

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 9, 2005**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/03/09

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening. You may be seated.
Hon. members, might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly visitors from Preceptor Gamma, Edmonton, who are lead by their president, Val Lavarato. They are a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi International, a world-wide organization of women whose motto is Life, Learning, and Friendship. This tour is part of their cultural program. They would like to congratulate the province and its legislators on the occasion of the centennial of our province, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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 9: Mrs. McClellan]

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am deeply honoured to rise in the House today on behalf of the constituency of St. Albert. This is my first opportunity to speak within this magnificent building, and I thank you for the privilege.

Mr. Speaker, every Member of the Legislative Assembly is sharing a special moment in time. We are members of the House during Alberta's centennial year. I represent the community of St. Albert, one of the original 25 constituencies that made up our first Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Liberals played a lead role in forming this province. Alberta's first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, was a Liberal as were our federal MPs who lobbied for within the Liberal government led by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier to create this province and the province of Saskatchewan.

My community has a long history of sending strong advocates with a passion for St. Albert to this House. Previous hon. members include people such as Dick Fowler, Len Bracko, and Mary O'Neill. They have each added to the expectations set out by our first MLA, also a Liberal, W.H. McKenney. I hope to live up to the excellent standard that these people have set.

St. Albert's history is rich and unique. St. Albert was the first community founded outside a fort. Our community was founded by

Father Albert Lacombe. It was founded by Catholic francophones, and their legacy is still evident today with an abundance of French immersion and francophone schools. Our public school system, St. Albert school division No. 29, established 140 years ago, is still a Catholic school system. Over the years a Protestant school system was added, further enhancing the quality and choice for an excellent education.

Mr. Speaker, our community, like virtually all communities in Alberta, has grown incredibly over the years. St. Albert's population in 1905 was about 500 people. Today we are almost 55,000 strong and reflect an incredible cultural mosaic. This diversity and our commitment to education and enhancing our quality of life will keep us strong as we move into Alberta's second century.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder what the founders of our province would think if they could visit us today. My father came to Alberta when he was 18 years old. He helped build the Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad and met my mother here. They were married in 1918, and he spent 42 years working as a CN railroad conductor. He was fortunate enough to be the conductor on two royal visits. My mother worked as a buyer for the ladies clothing department of Thompson & Dynes. She worked to support her parents who eventually joined our family in Alberta from Valleyfield, Quebec. Two of my brothers served in the air force during World War II.

As a young man I spent many nights sitting on the back porch of Dr. Greiger's home with Eddie Keen waiting for Lois and Ted Hole to close up shop at their fledgling garden market so we could sip tea and watch the setting sun.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many great memories that have been enhanced by the beauty of this magnificent province and the people who have made it their home. Just as it is important to reflect on the past when we reach a milestone, so is it important to take stock of the present and look forward to the future.

Present-day St. Albert is a community rich in heritage, culture, and performing arts. We take pride in our schools and our parks, our trail systems, our recreation facilities, our renowned International Children's Festival, all things we have worked hard to build and maintain. Our children are exposed to a multitude of opportunity, and our community supports people of all walks of life, all cultures, all levels of financial background.

Mr. Speaker, St. Albert is working toward building a multicultural leisure centre to enhance the quality of life. St. Albert is also working toward building a western bypass road to enhance the safety of our streets and ease traffic congestion. Our community hopes to have this bypass designated as highway 2.

We are working to make improvements to our library and to many other public facilities and public spaces that will serve the current and future needs of our community. The provincial government has a strong record of supporting these types of projects throughout Alberta, and I hope to assist St. Albert city council in maintaining and building on that support for our community's current endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, we also guard against the parochialism of the present. We must guard against losing our way, against the temptation to spend without thought, against the ease of glossing over real problems and challenges because they may not fit the theme of the celebration. This is the time to establish a long-term vision. When I say "long-term," I mean much more than the four-year election cycle. We need to create a vision that looks well into the century. We need to be imaginative, creative, and bold. We have a unique opportunity to invest our incredible good fortune and current wealth into Alberta's future. Our natural resources will eventually run out. We must invest now so that our children and their children will be able to look back with appreciation of our efforts and planning.

It is too easy to spend our wealth away and have nothing to show for it. We have all heard of the stories of the lottery winner who filed for bankruptcy within years of winning. Alberta has won the biggest lottery in history. We need to turn that winning into a generation of wealth and opportunity for all Albertans. This government's current practice will not take us there.

It is very important that all Albertans share in our prosperity. Too many of our children go to school hungry. Too many Albertans cannot afford to save money to buy homes, to send their children to postsecondary education, to keep up with ever-rising costs of living. This is especially true for our young families and for our seniors. Too many young Albertans are dropping out of schools, too many are being hooked on drugs like crystal meth, and too many lose hope believing that there is no place for them in today's Alberta. Further to this, Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the Member for Red Deer-North talk of Bill 202 recognizing the problem of drug addiction facing young Albertans and the importance of the family.

Our current system of achievement testing must be reviewed. There is absolutely no excuse for this 25 to 30 per cent high school dropout rate. We need to stop thinking of children as failing the education system. We need to view the huge dropout rate as our education system failing our children, and we need to fix it now. We must start diagnostic testing early to identify challenges that individual children have with language arts, math, and all subjects. We need to empower teachers and ensure that they have the classroom and school-wide supports to ensure all children experience success in learning.

Our children are under pressure to perform and are constantly measured against the students in the next class, the next school, the next community. Where is the sense in judging grade 3 students on a province-wide bell curve? Elementary education is crucial. We need to ensure that they enjoy going to school and enjoy learning. We need to create a system that teaches our children they are valued, able, and when they apply themselves, will be successful.

8:10

This is an urgent and significant problem. When children are convinced that they can't learn, when they are convinced they aren't smart enough, when they are convinced they have no hope of achieving success, at what point does this government finally wake up and say, "The way we are doing this isn't helping children"? If the system is creating such massive problems that 25 to 30 per cent of the children are dropping out, it's time to do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education told me his department is all about kids, and I trust that he is sincere and that he has starting building a solid plan to make some required changes. We all agree that our children are our future. Surely we can do more to support them and encourage success. Surely this is a legacy worthy of the centennial.

It is appropriate for Alberta schools to have common indicators across systems. Provincial achievement exams do serve as an indicator and provide independent verification that students are learning what they should be learning. Only about 30 per cent of achievement grade is really predictable on the basis of instructional skill. Other factors that account for lack of success in provincial achievement exams are the following: student personality, temperament, and task persistence on the part of the student. Support that students receive from their homes in terms of encouraging completion of homework and studying is very important. These and socioeconomic factors are real achievement variables. These along with intelligence levels amount to achievement scores.

Let us not forget that the amount of support a school provides for academic versus sports, fine arts, and other activities may also be a

factor. We need to value education of the whole child – body, mind, and soul. However, we have students that fall through the cracks. For example, students who have learning challenges generally are having difficulties keeping up with demands of the curriculum. Over time, given the stress and anxiety of schooling, they end up falling further and further behind and specialized programs are required.

Also keep in mind that inner-city schools are special needs. Comparisons of achievement testing results relative to other schools is not relevant as they have far greater percentages of special needs populations, minority groups, English as a second language groups, and so on. It is my contention that K to 3 should be a place where students develop a solid foundation in the core subjects for successful schooling. Students requiring special help need to get the help they need. Diagnostic testing identifying students requiring modified curriculum in reading, language arts, and mathematics is a must. Education in the province, specifically K to 3, must become more student centred.

My grandson in Okotoks was screened prior to entering into an early childhood program. This screening was done by a student services team, and it discovered that he lacked fine motor skills. This is being addressed, and hopefully he will acquire good handwriting and drawing skills much better than his grandpa's.

Mr. Speaker, the Klein government some five or six years ago gave extra money to health and education jurisdictions in various regions of this province to acquire family and school liaison counsellors, school counsellors, social workers, and nurses. They provided funding for psychological, medical, and psychiatric assessment for students that have very specialized needs. All of this is very good and should be continued, but the level of support, in my view, is often not adequate and doesn't meet the needs of the kids. I believe that this must be addressed to prevent the high school dropout rate that we are currently experiencing.

Mr. Speaker, a well-known professor at the faculty of education who has visited schools once or twice a week for the last 35 years is holding up a red flag. He has stated in a letter of February 26, 2005, that he has seen and is seeing a dramatic rise in behavioural, psychological, and emotional problems in students, including drug use. Further, he states that the government has made an effort to provide extra funding to assist these students at the school level, but it is not sufficient, and too many students, therefore, fall out of the system or quit altogether.

Somehow we have developed two very different points of view in Alberta. It is today that we should create a legacy for the future. We cannot continue to focus on testing results rather than completion results. We cannot continue to focus on the quality of roads while ignoring the quality of a low-income child's life. We cannot continue to focus on the centennial legacies while losing sight of seniors forced to sell their homes in St. Albert or drug grow ops springing up in rural parts of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we must work together to build the legacies that this government is contemplating. They will enhance our province and help take us into the future. However, we must also ensure that we don't get so caught up in building these capital projects that we overlook real problems facing our educational systems and our Alberta citizens. We have the ability and the responsibility to make our legacy too.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

I recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to congratulate the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker on their elections. I'd also like to congratulate all those who were elected during this last campaign. I am both honoured and humbled for being elected to represent the people of Cardston-Taber-Warner. I consider it my duty to represent all the people of my riding. I would like to thank all those who helped me before, during, and since the election.

My constituency starts in the southwest corner of this province, in the beautiful park of Waterton national park with beautiful mountains, beautiful lakes, and beautiful rivers. It heads out east up over the Milk River ridge, another beautiful area, and down into the valley and into the hoodoos of the Writing-on-Stone provincial park. Then it heads north and goes through numerous irrigation districts that are the breadbasket of our province.

I'd also like to go on to thank the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, who earlier today helped me reduce my speech by 15 minutes. It would have been a dilemma to include all that wonderful history in the allotted time that I have.

It's exciting to me to be here at the turn of the century, and I would like to thank Premier Klein for allowing us to start it debt free. In 1905 we were faced with similar challenges of infrastructure, schools, and now health care. History has shown Alberta as a leader, and this being the international day to recognize women, it's only fitting to realize and remember that in 1929 the first woman was elected to the Legislature, which was the first in the British Empire. In the 1980s Alberta led the way once again, and Premier Lougheed introduced the notwithstanding clause in our constitution, which enabled Albertans to keep a check on government and to keep those things that are true and important to us.

Now Alberta must take the lead once again. It's going to go beyond being just simply good government; we need to be a better government. This is a hard road but certainly an achievable one and one well worth travelling. We need a new way of thinking. As the Premier pointed out earlier this week, it is about science not politics. We have been injured because of the protectionism of our neighbours to the south, and protectionism does not serve the interests of the people.

The proper role of government is to protect the rights and the freedoms of the people and then to leave them free to exercise their rights so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. Alberta has prospered in the past because we have had the freedom for our entrepreneurial, innovative, and industrious people to choose for themselves and create the province that we live in today.

8:20

All of us in this great Assembly derive our powers from the people of Alberta. I know that the best administration is the one that is the closest to the people. The smallest government is the best government. We have to ask ourselves: what type of government do we want in the future? If we were to compare our government to a tree, we can ask: do we want a fruit tree or a shade tree? Government can create no wealth, but proper laws protecting our rights and freedoms allow the people and the country to prosper. However, if the branches of the fruit tree are not kept trimmed, the tree will not bear the fruit to its fullest capabilities. We have trimmed our health care, our schools, and our municipal funding. All the while the branches of our government have grown. Now is the time to trim the growth of our government. It is not only necessary; it is the right thing to do.

Government needs to be open, transparent, and accountable. Since we derive our power from the people, it must therefore be accountable to the people. We must continue to reduce taxes, user

fees, licences, and eliminate our health care premiums. With these we can allow the people the freedom from the overburden of taxation and protect the people from the government. With lower taxes that rival even the biggest economies, we can fight on a global stage and drive into a new century of leadership. Thomas Hobbes stated, "Unnecessary laws are not good laws but traps for money." It is critical that we protect the autonomy of Alberta and stop the inequitable redistribution of wealth.

In 1907 Edward VII gave us our motto: Strong and Free. To maintain that freedom and strength, Alberta must be a leader in our dealings with the federal government. Canada is founded upon the principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law and guarantee the rights and freedoms that can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. Thus, it is within Alberta's constitutional rights to protect Albertans under the law. We must recognize this defence of the individual rights, not protecting individual benefits but rather protecting freedoms. The proper role of government is to maintain these ideals.

It is critical at this time, as we go forward, that we balance the government. We can compare it to a bird. If on the left wing we have compassion and security, we cannot fly, but if on the right wing we have freedom, we can continue to soar and the sky is our limit. It is my hope and prayer that we in this Legislature will work together on common grounds and put our best ideas forward so that we can serve the people of Alberta.

I'd like to close with a little story of a miner that was lost in the desert. As he was travelling along – it had been two days since he had any water – he was struggling and figured that he was finished and done. Then he came across an old shack, and by that shack there was an old pump. He pumped vigorously on that pump but was unable to get any water, and he collapsed. Upon collapsing to the base, he found a glass jar with water in it. On the instructions on the outside it said: "This pump has been fixed and repaired. If you prime it with the water, the leather will soften and you can pump and get all the water that you need. All I ask is that you fill the water in the bottle before you leave." Weeks later the owner came back, only to find a dead man beside there and an empty bottle of water.

We've been blessed with a second chance here, and it's our opportunity to take the economic security and the benefits from our resources and prime the pump for future Albertans. I'm very pleased that we've started the educational foundation for our future. Our greatest assets are our kids, and we need to make the effort that every individual family does to protect and educate them. This is a huge opportunity that we have. We also need to look after our elderly and the sick and the afflicted, that we do have the ability to be compassionate and to reach out and to serve those people. By doing those things, our society will be better.

Society has the right to choose to be better or to choose to become decadent. It's my desire that we will be leaders here in this House and show by example and through sacrifice that we choose to be better, that we'll make laws that will protect freedoms and innovation and the desire for people to succeed as they have ideas to go into the future. In that we will be blessed, and it's a great joy to see that next generation as we look to them and see how they have succeeded. It's been encouraging to listen to the different members and the success that they have with their children that have gone on to education. I hope that we use our resources wisely for the benefit of all Albertans and that we can stand proud a hundred years from now on the things that we've accomplished at the turn of this century.

Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn the debate now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 1
Access to the Future Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd rise to move Bill 1, the Access to the Future Act, for second reading.

Mr. Speaker, this is a flagship piece of legislation. I think it's the first of its kind in Canada, perhaps in North America. It sets a course for Alberta's second century with bold new initiatives that will create and enable Alberta's advanced education system to reach even higher levels of excellence.

Mr. Speaker, this province has come a long way in the past decade. Albertans have worked hard to ensure that the government's finances are in order and the debt has been paid off. Now, with a strong fiscal foundation Albertans are looking ahead to the future, as is their government.

Albertans have told us, both in the process that led up to creating this 20-year strategic plan and through the It's Your Future survey, that a portion of future budget surpluses should be invested in higher learning. We ought, Mr. Speaker, to endow the future with our nonrenewable resource revenue, and that's exactly what this legislation does. It puts in place the mechanisms by which the government can set aside in a wise and prudent manner unbudgeted surplus funds, when they occur, for use in driving postsecondary education.

Bill 1 proposes that this be done in three ways. First, Mr. Speaker, a separate \$3 billion postsecondary endowment will be created within the heritage savings trust fund by contributing an additional \$3 billion to the fund, to be allocated to a separate account within that fund which will grow with the fund as the fund grows for inflation to retain its value. From that endowment 4 and a half per cent of the contributed and growing amount will be paid into the new access to the future fund annually, providing a stable, regular source of additional funding for postsecondary education. At full funding of the \$3 billion, \$135 million per year would go to the access to the future fund for that purpose.

The funding, Mr. Speaker, will not be for the standard operating costs. It's not intended to replace the operational costs that are budgeted on an annual basis to keep our postsecondary education system operating. In fact, it adds nitro to the fuel to fund new and innovative projects and initiatives within the system; in other words, it'll help to make a great system even better.

Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech we heard about two projects that were identified to give examples of how this fund might operate. The first is the centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta. That would be a matching gift program, where a substantial gift is to be made to the University of Alberta in the area of Chinese cultural material. The value of that gift could be matched, and with the gift and the matching funds together with other funds raised, the University of Alberta will be able to establish a pre-eminent centre of knowledge and understanding about Chinese culture, economy, and knowledge in the western world. Right here in Alberta, right here at the University of Alberta we will have the pre-eminent centre of knowledge about Chinese culture and the economy.

Now, what a benefit for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, because as we all know, the Chinese economy is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. As we move towards competing in the global economy, improving our ability to find markets out in the world, at the root of that is relationship building. Where better to build relation-

ships than to have a knowledge and understanding of one of the largest economies, if not the largest economy, in the world, that of the country of China and the Asia Pacific area?

So you can see from that example and that project that the access to the future fund will have a significant impact not only in expanding the opportunity for study and the opportunity for knowledge and transfer of knowledge but to do it in an area which will create a pre-eminent centre of excellence and knowledge and understanding about another area of the world that's going to be absolutely key to Alberta's continued future growth.

8:30

The other project that was announced in the throne speech was the Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library, and it was a honour and a privilege to be able with the permission of her family to name the new digital library after Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor. With the lifetime commitment that she had to knowledge – to the advancement of knowledge, the transfer of knowledge – and to libraries, Mr. Speaker, there couldn't be a more fitting memorial to her.

The Lois Hole library is a project which demonstrates the other aspect of the access to the future fund which does not require matching funds but which will allow a project, which I call an ingenuity project, a new example of a way to deliver knowledge or transfer knowledge, extend the reach of knowledge within our province, which could be funded from the access to the future fund. So the digital library concept will see us digitizing library resources whether they're books or periodicals, expanding the number of digitized resources that are available through the digital library, and perhaps digitizing any other three-dimensional collections that our universities and postsecondary institutions have.

That could even extend to art collections and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts – many ways through the SuperNet to take knowledge that's collected and resident in our postsecondary institutions, make it available to postsecondary students across the province and perhaps, Mr. Speaker, eventually to all Albertans. It's a dream which has huge possibilities for the transfer of knowledge in this province. It's a great project that's been under way for some time in different initiatives, in different institutions but headed up by the University of Calgary, a project which they have proposed for Campus Calgary. Now we've taken it the one step further to Campus Alberta and perhaps in the future to be able to extend it to all Albertans.

So two projects which demonstrate the length and breadth of the access to the future fund, being able to encourage the contribution of funds from private capital, from private donors, from corporate donors in areas that would expand access, quality, or affordability or projects which expand the way in which we make knowledge available across Alberta into rural Alberta to help build the rural development strategy, to help make sure that people in rural Alberta have access to the same knowledge resources that people in urban centres have, and to make sure that students right across this province have access to all of the three-dimensional resources and print resources that are available.

Mr. Speaker, it's a phenomenal opportunity, and it's an opportunity which will now be made possible in part by the access to the future fund. Those are just two examples, but we had those examples from the throne speech to show the absolute value and the power that will be in the hands of the access to the future fund.

Of course, there's a great thirst. Most of the postsecondary institutions in this province are raising funds for various projects which will expand access and expand quality. This is not a new concept by any means. In the 1970s there was a tri-university fund

which matched private donations and endowed chairs, some of which are still operating today at universities in the province. But it's expanded in a couple of very important ways. One, it's endowed, which means it will always be there; we'll only spend the interest. Very important. The other funds that were established in the 1970s were spent down, were concluded. They did good work, but they're not available any longer. This will be endowed. It will be there forever, and it will create an income stream which will continue to grow and help make these new projects, these exciting projects possible.

Mr. Speaker, this is a responsive project in that it was raised, as I said, through the 20-year strategic planning process. It was raised by an individual who talked to many of us I'm sure, both in government and opposition, promoting the idea of an endowment fund, a somewhat more modest amount but an endowment fund to do exactly this. I've talked to him, and he's indicated it would be all right for me to indicate that Mr. Harold Bannister had some small part to play in promoting this concept and setting it up. I think the first time he called me or wrote me on this one was about two years ago. So it's a credit to him to have the foresight to push this as, in his concept, a centennial project.

Then, of course, the Edmonton-Riverview Constituency Association of the PC Association of Alberta I have to give a nod because they brought forward a resolution to our annual general meeting last year, and it was passed, I believe unanimously, asking for government to endow the future in this manner.

So this is very responsive to requests from Albertans, both individual Albertans, groups of Albertans, people who know that our renewable resources are not ours alone today. They're not there just to fund the current Albertans, but they need to be also used to endow our future, to build and grow our future. What better way to do that, to underpin our 20-year strategic plan, than by expanding knowledge? So it's an exciting fund, and I'm absolutely delighted that we're able to set it up and get it running.

The second feature in Bill 1 is that the current Alberta heritage scholarship fund, which again was set up in the 1970s, would grow by \$1 billion, again from surplus funds, again a very important acknowledgement of the need to build knowledge and innovation in Alberta, to expand our knowledge base, and to expand our education in Alberta so that Albertans will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that will be here in the future.

Mr. Speaker, as we move from a carbon-based and a commodity-based economy to a knowledge-based economy – and by no means does that mean that we're giving up on oil and gas or that we don't think oil and gas will be around – we have to add knowledge and technology to our traditional economy in order to be prepared for the future as well as to look to the new knowledge-based economy. That's the innovation section of the 20-year strategic plan.

Scholarship funds will help to finance students so that they can get that education, so that finances will not be a barrier to getting an education. This project, under Bill 1, will make the scholarship fund five times larger than it is now, and the income will allow government to ensure that postsecondary education is affordable through scholarships, bursaries, awards, and other initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the third thing that Bill 1 proposes is doubling the Alberta ingenuity fund, currently endowed at \$500 million, with an additional \$500 million from unbudgeted surpluses. Again, the ingenuity fund has been in place since the year 2000, funding research and innovation across the province, and this expansion will allow and encourage even greater levels of innovation and ingenuity in Alberta.

I've already spoken, Mr. Speaker, about the need for that ingenuity, but you need to look no further than the oil sands, that we know

is adding huge amounts of economic development to our province and producing a great deal of oil and gas. The current technology in the oil sands is SAGD technology, steam-assisted gravity drainage. You get steam from water, which is a scarce resource, and you have to use gas to create the heat to create it. Gas is also a scarce resource. So it's self-evident just by looking at the technology that's extant there that new technology is going to be needed in the very near future if we're going to be able to capitalize on that resource and continue.

Innovation is essential whether we're looking at a traditional economy, adding value to wood fibre, adding value to agriculture products, or whether you're looking at the new economy of nanotechnologies, biosciences, and life sciences. Absolutely essential. So increasing the ingenuity fund for research adds to our knowledge base, adds to our ability to create knowledge in this province, adds to our ability to have the best and the brightest attracted here to educate other Albertans and to continue to improve our knowledge and technology base.

All told, Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 commits to \$4.5 billion in investments in higher learning opportunities for Albertans, \$4.5 billion in endowing the future. If I may add to the point, the \$500 million that was announced in January to be added to the Alberta heritage medical research fund makes it \$5 billion worth of endowment for the future, which is to me very, very exciting. There could not be a better way to enter into our centennial year in our new century. No province in Canada has made this kind of investment. We're blessed with the ability to do it, but we're also blessed with the obligation to make sure that we use those nonrenewable resource revenues in some small way to endow the future and to make sure that Albertans are ready to reach those opportunities of the future.

Albertans can be very proud, Mr. Speaker, of their hard work and their sacrifice, which has made this level of investment possible, and the clear direction that they've given to this government is enabling it to happen.

Mr. Speaker, those are the huge items in Bill 1. Those are really exciting, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the other very important aspects that are included in Bill 1.

Bill 1 also lays the groundwork for the introduction of a common postsecondary application process. Mr. Speaker, we hear often of students who are applying to two or three different institutions in order to make sure that they get in to one, and sometimes more than two or three, sometimes five or 10 and perhaps sending a deposit along with each application. When we have a common application process, a student will be able to apply online through one portal, pay one deposit if a deposit is necessary, and be able to indicate which institutions they would like their application considered by. We'll be able to track the success of each applying student to make sure that there is a space for every student who wants a space, for every Albertan who's qualified to go. And quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, every Albertan is qualified to advance their education.

8:40

So the common application process is a very significant step forward, but we also suggest in Bill 1, Mr. Speaker, that a framework be put together for a common application process for scholarships. Again, I don't know if other members of this Assembly have had the privilege of helping a child or perhaps for themselves going to postsecondary education and looking to see what scholarships might apply to them. There are a myriad of scholarships and bursaries and financial assistance available out there, but you have to be somewhat of a detective to find all of the opportunities, and you have to be very persistent to find the ones which apply to you. So if we can design and build a common application process so that

a student can log on and find those scholarships, bursaries, and financial assistance processes which apply to them and apply through one common portal, that will be a huge assistance to students who want to get an education and have to deal with financial aspects of doing so.

It will also, Mr. Speaker, allow for improved transferability and recognition of prior learning experiences. We have in this province – and I'd like to say it in this Legislature and acknowledge it – the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, and it is a model for the country. People come from other jurisdictions to take a look at our Council on Admissions and Transfer, the transferability, the seamlessness to a great extent by which people can move from one type of postsecondary education into another and be able to transfer their course credits across. But it's not perfect, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of work that can be done. Even though we have the best in Canada, it's not good enough.

We need to work with the postsecondary institutions and with the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer to make sure that there is no dead end to an education in Alberta, that from wherever you are now, you can go to somewhere else if you wish to advance your education. If you're taking an apprenticeship program and you become a journeyman, that experience, that education, and that work experience should be able to be applied to the next level should you decide you want to take it there. So through Bill 1 we'll be working to expand those opportunities, but prior learning assessments are also important. There are many people who haven't had the opportunity to take advanced education or even, perhaps, finish their high school, but they have got a great deal of learning in a practical way in their work. We need to find a better way to recognize at what level they ought to be able to enter a postsecondary education process should they desire to do so.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, people coming from other parts of the world who might be bringing credentials from that part of the world which may or may not be consistent with our credentials here: we have a great program through IQAS to recognize foreign credentials, but in the event that they need to bridge those foreign credentials to Canadian or Alberta credentials, there need to be better ways to do that, better ways to maximize the human potential that we have. Bill 1 will assist us in moving significantly in that direction.

The legislation will also represent that we need to develop better ways to involve those people who are underrepresented in our postsecondary system and in our advanced learning processes, to represent them and bring them into the system. Mr. Speaker, it would come as no surprise if it was suggested that for aboriginal and First Nations people we need to encourage and promote and inspire the passions and make the systems available so that more and more people, First Nations people and any others that are not now able to or do not now have access to postsecondary education or an opportunity to advance their learning, have that opportunity.

The legislation, Mr. Speaker, has a strong focus on quality, recognizing that while access and affordability are important, having an advanced education system with the highest quality is equally important. If we're going to be competing in a global economy, it's not going to be on commodities alone. In fact, it's not going to be on commodities really at all; it's going to be on knowledge. What we're going to be selling in the future out to the world is a knowledge base. Whether we use that knowledge to advance the value of our agricultural products or to advance the quality of our environmental technologies, which we do now sell out into the world, that's where our advantage is going to be. So access and affordability are absolutely important. Quality: we have to be among the best in the world if we're going to compete in that knowledge-based economy.

The legislation allows for and requires, in fact, that we develop a

comprehensive examination of postsecondary standards and outcomes with the aims of ensuring that the system meets or exceeds national and international standards. Mr. Speaker, it's not good enough for people to read *Maclean's* magazine to decide where their postsecondary institutions rank with others. That's just not the appropriate level of assessment. So in its entirety Bill 1 will ensure that Alberta has a world-class advanced education system, poised and equipped for the challenges of the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, it's an exciting time to be involved in Alberta. It's an exciting time to be involved in postsecondary education. It's a grand vision for advancing education in Alberta, whether you're moving to literacy or moving to a PhD. I would encourage all members to vote for Bill 1.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to start out my part of the debate this way, but I think I will by referring to what is not the central theme or the central point of Bill 1 at all, of course, but which is worthy of consideration, the common application process for entrance to public postsecondary institutions. I'm going to start there because the minister mentioned, quite rightly, about having experience with people who are applying to a number of different institutions because they're trying to get into postsecondary education, and they're applying to different institutions with different deposits that they have to hand in and all the rest of that at the time because there isn't this common application process.

I'm starting there because it struck home with me. My son turns 18 in about a month and graduates from grade 12 at the end of June and is going through the application process as we speak. He has applied to three different institutions. Unfortunately, two of them are out of province, and he's done that because of the sense that he has and that his fellow students have that postsecondary education in the province of Alberta isn't quite up to snuff, and that's where we need to start this debate.

I'll give you another sort of real-life example, that goes back to probably the college and university campus days of a whole bunch of us here in the Chamber today. You think back to your days in university, and you probably knew somebody, a fellow student, who had an old car. I remember a guy who had I think it was an old Datsun B-210, and it was basically rusted out. It barely moved, but, gosh, it had a good stereo system. It had a stereo system that was worth more than the whole car, and there's an analogy to be drawn with Bill 1. You know, there are many good things about Bill 1. It is a bold new initiative lifted from the pages of the Alberta Liberal election platform and then watered down.

Ms Blakeman: Whose Liberal platform?

Mr. Taylor: The Alberta Liberal platform.

It doesn't solve the problem to put great big honking speakers and a subwoofer in the trunk of a car that is barely roadworthy. Now, maybe I overstate the case. Our postsecondary education system is certainly more than barely roadworthy, but it has been starved. The minister himself said some weeks ago that it's time to take postsecondary education off its starvation diet. It has been starved by 12 years of underfunding, funding that has not kept up, has not kept pace with inflation and increased enrolment. Since 1993 government funding to postsecondary education in the province of Alberta in real terms has decreased 28 per cent per full-time student while tuition, adjusted again for inflation, in real terms has increased 183 per cent per student.

8:50

The fundamental problem, the systemic problem is that the system is hurting from underfunding. What Bill 1 does not address and what I hope this government will address later on in the budget is a fundamental need to increase substantially base operating grants to postsecondary institutions in this province and take a look at the formula by which they determine base operating grants and come to a real understanding of the basic worth of a postsecondary student in the province of Alberta.

I'm pleased that the government has seemingly taken a renewed interest in advanced education with Bill 1. It's about time after 12 years of underfunding. Investing in quality educational opportunities for students and in the creative contributions of our postsecondary faculties is almost certainly the best investment that we can make as a society. Creating world-class educational environments that are affordable for every Albertan with the drive to succeed is a duty of this government. It also represents a unique opportunity to combine the dual goals of economic competitiveness and social equity. I heard what the minister said. The minister gets much of this – much of it – and I'm glad he does. It's one of I think the most positive signs we have seen in postsecondary education in many, many years in this province, Mr. Speaker.

High-quality, affordable education from early childhood education right through to graduate degrees is the foundation for creating a society with equal opportunity for all. It's also vital to remember that such investments pay off not only in terms of economic competitiveness in a new knowledge economy but also by creating and sustaining the conditions for a vibrant, diverse culture and an informed, engaged democratic society. Higher education is critical to meeting our demand for skilled labour and ensuring that our students are equipped to compete in the job market.

But, Mr. Speaker, that is not the sum total of what higher education is all about. I'm hopeful that Bill 1 represents the end of an era when spending on higher education was considered a cost to be minimized and an understanding now that it is, in fact, an investment in the future of today's students and tomorrow's Alberta. The goal seems to have been for the last 12 years to simply produce as many degree and diploma and certificate holders as possible for the lowest cost possible, to churn them through. You know, it's a suitable approach for producing widgets, but it's not so good for facilitating the growth of citizens.

We must recognize that higher education is a great public investment, and we must be ready to invest in a way that supports the multiple roles that higher education plays in our society. This is certainly something Albertans have been demanding for a long time, something the Liberal opposition has been pressing for for years, so I'm gratified that this government seems to be responding in some measure to Bill 1.

But in what measure, Mr. Speaker? The minister says that this government is committing to put \$4.5 billion into higher education, into postsecondary education, through Bill 1, but it's not really a commitment, unfortunately. It's not a firm, unshakeable commitment to put that money in. On the Liberal side our commitment was to take 35 per cent of every annual budget surplus no matter how big, no matter how small every year and put it directly into a postsecondary education endowment fund with no cap. You know, I'll grant you that this government's proposal may actually get more money into the access to the future fund more quickly than the Liberal plan would have, but once it hits \$3 billion, if it hits \$3 billion, that's all she wrote. That are it. No more. Uh-uh. Finis. We're full.

The Liberal plan conceivably could have seen a billion dollars a

year go into that postsecondary education endowment fund so that at the end of 20 years there would be \$20 billion. I didn't just pick that number. I didn't just pick that number out of a hat because \$3 billion for a system with 140,000 full-time learning equivalents is not sufficient. It permits some interesting tinkering at the margins, but it won't really provide the financial foundation for a world-class system.

Let me give you some comparative figures. Harvard University's total endowment is \$20 billion, not \$3 billion for an entire province, an entire system, but \$20 billion for one institution. Princeton's endowment is approximately \$1.3 million per student. Alberta's \$3 billion, even at current enrolment levels, represents less than \$17,000 per student. It's not enough. And that, Mr. Speaker, is contingent on this government really putting in the money that it says it will, that it might, that is scheduled to go into this account within the heritage savings trust fund, to be allocated as considered appropriate by the Minister of Finance after April 1, 2005.

So the Minister of Finance is the final arbiter of how much money goes into the fund, and the Minister of Finance has the opportunity to say, "You know, I don't think we can afford to put any money into the fund this year," or "I don't think we can afford to put in more than – I don't know – \$100 million, \$50 million." Pick a figure. Maybe the Minister of Finance will say: "Boys, we've got \$3 billion sitting here. I'm putting it into the fund right away." Of course, then it's capped. Then it's capped. It doesn't get any bigger than that.

Maybe the Minister of Finance will say: "We have a BSE crisis on our farms. We have yet another summer where the forest fire fighting budget has gone through the roof because it's been a much worse fire year than we thought it was going to be." Maybe there's another crisis that comes down the pike. "I need the money. I need the money that should go into the access to the future fund to pay the farmers and pay the firefighters and do that sort of thing." You see, the thing is that there's not a guarantee in here. There's a commitment in principle, I guess, but there's not a firm commitment to put the money into the fund.

The same thing goes for increasing by a billion dollars the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, and the same thing goes for increasing the Alberta heritage science and engineering research endowment fund, in each case by \$500 million. In each case it's in amounts considered appropriate by the Finance minister. I'm not suggesting that the Finance minister doesn't want to do the right thing. I'm suggesting that other issues may come up. We need more certainty than Bill 1 offers. Bill 1 is a start down the right road, but it's not certain enough.

The other problem that I have with the money and where it goes is that it tends to go, as is very often the case with this government, into areas that deal with applied knowledge and applied research. The Alberta ingenuity fund, for instance, funds especially applied research in science and engineering. Arguably, this contributes to harnessing public education to industry interests. You know, there's a role for that within the broad scope of advanced education, Mr. Speaker. There's definitely a role for that. But the whole system should not be geared up to the needs of industry. There needs to be a place within the context of the broad scope of advanced education for the pursuit of learning for its own sake, for the pursuit of creative thinking and pure inquiry, for the pursuit of arts and humanities.

There just isn't the commitment to arts and humanities that the Alberta Liberals would like to see. We, of course, had a plan. Again. This part wasn't adopted by the government. We had a plan to put 5 per cent of every annual budget surplus into a fund to complement the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We think that the government should do the same thing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there's a delicate balance that needs to be struck in our public institutions between ministerial control and institutional autonomy. I'm wondering if there aren't some clauses in this bill – and I don't mean to go through it clause by clause – that threaten to tip that balance. Institutions are public, but they can never become partisan or be made simply to perform pet partisan projects. Institutions, including board members, presidents, and all faculty, need to be assured that they can speak out on important matters of public policy without fear of reprisal. It's also vital that qualified academics are empowered to set academic policy and standards at their institutions.

9:00

In some respects the degree of ministerial or governmental control that this bill provides is somewhat troubling. The fund, if and when fully funded, will provide the minister with, we think, an excessive degree of discretion to pick winners and losers among the institutions or to reward and punish according to how accommodating the institutions are. The conditions of making those grants will not be subject to legislative debate approval since they will be made through regulations passed by orders in council, which this government is wont to do.

The minister also appears to want to establish, albeit “in consultation” with institutions, enrolment targets and entrance requirements. Now, institutions currently and appropriately are empowered by the Post-secondary Learning Act to establish admission standards. There seems to be a conflict between Bill 1 and the PSLA.

The minister is also empowered to appoint all the members of the council, his advisory council. Institutional stakeholders, we feel, including administrators, faculty council, students should be empowered to formally nominate representatives to the council. A good advisory council is made up of good advisors from the areas that you want advice from. You don't just hand-pick people you like; you allow these organizations to put forward the names of people they know can contribute to your council.

The purpose of the fund is “to promote the . . . attraction and retention of the faculty, staff and graduate students.” We hope that that is not going to undermine current collective agreements and the ability of faculty and staff associations to freely bargain. I don't think the province of Alberta right now needs temporary Venezuelan professors, Mr. Speaker.

The other point that I wanted to make is on reporting and accountability. This minister is to be commended for trying to make the system more accessible, more affordable, and more excellent. He is to be commended for wanting to “develop and implement mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and report on the quality of advanced education in Alberta.” He's to be commended for wanting us to have the best system in the world. But postsecondary institutions, already underfunded, are burdened by numerous accountability and reporting requirements. Entire institutional bureaucracies have been created to handle the reporting demands of the ministry, and, you know, there's never been any extra money for that. If institutions are expected to participate in substantive ways in establishing or administering common application processes, financial aid inventories, prior learning recognition and transfer arrangements, participation or affordability plans, or quality assessments, then they must be provided with the resources required to fulfill these duties. This has not been the case in the past.

You know, I've heard from so many stakeholders in the advanced education field that this government repeatedly demands from the institutions four-year business plans, yet they cannot get back from this government the commitment to more than one year of funding. Sometimes they're very, very perilously close to the end of their

fiscal year before they can get the commitment for the next year. Fair is fair, Mr. Speaker. If you're going to demand a four-year business plan, then present certainty of funding with a four-year funding policy.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to debate Bill 1 through second reading, through Committee of the Whole, through third reading. My colleagues are going to have much more to say about it. I think that gives you an overview of the Alberta Liberal opposition point of view on Bill 1. It's a good start, but it needs a lot of work. It's kind of like that Datsun I referred to. It needs some real body work, hopefully better than Bondo. It needs some real body work and perhaps a mechanical tune-up as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to commend in sort of a backhanded way the effort and sort of the idea of creating the best postsecondary system in the world here in this province. Certainly all members of this province and students going into postsecondary deserve such a thing. We can afford such a thing. But I think that perhaps we have to look at a larger picture here besides just the endowment fund to make it a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my comments this evening by outlining some of the structural difficulties that our postsecondary system is currently experiencing. Alberta has had the fastest rate of tuition increases across Confederation in the last 13 years. The average student debt is over \$20,000 per student. That's only public debt. The student loan system is so inadequate that many students are going into private debt and credit cards to get by, not to mention the good graces of their parents and relatives. Imagine if you had to live on \$700 a month. That's what the student loan system currently gives Alberta students.

Base operating grants to universities and colleges do not keep pace with inflation in this province. While government posts multibillion dollar surpluses, postsecondary institutions are cutting programs, laying off staff, and eliminating student services. At the University of Calgary they're looking at 20 per cent cuts over the next four years under this current fiscal situation. Teaching and learning conditions have suffered as a result. Four hundred people crammed into a lecture hall is not an educational experience, Mr. Speaker; it's a mere shadow of what a meaningful educational experience should be.

The arts and humanities have suffered the most. Students are paying more and getting less. Departments are cutting resource materials and support staff and not replacing retiring faculty at replacement levels. Class sizes are going through the roof, and quality suffers as a result. Even with the tuition freeze institutions are charging more fees this next year because their budgets are still too tight. At Red Deer College students are looking at a \$40 new fee just for their athletic teams. This sort of thing should be coming out of the base budget, not out of students' pockets, but institutions are just trying to get by, and these other extra billing fees are coming in.

The Premier said that they're rewriting the tuition fee policy for 2006. He says that it will be, quote, an entrepreneurial tuition fee policy. What exactly does that mean? Parents taking on a second mortgage? Students having to run bake sales outside universities? It sounds to me like another misguided market solution, which has been proven disastrous in every other jurisdiction that has tried it, such as Australia and New Zealand.

The tuition fee policy in 1991, '96, 2004, and now again – students will get nothing out of this new policy other than what they

have gotten in the past 14 years: more student debt, higher tuition, lower quality education. Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 is not inclusive enough to address these concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like to remind the hon. member that we're not in Committee of the Whole. You have to be in your seats.

Carry on.

Mr. Eggen: I, too, have difficulty with that rule. Mind you, I'm a new guy, so perhaps I had an excuse.

Anyway, Bill 1 is not inclusive enough to address these concerns that I've just outlined. We need a long-term, independent look at the future of postsecondary education here in Alberta. We need a postsecondary learning commission similar to the Learning Commission that we had for the K to 12 sector.

Specifically, our criticisms of Bill 1 are as follows. Now, the government is saying that they are reinvesting; but how exactly? They are relying on unbudgeted surpluses in order to fund what should be long-term investments. This is questionable funding as well as being confusing public policy. If there's a downturn in the price of oil and natural gas and future budget surpluses evaporate, Alberta's postsecondary students will either have no endowment at all or a significantly smaller endowment than was first advertised. If endowments such as the one proposed for postsecondary education are set up as outlined in Bill 1, the cost of doing so should be built into the budgets up front.

9:10

I am also concerned about the increased involvement in the private sector, which will be in this new endowment fund. No one stipulates that the endowment fund money will be given out to institutions that find matching funds from private donors or the private sector. This doesn't allow institutions to plan ahead for the future. Postsecondary institutions will have to take some focus off teaching and learning and now on to raising money and on increasing the role and influence of the private sector. Also, smaller institutions will have more difficulty raising this matching fund because the money will naturally gravitate to the larger universities in Edmonton and Calgary.

This has very disturbing implications for academic freedom as well. Academic freedom is seriously compromised when developing new programs, faculties, and areas of inquiry is dependent on structuring funds from the private sector. Postsecondary institutions must be able to ask difficult questions, must be free to pursue knowledge for the sake of seeking knowledge, and must be able to operate freely from the constraints of vested interests.

Mr. Speaker, seeking matching funds from the private sector or from large private donations also fails to build a new century for the arts, humanities, and social services in our universities and postsecondary institutions. Private donations to the social sciences and humanities are usually far lower than they are to the so-called hard sciences. Under the Tory scheme, as we see from Bill 1, the arts and social sciences will continue on the decline in this province because Bill 1 does not allow for increased base operating funding, which is what arts and social sciences programs need to be sustainable.

Alberta's new century must be built on a solid foundation of informed, well-rounded citizens. It is no surprise that today's CEOs and business executives often look to graduates from the social sciences and humanities for their new workers. This is an increasing trend because arts graduates have an ability to write, to think critically, to solve problems quickly, and to look at the world in a broad context. The Conservative government continues to under-

fund and underappreciate the arts and social sciences, but they will do so at their own peril. They do so at the peril of starving the very lifeblood of democracy: a well-informed, active, and engaged citizenry.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude my comments, and I now beg leave to adjourn the debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

head: *(continued)*

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have seven minutes left. Do you wish to continue?

Mr. Hinman: I'm finished.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity, and congratulations on your job, something that not many of us care to fulfill. It's not a challenge to a lot of us. I do want to congratulate you, the Speaker, and the Deputy Chair on your elections. I also, like many others here, want to congratulate His Honour for his speech. Mine is a rather informal bunch of comments and reflections at this time.

When I was a young kid, my dad used to go down to Lethbridge to a function called the Lethbridge sportsmen's dinner, and I still have a baseball that dad brought home to me signed by – now I guess I have to call him His Honour. He was then a pretty fabulous star with the Edmonton Eskimos, and I can also remember his nickname, and it was a term of endearment. I would imagine that in this day and age of political correctness, they'll have to rewrite the history book to eliminate that reference to him as well. I won't even mention what it is here because I'll get myself in hot water.

I would also like to pay respect to Her Honour. You know, not too many of us didn't have an opportunity to get a hug, not too many of us didn't have an opportunity to see her. I can remember the kids in a little small community in our constituency called Little Bow. The community was Lomond. It's about 208 people, and they had the grand sum of six kids graduating from grade 12. Her Honour had been invited down there and managed to escape all the protocol, give all the kids a hug, and helped a little handicapped graduate not onto the stage, but instead of making him feel a little different, she brought all the kids down onto the main floor so everyone was part of the graduation ceremony.

I wanted to reflect a little bit and tie this into the throne speech in this our centennial year, where we've come from and where we're going to. I know that it was 13 years and five days ago that I made my maiden speech after a by-election, and I can imagine that those of you who have given speeches today were pretty darn nervous like I was. I know that the thing that appealed to me the very most was your references to your family, your background, and an appreciation for the people that got you here.

I don't think I'm any different, but in this our centennial year I have to think back to my great-grandpa who came here in 1898 to an area south of Pincher Creek. If the family still had the land today, they would have received the farm century award, but unfortunately with progress the old homestead is under the Waterton dam. He raised horses for the North West Mounted Police, and I reflect today of the sadness that everyone will think about and attend tomorrow.

I'm also reflecting on the fact that looking in the newspaper

accounts at a picture of a young officer out at the Mayerthorpe detachment, I recognized the name and did a phone call and found out, lo and behold, that it's a cousin to my very best friend that I grew up with in the little town of Carmangay. It is miraculous that she wasn't one of the unfortunate few that had to attend the scene.

When I think of our riding I'm really quite amazed that in the 13 years I've been here, it's grown about 40 per cent geographically. We've got a wonderful riding, really. Another reason that I wanted to give you a thumbnail sketch was for those of you who haven't been in southern Alberta to our riding called Little Bow. It's actually a very large riding, one of the ten largest, and it starts about 70 kilometres north of the American border at the south end of the county of Lethbridge. It goes all the way north to within 22 kilometres of the southeast part of Calgary, one of the newer communities, Copperfield. If you swam across the river, you'd be literally 15 minutes from one corner of our riding over to Calgary, and down in the southeast we're only within 60 kilometres of the city of Medicine Hat. A huge area, over 20 municipalities, and every one of them has something to be very proud of.

The county of Lethbridge, for instance, is probably best known for the fact that it has the largest total number of intensive livestock operations, not to take away from the county of Lacombe. I know that they have the largest number of confined feeding hog operations, but the county of Lethbridge has the largest number of cattle, swine, dairy – you name it, they seem to have it – over 680 confined feeding operations.

And, you know, neighbours get along. Yes, they're concerned about water, but you know the irrigation systems in the area have a far higher quality of water than many of the treatment plants that we have in our towns and villages.

They also are the home to the Lethbridge regional airport, something that quite a few of us in the Assembly want to see maintained, not only the viability of the airport but the airline that services our capital here in Edmonton. It's one of the only airlines that has a direct flight, 75 minutes, second-longest in the province other than one of the flights coming in from northern Alberta, all without a washroom, mind you, but it is a critical service to go 75 minutes nonstop and not to have to go through an international airport and security.

9:20

The county of Lethbridge is also the home to probably one of the world-class agricultural research stations, and it's a marvel in itself because it's a joint federal/provincial venture that's been in place for years. That sits outside the city in our riding, as does a provincial jail.

We have the entire county of Vulcan, and that's primarily an agricultural community, again. The largest centre, the town of Vulcan itself, has a history of being one of the few flight training centres in Alberta during the Second World War, training over 1,200 RCAF pilots. Today when you think back to those guys who trained in Harvards, now their theme, their tourism draw, is the Star Trek theme. It's my understanding that this year they'll host a grand national assembly of Klingons attending in Vulcan from all across North America. It's the second week of June if anyone wants to go.

You know, it doesn't really relate to the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, but it does when we think of where we were a hundred years ago. The technology and the education and the things that we kind of take for granted today, a lot of it speaks in my mind to disposable income. You know, the fuller our stomach is, the more we want to whine and the more we expect and the more we want to keep up with our neighbours.

I was one of the very fortunate few, I think, of my generation. I

was the oldest in the family, and it was a dream that I should go to postsecondary. But none of my other brothers or sisters were able to, you know. We just didn't have the money. I'm very fortunate. My wife and I have four children, and all four have been able to attend some form of postsecondary. When the kids today talk about how much it costs to go to school, it's true: it costs a lot of money. But I remember when I went to the U of C for a brief time before I went to SAIT. You got by on a hundred dollars a month, and that was big living. Mom and Dad had to scrape like crazy just to make that available.

I'll even go back to our oldest son, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 at the U of L they were paying \$1,200 per semester, and we were looking at a 3 per cent increase in tuition fees, and the kids were going wild. Well, I happened to speak to a parent from Massachusetts that same year, and he had his son attending what they call a land grant college in the state of Massachusetts. I said, being a nosy farm kid from southern Alberta, "How much is it costing you to send your child to go to school?" He looked at me, and he said, "Eleven thousand." I said, "What? For one year?" "Yup. For my own state college. Eleven thousand dollars."

I knew at the time, as many of us in this Assembly have spent time on municipal and city councils, roughly what our tax rates were, and it was suddenly arousing my curiosity. I said, "Up at home for about a 1,500 or a 1,200 square foot home, we pay about \$1, \$1.10, \$1.15 a square foot for property taxes. What do you pay?" His answer was: "Seventy-five hundred dollars." Have any of us ever thought of what a wonderful province we actually live in?

You know, I've got quite a few other communities, and the problem with speaking of one, then you forget the other one, or somebody says that you didn't mention our town. Well, we've got a couple other really neat ones. Coaldale. It's the largest community in our riding: 6,500 people. It's the home of the oldest Mennonite settlement in the riding, maybe even in Alberta, a gem of the west. It's an old church that a group of volunteers have restored by taking advantage of the CFEP program, and it hopes to be a tourism, educational recollection of old antiques and what things used to be. Bring kids in and show them how their great forefathers farmed the land.

It is also the home of the Alberta Birds of Prey Centre, and it's state of the art. It's probably one of only four in North America that takes birds that have been injured in the wild, treats them, and then releases them out. I encourage you to come down and see it.

It also is the home of a centenarian this year. Mr. John Gettman is going to be 102 years old, and he still sets up the tables when the seniors have a meeting in the lodge, and he's got almost as much dark hair as I do. He's an amazing guy.

We have Vauxhall. It's the potato capital of the world. Again, not a big town, 800 people, but you know when I went to the high school graduation last year, over 80 per cent of the kids were on the honour roll. Not too shabby, is it? We've got a poor education system, don't we?

When I went to Vulcan, you know, the same thing. A couple of years ago they were ranked third in all of Alberta for the high school ratings. People can't stay at number three all the time because there's always another school that wants to compete and beat them and be better.

Picture Butte. It's the feedlot capital of Alberta. Some call it Feedlot Alley.

You know, there are all kinds of communities. Champion, if anyone is ever down there, has Little Bow provincial park. For 25 years the people in the county hoped and prayed and planned through droughts to develop a water management thing, a thing called a dam, that was, yes, going to displace a few people, but you

know the community came together and realized they wanted municipal water that was safe and secure to fight fires with, that they wanted a recreation area, that they wanted to be able to develop private irrigation, and that will allow 10,000 acres of private irrigation to come on stream. No government money to do that, they do it on their own. They invest over \$500 an acre just in the capital to put a pivot system on their own land.

Speaking of irrigation, we've got three irrigation districts. St. Mary's is shared with Cardston-Taber-Warner and Little Bow. We've got the Bow River irrigation district on the east side, Lethbridge Northern irrigation in the middle. This is a positive thing, I believe, for all of Alberta. It's not a grab. It's not an empty trough of wasted money. It's 4 per cent of the agricultural land generating 22 per cent of the agricultural revenue.

The neatest thing is that a little community called Barons teamed up with the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district, and this spring they unveiled a 10,000-acre expansion to the district in the Barons area totally enclosed in pipe. Not one drop of evaporation. All the guys now are irrigating with pivot systems with low-drop, low-pressure systems. You know, talk about being innovators and talk about being responsible.

I think I've almost wasted my 10 minutes, and I probably had 10 minutes more, but I did want to . . . [interjections] Pardon me? Keep on going? Okay. Well, I'll try to speed it up just somewhat.

You know, that Little Bow dam – it's called Twin Valley dam and reservoir right now – will provide a recreation area not just for people in our constituency. We're about a hundred miles from the Little Bow provincial park and Twin Valley from the city of Calgary, and it's booked by Wednesday night on any long weekend. It provides an escape for the people from urban centres who want to come out and get some fresh air and do some waterskiing, get some nice sun, lean into the 80-kilometre an hour winds. You know, those kinds of things are what Alberta is made of. The only thing is that all of these facilities that we have south of Calgary that are called bodies of water are manmade. Only two are natural resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to our tour.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to rise on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

9:30

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't planning to speak tonight to the Speech from the Throne, but as I have to move to adjourn debate, I don't want to miss my opportunity to make a few short remarks before I do that. [interjection] Is that an invitation to treat?

Mr. Speaker, I was absolutely enthused by the Speech from the Throne delivered by our new Lieutenant Governor, and I, too, want to add my congratulations to the Honourable Norman Kwong as our new Lieutenant Governor. He has big rubber boots to fill indeed, as he noted as he delivered his remarks to our House, the remarks about the next Alberta and even the titles throughout it: "The Centennial: A Century of Achievement," "The Next Alberta Will Be a Leader in Learning," "The Next Alberta Will Have a Diverse and Growing Economy," "The Next Alberta Will Be the Healthiest Province in Canada," "All Albertans Will Share in the Alberta Advantage," "The Next Alberta Will Be a Leader in Canada and the World."

Mr. Speaker, last year this government published a 20-year strategic plan, a strategic plan that talked about Albertans being self-reliant and entrepreneurial, that talked about building on four basic pillars: unleashing innovation, leading and learning, competing in a global economy, and making Alberta the best place to live, work,

and visit. Mr. Speaker, those pillars, that direction, that vision for the future of this province is reflected in the Speech from the Throne and the action that this government is going to be taking over the next year and the next period of time with the three-year business plans and, indeed, over the next 20 years to make that vision a reality.

Mr. Speaker, the focus on education is absolutely key. It's not just one of the pillars of the four pillars of the strategic plan, but it's the underpinning of the whole strategic plan. You cannot unleash innovation without education, and it's necessary to unleash innovation because in our economy if we do not advance knowledge, if we do not apply knowledge to our economy and make Alberta a leader in knowledge, we will not be competing in a global economy.

All you have to do is to look at our traditional economy, oil and gas. The investment that was made in research and development by our predecessors had tremendous foresight, and it's resulted in us being leaders both in the traditional oil and gas development and also in synthetic crudes in the oil sands. It was investment in technology that's made that happen. It's investment in technology which will take us to the next level, to the new technologies which will continue to allow us to extract values from those resources, to move into clean-burning coal, to move into coal-bed methane, both in an environmentally sustainable manner.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at other areas of our economy as well. Our fibre economy. It doesn't make sense over the long term to be shipping wood fibre relatively unprocessed to other places in the world. We need to add technology to add value to keep those jobs here, and that happens through the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. In the agricultural economy it makes no sense for us to ship our agriculture products relatively unprocessed to the United States or to other parts of the world. We must be adding knowledge, adding value, using technology to increase the value here and keep the jobs at home.

Moving to the new economies of biosciences, life sciences, and nanotechnology requires innovation. It requires knowledge. So the first pillar of our 20-year strategic plan, unleashing innovation, is absolutely underpinned by the expansion of knowledge, the expansion of education, the advancing in education that's referenced in His Honour's Speech from the Throne.

Leading in learning is self-evident. We need to have basic education. We need to inspire our students to complete their high school education because we know that in the future – I think one of the statistics that's often thrown out is that 67 per cent of all future jobs created are going to require a postsecondary education. We need to inspire our students to finish their high school and to move into an advanced education.

We need to recognize that advancing education is not just about completing high school. It's the full, broad continuum of education. It's those people who need, moving to literacy as well as those people who want, moving to a PhD or beyond. So advancing education and being leaders in learning are pivotal to the new economy and to the next Alberta.

Competing in a global marketplace. Absolutely essential for Albertans. With 3 million people, even if we grow to 4 million or 4 and a half million people, Mr. Speaker, we need to trade out into the world, and we're not going to be trading out into the world effectively with our current commodity bases. We have to trade out into the world with new commodities, with advanced commodities, with high-value commodities, and with knowledge, particularly with knowledge, competing in a global economy.

What's going to make it possible for us to compete in that global economy, Mr. Speaker? It's, again, our human capital, the people who we have here in Alberta with a good education, with a strong,

innovative and entrepreneurial ability. One thing that we seldom reference about Alberta but which is particularly true is that we are a complex, cosmopolitan community with friends and relatives from all over the world, and in the new economy those friends and relatives, the fact that Albertans come from everywhere, are related everywhere, is going to be so critical to us not only in the basic makeup of our modern economy and our modern society in this province. It's what makes our society an interesting and diverse place.

We live together here in harmony better than virtually any place in the world. Compare Alberta, compare Edmonton to any place in the world, and you won't find the kind of diversity we have and the ability to live together with that diversity, to value that diversity, and the ability that that gives us to trade out to friends and relatives all over the world. Just one high school in this city, Harry Ainlay high school, at one time had 88 different language groups represented in that school. It's phenomenal. It's a very, very valuable resource that we have in human capital of this province, and it's something that we need to value. So competing in the global economy, absolutely important. We're well positioned to do it. We need a knowledge base to be able to do that.

Making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit, the fourth pillar of our 20-year strategic plan. It's not about beating our chests and saying that we're number one, Mr. Speaker. It's about having the quality of life which makes people want to live here and makes living here worthwhile, valuable, and a place where our children and our grandchildren can be.

What makes it worthwhile? Well, it's being stewards of our environment: the clean air, the clean water, the great mountains, the wonderful place that we have to live. That's what's important. That's where we provide stewardship. We must leave as small a footprint as possible so that future generations can enjoy the same Alberta that we enjoy.

It's about having a good education system so that our children can grow up having the advantages of an education system which will enable them to take advantage of the opportunities which present themselves in the future.

It's about having a health care system that takes care of our children and our parents when we need it. It's about having safe

communities. That's the type of thing which makes our community a livable place.

It's about the arts. It's about the quality of life which makes life enjoyable and celebrating the arts. That's a very important part of our community. I had the opportunity to go to an IRDC conference in San Antonio, Texas, a number of years ago, when I had the portfolio of intergovernmental affairs. IRDC is an organization of senior executives that looks for the next place for their corporation to invest. When you ask what the criteria are that they're looking for, sure they're looking for low taxes; that's important. They're looking for low input costs; that's important. They're looking for a well-educated workforce and a well-education population; that's important.

But what they really want are the creative costs. What they really want is a place where their employees, their senior executives, and the senior executives' spouses and their employees will enjoy living because when they have an enjoyment of life and when they know that their children have a place where they can be educated, be healthy, have a quality environment, and have the arts, they will be productive, happy employees, and they will make the economy sing. So it's a tautological thing, Mr. Speaker. It all comes together. It's what the strategic plan is all about and is so ably reflected in the issues that are set out in the Speech from the Throne.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted with the Speech from the Throne this year and the avenues we are taking to make the strategic plan for this province sing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, with tomorrow's sombre observances in mind, specifically the national memorial service for the four Alberta RCMP officers murdered last week in the line of duty, I move that the Assembly stand adjourned pursuant to Government Motion 12 agreed to by this Assembly yesterday until 1:30 Monday afternoon, March 14.

[Motion carried; at 9:38 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]