oh, sorry. Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry have a question?

**Mr. Bonner:** No. I was going to speak.

**The Speaker:** No. We've already recognized the hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that I'm an incredibly fortunate individual to be here today, to be an Albertan, to be a Canadian, to have the opportunity to speak my mind on any subject that I'd like to speak my mind on at virtually any time, to have the freedom to participate in debate, and all of that comes because I was extremely fortunate to be born to parents who believed in education.

In 1936 a young lady of 24 years of age left Edmonton and journeyed north by train to Peace River and then got on a boat and went down the Peace River to the hamlet of Fort Vermilion to teach school. When I think of what my mother went through as a young lady and think about the advantages and the privileges that we have today and think about the things that we consider to be hardships today, I just can't imagine it. She did go up there in 1936 to teach in a one-room schoolhouse, to teach children from many backgrounds, most of them First Nations, or aboriginal, native as they were called then, because Fort Vermilion was essentially a native community, and farm families as well in the Peace River district. Up there she met my dad, who had also left Edmonton as a young person to take a job with the Hudson's Bay Company, where he served for 45 years buying fur and running stores in communities and posts all over northern Canada, northern Ontario, places like Pikangikum and Sioux Lookout and Pickle Crow and Osnaburgh House, Fort Vermilion, Hazelton in northern B.C.

During the 45 years that he served in those small communities – and in many of those small communities my mother taught school – they raised seven children. I'm the youngest of those seven children. Every one of those seven children has a postsecondary education, and whether it was from the U of A or from NAIT or SAIT, we have that postsecondary education because our parents cared vitally about education and believed vitally that the most important thing they

could give their children and the most important thing they could do was to ensure that their children had a good education. I have that belief from them and, in fact, that belief in the necessity for a good education for all citizens, particularly a good liberal arts education, but then the ability to move on was something that we needed to have as a fundamental to our society and our community.

**9:10**

So I am absolutely delighted that in our strategic plan as it's going to be unfolded we put such an emphasis on leading in learning and that vital component of education in our system and how that leading in learning is used in unleashing innovation. I think it's important because it builds on that concept that Albertans have always had of self-reliance, of taking care of your family and contributing to your community and that value that many of our parents – not just my own because I don't think my parents were unique in this – placed on ensuring that their children were well-educated and had that opportunity for the future because, Mr. Speaker, education lays the foundation for the future, not only for future jobs but also for a life rich with and open to all kinds of opportunity.

When the throne speech introduced what I consider to be a truly great initiative, the Alberta centennial education savings plan, which is now the subject of Bill 1, to mark Alberta's 100th birthday with a new program that encourages parents to save for their children's future education, I think that that was a fundamental, far-sighted step in the right direction to encourage all Albertans to have that opportunity that I've had, that opportunity to be the best you can be, to contribute in the best way you possibly can.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, will encourage parents to set up educational savings plans for their children, RESPs, and in return government will invest \$500 at birth and three payments of \$100 over the years to encourage that continuing saving towards education, that continuing commitment towards education, that continuing understanding that education is fundamentally one of the most important things that we as parents – because I am a parent now – can deliver for our children and can do to make sure that our children succeed.

The government's contribution to the RESP is clearly not going to cover all of a child's tuition. Tuitions go up. Costs go up. That's not the intention. The intention isn't to cover all the costs of an education, but it does provide a foundation, Mr. Speaker, a starting point upon which parents and children can build over the years. More importantly, because it starts at the child's birth, it encourages people to think strategically and to work towards the long-term goal of having that most important postsecondary education.

As we move from a carbon-based economy, from a commodity-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, the gap between those who have and those who do not have is going to get wider and wider. The only way we can narrow that gap, the only way we can ensure that there is fairness in society, the only way we can ensure that everyone has an opportunity to succeed and be the best they can be, is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to get a good, solid education and to have that opportunity to go to a postsecondary institution of their choice, whether it's technical or at a university, in the trades, whatever path they choose to have that opportunity to get that education so that they can not only have a job but a good-paying job, and the statistics show that people who graduate from postsecondary education have a far higher rate of employment and higher incomes than those that don't.

But it's not just about getting a job. It's not just about having that success on the economic side. It's the opportunity to have that life that's rich and open to all kinds of opportunity, that ability for Albertans to really seize any opportunity that's available to them.

So we have some who would criticize that dream, would criticize that concept that Bill 1 and the centennial education savings plan – which provides an impetus for parents to help develop, help start as soon as a child is born the concept that that child should have every opportunity to succeed. And they say that that process is unfair.

I listened to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and like my colleague before me who commented, I like to listen when the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods speaks because there are usually some nubs of wisdom in what he says, and I believe that he's a very thoughtful contributor to debate in this House. He commented about making sure that children have the opportunity to move from high school to university. I think that Bill 1 does speak to that in the future. One of the things that we need to try and do is raise that level of encouragement for all our children in this province to move from high school into a postsecondary education of some sort so that they can be a participant in that knowledge-based economy and so that they can be successful in the future.

I think Bill 1 does speak to that kind of a dream. It doesn't create that dream in 2005 for a child that's already in school, but it does point that direction. It does make that a part of every family's life that wants to participate in it. That's not only a benefit to the children who have the educational savings plan in place, but it's also a benefit to the other children in the family when the family has that focus on education.

One of the comments that's been made – I think the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made it, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona also indicated that not everybody has an RESP. That's true. That's another very good reason to have this bill, because this bill will encourage every family to consider opening an RESP.

I hope that every family will get a package with their birth certificate that says, "Fill in this form, and get to your local bank or institution," or wherever else they may go. "Here's where you can go. Here's how you can do it. Here's how you sign your child up. Make your modest deposit," whether it's a dollar to open it or \$100. Quite frankly, I hope there's a program so that if you can't afford the dollar, you can get the dollar, because it's that important that each family open an RESP and consider starting to save for their children's education and start to put that importance on education.

The low rate of contribution to RESPs is absolutely abysmal given that the federal government in its wisdom has agreed to contribute 20 per cent of a contribution each year up to a maximum of \$400. We should be encouraging more people to take advantage of that. Now, not everybody can. Not everybody can donate \$2,000 to an RESP every year and achieve that \$400. But we should have that opportunity for people to open their RESPs, to get the \$500 contribution from the government, to make that start and to make it a focus.

There were other comments about it not being fair to all Alberta students because some students won't be able to use this because they were born before 2005. Well, Mr. Speaker, there are all sorts of programs available now that are not available to all students. The Rutherford scholarships were mentioned. They're available to students who achieve 80 per cent averages. That's a good program. I don't think anybody here would suggest that we cancel the Rutherford scholarships program because it's not available to all students. It's an excellent way of encouraging academics and encouraging students to achieve through grades 10, 11, and 12, and it provides a sum of money which will assist those students at university.

There are northern bursaries if you live in northern Alberta. I came from Fort Vermilion to go to university years ago. I didn't take advantage of a northern bursary. I wish I could have. I had to



pay off my student loan over 10 years, and pay it off I did. The best investment I ever made in my life. Northern bursaries are available to students from northern Alberta to come to a university or postsecondary and make a commitment to go back to their community and contribute for a few years. That's not available to everybody, just those in northern Alberta.

Student loans. I spent seven years, Mr. Speaker, on the Students Finance Board, one of the most productive times that I've had in terms of my feeling that I was making a contribution towards students getting an education. The informal motto of the Students Finance Board, at least when I was there, was that finances ought not be a barrier to a student getting a good education. In Alberta finances have not been a barrier to a student getting an education. In fact, there's a remission program attached to our student loans, so if you get a student loan, you're likely to get 50 per cent of it remitted. In other words, you don't have to pay that back. Well, if that's not a contribution by the government on behalf of the people of Alberta to certain students, not all students but certain students, I don't know what is, and certainly in most cases it's far higher than \$500.

So to suggest that we ought not start a new program because it would be unfair, when we've got all sorts of other programs that people take advantage of, doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker. In fact, you have to start good ideas sometime, and now is the time for us to start, in the year of the province's centennial, with this wonderful idea, which was first brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Egmont to encourage self-reliance, to encourage families to save for education. To encourage the concept that families are responsible with their children for a portion of the costs of education is very important. And it is a portion of the costs, because there's a real balance.

9:20

The community does benefit when somebody gets a good education. I think that's another message that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods put on the table, that there is a benefit to the community in everybody getting a good education. An engineer not only benefits himself by earning a good income, but he benefits the community by using his talents in contributing to the community. You could say the same of every profession, of any person even with just a liberal arts education, that there's a benefit to society. So there's an obligation for society to . . .

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** A small "I" liberal education.

**Mr. Hancock:** A small "I" liberal education.

There is a benefit to society in people having a good education and having the ability to take advantage of opportunities and help to make this province of ours even greater, to unleash innovation, to be a part of building the future, and there's an advantage to the individual in terms of the income, in terms of the ability to get a job, particularly with postgraduate degrees or degrees in law or medicine or engineering or those areas where you end up with a better education or a better income than average. There's clearly a benefit to the individual, and so there's a cost sharing. So it comes back to the concept that in the spirit of self-reliance and in the way in which our . . .

I'll just end there, Mr. Speaker, because my time is up, by saying that you can't emphasize too much the value of education, the value of developing the human capital in this province, and this program is one of those which I think is far-sighted and will do that better than many others we've seen.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in for five minutes. Comments? Questions?

Do I now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry?

**Mr. Bonner:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 1, the Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Act. Like so many pieces of legislation that we do debate in this House, there are many different ways we can view it. This is certainly one of those bills where we can view it from many, many different angles.

When we talk about the benefits of postsecondary education, that has been a commitment that has been made to Albertans since 1905 when we formed the first government under Premier Rutherford. He felt that education was so important that he also named himself minister of education and minister of finance. He saw the benefits of a strong public education system and how it would help the people of Alberta and their neighbours.

In Bill 1 we have set aside in the neighbourhood of \$20 million for the 40,000 children who are going to be born in 2005. We talk about the fairness of setting this amount aside for these future students. I've had the opportunity to teach in St. Albert, and it was a delight to teach there. The quality of student from an academic standpoint was amazing, and it was a pleasure to work with those students. I've also had the opportunity to teach in Edmonton in a different situation, in a purely blue-collar neighbourhood, and again it was exceptional.

When we start looking at students across this province, we also have to start looking at high school completion rates. If we look at the results we get from student achievement and the results from Alberta Learning on student achievement tests, it certainly shows that we have a great disparity in students who complete their high school education. So to think that these dollars that are going to be set aside are going to be available equally to all students is not correct. It is great, but it is not correct that it is available to all students.

When we also look at commitment to education, many of us in this Assembly that did attend postsecondary education benefited from student tuition fees that were incredible. But just 10 years ago, when my oldest daughter started university, by the time she completed her four-year degree in four years, her student tuition had doubled. That was not a commitment to education at that particular time.

I think we see what we have done with students over the past decade by allowing costs of university to increase, with great results. I have an article here from the *Edmonton Journal* dated Saturday, July 5, 2003. It goes on to state: A Statistics Canada study which reveals Alberta has the lowest number of students who attend postsecondary institutions right out of high school shows the province needs to do a better job of educating its own, says a top University of Alberta official. Now, certainly we can argue either way, again, that this bill will not help or that this bill will help. But the one thing is that we have a problem in this province, Mr. Speaker. If this bill does raise the awareness amongst the parents and students of this province of the importance of a postsecondary education, then certainly that is one of the good points of this particular bill.

As well, we have to look back at what happened prior to 1993. We had the Liberal government in this province, we had the UFA government, we had Social Credit, and we even had Conservative governments that up until 1993 paid a tremendous amount of money into our public education system. Those were the statistics that were brought to the front by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Twenty years ago for every dollar that a student put in out of their own pocket, the province contributed \$10, whereas today for every

dollar a student contributes, the government only supplies \$2.34. So, yes, we have seen tremendous changes in the amount of commitment to Alberta postsecondary students in the last decade.

We do have those students in the province who have a much higher debt load when they do graduate. It is not uncommon now for students to have a debt load of \$20,000, and if you're one of those unfortunate students who has to leave home in order to study and seek room and board in a residence or whatever, that debt load is even going to be more.

One of the things the hon. Member for St. Albert brought up that I like was that certainly we are trying to raise awareness and that education is a tremendous investment. But if this government is truly saying that, then why did this government with its actions not fund an arbitrated settlement to teachers? Why, if this government is so committed to education, did we see the layoff of a thousand teachers? These are a thousand teachers of whom the majority would have been educated right here in Alberta. They went ahead and they got their education, and then they were told: sorry; there's no room in the inn because we will not fund an arbitrated settlement.

So we cannot speak out of both sides of our mouth, Mr. Speaker. We cannot say that we're going to raise the level of awareness of a postsecondary education and then on the other hand lay those people off. So what we do need here is a long-term commitment to our postsecondary institutions to properly fund them in order to keep down costs for students, and certainly that would assist all students who are attending a postsecondary institution.

**9:30**

Now, as well, we were offered a challenge here earlier: how could we make this bill better? Well, there are a number of interesting things that are happening in the province right now, and certainly one of them is what is happening with Edmonton public. The best way that we can track high school completion rates for students in the province is certainly by looking at results from Alberta Learning. We looked at those over a five-year period, and in doing so, Mr. Speaker, we can look at the systemic changes and see what is happening with student achievement.

What happened when Angus McBeath became superintendent of Edmonton public schools? He indicated at that time that his goal was to raise student achievement. So what he did was he centralized the whole aspect of student achievement in Edmonton public schools. One of the cornerstones they did was that they were going to make certain that every student was identified as to what grade level they were reading at, and their goal was to get every student reading at that grade level. One of the reasons they did that was because they knew from their statistics that students who entered high school and could not read at a grade 10 level have a 99 per cent chance of not completing high school.

So this is definitely one of the ways that we can improve this bill, and that is certainly to make student achievement in the lower grades one of our priorities and certainly to build the cornerstones so that we can improve the high school completion rate for our students.

Now, what also happened in Edmonton public – and again it's a great change from what they've had – is that over the past three years their completion rate in high school has gone from 62 to 69 per cent. That's 7 per cent in three short years. That is phenomenal in a school board of that particular size. They're also looking, Mr. Speaker, at having a high school completion rate of 75 per cent by the year 2005. So, again, that is another 6 per cent in a very short period of time, and I have no doubt that they will do it. When we see results like this, that are directly tied to student achievement, then certainly this is one of the areas that Bill 1 could focus on so that we bring all students along when we work.

As well, when I was on holidays, I came across an article in the *Arizona Sun*, and this article was dealing with teachers. The title of the article is Let the Best Teach the Rest. What they did at the Rodel exemplary teacher academy was they identified characteristics in very successful teachers which made them better than the rest, and those were quite simple. One was a passionate belief system. Another quality that excellent teachers had was motivation and student engagement. A third was that they would focus on subject matter. Another quality that excellent teachers had was effective classroom management strategies. A fifth one was positive communication and leadership. They found in their studies that successful teachers shared all of these.

They wanted to take this one step further, so what they did was this. Over the next three years they took 10 of these teachers and each one of them is going to be assigned six teachers, so at the end of three years we'll have 60 more teachers who have had the benefit of being mentored by these excellent teachers. So if we wish to do something for all students in this province, then certainly one of the ways we can do it is by establishing a mentorship program in our school systems here in the province so that all students will get the benefit of those excellent teachers.

There were a few of us that attended the state Legislatures conference in Chicago a few years ago, and one of the key topics that was discussed at that particular convention was: how do they improve the education system in American schools and particularly in American schools in their large cities? They have the opposite problem in their large schools. Teachers do not want to go into the inner core of large American cities to teach school. They want to get out into the suburbs, where many of the problems that they'd encounter in the inner city they would not encounter with suburbs. What they found in that particular situation, Mr. Speaker, was that if they wished to improve student achievement, the cheapest and most effective way to do that was to increase the quality of the teachers going in there. They were able to do that through professional development. So those are definitely things that we could do in this province. Those are things that we could be spending our money on that would benefit all students in this province.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it's great. I wish my students had had some more money when they were attending university. It would have helped them out. From that aspect this is certainly a good bill. Some people are going to get some money. On bringing awareness, yes, it does bring awareness to the needs of postsecondary education. It also brings awareness to the fact that the sooner families start to save for the postsecondary education of their children, the better off we are. But the bill falls so far short of the many good things that we could be doing in this province to benefit all students.

So I'm going to reserve how I will vote on this bill. It certainly isn't all bad, and it's certainly not all good. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. McClelland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry makes some points that certainly there is always room for improvement and certainly there is room for improvement in Alberta in learning, particularly in participation rates and graduation rates, and we're working on that. But it was interesting that yesterday the Legislature was honoured by the presence of the minister of education from the state of Saxony in Germany. They were here to witness our education system, which has been in many instances considered to be not among the best but the best in the world, which is a great credit to everyone associated with education and the learning system: Alberta Learning, the

teachers, the students, parents, even legislators with the foresight to do what has been done to make education in Alberta so important, and in particular the Edmonton public school board.

It was interesting in the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry made that tuition was a major deterrent for postsecondary education when, in fact, Ireland found that not to be the case when tuition fees were completely eliminated, and it was determined after the fact that the single most important indicator of whether or not a child would go to postsecondary education was the family experience that the child grew up in. So would not this bill and the sense that from the moment of birth each child in Alberta and each family in Alberta will be inculcated with the sense that education and postsecondary education is a vital part of the foundation of life – is that not an extension of Alberta's Promise, which is already so manifestly delivered in education but even greater for the future?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

9:40

**Mr. Bonner:** That's an interesting point that the hon. member has brought up. Certainly, it's one of those points that, again, depends where you do live in this province. When I grew up in Jasper, it was a railroad town. We had great emphasis on education by people in that town. They knew the benefits of it. Yet we had a situation where we could leave high school at the end of grade 12, go start working for the railroad, and make \$10,000 more per year than the principal of the high school was making. So to try and impress upon some people the benefits of continuing in a postsecondary education was rather difficult.

I would suspect that if we were to go up to Fort McMurray today, where wages are extremely high, where work is available, it is much more difficult to motivate students in that particular situation to attend a postsecondary institution than to go to work and make some big dollars.

I also think that particularly for students who have to leave home, to travel from a small community to a big city to live in residence or to seek room and board somewhere, it is also intimidating to a degree for many students. So I think there are many factors why students would not attend postsecondary institutions.

As I said in the debate, this brings awareness. If it does encourage students to think more about a postsecondary education, then certainly it's done its job.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

### Bill 6

#### Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2004

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 6, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2004.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act builds on Alberta's success at helping people move from income support into the workforce. It is the legislative authority for Alberta Works, which will provide more co-ordinated access to employment

and training services, income support, health benefits, and child support services. The goal is to help people become self-reliant, help employers meet their needs for a skilled workforce, and help individuals and families meet their basic needs. Alberta Works implements the main recommendation of the MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs to move on integrated systems of income and employment supports.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 amends the Income and Employment Supports Act to make it easier for government to help low-income parents get the child support they should be receiving from the noncustodial parent. The child support services program assists parents to obtain child support agreements or court orders which are enforced by the maintenance enforcement program. Extended family, employer, landlords, or other third parties may be asked to provide a phone number or address so the noncustodial parent can be contacted to discuss child support.

In the past some people have been reluctant to provide this information for fear of their names being disclosed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 allows government to protect the privacy of third parties in such circumstances and helps ensure parents meet their responsibility to support their children to the best of their ability. This approach is consistent with other government programs that rely on third-party information to carry out their mandate.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 makes minor wording changes to the Income and Employment Supports Act. To name a few, section 12 adds that employment and training benefits may be provided for a person with disabilities. This change clarifies that the department can provide such assistance either directly to the person or indirectly through the employer or school.

Section 24, Mr. Speaker, provides that the department will notify the training provider when the department imposes an administrative penalty.

Section 43(1)(a) clarifies that appeals may be either relative to eligibility or relative to the amount or value of assistance.

Section 49(2), Mr. Speaker, includes two changes. The first clarifies that three conditions in the act are additional situations in which personal information can be disclosed, and the second ensures that the minister's power of authorization for disclosure must be exercised for an identified purposes.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, section 49(5) allows the department to refuse to disclose the source of information when investigating a child support case.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 makes minor wording changes to the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act and makes it easier for the child support services program to carry out its mandate.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I move to adjourn the debate on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

