

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 7, 2005**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Wellness Initiatives

501. Ms Blakeman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider using taxes from tobacco sales to create a wellness fund to support wellness programs, public health initiatives, and research.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason I have brought forward this particular motion and ask for the support of the House for it is two parts. One, I think that we are a healthier society, a better society if we have more well people in it. I like the idea of a wellness fund that supports initiatives to get more people with a wellness attitude rather than always looking at a sickness model.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'm very interested in the idea of cost containment in our health care system, and I think one of the easiest and most obvious ways to contain costs is to have more people well and less people in need of acute and primary care.

The Alberta Liberals really believe in this. In fact, this was our number 2 policy in our Creating a Healthy Future policy position, and this motion is a paraphrasing, essentially, of that particular motion, but it contains all the important ingredients of it.

The background to this is that in March of 2002 – so we're talking three years ago – a number of stakeholder organizations came together under the banner of Wellness Alberta to advocate for the establishment of a wellness fund. There were a number of organizations that were involved in that: Action on Smoking and Health, Alberta Centre For Active Living, Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, Alberta heart health project – I'm just jumping around here, Mr. Speaker – Alberta Public Health Association, Alberta Recreation & Parks Association, Dietitians of Canada, Grande Prairie & Area Safe Communities, the Health Promotion Research Group at the University of Calgary, et cetera. It was a very lengthy list. They were calling for a provincial wellness fund of approximately \$200 million annually that would be funded out of tobacco tax revenue.

We think that's an excellent idea, and essentially that's what we've incorporated into the motion that I have before you here tonight. The Alberta Liberals listened to those experts and those members of the health promotion community. We heeded their good advice and their suggestions, and thus we are in favour of creating this province-wide wellness fund.

Now, how does the fund work? Well, it would be phased in. The idea is to eventually collect \$200 million a year from taxes on tobacco and tobacco products, and that \$200 million a year would then be fed back out to support projects aimed at improving health and wellness.

The amount of this fund could be adjusted for future years based on the tax revenue and Alberta's increasing population. It anticipates that hopefully we have fewer people smoking and that tobacco tax allocation of money does in fact drop. Currently it's at \$660

million a year, and we are proposing using \$200 million of that for this wellness fund. But let's say that we do have a tobacco tax revenue drop and it becomes inadequate to sustain this. Then we can look at other sources of revenue to sustain it; for example, perhaps liquor taxes. We should note that the \$200 million is not a one-time cost, but it is in fact an annual cost of \$200 million each year, and the funds are expended annually.

Mr. Speaker, I want to underline that the wellness fund would under no circumstances take revenue away from other programs. This is not meant to cause any kind of a clawback in any other area. This is intended to be separate and a new fund beyond what we have, so it shouldn't take money away from acute care or chronic care or anything like that.

Now, we propose that the money be distributed and get into the community and create wellness initiatives through a couple of different ways, but the primary venue that we would like to support is using the family and community support services. We would hope to foster healthier communities and by extension healthier families and healthier individuals by funnelling most of this money through the FCSS set-up.

FCSS currently supports approximately 192 programs across the province, and they vary widely. They range from things like parent-child development activities, support services for young school-aged children, parenting and family life education, youth development, home support services for the elderly, outreach and co-ordination for the elderly, newcomer services, education services. It's quite an extensive list.

You can start to see what becomes possible there; for example, the issue that the Member for Red Deer-North raised earlier today around drug-use problems with youth. We could be looking at initiatives on wellness that dealt specifically with youth and the drug culture. So lots of possibilities there.

Right now 286 municipalities and Métis settlements are participating in FCSS programs. In other words, almost 98 per cent of Alberta's population has access to an FCSS service.

FCSS is particularly a good venue for us because it's driven by the communities that it serves. In other words, it's localized decision-making for the allocation of dollars. Neither the province nor any provincial agency directly creates or runs FCSS services. They rely on municipal initiatives and community support in order to achieve their objectives. The process works from the bottom up. What does the community need? They identify that need, and then we can look at the programming that feeds into it.

Currently there is an 80-20 split. The municipalities put in 20 per cent, and the province puts in 80 per cent. With the wellness fund in place, this formula could be re-examined, for example.

I think that in FCSS we have a proven, successful mechanism for building partnerships between Alberta's provincial and municipal governments and the communities that they serve. We think it deserves more credit for the work that it does and more money to do that work. We think the wellness fund would allow FCSS to create new programs and services in addition to those currently offered. We'd also like to explore ways to encourage stronger partnerships between FCSS and the public health organizations.

8:10

Now, the second initiative we're looking at underneath this motion, aside from funding through FCSS, is to support specific public health initiatives. Investments in health promotion require that we invest not only in programs that would benefit targeted high-risk populations, for example people with diabetes, but we also look at ways to fundamentally change the way we operate our schools, our hospitals, our local community organizations. So we're talking about institutional change and incorporation there.

Lastly, we would like to look at furthering research into wellness initiatives and pilot projects, and part of that is looking at and better integrating social determinants into the way we look at our health system and wellness initiatives. Furthering health promotion research is also a key component of the wellness fund, and I don't think we can make informed decisions on how and where to invest our money unless we understand what works and what doesn't work.

I think that there's a variety of groups that can gain funding through this. Public health and health promotion are not solely the responsibility of any one government department. We think that through these three ways – the FCSS, the public health initiatives, and the research initiatives – this is an excellent way to disseminate that money.

I know I have other colleagues who want to speak tonight on different aspects of a wellness fund, social determinants, wellness overall in society. I will ask for the support of the Assembly in supporting this motion, and I will take my seat and allow some of my colleagues to be able to speak to this. Thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 501. Sadly, I can't support it, but I would like to try and explain why.

There is already a fund dedicated to healthy living initiatives in Alberta. It is called the Department of Health and Wellness, and currently it is funded at about \$8 billion per year, and it is moving up at the rate of about 10 per cent a year. There is another fund. It's an endowment fund, Mr. Speaker, called the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. A commitment has been made to move it from the original \$300 million in grant money to \$800 million by adding an additional \$500 million this year.

While I agree that more needs to be done on the wellness side of our coin, reality has a habit of getting in our way. Health care funding has been growing at a rate exceeding 10 per cent a year. It becomes difficult to do the extra things in health care or in any other department even when necessary when growth in health care spending is so high. It not only precludes our ability to deal with new initiatives; it makes it difficult for other departments of government that are continually being denied additional funds as health care and education come first, as they should. They're the priority, but the growth in those two program lines is starting to hurt other programs.

All is not lost however. The current minister of health continues to work on a wellness strategy, and I am confident that even small things like more phys ed in schools can have a huge impact on the well-being of our children's lives. Impacts from the tobacco reduction strategy are being felt. As the minister of health indicated, over a hundred thousand people have quit smoking in the last two or three years.

Mr. Magnus: And one.

Ms Haley: And one.

The International Symposium on Health will provide a forum to explore a variety of ideas regarding health care in Alberta and hopefully will also look at the potential on the wellness side.

The actual idea of a wellness fund is not new, Mr. Speaker. It was in fact mentioned in the original Rainbow Report, and it is something that I think makes a lot of sense. But at the same time we need to constantly be reviewing the things that we are doing, such as the

CFEP grants of \$25 million a year. It's an awesome program that allows communities, in my area at least, to work on their recreational facilities. We were lucky enough to get a million dollar grant towards a swimming pool. Well, it's a \$12 million swimming pool in Airdrie, but we were able to get a centennial grant, which really helped. Those are the types of initiatives that my communities are working on, and I'm glad to try and support them in any way that I can.

As well, as a parent when my sons were younger, one of the most important things, I think, that I could do for them was to encourage them to be in as many sports as was possible, and we tried them pretty much all, from swimming to football and basketball and volleyball and everything in between. We started out with just soccer, which was a very inexpensive sport for children to participate in. It was also something as a parent that I could get involved in with them.

So I think that not everything is about trying to spend \$200 million. Perhaps it's more about getting people to reconnect with our beautiful province. If I actually had \$200 million to spend, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would do would be to try and invest it in our parks because I happen to think that that's an area that needs that kind of investment, but it would be a one-time investment, not an ongoing annual expenditure.

I would like to point out that if you combined our personal income tax, our health care premiums, the tobacco tax, the alcohol tax, you still wouldn't have enough money to pay for what one year of health care is costing us right now. So, clearly, wellness is an incredibly important issue, but never yet in all my years here have I seen anything that we've done in health care to help reduce costs actually reduce costs because the second that you find a way to do one surgical procedure for less, you end up doing two more of another one later. So there's never a reduction, and we have an aging demographic, so we also have to be cognizant of the growth potential in the health care sector.

I guess to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to caution all of us on setting up funds like this for a dedicated revenue stream. I think that there's a risk that we set priorities today that 10 years from now may not be the priority for the government of that day, and we tie their hands by precluding their ability to change things like this. We make it very difficult with endowment funds and foundations in order to be able to deal with the current realities. Right now life is pretty good because we have a very nice surplus. Oil and gas prices are high. I remember a day when they were very high in the early 1980s, and everybody believed that they would stay high. Then I remember about 10 years where things were not so great in Alberta, and we ended up with major deficits and debt that we've just now finally concluded paying off. So I really think it's important that we not dream with taxpayers' dollars but, rather, try to find the best way to deal with the program needs that Albertans are actually asking us to deal with.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the motion, but I appreciate very much the opportunity to get up and address the issue. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we'd all agree that wellness is the preferred concept to date for us to talk about our physical and emotional well-being. In fact, a paradigm shift has taken place in which the emphasis has shifted from a biomedical model to a focus on social conditions. A recent report commis-

sioned by the Alberta government, the 2004 report on comparable health indicators, affirmed that

health is much more than just the absence of disease or disability. It is a state of physical, emotional and social well-being. Our education, employment, income and physical environment influence our health as much or more than the quality and availability of health service.

If we're really serious about our overall health and wellness, we must shift our focus. Roy Romanow wrote recently: we need to move from an illness model to a wellness paradigm that connects the dots of all of the factors that contribute to health for individuals and society at large.

This is not just an academic exercise. It's really a life and death matter. Over 80 per cent of cases of coronary heart disease, diabetes, and lung cancer could be prevented. We ignore the social determinates of health and wellness at our own peril. Tommy Douglas said: the ultimate goal of medicare must be the task of keeping people well rather than just patching them up when they're sick. The social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities, and societies as a whole, conditions such as early childhood, income, availability of food, employment, working conditions, and social services.

Of course, there have been studies on this for a long time. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century there was a famous classic analysis of the social determinants of health written by Friedrich Engels, 1845. It was entitled *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He discovered that in Manchester death rates were directly affected by the quality of material conditions, housing for example. Rudolf Virchow, a German physician and the father of modern pathology, in his investigation of a typhus epidemic in Upper Silesia discovered that poor living conditions, inadequate diet, and poor hygiene fuelled the epidemic. So finding a direct relationship between social conditions and health is not new, and recent studies in Canada continue to confirm, and it's really a common-sense conclusion.

8:20

The 2002 York University conference on the social determinants of health identified 11 key determinants: aboriginal status, early life, education, employment and working conditions, food security, health care services, housing, income and its distribution, a social safety net, social exclusion, unemployment, and employment security. Mr. Speaker, the FCSS-supported agencies – and they do such a great job in Alberta – address all of these social determinants. A wellness fund directed to the social conditions just mentioned will lead to creating a healthier society and saving the health care system millions of dollars.

One of the most important social determinants of health, of course, is adequate income, the fact that people need a living wage. Study after study demonstrates that poverty is the biggest contributor to poor health. Low income is a determinant of the quality of early childhood, education, housing, employment, working conditions, and, of course, food security. Canadian children living in low-income families are more likely to experience greater varieties of illness, mental health problems, lower school achievement, early school drop out, family violence, and child abuse. Material deprivation often leads to greater consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and a lifestyle of poor diets and lack of exercise. I do not blame people living in poverty. There is too much of that kind of blaming the victim in our society.

Welfare is not enough. There must be support for full citizenship and participation in the wealth of our society. People on welfare are not just clients and recipients of welfare or the beneficiaries of the

government's largesse; they are citizens and ought to be treated with dignity and respect. Without the self-esteem and self-worth of being treated with dignity, their wellness will be undermined and ground down, ensuring their dependence on the health care system.

So, Mr. Speaker, the most important question, I believe, for us in this Assembly is to ask ourselves: has government policy contributed to our wellness or undermined it by weakening the quality of so many social determinants of health? Rudolf Virchow, whom I quoted earlier, wrote in 1848: medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing but medicine writ large. One of the most important aspects of the Hippocratic oath of physicians is their commitment to not do any harm. So we must ask if government policy, especially since 1993, has contributed to our wellness or undermined our wellness. Has government policy done more harm than good? So it's not a question of blaming the poor; it's looking at ourselves and our own social policies.

I affirm the wellness fund. That's going in the right direction: to put money and resources where it counts, to enable Alberta to be a more healthy province. Roy Romanow put it best, and this is my conclusion:

Historians and health experts tell us that we have had two great revolutions in the course of public health. The first was the control on infectious diseases . . . The second was the battle against non-communicable diseases.

The third great revolution is about moving from an illness model to all of those things that both prevent illness and promote a holistic sense of wellbeing .

Motion 501 recommends putting our money and resources into dealing with the social determinants of wellness. If we do that, then the promise will come to pass. Albertans will be the healthiest people in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join the debate on Motion 501, which would have the government consider dedicating tobacco tax revenue to a wellness fund. There is no doubt that health care continues to be one of the greatest concerns in our province. Motion 501 would appear to be one way to address certain issues in the health care system; however, I do have several concerns with this motion.

While I am sure that the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Centre is to in some way further meet the health needs of Albertans, I feel that this approach will not be beneficial for several reasons. Mr. Speaker, in March of 2002 tobacco taxes were raised in our province in an effort to reduce the number of Albertans who use tobacco. This is part of the provincial government's overarching strategy to combat tobacco use in our province.

Prior to 2002 tobacco taxes generated roughly \$350 million each year. In 2005 this will go up to \$720 million, so a doubling plus. Currently these revenues flow into the general revenue fund, or GRF, of the provincial government. From here the government allocates revenues towards spending priorities, including health care, primary and postsecondary education, infrastructure, and other provincially delivered programs. By funding programs from the GRF, the government is better able to respond to changes in priorities and circumstances.

According to the wording of the motion, if the government were to accept Motion 501, this would mean that over \$700 million per year would be dedicated to the proposed wellness fund. This is no small amount of money, and the effective removal of close to three-quarters of a billion dollars from the provincial budget would have a large impact on the budget process.

As an aside I must say that exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Centre is suggesting is a little unclear. The wording of the motion seems to indicate that all revenues from the taxation of tobacco would be dedicated to this fund. However, the press release regarding this issue states that only \$200 million would be directed towards this fund, so I may need clarification there. I appreciate the opportunity to debate the issues in this Chamber, but in the future it would be helpful if exactly what is being debated could be a little clearer, but I digress. The dedication of funds solely to one purpose could result in the limiting of spending choices by the government and hampering of the ability to deal with emergencies if they arise.

My second exception to this motion surrounds the issue of efficient program development. What is proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre would appear, in my humble opinion, to be a backward approach to program development. In order to have an effective, efficient program, it is best to design what would work best to accomplish a specific goal, then set out funding it. This way there are definite targets and strategies in place so that the program can achieve the original aims that it's created to fill. What is proposed in Motion 501 would appear to put the cart before the horse. In this case it would appear that the Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying: start out with a pile of money, and then we'll see what we can do with it.

Mr. Speaker, to be honest, this method of program development makes me nervous because of the very large chance that funds would be used inefficiently. In one scenario the level of funding would be inadequate to fully develop a program that would be effective, and the program will fail because of this. This will result in the waste of all the funds poured into the program. The other possibility is that there will be a surplus of funds to develop a program, and this will result in wasteful spending. Funds that could have been used to develop other programs in other areas will be locked into a dedicated revenue stream and could not be accessed. Either way, there exists a very large possibility of waste due to a lack of freedom and ability to adapt to changing needs within government funding.

Mr. Speaker, while I do not agree with the mode of funding that is suggested by Motion 501, I very much agree with the measures that are proposed in it. The proposed fund in Motion 501 would support wellness programs, public health initiatives, and research. As I have said, I agree with these initiatives entirely, which is why I am so glad that the government of Alberta has already had these programs in place. The provincial government currently has in place the measures which this motion would achieve. These programs have been in place for some time now.

I would like to briefly discuss the research program that is funded by the provincial government because there is some astounding work benefiting from this. The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, or AHFMR, was created specifically to fund medical research. Each year this foundation awards over \$40 million in grants and awards to medical research. The funding for these grants comes from the endowment fund created by the provincial government for this purpose. The proceeds that are generated from the investment of the principal of this fund are used for the grants and endowments awarded by the AHFMR. Since its creation in 1983 the AHFMR has been recognized internationally as an outstanding institution, and the provincial government was applauded for its vision in creating it.

Mr. Speaker, as I have stated previously, I agree with what this motion seeks to accomplish, but I do not feel that I can support it because these measures are already being undertaken. To create a seemingly directionless fund with a vague purpose of wellness would be a disservice to Albertans. These are serious questions that surround the issues of health care, and the questions deserve serious answers, not vague promises of some form of spending.

I will not support Motion 501, and I would urge my colleagues in this Chamber to do the same. Thank you.

8:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in support of this bill. As a physician in practice for the past 30 years in the province I've come to a real revolution in my own thinking about the way we're spending our health dollars. In fact, approximately 95 per cent of our health budgets are being spent on treatments and prescriptions, and it's not working.

The wellness fund is really about getting at root causes, not dealing with symptoms, not dealing with the results of lifestyles and social conditions that have created the problems in the first place. It's really about getting at root cause, not about prescriptions. That's hard even for medical people to understand. So it's a challenge to shift our thinking around from what we have been used to in the so-called health system, which is actually a sickness treatment system, to one in which we are creating conditions for people to live more healthy lives. The health system is consuming increasing portions of our budgets. It's clear that the returns are diminishing, and it's because we are focusing so much on the supply of services, not on the root causes of the conditions that are coming into the health care system.

In research done in the last 10 years it's increasingly clear that the health system can resolve between 25 and 30 per cent of the conditions presenting to it. This is because in our modern society many of the conditions that are presenting to us are having to do with environment, genetic issues, and social relationships. Many issues today are stress-related: self-esteem, loneliness, violence, addiction, anxiety, depression. We need to begin to address the broader determinants of health, and this fund is designed to try to do that.

Income supports are an example that was referred to earlier. The Quebec health system has investigated the proportion of users of the health care system and found that over 50 per cent of the users of the health care system are on the poverty side of the economic spectrum. Wellness is about how people feel as well as what their medical measurements may tell. It's beyond diagnosis and treatment. It's beyond pills and even beyond lifestyles, which are the symptoms of conditions from which people are struggling to be liberated.

People make choices on the basis of the opportunities and the barriers that they experience in their lives, especially their early childhood experiences. It's appropriate to recognize that this government is spending in some areas of early childhood enrichment. That is going to pay back bountifully in adult lives and health. Early childhood is a vital priority to improve health and to reduce health system use.

Real health promotion – and this is what the wellness fund is about as opposed to sickness management – begins with finding ways to increase people's sense of control, Mr. Speaker. That comes through improving living conditions. Health is about power and money in our culture. In this democracy there are many opportunities, and we need to find across the sectors – the health sector, social services, education, the justice systems – a common commitment to engaging with people and their communities in their responsibility for their health and their future. We can assist them in finding that joint responsibility for health.

This is the crux of wellness. This is the crux of a new paradigm we call health promotion – it's political; it's not medical – stimulating, liberating, caring, healthy communities. It's a challenge to all of us to think about who is responsible for health. The medical

model says: we will take care of you. The wellness model says: together we can create healthy, caring communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking in favour of the motion. The notion of using a sin tax to promote wellness – in other words, turning a negative into a positive – has a sweet irony to it. Another example of irony or paradox is that this government has had no difficulty at all in terms of assessing Albertans and collecting over \$900 million in the form of health care premiums, taxes by any other words, but seems reluctant or reticent to have what I see as almost found money, \$200 million out of a fund of \$660 million, set aside to promote wellness. The notion of promoting wellness is so much cheaper than the after-effects of disease.

The ideal would be through a comprehensive program of education combined with a total ban in public places including bingo halls, casinos, bars, and so on, to promote such a healthy lifestyle that there would no longer be any taxes to collect. And until that wonderful day arrives, we should be setting aside portions of this sin tax to fund healthy investments.

Investment in health is like an investment in education: it just continues to pay and pay and pay. It's not a matter of either/or, robbing Peter to pay Paul. Setting aside \$200 million of a \$650 million windfall from the unfortunate nature of smoking provides us with a kind of funding that can set aside community health support in the form of schools. Compare this kind of an initiative to simply mandating daily phys. ed. without providing either the infrastructure, the equipment, or the support for such a program. You can't mandate; you can only promote.

To get back to the notion of not robbing Peter to pay Paul, we have in this province in one sense the good fortune of our revenues from oil and gas, which this year are accounting for somewhere between \$6 billion to \$10 billion. So the idea that we can't set aside \$200 million just, I'm afraid, is not a wise argument.

We must invest in health if we are going to move into this next hundred years with a healthier lifestyle than we currently have. We have a whole series of problems with regard to obesity, with regard to drug addiction. The latest with the crystal meth is causing a great deal of difficulty. If we can avoid these pitfalls through a wellness fund, which has an education component in it which states that this is the lifestyle we should be seeking, then we can convince youth to avoid the pitfalls of crystal meth and other forms of drugs. This \$200 million could be used in part for programs like AADAC. We're having a bill come up later along that same line, where we're talking about the best treatment for crystal meth, but I'm not sure that we have sufficient funding for that program to be realistically implemented.

The government has said over and over again that health care costs are spiralling out of control. I take exception to this statement because since the 1980s as a portion of GDP our expenditure on health has not risen. It has stayed under that 10 per cent level, yet here we have a fund which by itself would provide an extra \$200 million.

One of my former Calgary colleagues was concerned that the principles weren't laid out. Where was this money going to go? Well, I would point to the fact that it should be noted that this \$200 million is not a one-time cost but an annual cost of \$200 million each year. Funds would be expended on an annual basis, or as I indicated earlier, hopefully by having healthier lifestyles, we could do away with this fund, and health would be seen as an investment, not something that we had to provide a fund for. As to how the fund

should be used and the notion that it wasn't delineated, that's what a committee of all representatives of this House could determine: how best should we be investing in health care funding and wellness?

8:40

In February I was fortunate enough to go to the University of Calgary and there attend a public health care international symposium. Doctor after doctor from around the world indicated that wellness was certainly a better option to what we currently have. Rather than a health care system, what we have is a sick care system. We deal with people who have succumbed quite often through no fault of their own, through a matter of family genealogy, and find themselves in need of health care. The opposite of that is to promote wellness. Save that money; invest in the future.

For 34 years I taught in the public school system. My most enjoyable early experiences were teaching elementary school when, before laws were too tight and curriculum was so designated, we had the opportunity to go for runs on a regular basis. And talking to my students 32, 34 years later, the times that they remember the most were when we were out there doing these healthy pursuits.

I would recommend to this government the notion of turning basically a sin activity into a heavenly pursuit: \$200 million available, used over and over again, to promote wellness to the point where we eliminate the cancer-associated problems with first-hand and second-hand smoke.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first observation I have is that the hon. Opposition House Leader's motion is quite vague when she speaks about wellness programs, public health initiatives, and research. While I would agree that reforms of the health care system are certainly in order, the Ministry of Health and Wellness already does all of the things which this motion speaks to.

Tobacco taxes bring in approximately \$700 million, while approximately \$9 billion are already spent on health and wellness. So we can assume that every penny of the tobacco tax is already spent on health care. We already have a medical research endowment fund in the province of Alberta, and we already spend approximately \$233 million on wellness programs. So if the hon. member is suggesting that \$467 million more be spent on wellness programs, we would have to take away necessarily from some other health care programs. I'm not sure what those would be.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the motion is simplistic, and it is vague, and I would urge all members to vote against it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak from a geriatric nurse perspective. There are so many things that we can do to help keep our elderly out of nursing homes, which in the long run is or should be really what our aim is with our health/wellness dollars.

There was something I heard from the other side of the House that I had to really think about, the fact that if we took \$200 million annually, that would tie up something that would happen or decisions that would be made 10 years down the road. I really can't help but think that 10 years down the road the thinking would be different, and the changes would be made according to how the future would call for it at that point in time. So saying that your hands are tied because you decide something today to me is a little bit frightening.

There was an analogy that I thought I could use about the \$200 million out of \$720 million, and as I was listening, it went from \$350 million to \$720 million. Who knows what it's going to be five years from now? I would like to sincerely believe that it would be lower because we don't have people smoking as much; however, we'll see how that works out.

But there is an analogy that I'd like to use in my own budgeting procedures. Many, many years ago I was taught how to budget with an envelope. I have little envelopes, and if I want a new car, I take that money, and it is specifically put aside for my new car. Now I have my new car, but guess what? In five years I'm going to need another new car, so my little envelope doesn't move. Those dollars are specifically taken, and I can figure out the rest of my budget based on that one thing.

I truly believe that by taking this \$200 million out of the \$720 million, it would be money exceedingly well spent. As a municipal councillor I have seen the benefits and the operation of FCSS first-hand. They address local issues, and they address them at the local level. So, Mr. Speaker, I would of course support this Motion 501, and I would ask that the hon. members in this House perhaps reconsider some of the things that we have discussed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand in support of this motion tonight. Considering my background as a health care professional, I understand and recognize the benefits to be realized if this motion is accepted and if the plan is adopted. I remind everyone in this Assembly about the old saying about the ounce of prevention. Mr. Speaker, what we are suggesting here is using a few ounces of prevention to save a whole lot more of pounds of treatment.

I disagree with the hon. members who went before me who suggested that this plan duplicates already existing government programs. This motion seeks to empower local communities and groups to promote health and wellness. It is not meant to replace what the government already has in place. The money collected through tobacco taxes just goes into general revenue. It is not spent on health promotion and disease prevention. Mr. Speaker, so do the health care premiums that we pay and the user fees that we pay. It all goes into general revenue.

There is no harm in setting aside some of that money to promote healthier communities and healthier individuals. Billboards and banners and TV ads telling people how to lose weight, how to drink responsibly, how to not smoke are simply not enough. We need to offer them a new tool, a new mechanism by which to operate, and I think this idea is wonderful, and I urge everybody here to vote yes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the debate?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I've enjoyed the debate tonight, and I thank my colleagues for participating in that and bringing a number of different perspectives to support the motion.

To those who spoke against the motion, I certainly respect your point of view, but I'd like to take the opportunity to address a few of the misconceptions that I heard there. The Member for Calgary-Hays talked about funds being used inefficiently, and I urge the Member for Calgary-Hays to investigate the excellent record that

FCSS funding has held in this province for many, many decades. It's a primary funding source used by the provincial government over a very long period of time. So if the member feels that there might be inefficiencies, I think he's going to have to look at his own government involvement in this very long-running program. As I said, the provincial government funds 80 per cent, compared to 20 per cent municipal support for the programming.

I think what's important here is that we don't want to spend more money. We are spending more money on health care. We're spending more money on health care all the time. We're seeing more money spent on acute care, and we're now spending a 10 per cent top-up to get a private health care provider to do knee and hip surgeries in Calgary. Talk about spending more money, there's a way to do it: let's give more money to private health care providers.

I think what we need here is less sickness management. What we want to have is less use of health care services by having healthier people overall. The idea behind a wellness fund and dedicating tobacco tax revenue specifically to a wellness fund is to have those initiatives that will help our Alberta population achieve a better level of wellness and therefore use health care services less. So I'd be very surprised to see government members on the side opposite voting against an initiative that was to promote healthier Albertans and reduce the costs on the health care system.

I once again urge all members to vote in support of this motion and thank you very much for the opportunity to bring it before the Assembly tonight. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:49 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Orders 31 and 32 basically, effectively, deal with what we're doing now. This is called a division, and one of the interesting parts about the division is 32(4). "Every member remaining in the Chamber must vote on the question being put." There is no choice.

For the motion:

Backs	Eggen	Miller, B.
Blakeman	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Bonko	Flaherty	Swann
Chase	Hinman	

9:00

Against the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Brown	Groeneveld	Oberg
Calahasen	Haley	Pham
Cao	Hancock	Prins
Cardinal	Johnston	Renner
Cenaiko	Knight	Rogers
Coutts	Liepert	Stevens
Danyluk	Lindsay	Strang
DeLong	Magnus	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Marz	Webber
Fritz		

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 31
---------	----------	--------------

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 lost]

head: **Government Motions**

4. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mrs. McClellan:
Be it resolved that the Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

Spring Recess

6. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, March 24, 2005, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 4, 2005, at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's the Easter break motion and basically proposes that we have an Easter break. This year the stars are aligned. Normally we have to tussle over whether we take a spring break with the Edmonton school break or with the Calgary school break or with the rural break, which is normally aligned with the week following Easter. This particular year all three weeks happen to be the same week, and therefore it's very easy to suggest that the last week of March be a break from the session.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Adjournment of Session

7. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the First Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this, again, is the routine adjournment motion. I always get razzed for raising it so early in the session. People say that we're already talking about going home, but in fact it's just prudent to get these routine measures on the table so that they are available for us when the appropriate time comes.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

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

Mr. Lukaszuk moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mrs. Fritz]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to say a few words about my reasons for being here, who I am, and what I hope for the future for Alberta.

I'm a husband, father, and recent grandfather and, like many of you, revelling in life at this stage. The opportunities and gifts of life seem greater than ever, perhaps also because at our age some of us have lost as much as we've gained, and we're getting ready for later-life experiences. So I come from a place of gratitude and especially in Alberta, Canada, a place of great abundance. After 30 years in medical practice, including work in developing countries, I'm also counting my blessings. E.E. Cummings probably expressed as well as anyone my feelings today: "I thank you God for this most amazing day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes."

I experienced the reality of our democracy deficit personally in this last year in my firing for speaking out in support of the Kyoto accord, and more broadly I experienced it as I witnessed the lack of public involvement in many of the key issues of our day, from justice and peace issues to taxation to social programs to environmental protection and preservation. Healthy debate is essential at all levels to minimize the impact of vested interests in our policies. This deficit is clearly connected to people's sense of control and their health. This has been identified in a large body of research from medical sociology and epidemiology.

I want to speak briefly to these issues: what we mean by health and democracy, what we can do to ensure the appropriate balance of economic, social, and environmental health into the foreseeable future.

9:10

Proud as we all are of our hundred years as a province, we as custodians of our future must articulate a meaningful vision and a plan for the next hundred years that inspires Albertans to be all we can be, working together with citizens, elected officials, and nongovernment organizations, a huge and growing sector across this country, to create the rules and conditions for sustainable, healthy communities.

I want to be part of a new politics of trust, integrity, transparency, accountability, and honesty. Our reputation as politicians begs improvement. As a physician in clinical medicine for 10 years and public health for 15 years, having worked on five different continents, I bring all of this perspective to the Legislature. I'm fundamentally concerned with health, which I have found fundamentally to be about relationships. Relationships are largely about mutual trust and caring. I've come to believe that a vision of health on the planet is essential in our work for a better world to avoid the twin deceptions of self-interest and fear.

Health for me means maximizing participation in decisions, maximizing people's sense of control and freedom, balancing the interests of the short term with the long term. I'm reminded from time to time that these are dangerous times. There's an urgent need to find a new way of living and relating to each other. The mentality of us and them, winners and losers, good and bad is not serving us or the environment.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Huge challenges have developed: economic interdependence, burgeoning populations, water sustainability concerns, habitat disruption, resource depletion, an increasing divide between rich and poor, and increased religious fundamentalism. These challenges are connected to our Alberta concerns, and if we do not learn from the

exploitation of other times and places, we will find ourselves in the same circumstances as many countries in the world in history and at the present.

I would like to talk a bit about the future. I dare say that all of us entered political life in order to make a difference to some of these pervasive and persistent problems, and I want to use this opportunity to call us all again to our common agenda or vision, both globally and locally, to democracy, to community, and to a sustainable economy. Too often I hear the economy pitted against the environment and quoted in this dichotomy: do you want jobs or environment? It's abundantly clear to all that the economy depends fundamentally on a sustained, healthy environment. To believe it can support uncontrolled growth in anything, including the economy, is to court disaster. Uncontrolled growth is the definition of cancer in the medical field. Nothing in the natural world supports the notion of uncontrolled growth.

There must be checks that protect the natural environment, or we will leave, as other parts of the world attest, a wasteland to our children. This necessarily means intervening in the free market, where demand and supply govern everything. My constituents are telling me to confront the truth. Business must no longer determine the rate and conditions of resource extraction in Alberta, either renewable or nonrenewable resources. This is not a partisan issue. It's a matter of decency, humanity, and sustainability, and it will require of us in this new dispensation the courage to think freely about our deepest values, to speak out on our convictions, and to be the change that we and our constituents want to see. In short, it means renewing our commitment to the long term of the province and to the people of Alberta above all else, even our own parties.

Besides my personal experience in the Palliser health region there were two key reasons for entering politics: number one, the recognition that the average citizen feels disconnected from each other and from the political process and, secondly, that many citizens, including myself, believe that the public interest has not been adequately served in Alberta over the long term. Essentially, then, I entered political life because of the weakening of democracy and its connection to balancing financial self-interest with protection and preservation of the environment.

I want to say just a few words about those. As a physician I've always been keenly interested in what makes people healthy and what undermines people's health. A definition of health I've come to appreciate has a spiritual dimension to it. It was coined 3,000 years ago by St. Irenaeus when he described health as to be fully human, fully alive. I found it helpful to apply this to my own condition from time to time and to assess the needs that I need to make for change in my own life.

Work in a number of countries in Africa and southeast Asia as well as northern Canada has also opened my eyes to how other cultures view and experience the limits of modern medicine. When people do not feel significant, listened to, in some control of their lives, including what they say and how they live, their health is eroded. Support of family, friends, and workplaces is vital in keeping people well. We are in this environment of winners and losers, I quote, rapidly losing a sense of that security that comes from these social supports. At a larger macro level the policies and system supports similarly can either strengthen or weaken people's sense of control, and so we are increasingly seeing stress-related disorders, anxieties, and addictions that relate to people's loss of a sense of control. So from South Africa to Medicine Hat I've noticed the importance of strengthening civil society and of inclusive politics to assist people's sense of control and thereby their health.

Since my firing two years ago many people in the health professions, teaching, and social service systems have expressed their

concerns also about feeling unable to talk about certain controversial issues in their own sphere of influence. I have increasingly realized that democracy is only a word. Living democracy requires every one of us to think our own thoughts, speak our own truth, and take action on what we believe most deeply.

Someone said that weakness corrupts: absolute weakness corrupts absolutely. I take this to mean that when the electorate relinquishes its responsibility to be fully human even to elected officials and does not make them accountable for key decisions, the elected people predictably respond to dominant pressures – wealthy lobby groups, party interests – and not necessarily the public interest.

My political campaign opened many doors in my constituency, literally and figuratively. The constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, the second largest in the province, about 42,000 people: one-sixth are immigrants; two-thirds have a postsecondary education; the average income is \$60,000 per year. I developed a new appreciation for how people are living and what is important to them. Voter apathy is widely discussed in the media. I began to hear beyond the words of people to actually a feeling of being discounted, hopeless, and weary of a process that doesn't seem to include them. Feeling disconnected and powerless, many had little capacity to get involved in another election exercise.

I had the door slammed in my face as soon as I identified myself as a politician in some cases and as soon as I identified myself as a Liberal in other cases. I take that to mean that people are not interested in politics anymore, and that's a real scary thought to me. Yes, there are people who have stopped caring. But I have to ask: what experiences have they had in life to leave them so wounded that they no longer care enough to participate?

In our world of winners and losers, us and them, good and bad, we are often polarized and alienated from one another. I have begun to experience that here in this Legislature. Though not unexpected, it does lead me to ask the question: is this the best that we can do? We must be careful not to demean anyone if we are to model the kind of living we want to see around us. Actions, ideas, and plans can be challenged, but the person must not be undermined or we damage our own health as well as that of our democracy. That contributes to the distrust and hopelessness that we talked about earlier.

If we are not contributing to trust and hope in the Legislature, can we really be believed when we say that this is what we want for our province? It's like health professionals prescribing healthy lifestyles and not practising them. There's a major disconnect here, and I don't believe it's inevitable. I here make a public commitment: I will not heckle nor put down any person in the Legislature for any reason. I have three reasons for saying this and making this commitment to all of you. First, it doesn't accomplish my goal, which is to get the truth and to make the decisions; secondly, it undermines my own credibility when I put someone else down; and three, health is too important to me to sacrifice for expediency.

9:20

The bigger question is: how do we prepare people to take their roles as citizens in our democracy on behalf of our communities and on behalf of our environment? I'm discovering how fragile our democracy is and how much I need a large, caring base to help me reach those who for whatever reason find it difficult to talk to me. Democracy, like the doctor/patient relationship, lives in honest conversations. Who is responsible for the democracy deficit? All of us, of course, including those of us privileged to be elected. We need to make it clear that we're open to discuss all perspectives on issues.

I'm also here because I believe that the long-term interests of people, of Alberta, and indeed the planet have become secondary to

narrow economic and vested interests. What has moved me most powerfully are two things: the experience of largely preventable disease in our society and the evidence of huge decline in the natural environment. In both cases, individuals and the environment, I recognize difficulty in being heard and addressed in a holistic and a lasting way. I'm therefore doubly aware of my responsibility to tell the truth, to care about the healing needed, both my own and that of others, and to persist in searching out the root causes rather than the quick fix. It is a truism that if I fail to be concerned about the security of my neighbour, including you, I threaten my own security.

Mr. Speaker, we are living beyond the means of the planet, and no one wants to call a limit on production and resource extraction. If we're committed to people's health and the environment, we must create limits to growth. In addition, we need to have the courage to speak and to be the change we want to see. In our use of resources like water, electricity, and automobiles we need to model change as representatives of our people. We must use our dollars to stimulate responsible business practices, building renewable products, and minimizing waste.

Our greatest responsibility as citizens and elected representatives is to show our children the way. This means each of us deciding to take less, a radical notion in today's society. We must search our hearts and minds for ways to express our integrity as fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, citizens of Alberta, and citizens, increasingly, of the world. For our sake and for the sake of the planet we must place limits on our growth.

I began with a creative expression of gratitude and hope, and I end with a stark expression, but one that's still of hope, by Leonard Cohen.

Don't really have the courage
To stand where I must stand
Don't really have the temperament
To lend a helping hand

Don't really know who sent me
To raise my voice and say
May the lights in The Land of Plenty
Shine on the truth some day.

I'll close with the rallying cry of The Hunger Project on transformation: If not this, what? If not now, when? And if not me and you, who is going to make the change?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to remind all hon. members that under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes is available for questions, comments, and responses. Anyone wish to rise on that?

Seeing none, I would recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate each and every member of this House for their success in the recent election. It is always a great honour to have the trust of the constituents and to serve them to the best of our ability. I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on another successful bid to be the Speaker of this House, and also my congratulations go to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on his elected role as our Deputy Speaker.

I would like to congratulate the Lieutenant Governor for his appointment to this important position. I believe he was correct in asserting that he has big boots to fill, but I feel confident that the footprint he leaves will be impressive. Mr. Speaker, the late Lois Hole was a great Albertan. I thank the government for recognizing her contribution to this province and for establishing the lasting tributes to Her Honour. As a member of this House I had many

opportunities to attend various events with Mrs. Hole, and I can attest to the magic of her presence and the lasting impression she has left on the people of this province. She will be missed but never forgotten.

I want to draw your attention to the recent election. It is a great honour to be re-elected, and with great help from my campaign team and my volunteers and the trust of my constituents, I have the privilege of serving again. I would like to thank all the people who have participated in the democratic process, their dedication with time and resources. It takes a lot of effort and commitment to run a campaign, and there is far too much work for one person to do it successfully. I could not have done it alone. I sincerely thank all of those who have helped me. My campaign team, headed by Mr. Bob Gray, who designed and orchestrated a strategy that was open, honest, and ethical, allowed me to return to this Assembly serving Alberta with you.

Mr. Speaker, the voice of democracy has spoken again in the last election, and I thank all those candidates who ran an honest and ethical campaign. This type of integrity is absolutely necessary for us as legislators to be able to properly represent our constituents. Being ethical and accountable is of utmost importance as we cannot function properly unless we have the confidence of our electorate. I thank the candidates of Calgary-Fort for running honest campaigns. This is the least our voters can expect from us.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to call on all candidates in the Calgary-Fort constituency to work with me to serve our constituents. Yes, if you have ideas to improve the quality of life for our constituents, I would certainly welcome them. To my constituents I can pledge with certainty that I will serve them and Albertans at large to the best of my ability based on four principles: being ethical, patient, effective, and economical in life, at work, and in politics.

Mr. Speaker, the boundaries of my constituency have changed. The new community of Forest Lawn has been added, and I would like to welcome all the residents of this historic area to the constituency of Calgary-Fort. In the beginning of the last century Forest Lawn was a flat prairie inhabited by no more than half a dozen families. The area had no transportation and was slow to develop. As a way to spawn interest and growth in the area, two land promoters bought hundreds of railway ties and laid them out to the centre of Forest Lawn from the Calgary boundary. Then the promoters started a rumor that the streetcar was coming, and lots started to sell soon thereafter.

The area grew and developed into three separate, distinct hamlets: Albert Park, Forest Lawn, and Hubalta. The name was thought to be attractive to the real estate speculator, so it was named to encourage purchases. In 1934 the three districts of Hubalta, Albert Park, and Forest Lawn were incorporated into three villages. However, no one would run for an elected position, so the provincial government combined the three villages into one, and the village of Forest Lawn was formed. On November 29, 1952, the proclamation was official, and the three districts became the town of Forest Lawn. Then the people of that community voted in favour of annexation in October, and Forest Lawn became a part of the city of Calgary on December 31, 1961. The town's population was 13,000.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, today Forest Lawn is a beautiful and vibrant community. Its high school consistently produces outstanding graduates that move on to become leading doctors, lawyers, engineers, various other professionals, even politicians. These individuals bring a great deal of pride to the eastern side of Calgary.

My vision for Calgary-Fort and indeed for all of the eastern part

of Calgary is to work with community to raise their profile. I want to see more of the provincial government's services in this area: more schools, more transportation, and more housing for seniors. The hard-working people that live here deserve more, and it will be my most important commitment to ensure that they will get it.

One way eastern Calgary will get recognition is through the further development of 17th Avenue southeast. This road is now known as International Avenue in Calgary. I will support improvements in this area as I believe that Albertans and Canadians can capitalize on our international diversity. We are unique in that we are made up of such a large variety of cultures, yet we unite under one flag. International Avenue allows us to display our diversity and learn from each other's experiences.

I also proudly support events such as the international fireworks festival, that takes place every year now at Elliston park. Events like this will give us more opportunity to come together and to celebrate our culture.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Fort's land is as diverse as its people. We have major roads, parks, schools as well as residential areas, commercial areas, and even a fish hatchery. This hatchery is located in a wetland park, and it is very good for education about the environment.

Calgary-Fort is the home of an outstanding Canadian Olympic gold medalist, Kyle Shewfelt, who won the first-ever gold medal for Canada in gymnastics in Athens in 2004. I had the pleasure of speaking to this resident of the community of Dover, and his winning spirit was an inspiration to me. My great feeling was to see Kyle on TV performing his routine and standing on the podium receiving the gold medal, and my great thrill was to rush to his home right after he came back and hold the shiny gold medal in my hand.

Mr. Speaker, it's amazing that Alberta has only 10 per cent of Canada's population, but we won 2 out of 3 gold medals for Canada. I wonder if our government's policies have anything to do with it, but I believe so. By giving citizens the self-reliance and choices, they will propel themselves to the highest levels.

Mr. Speaker, I'm inspired by the vision of this government for recognizing that the key to the prosperous future of this province lies in the education of our children. I welcome announcements such as the scholarships and fellowships program, that will help a total of 300 masters and PhD students through their studies. I look forward to seeing opportunities present themselves to students with the addition of new spaces in the province's postsecondary institutions.

Alberta's kindergarten is very important. From kindergarten to grade 12 students currently lead their peers across the country and should therefore be able to move on and become top students in our postsecondary system. They should not be prevented from achieving all their talents, not allowing them to achieve because of money constraints. Alberta has too much prosperity and its students have too much potential to allow this to happen. For this reason I applaud the government for commitment to creating a new tuition policy ensuring that tuition and schooling costs aren't a barrier to learning in this province.

I also commend the government for its announcement on the development of an Alberta-wide digital library. This is an example of how this government uses today's technology to overcome the problems of yesterday. With the Internet comes endless opportunity and innovative efficiency. Alberta will reap the benefits of such initiatives, and I thank the government for naming this library the Lois Hole digital library as a tribute to her dedication to libraries, literacy, and books. This highly symbolic gesture will connect the dedication of a great Albertan from the past with a generation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will celebrate our centennial. This occasion will allow all generations to come together to commemo-

rate all the achievements we as a province have accomplished. Our position in the federation has changed from that of a western province with more livestock than people to Canada's leader. This accomplishment is due to our strong values, that include hard work, relentless dedication, respect for family, fiscal responsibility. We have a lot to be proud of this year.

I also thank the many seniors in Calgary-Fort, who have provided me with their insight and experiences into the many matters that affect the community. I will work hard for you, I could say to my seniors, to ensure that your opinions are heard in this government and that your ideas are represented in this House. This year's centennial will give us the unique opportunity to learn about how the sacrifices of your generation are affecting this generation's present and great future.

Mr. Speaker, the future of this province looks bright, and I thank my constituents for allowing me the opportunity to once again have a role in making it even brighter. I look forward to working with the people of Calgary-Fort, Albertans at large, and the members of this Assembly to make it good for all Albertans. By working together, we shall build Alberta's greater future.

Mr. Speaker, a personal point of pride, I may say, will come from listening to the Alberta song, which will be played time and time again throughout this year. I thank my colleagues for supporting me in this initiative. May I end this with a refrain.

Alberta is calling me.

Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be.

Alberta is calling me.

Livin' right I'm feelin' free.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise under Standing Order 29?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you. It's an honour to rise as a newly elected member in this Assembly. I want to thank my family first of all for their encouragement and support. They constantly point out that I must have the dreamer's disease. It isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's a good thing, in fact, when you think about the combined possibilities of the ideology and the personality. These are the things that make a person. My family encouraged me to run, and they saw that with the community as well.

I would also like to thank the many volunteers who helped with the campaign for their time, money, and other donations. They were very generous. There were friendships created as a result of the election which will last a long time. This is more than I could have imagined, and for that I am truly grateful. I owe the volunteers, friends I call them, more than I can say, and I will do my best to represent all of the constituents within the newly named riding of Edmonton-Decore.

I would like to thank Bill Bonner, the Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Glengarry, for the past eight years of service to the people of this community. I think it's very fitting that a Liberal be the first elected to the newly named constituency of Edmonton-Decore, honouring the late Laurence Decore, who served Edmonton as an alderman, a mayor, an MLA, and, finally, a Leader of the Opposition whose vision of a debt-free Alberta is almost realized except for the fact that Alberta still has debt in areas of infrastructure, causing municipalities to go further into debt, borrowing money for things that should be funded by this province; education, not having enough money to pay for arbitrated settlements negotiated by third parties, causing boards to lay off teachers only to rehire them later; health care backlogs and waiting lists and roadway construc-

tion in which we have to form partnerships in order to fund projects. All this when we boast a debt-free Alberta.

Alberta will celebrate 100 years, and I wonder if this is what the first members, while sitting in the Thistle curling centre rink, the first Legislature, had envisioned for Alberta 100 years ago.

Edmonton-Decore is truly a unique constituency, some neighbourhoods older than 50 years and some not yet established. I know these areas well from having served a great many of these constituents as a school board trustee for the area. I spent most of my life growing up in the Killarney area, attending the local schools from Glengarry, Mee-Yah-Noh, Killarney junior high, and finally finishing at Queen Elizabeth high school, but not all residents were as fortunate as I was to have neighbourhood schools in newly developing areas. They continue to bus children out of the area, so after 20 years of bussing we leave the environment with more pollution and nothing more to show for it. In some areas of the city the school boards are actually considering closing schools, further hurting communities' dreams of growth.

9:40

Edmonton-Decore is rich with diversity, and rich with groups able to call it home in the newly established boundaries, allowing for a mix of newly developing along with well-established neighbourhoods. Not all of these people that I met during the campaign share the Alberta advantage. In fact, many people question why we still have the high cost of gas and electrical prices in our rich province. Many of the people not on fixed incomes still feel the burden of these payments while raising families. In some cases they seem like mortgage payments, they indicated to me.

The lack of affordable housing, seniors' complexes as well as assisted living, is very concerning in the area. There are long lists to get into these facilities and when successful, if successful, it's very expensive to be able to stay in these places as well. For those who are not able to wait for the need and the housing, they're often shipped off to other neighbourhoods, having been long-term residents, expected to move to unfamiliar locations.

Other questions that surfaced during the campaign range from: why the delay in surgeries? We have such a rich province. Why does a waiting list continue to grow for these people, except for the fact that we're paying for quicker services and they refuse to do that when they're on fixed incomes? Other questions during the campaign: why does this government still fund abortions while we still have expanding health care concerns? Our health care is the envy of other countries, although not perfect, yet it needs solutions to ensure that it's sustainable for the next wave of the needed use, when the baby boomers will put the system to its greatest test.

Postsecondary was also raised as well as costs of access as well as debt repayment. Youth who are considering enrolling and those who are enrolled certainly face the reality of debt and the repayment. There is outrage, at least, from the approach of the funding of universities during election time, when Albertans are expecting long-term, predictable, sustainable funding that they can count on.

These needs need to be met with more public debate to ensure Albertans' voices are heard and considered. At the end of the day, I think we all seek the same for our communities; it's the Alberta advantage. As an elected member and a member of the Official Opposition, it is my job to ensure that the government is held accountable through questions raised by myself through conversations with day-to-day constituents.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I will state that I am honoured and humble to be here to represent all the viewpoints of the constituents of Edmonton-Decore. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I would be recognizing the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a tremendous honour and privilege that I rise on this, my first occasion to address the Assembly, in response to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate His Honour on his appointment.

It is with a heavy heart that I say a fond farewell to my dear friend Her Honour Lois Hole and thank her family for sharing with us the queen of hugs. She will forever remain the queen of our hearts. May she rest in peace.

I would also like to congratulate my colleagues and wish them the best during this 26th Legislature, with a special acknowledgement to the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for his acclamation once again as Speaker of the House and to you, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, for your election as Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as the new Member of the Legislative Assembly for the Leduc-Beaumont-Devon constituency I am humbled and honoured to extend thanks to my constituents and assure them that their interests locally, provincially, and nationally will be represented to the best of my abilities and with these interests as my guide. I'm able to stand here because of the encouragement and support from my wife, Brenda, my children, many other family members, and an exceptional team of friends and supporters who believed in me and worked hard on my behalf. I would like to thank them all very much.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon is located just south of Edmonton and reaches from Devon in the west to an area east of Round Hill, which is northeast of Camrose, some approximately 60 miles. The other communities I represent include Armena, New Sarepta, Hay Lakes, Kingman, Beaumont, the city of Leduc, and portions of Leduc and Camrose counties. The constituency may have a new name, but the boundaries are essentially the same as the old Leduc riding with the addition of two unpopulated quarter sections west of the town of Devon. With a population of approximately 34,000 people the communities contained within the constituency are situated just far enough outside of Edmonton to enjoy the amenities of a large urban centre with the serenity and friendliness of small-town, rural Alberta.

Manufacturing and retail are the largest employers in this riding, which also has a strong agricultural base and is home to Nisku, western Canada's largest business park, contributing to average household incomes of approximately \$73,900, which, Mr. Speaker, is above the Alberta average. With all of these wonderful blessings, it is the warm, friendly, and resourceful people that make me proud to call this area my home.

Mr. Speaker, the population of this constituency is very stable, reflecting that two-thirds were born in Alberta while some 7 per cent are immigrants to Canada. I'm very proud to be a part of that 7 per cent. As a native Jamaican I'm extremely proud of my heritage and my roots. I am equally proud to call Alberta my home since I arrived in Leduc in 1975.

Mr. Speaker, my 17 years in Jamaica provided me with a foundation that allows me to fully appreciate all the wonderful opportunities that our province has to offer. These years along with reminders from my dad, Hal Rogers, who was, by the way, a much-loved grade 5/6 teacher who passed away at the young age of 53 in Leduc, taught me that "if you wan' good, you nose hafi run," a Jamaican term which in everyday language means nothing comes without sacrifice or hard work.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a proud graduate of NAIT with a diploma in business. This foundation provided me with the ability to work successfully in the oil industry and in municipal administration between 1980 and 1991. More recently I was a successful realtor from 1992 to 2004.

In 1992 the citizens of Leduc placed an enormous trust in me when I was elected by a record number of votes as an alderman. That trust was further extended with the municipal election of 1995. In 1998 I was elected as mayor, and that privilege was further extended with the 2001 election. During my tenure on council I was elected over 10 years by Alberta municipal colleagues to the board of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. I served four years as vice-president and two years as president. This role allowed me to promote and champion the needs and challenges of Alberta's communities to the provincial and federal governments as well as other stakeholders.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, these are a few of the tools that I bring with me that I believe will help me to make a positive contribution to this House and to the constituents that I represent.

I would now like to discuss a few of the many positive contributions the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon has and continues to make to the province of Alberta and how the commitments made by government through the Speech from the Throne will help to contribute to the success of these extraordinary communities.

When the majority of Albertans hear the word Leduc mentioned, they think of the famous discovery at Leduc No. 1 in 1947, and rightly so. It was a major turning point for our province. In a local history book Harvey Maloney describes the discovery that transformed Alberta as turning much of the province into something resembling a geological pincushion. With the discovery of oil at Leduc No. 1 the grainfields northwest of Leduc were soon dotted with drilling rigs, and by the early '50s it seemed that all of Alberta was bathing in oil and perfumed with gas.

Albertans have much to be proud of and to be grateful for as we enter our centennial year and prepare for the celebrations that will be taking place and the visit from Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. The discovery in Leduc has played more than a substantial role in making Alberta's first century a great success. Our natural resources will continue to play a crucial role in Alberta's future. It was, however, reassuring to hear that the Alberta government will continue its very strong commitment to a healthy and sustainable environment.

Mr. Speaker, although the discovery of oil has played a large role in defining the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, we are also very proud of the diversity of the region. This diversity ranges from agriculture to industry and has provided the region with stability and confidence in good and bad economic times. The economy of the area originally revolved around agriculture, and still today we are at the centre of one of Alberta's richest and most diversified farming regions. Dairies, livestock operations, and grainfields are plentiful and flourish.

An example of the success of the region during the current challenges faced by the agriculture industry is the agrifood business incubation facility announced last fall by the minister of agriculture, the Alberta Agriculture Value Added Corporation, and its partners. This facility will help take Alberta's value-added food processing industry to new levels of success, helping entrepreneurs make the transition from product development to the marketplace. The facility will house a food processing business incubator, which will help start-up companies move from product and process develop-

ment to the establishment of their own facilities. The incubator is currently under construction next to the food processing research centre in Leduc and will be managed by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Speaker, it is innovative developments such as the incubator that propelled the Leduc region to the head of the agricultural sector in Alberta. It makes me extremely happy to hear through the throne speech that Alberta will continue to stand by agricultural producers and increase the expansion of value-added products.

I was also impressed to hear that the government will work to strengthen the agricultural sector by advocating market choice for wheat and barley. Many of my constituents, Mr. Speaker, will agree that the Canadian Wheat Board has for far too long dictated the market value for Alberta wheat and barley in what should be a free global marketplace. It is reassuring that the government continues to recognize and support rural communities through these commitments as well as through the recommendations of the rural development strategy, which will sustain and strengthen rural Alberta.

With my history in municipal politics I was encouraged by the commitment to work with municipal partners by the government's commitment to allocate \$3 billion to address municipal infrastructure needs. A new spelling, Mr. Speaker, for the word "relief." Mr. Speaker, the Alberta advantage is the product of activity in individual communities across our province. It is vital that local communities have the sustainable fiscal capacity to provide and adequately maintain infrastructure, both hard and soft, which is critical to the advancement of the Alberta advantage.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the government on its commitment to education during Alberta's centennial year both through Bill 1 and enhancements to K to 12 already in progress. I have been blessed with three wonderful children, all of whom are currently thriving in Alberta's education system from grades 9 through to university. I therefore have a very personal stake in this area. I know the trials and tribulations that students can face when attempting to follow their dreams. If those dreams are achievable anywhere, they must be achievable in Alberta. Our children are our future. As leaders we must lay a sound foundation for them to prosper. Bill 1 goes a long way to laying this foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate surrounding these topics as well as the many other discussions that will take place in this House. It is a privilege and an honour to be here as the humble servant for the constituents of Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. I thank you and my colleagues for this opportunity to speak tonight.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29?

Seeing none, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd move that the House stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]