

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 28, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/02/28

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

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

Mr. Johnson 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 February 28: Mr. Strang]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered so eloquently by the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. I'd like to begin my speech, as others have, by commending His Honour on the work that he has done over the past year. His love for the province is evident, and his dedication to our home is beneficial to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the speech delivered was one that laid the plans for our province for the next 12 months. I'm very excited about many aspects in the speech. Quite a few of the areas covered are directly related to the constituency of West Yellowhead. As I'm sure my constituents are aware, West Yellowhead is a growing and a vibrant area. There are challenges within the electoral boundaries, but the people are facing these challenges and meeting them with innovation and success.

One of the areas touched on by the Lieutenant Governor was that of education. One of the challenges that West Yellowhead is facing is education. The challenge is not enticing students to postsecondary as much as it is having students make it through and finish their high school. I appreciate the creation of the high school completion symposium to help all legislators understand some of the reasons why students decide not to complete their studies. The government not only needs to find out why our students leave high school early but has to show young people in Alberta the extremely successful postsecondary schools in the province. We all know about how good our universities are in the province, but I think we need to highlight how good our consortium and technical schools are.

The education system in Alberta is top-notch and cannot be overlooked. I do not think there is a province in Canada that can match the performance of our system. This excellent system extends from kindergarten to grade 12 as well as to university and to our consortiums and technical institutes. In my constituency the consortium and technical institutes are extremely important as a lot of our citizens of West Yellowhead attend these schools. I think the government needs to continue to entice young people into the consortium and tech schools around the province. By doing this, it will encourage the students to stay in school and finish their high school studies. The government must stress the importance of high school education because without it life can be very difficult in this day and age.

West Yellowhead is seeing a boom in the region through the coal,

forestry, oil and gas, and tourism industries. This boom has brought with it many positive changes as well as many challenges.

My constituents are also heavily tied to the forest industry, and I'm very pleased to hear His Honour mention that the government will ensure a strong and sustainable forest sector. We must ensure that there is long-term sustainability in our forest sector. The future of West Yellowhead depends on a very smart approach to forestry management. My constituents depend on the government continually looking for new ideas and ensuring that this vital industry continues to grow. This industry will grow. I'm extremely confident that it will remain strong not only through the commitment to harness innovation but also the support to the Alberta forestry institute. West Yellowhead will always be intrigued by changes done to the forest industry. As a government we need to ensure that there is balance in the industry so that we will see full utilization of all products and services that forestry offers.

Another important industry for West Yellowhead is the coal industry, and my constituents were pleased to hear that there will be a commitment to the coal industry. Now, while debate is looming about this resource, we cannot underestimate the usefulness of coal, nor can we underestimate the effectiveness and the environment-friendly aspect of clean burning coal technology.

Coal has a rich heritage in my constituency, with the Mitchell family running Luscar in the early 1900s. This area was called the Coal Branch. Many of the communities in my area were established, built, pretty nearly destroyed, and rebuilt again all because of coal. It is so vital to communities like Edson, Hinton, and Grande Cache, which need the government to continue its focus on this valuable resource.

Although many people believe there is no such thing as clean burning coal technology, I would like to tell them to come out into my constituency. See for yourselves the work that is done in the area on research of this new technology. As the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor mentioned, we have coal reserves to at least a thousand years. We must continually push forward to find the clean burning coal technology as fast as we can. Even though many think we are not environmentally sound individuals, the environment is one of the most important things to my constituents, and they are extremely supportive of clean burning technology as they realize the economic benefits that we have. My constituents are also depending on the technology to move forward, to become more and more viable. The opportunities for West Yellowhead are immense, and I cannot wait to see some of our coal technology.

The final thing I'd like to touch on is the mention by His Honour of the rural development strategy. As you know, the strategy is very important to West Yellowhead as it is a rural constituency. There is so much development in this region, and much of it can be attributed to the rural development strategy. I believe my constituency is going to benefit because the people of West Yellowhead are striving to work with regions surrounding it to make sure we are prosperous. The rural development strategy pushes this idea of teamwork. I'm very excited to see how this government is going to invest in our rural areas.

I feel this strategy is only going to be successful if all rural regions work together. This has already been seen through the many economic partnerships that exist around rural Alberta. West Yellowhead shares an economic alliance with communities in the Drayton Valley-Calmar and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituencies, and this strategic partnership has proven extremely valuable to our economic growth. The Grande Alberta Economic Region is a very good example of how a rural development strategy will be successful. As the government promotes partnership and teamwork, it will become very significant to my constituents. The rural development

strategy will complement the already established economic partnerships and will only make my region stronger.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are optimistic about the future of this province. They have no reason not to be. The government has put a multitude of effort and resources into helping this province succeed, and this is the same for my constituency. We are excited. I am excited. I look forward to the next 12 months.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and offer my response to the Speech from the Throne. It has been about 15 months since I joined this esteemed Assembly, and let me start by saying: wow, what an incredible journey. I have found my time and experience as an MLA both engaging and rewarding. A year ago 13 of our 16 caucus members were new. We had to learn quickly, and we hit the ground running. Looking back, I am pleased with our work and promise you, Mr. Speaker, and the people of this great province that we're going to work even harder to advocate on their behalf and continue to take their issues and concerns forward.

Like I said last year in my maiden speech, sir, I represent a wonderful constituency. One observation I made in my 15 months of service so far was that my constituents are paying a lot more attention, and this is probably true for most other constituencies in Alberta. People are starting to ask questions and investigate available options. They demand answers and are only convinced when presented with facts and clear evidence. This is a trend I like and encourage. Albertans no longer have blind faith in their leaders. This may yet need to be reflected at the polls, and I hope that one day voter turnout would increase from its currently low levels.

Talking about observations, Mr. Speaker, I have also reached the conclusion that there's definitely a democratic deficit in this province. Alberta is exhibiting clear signs of democratic sickness. Take the short legislative sessions. We're lucky if we sit for more than 50 days a year, and that's counting both the spring and fall sessions. Take the lack of opposition representation on standing policy committees. Talk about the Public Accounts Committee and how handicapped it is. Take our privacy legislation, which really exists to ensure secrecy and privacy of government actions and decisions, where, in fact, it should be people's privacy we're guarding. Access to information has been turned into denial or restriction of access.

This province desperately needs democratic renewal. Part of the problem, I think, is attitude. Most cabinet ministers and some government backbenchers – and I'm not saying all, but some – believe or want us to believe that everything is A-okay and nothing better could be achieved. Why is the opposition questioning their divine wisdom? How dare we suggest alternate solutions? Many of them think: if it comes from this side of the House, then it must be bad. Now, how would I characterize this attitude, Mr. Speaker? I'd probably call it childish. I view it as regressive, misguided, and arrogant.

This government has made a habit of introducing and passing a budget and then blowing it to pieces, sometimes in less than two months or so, by incurring budget overruns, which I call an overdraft or a deficit, but the government spin doctors so cleverly call them supplementary supply. In any sound business when your spending exceeds your budgetary allowance, it's called an overdraft or a deficit. Could it be that this government intentionally lowballs and

underestimates its revenues? Could it be that the ruling Tories are using annual surpluses to cushion their ad hoc, one-off, pet projects?

My friends across the floor should think about this point for a second.

An Hon. Member: What friends?

Mr. Elsalhy: Few. A few friends across should think about this for a second. I hear the hon. Member for Castle Downs laughing. I really enjoy entertaining him.

Why are we spending more than we're earning? Think about this: why are we spending more than we're bringing in from stable funding sources like taxation or non resource-based income? This government's reliance on surplus, nonrenewable energy, resource-based income is dangerous. Markets are volatile and unpredictable. Better budget planning and fiscal restraint are really warranted. I'm hoping for a day when the budget would more accurately reflect our financial situation and when budget surpluses would be more closely forecasted. When will Albertans demand that their government think to the next quarter century rather than just to the next fiscal quarter?

Moving on to my next observation, which is the practice of governing from one crisis to the next and the demonstrated shift from need to greed, after 35 years in power the ruling Conservatives' prime directive, Mr. Speaker, is to sustain their grip on power and get re-elected. They're tired and stale. An open-ended question: why is it that the government is so bent on things like deregulation and privatization that it appears to have become a goal and not a means? Why wasn't privatizing health care, for example, and the so-called third way discussed during the November 2004 election?

People were promised the opportunity to be fully consulted. The government said that they were going to consult with people, but here we are on the verge of dismantling our public health care system, and no consultation occurred. Some people argue the fact that there's going to be a website where people can send e-mails to the government or that some documents would be put on the Internet for people to access. I don't think that this is consultation. I was not consulted. I wasn't consulted as an elected official, nor was I consulted as a front-line health care worker and not even as a citizen. Now, what do Martha and Henry think?

The next issue, Mr. Speaker, which I would like to talk about is the rate of growth this province is experiencing. Just today we tried to debate the urgency of people's drinking and farm water being contaminated by methane and other gases and contaminants, to just cite one example. The government side didn't think that was urgent enough, and the discussion went nowhere.

I guess my message here is that people should really come before profit. People before profit: I'm not sure that this is a sentiment that is shared by all 83 members of the House, but I know that at least 21 of them in opposition share that sentiment. Most likely the government has other plans for this province.

Think with me, Mr. Speaker, to the early days. Think a First Nations' tribe which hunted buffalo. They hunted one every two to three days, and that was good. Then they were able to organize their hunt and capture two or three animals in one expedition, and that was great. Then they reached the idea that if we drive the entire herd off a cliff, we can harvest tens or even hundreds of buffalo in a single day. What they had was a lavish feast for a short period of time, followed by famine as they depleted the resource. Is our speed of development and rate of growth taking us in that direction? Are we not spending our children's and grandchildren's money today? What are the ecological and environmental implications of our actions?

This province needs structure and control as it forges ahead. No one hates money. We all want to get richer, but it's the nature of growth that's in question. What I am advocating is smart growth. I want a future that is sustainable. This province needs a solid plan, and the Conservatives, unfortunately, cannot muster one. It's really time to wake up and take stock. Albertans deserve the best open, transparent, democratic government; the best affordable education, K to 12 or postsecondary; the best public health care system; and the cleanest and most sustainable environment on the planet. All Albertans should share in the Alberta advantage, not just a select few.

Many Albertans, Mr. Speaker, including many constituents of Edmonton-McClung, are hoping for better leadership and a clearer vision for the future but are also convinced that this government is incapable of delivering that. They're hoping that the next provincial election will provide a leader who is inclusive, collaborative, and in touch. They want a government that is responsive, representative, and accountable. People also hope to be fully engaged in the decision-making process, and I'm all for that.

8:20

This year's Speech from the Throne and, similarly, the taxpayer-funded 30-minute infomercial on television featuring the Premier were nothing more than feel-good, pat-on-the-back media stunts, a patchwork of mini-announcements and policies on the fly, big on short-term promises from a Premier who is now a short-term leader. It's a boom-year speech with no sense of a concrete framework for the future of Alberta.

Take, for example, the heritage fund. I'm pleased that, finally, some money is going to the fund. But, really, think in terms of your own RRSP, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking in proportion here. If you contribute \$1,000 annually into your RRSP account over 20 years, you achieve significantly more than \$20,000 in your 20th year, a lot more. Why didn't this government follow good fiscal reasoning and a proven practice and contribute annually, even in smaller amounts – we're not asking for a billion every year – rather than wait for years and years to finally put a billion dollars into it? The math doesn't add up. Again, there is no plan.

We were also pleased to see a number of issues addressed that we as the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition and Albertans across this province have demanded action on for years. We have long advocated for the twinning of highway 63, the development of an inventory of groundwater in this province, and for developing a strong land-use framework. We were excited about the announcement that some assistance will flow through Alberta Works to Albertans who cannot work. No details were given though. So, yes, we're glad the government has made an initial commitment to tackle these issues. We just hope that they are as good as their word.

I'm also happy with some recent announcements showing that this government listened and favourably reacted to some of my own concerns with respect to the threat posed to the privacy of information of Albertans by the USA PATRIOT Act, for example.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on about the hits and misses, what was in the Speech from the Throne and what was ignored or omitted. However, in the interest of time I will just recap by saying that the Alberta Liberal opposition will continue to work with the government if its members are reasonable and willing to co-operate. We will also hold their feet to the fire whenever they lose sight of why they sought office. We will constantly remind them that people should come before profit and that there is no contradiction between guarding individual rights and interests on the one hand while advancing business and growing capital on the other. We can all be

winner and enjoy what Alberta has to offer. The Alberta Liberals have what it takes, and we're ready to serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure and a privilege to be able to respond to His Honour's Speech from the Throne. Having just listened to the previous speaker, one would think that either I live in a very different part of Edmonton or in some very secluded part of Alberta where we're blessed with privileges and blessings that other parts of Edmonton wouldn't enjoy. As I look at my constituents and as I look at the situation in my riding, it differs significantly from the doom and gloom that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung is professing there to be.

Let's start, for example, with the Speech from the Throne. The first main issue raised by His Honour was a learning society, education. Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board is renowned not only throughout the province, not only throughout the country, not only throughout North America but throughout the world as a leader in education. It's not that long ago that I had the privilege of spending some time with the Minister of Education for Bavaria, Germany. Guess what? She was aware of the Edmonton public school board. As a matter of fact, they're remodeling their system in Bavaria based on the Edmonton public school board because of the approaches and the results that they achieved with the Edmonton public schools. It's quite unusual that the Member for Edmonton-McClung would not be proud of the system. Having the Member for Edmonton-Decore sitting behind him, who was a member of the board of trustees for the Edmonton public school board, I imagine that there must be a little bit of dissent on the Liberal benches because it is indeed a system to be proud of.

It's not only Germany that's looking at us. Governor Schwarzenegger just last year sent a whole troop of educators from the state of California to examine the Edmonton public school board and to remodel now California's school system based on the Edmonton public school board. That's just one of many school boards in this province who are doing exemplary work.

Mr. Speaker, we're not resting on our laurels. The Minister of Education and His Honour in the speech have indicated that roundtables will be taking place throughout the province which will be looking at some of the weaknesses within the system because no matter how good we are, you can never assume to be perfect. One of the issues that we will be looking at, according to the Speech from the Throne, is high school completion rates. The economy is booming in this province. There are many competing interests, and obviously for some when you juxtapose the potential of making some money versus attending classes and writing tests, money seems to be a bigger draw than writing tests, and they withdraw from school. That's only on the three-year completion. If you look at the five-year completion for high school students, we actually fall within the national average and do quite well. But that's not good enough, and His Honour has clearly indicated in the Speech from the Throne that we will be addressing those issues.

Now, again, maybe the media doesn't reach the southwestern part of Edmonton, but if one was to watch the news within the last couple of days, one would see, as indicated by His Honour in the speech, that the Minister of Advanced Education is addressing the issue of the trades and, as a matter of fact, extending the opportunities to our native population and making sure that they equally share in Alberta's booming economy and have the ability and the opportunity

to work within the trades and avail themselves of not only a good income but the intrinsic reward of being a member of a profession and learning the skills that will be transferable later on, no matter how the economy may turn in this province. That's just, Mr. Speaker, in the area of learning.

The Speech from the Throne carries on, and it talks about a prosperous society. Now, we all know that Alberta happens to be in a position where we can refer to ourselves as a prosperous society. But as I always say, the Stone Age, Mr. Speaker, did not end simply because they ran out of stones; it ended because another material came about. Bronze I believe it was, those days. Well, the prosperity in Alberta will not end on the day when we hear that slurping sound coming from the ground and the oil runs out. The prosperity coming from this particular resource will end because other resources will come online, and this government, according to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, is quite prepared to look at that.

If you look at the Speech from the Throne, you will find that such innovative ideas as biofuels are being looked at, and as I can hear to my right, there are some serious considerations taking place to redevelop coal in this province. Mr. Speaker, we're lucky again because we have coal that is actually, comparatively, relatively clean coal, low-sulphur coal. If you look at the coal that's being dug out in the province of Nova Scotia, for example, or if you look at the coal that's being dug out in Europe, our coal happens to be one of the cleanest coal that you will find on the face of the planet. But we can do better. We know that there are possibilities of gasifying coal, and there are possibilities of developing secondary industries, which can carry our economy into the future.

So are we stagnant? Are we just relying on gas and oil? No, we're not. We're looking at value-added. We're looking at other resources. We're looking at stripping gas. We're looking at developing secondary economies, and we are already seeing progress in those particular sectors.

Also, in order to be competitive in this world, we are looking at infrastructure. The province is only as good and the economy will be only as good as the infrastructure that's put in place to support it. Supernet was just one example of the infrastructure that's being put in place to carry our economy into the future. Actually, a solid infrastructure such as highways, such as schools, such as hospitals, such as bridges and overpasses: those require investment as well, and the Speech from the Throne clearly lays out a plan that's affordable, a plan that's rational, a plan that's staggered over time to put that infrastructure into place. It appears that this kind of information simply is not getting across because the doom and gloom would make one believe that Alberta is on the verge of collapse economically and the infrastructure as well.

8:30

Now, in order for this province to prosper, there has to be a big plan in place, and His Honour has laid out that this government will be undertaking a land-use strategy. Mr. Speaker, we are blessed with wonderful land, with wonderful landscape over here, but in order for us to enjoy it and in order for our children to enjoy it into the future, we have to manage this. We have to preserve our environment, but we also have to have a co-ordinated plan about how we are going to manage our land. To do so, just like we have done with water, with the Water for Life strategy, the government will be developing a land-use strategy, which means that we will develop a co-ordinated plan on how this precious land of ours in this province will be used for industry, for development, for recreation, and for other uses. According to the Speech from the Throne that plan is being put in place. Albertans will be consulted, and municipi-

palities and other orders of government will be consulted on developing this land-use strategy.

Another issue touched upon by His Honour in his Speech from the Throne and a very topical issue at this point is the issue of a healthy society. No doubt this government places a great deal of value on the publicly funded health care system, but we also realize that changes need to be made. I think that realization is acknowledged by all members of this House, that certain changes have to occur in order for this system to be permanent, to be sustainable, and to be available to our children and our grandchildren. One of the changes and one of the alternatives that has to be introduced is innovation, and we have shown clearly, Mr. Speaker, and His Honour has noted in his speech that innovation actually works in the health care system. A prime example, as pointed out by His Honour, is the fact that with just a little bit of innovation, just a little bit of outside-of-the-box thinking, the wait-list for hip and knee replacements could be shrunk from 47 weeks to five weeks.

Now, if that kind of innovation could be introduced to other sectors of health care, that kind of innovative thinking and the ability to think outside of the box, if that ability to be different and to try something different could be applied to the health care system overall, clearly we could achieve better results perhaps for less money and an increased accessibility for all members of our society so that they can enjoy a good quality health care system into the future.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is our health networks. A partnership between physicians, between specialists that can operate in cities 24/7 and provide ongoing, high-quality care to our residents is something that's being introduced. The Member for Edmonton-McClung will notice that in Edmonton, in the near future, there will be some announcements allowing doctors to practise and provide better care with the resources that they have and provide more continuous care to our patients.

Perhaps most importantly, as noted by the Lieutenant Governor, is the initiative of this government on cancer. One of the biggest parasites in our health system is cancer, killing our children, killing our parents, our brothers and sisters, and costing the health care system at the same time an enormous amount of dollars. Now, what can we do about it? Can we just treat it, or can we research it? Can we look at alternative treatment? Can we look at perhaps even preventing it? Well, we can, and this government will be not only a leader in this country and on this continent, but this province can actually become an international leader on cancer research with this injection of \$1 billion, and I think we all should be proud of it. Now, that's a positive story that again didn't get to Edmonton-McClung.

Superimposed on that, Mr. Speaker, is the initiative on battling crystal meth, which again is another parasite within the health system that's costing us not only in health care but also in justice and in other social departments. One needs to not only look at the money; we have to look at the moral cost that it brings to our society. Again, we are leaders in combatting crystal meth.

Now, another issue that His Honour brings as a challenge to this government, which is being addressed, is the issue of law enforcement. If we are to have a healthy and prosperous society, we also have to have a safe society, and I think, again, quite a well laid out plan is being put forth by His Honour in his Speech from the Throne.

Just to give you one example, a program that's being instituted by the Edmonton Police Service here in Edmonton, which perhaps the Member for Edmonton-McClung would have heard about, is a program that deals with issues of multiculturalism. We are the only police force right now in North America that has members of all visible minority groups – be it racial, be it gender preference, or

other minorities – who get together with officers at Edmonton police headquarters once a month and discuss issues of hate crime and resolve those issues together in a very consultative manner and educate our society. The results that they achieve are phenomenal. The percentage of hate crime in this city has dropped significantly ever since that task force was put together.

Another one is NET, Mr. Speaker, the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team, put together with the assistance of the Solicitor General of this province, putting one police officer together with a whole bunch of civilians and allowing civilians to take control of their own neighbourhood and basically chase crime away from their neighbourhood by patrolling neighbourhoods, by providing neighbours with Clubs to protect against car thefts.

Those are positive things that somehow do not penetrate across this aisle, and perhaps we ought to communicate them louder. Maybe the media is not doing a good job.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the Speech from the Throne. I'm very proud of the plan that has been laid out. I think that it's a plan that is second to none. I think it's a plan that makes this province yet again, this year, a leader in all realms of government. Is it perfect? No. That's why government continues to be needed. If you look for perfection, you will never find it because there is always room for improvement, but if you want to focus only on the negativities, you will never bring anything positive about. So I think we should continue on the positives. We should proliferate the positives and just only improve them and ignore the negative comments from across the aisle.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask our hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs whether the NET program is a provincial initiative. It's certainly an Edmonton city police initiative and has had some success in various neighbourhoods. I like the program very much. It's presently working in the Britannia Youngstown area of my riding. In what way was the province involved in that program?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Good question, Mr. Speaker, and I'd love to meet with the member after and explain it to him. In the instance of setting up the NET program in Edmonton-Castle Downs, I approached the Solicitor General and said that we need this program. Even though, indeed, the program is managed through the Edmonton Police Service, the Solicitor General, with the assistance of the Minister of Gaming, extended a grant allowing the program to move into that particular neighbourhood. That's usually how it is co-funded. Even though the program is administered by the Edmonton Police Service, the co-funding that comes for this program comes from the minister of lotteries, which allows them to put this program in place. If the member would like more information so he can set one up in his riding, I'd love to share that.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the Speech from the Throne.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and an honour to rise and honour both the Lieutenant Governor and his message, a message of hope and a message with wide-ranging ideas for all Albertans. After one year in this position my constituents continue to support me and also to challenge me and stimulate me to seek better ways to address the public interest. Many of the issues

that were raised by the Lieutenant Governor are dear to my heart, so I'll respond to some of these with some amplifications that I hope are appropriate and helpful in the House.

Let me talk about democratic response-ability in the sense of a hyphenated word with the emphasis on the ability of people to respond and to be responded to on issues affecting their lives. One of our greatest challenges is finding creative ways to engage citizens, especially young people, who must learn ways to participate and influence our future, indeed their future.

I have many young people in my constituency who are seeking hope, they're seeking trust in a system that doesn't seem to be responding to them in many ways in a society that doesn't seem to be responding to them in a constructive way, and they're looking for integrity in their representatives. They're remarkably aware of the difference between looking good and being good, of speaking and acting, of material success and true personal success. I'm very proud of our young people and their motivation for more humane and simple lifestyles, recognizing the frenetic pace that's killing so many of our fellow citizens.

8:40

My constituents are looking generally for more respectful, responsible leadership in the province, particularly in relation to cherished values, including fair social supports, particularly for those in disadvantaged positions; better environmental protection and enhancement of our environment; predictable educational investment that they can feel significantly supported in; and real health care reform.

A welcome sight to see in the message from the Lieutenant Governor was an emphasis on a land-use strategy. Indeed, this is the third time this decade that this process has been attempted, and clearly this must be the foundation for all else that happens in the province, yet it is so late in coming. It remains to be seen whether it will actually govern decisions rather than simply guide decisions to be easily overcome by vested interests in and out of government.

We must have three elements if this strategy is to be effective. First, it must have significant public involvement, including our municipalities. Any land-use planning without that is doomed to failure.

Second, it must have true integration in all the ministries. Five or six ministries are now involved in it, and that's appropriate. Any policies now need to be integrated well into those ministries such that they all understand the same rules, the same goals, and the same process.

Third, whatever we come to in terms of a land-use strategy must be enshrined in legislation, not guidelines. Without legislation it will continue to be undermined and manipulated.

Without these, Albertans will continue to be rightly cynical about the real intentions, especially after two previous attempts at a land-use strategy, in relation to taking control of our future and not leaving it to the industrial community and vested interests.

In relation to social supports my constituents are very concerned about the mismatch between the economic success of the province and the penury in which many of our disabled and disadvantaged people are living. They want to see more fairness, indeed generosity, from this government. How can we expect people with disabilities to live below the poverty line, to receive less than a 4 per cent increase over the past decade while we in privileged positions, indeed, set our own salaries? Now, if that isn't a conflict of interest, I don't know what is. We ourselves received 4.5 per cent just this year.

In relation to the democratic deficit I am struggling with many in the House to find ways to engage more people in discussion and

active involvement in our political process for healthier communities and for better public policy. How do we get more participation in our constituency work?

Well, there are a number of ways that have been discussed across the country and are being embraced in a number of different jurisdictions. They have to do with, in the first instance, a citizens' assembly, such as the one that was held in B.C., and it holds real promise for engaging people, thinking perhaps for the first time about what a responsible electoral process might look like and looking at the whole electoral process for ways in which it might be more responsive in the election of their representatives.

We've talked repeatedly in the House about all-party committees, and it's not clear to me what the fear of this might be. Most jurisdictions in democratic countries argue for an inclusive, participatory democratic process where all ideas are shared and debated openly. It can only benefit our democracy to have this.

Fixed election dates would also be progress in terms of moving us towards a more stable, less manipulated, important election time.

Whistle-blower legislation: clearly one that this government has resisted for years but would demonstrate a clear commitment to wanting dissent, seeking opportunities for honest dissent. Many are looking in both the academic community and in the public for signs that this government is willing and courageous enough to welcome whistle-blowers. The most recent events around the grizzly expert being demoted is just the most recent example of undermining the public confidence. The scientific community needs a voice in public policy, and it's not clear the extent to which they are receiving that. Obviously it's not the only contribution to public policy, but science and public values, constituent values, should be determining more effectively the public policy we embrace.

Fossil fuel use is obviously a big issue in the throne speech and is rightly highlighted. I think it's important to recognize the new thinking south of the border, where President Bush himself has indicated that we have to end our addiction to fossil fuels. How are we embracing that in Alberta? Or are we continuing to hide from the reality that fossil fuels are fossils, that they're a thing of the past, and that we need to move quickly away from fossil fuel use as a primary form of energy production in this province? Our young people know it. Even our old people know that it's time to make the break. Rich as we are, there is no reason why we can't extend our fossil fuel life well into the future and be leaders in renewables and energy efficiency in this province.

I know that the Environment minister has talked about this. I would like to see some investment, significant investment, incentives in these kinds of initiatives, and we have yet to see that in a significant way. This is a win-win-win for Albertans. It would give us an economic competitiveness, not paying the same prices for energy that others would be paying because we would be generating more of it with renewables. We would have reduced fossil fuel costs, we would have new technology and jobs, and we would contribute to the global climate change problem. We would be truly leaders on the planet.

Biofuels are an excellent addition, and these were identified in the throne speech. They will diversify our agriculture, and they will move us along toward some of the renewable energy sources we've talked about, but they need a fair, level playing field to compete with the fossil fuel industry, which has had ample, generous, some would say ignominious subsidies over the years. Especially now, we need to incent energy that is good for the environment. We do not need to give incentives for fossil fuels any longer.

Coal is not clean. There may be some experimental and scientific research that's showing how to burn it in a way that gasifies it and where some of the capturing of pollutants can be achieved. There is

still a tremendous amount of energy that goes into extracting coal and into transporting it, and it is not clear to me from the literature I've read that we are even within 10 years of having clean coal. So I have real concerns about this, as many Albertans do. It's another demonstration of addiction to a fuel that has to be partitioned closely and slowly as we phase out of it.

Ironically, in the face of tremendous commitment to fossil fuels, we are talking about a billion dollars in cancer prevention when fossil fuels are a major contributor to cancer in the country. How does one reconcile these two, except in an unhealthy way, to see that an emphasis on fossil fuels is going to definitely require much more investment in cancer treatment and cancer prevention? There's a mismatch there that I think is not lost on most Albertans.

I was very pleased to see a youth environment summit being discussed, and I look forward to that very much. I think our young people have a great interest and a great willingness to give ideas and get involved in a very substantive way in protecting our environment and developing new ways of approaching a more sustainable environmental practice.

8:50

How will we measure a clean environment? After 30 years it's still not clear that we even have the general progress indicators in mind, let alone significantly measuring these measures of sustainability. The Pembina Institute has given us a wonderful model from which we could examine a broad look at social, economic, environmental indicators that would give us a proper balance on whether or not we are developing a more sustainable society. I hope we can see some of those included in our annual reports in this Legislature before long.

The Water for Life strategy has been a great prototype, a great guide. It has been there for almost five years. What we need now is sufficient investment to establish commissions, to protect watersheds, to monitor industrial activity, to prosecute polluters, and to shift to best practice wherever we can. We continue to focus on the end, on water treatment, instead of on the prevention upstream, upslope and on the preservation and conservation of water. This clearly has to be a focus for this next decade, especially in southern Alberta.

Why do we not yet have all water wells registered in Alberta? With hundreds of thousands of oil and gas installations and hundreds of spills every year, when will we see a monitoring agency with teeth? Why aren't there prosecutions for all these spills? How many contaminated sites will go unreclaimed and, ultimately, be passed on to the public purse? These are concerns that many of my constituents raise because many of them are in the oil industry, and they also have concerns about their future.

I think it's important in thinking about prosperity for the long term to remember how many of our so-called investments are actually expenses, and they've been externalized costs as a result of environmental and human health costs. I'm thinking here again in terms of our extensive dependence on fossil fuels. If the energy industry was paying its share of health and environmental costs, we would see a much different playing field for renewables.

In relation to health care it's I think fair to say that the primary care networks have made a great contribution to health care in all of our jurisdictions. It's nice to see health practitioners working in teams. They can produce more efficient, more effective results than isolated practitioners who are not co-operating and working on the same agenda.

I need to remind this Assembly, perhaps not my colleagues but the Assembly, that economic competition does not improve the care of people. It never has. Money will not be an incentive for improving

the care of people. We need administrative efficiency. We need more investment in prevention. We need full investment in home care and physiotherapy to keep people as active and mobile as possible. We do not need private options that will reduce public quality and access.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: I'd like to ask the hon. member: does he feel that we need more administration in health care then? He didn't quite get to finish his point there. I'm concerned that it seems like we're already heavy with bureaucracy and not enough front-line service. Is that what you were intending? What did you mean?

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent question. It's not clear to me what has been the result of regionalization of our health system in Alberta. Has that meant less bureaucracy or more? Has that meant more efficient leadership? Has it meant more investment in the kinds of preventive and health promotion activities that would actually reduce the population demands on the health system? Already we're recognizing that over 70 per cent of what's coming into the health care system is preventable.

So, no, I don't think we need more bureaucracy. I don't think we need more administration. I'm asking: have we assessed the relative merits of the changes in regionalization and the present administrative relationships? Could we make them more efficient and more effective and streamlined?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his comments relative to the importance of youth and the role they play. It's often said that the greatest environmental victories of the future will be not what label we carry, be it as a Conservative or a Liberal or a Bloc or a Green or a New Democrat. It ultimately will be the victory we carry as people concerned about the health of ourselves. Taking care of the environment is also taking care of ourselves, and that carries no label because we're all involved.

But I pose a question. On numerous occasions you've made reference to Water for Life. You've made reference to the issue of investment. As much as this government in the past and the federal government of the past had a fiscal regime relative to attracting investment in this province for some of the fossil fuels you make reference to, I would ponder his thought relative to a fiscal regime for environmental initiatives of the future, speaking to that responsibility that companies and others might also have as we invest in these important points that he makes reference to.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an important question, how we incent in the right ways citizenry that is used to consuming. I think that one of the key indicators of whether we're moving towards more sustainable energy policy will be the degree to which we give incentives for people to consume less, to consume

smarter with less in the way of pollution and throwaways, and to consume, particularly, appliances and material goods that are much more efficient and much more beneficial in their level of pollution. In that sense Climate Change Central has conveniently put on their website every province in the country and all the incentives that each province has created for some of these changes in lifestyle that all of us need to make and that industry needs to make.

Alberta needs to do more relative to what other provinces are doing in incentives for citizens to do the right thing, to take the one-tonne challenge, for example, and to live in a different way that will demonstrate not only to our own society but to our children that we take seriously our commitment to living lighter on the Earth.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: No others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort on the throne speech.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered last week by the hon. Lieutenant Governor. Before commenting on the Speech from the Throne, I would like to recognize the outstanding job that the hon. Lieutenant Governor has done in the busy, exciting centennial year of Alberta. I also want to congratulate the government, our Premier, and our Minister of Community Development for putting together a great centennial celebration across our province.

Talking about the centennial, 2006 is the centennial year of our Legislative Assembly, the seat of our Alberta democracy. I want to thank the founding members of the Alberta Legislature and all the members during the last 100 years for keeping this legislative institution strong to serve the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to celebrating with you and all members of this Legislature the 100th anniversary of our democracy. Our democratic parliamentary system has over 800 years of proven tradition and experience. As long as Alberta follows this proven parliamentary system, we have no democracy deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly address the Assembly today on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Fort. In the past year I have had the opportunity to work with so many of my constituents. I'm proud to say that working together, we have made life in Calgary-Fort and elsewhere in Alberta better and better each day. Making life better is our commitment. Making a better life in our community and in our province is the government's goal.

There are several aspects of the throne speech that I would like to speak on today because they are of particular interest to my constituents and to myself. I will start by saying to the government of Alberta: thank you for a job well done. Indeed, our leader and our government members have done an excellent job in making Alberta the leader and a model in Canada. Where else in the world can we find a jurisdiction that's free of public debt, living within our means, having windfall surpluses and, yes, public issues that other jurisdictions only wish and dream to have? As a matter of fact, Alberta has the highest economic growth rate, the highest employment rate, the highest average income. Alberta is only the lowest in overall tax burden on its citizens in the country.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, to anyone who cries that Alberta's sky is falling or shouts that the glass is a quarter empty instead of three-quarters full or complains about living in Alberta or criticizes Alberta, I advise this person just to go out of the province for a while and look back. I also want to ask that person the question: why has Alberta the highest population growth? Yes, more Albertans may be indoor

bound during the long winter months, and we love each other lots more, but that's not enough to account for the tremendous growth in population. The true answer for Alberta's growth can be found in the 2,500-year-old saying of the great sage, Confucius: good land; birds nest. To that this not-so-wise Cao-fucius adds: good governance; people come. These growth statistics are very impressive, and they point us to the belief that our government is on the right track, and this second century belongs to Alberta.

To be a leader in this country in the long run we must use extreme caution with our surpluses because, as history has shown, our future can slip from under us before we know it. I'm so pleased to know that we categorically disburse the windfall surplus in three areas: namely, saving for the future, spending on priority items, and returning to Albertans to meet their rising costs of living.

This is why I am so enthusiastically supporting the announcement of the \$1 billion investment in the heritage savings fund, and a further investment will be tabled in Budget 2006. Today's windfall revenue comes only once, but with substantial investments into the heritage savings fund we will guarantee the future generations the benefit of today's economic prosperity. As a member of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee I welcome this addition to the fund on top of the inflation-proof amount and also suggest more savings in any form in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, our wealth is created by our people. To continue our road toward prosperity, we need to develop our people, our human resources. I'm very pleased to hear of the government's big investment in education, making its priority education and training to be accessible and affordable to Alberta's youth, who are our future. This requires investment to create space in our educational institutions and provide financial assistance to the learners. It also requires lots of innovative approaches in learning and teaching.

Our full-steam economy indicates that there's a shortage of workers, but I want to emphasize one point here, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want to ensure that our Alberta human resources development should first focus on the people who are already here before bringing in people from other places. I'm pleased to see that our government tackled this labour shortage by partnering with aboriginal groups and industry on our new training projects for aboriginal people. We need our aboriginal population to be of higher capacity and ability and to contribute as much as possible to our economy. I support any effort to encourage this participation.

Mr. Speaker, we also encourage people to move to this province, but we need to support them when they arrive here and to integrate them into our economy as quickly as possible. My point is that in order for our economy to continue to roll like it is, we need highly skilled and hardworking, ambitious people to move to our province, but when they get here, we also need to help these people to be productive with their ability and to work in their fields.

I also want to draw our government's attention to helping the people who have already emigrated here, our fellow Albertans. More encouraging is the government's expansion in immigrant settlement services and English as a Second Language training and a commitment to making it easier for foreign-trained professionals to work in Alberta because getting our skilled immigrants working in their field as quickly as possible is one of the fastest and most efficient ways to tackle our labour shortage.

Businesses in my constituency have expressed to me that not only do they need skilled workers, but they also need more unskilled or low-skilled workers in their operations as they cannot find these people in the local labour market. Our government should develop initiatives to bring in low-skilled workforces from outside Canada, working with the federal government to sustain our economic development. Mr. Speaker, making Albertans more productive,

more skilful and innovative will continue to ensure our leadership in the world's economic competition. It also raises our quality of life in Alberta.

I also support the upcoming comprehensive regulatory review our provincial government will undertake this year to identify and remove the unneeded red tape. To open successful small businesses takes an unbelievable amount of dedication and risk, and government red tape cannot stand in the way of these businesses' progress. It's as simple as that.

Now, the other important matter for my constituents is health care. Another aspect of the throne speech I would like to address is government's commitment toward improving our health care system. My constituents are pleased to hear that the government keeps on improving our public health care system through innovative ways. Our current spending on health care is huge, over 30 per cent of Alberta's total budget and rising. To me, this is solid proof that our publicly covered health care system is the highest priority in our government.

My constituents and other Albertans are assured of this publicly paid system and services available to them when they need it. But to be better, we need to do more with the same spending. Let's just say that we sustain our public health care spending at the level, say, of \$9 billion. If we cannot make this spending amount more effective – that is, get more results from the same amount – then any additional spending should be more effective and innovative. That's what I mean. It's more bang for the buck, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, there's always room for improvement, and I'm very pleased to see the drive for continuous and evergreen improvement in our health care system. The government also intends to improve the quality of health care services to Albertans, and any successfully delivery model utilizes the teamwork spirit of professionals together to provide this excellent care. An example is the Alberta hip and knee replacement project, that has successfully reduced waiting time from 35 weeks to six weeks, and so on. This is a tremendous achievement.

On the preventive side prevention in health care is very, very important. I'm very pleased to know that our government shows vision in this area by investing in cancer prevention and treatment research. Cancer is a leading cause of death in Alberta. We know that. I have heard some experts say that Alberta has the ability and the capacity to lead the world in this field, and now we have the will and determination, and the government sets it in motion.

Mr. Speaker, on another, more personal level before I conclude, I would like to share with the Assembly and my colleagues what I call the four-E principle for government operation: that is, to be ethical, economical, efficient, and effective. Why do we need this four-E principle? Because Alberta is a wealthy province. Alberta has no problem in revenue, but the issues are in spending, the problems and issues that other jurisdictions wish to have. For a population of just over 3 million people last year's public operating budget was around \$25 billion, and our capital spending was in the tens of billions.

This is just like in a family. When we have ample money, if we're not careful, we can easily spend on things that we do not need, or we buy things, and we don't even look at the price tags. There are many stories of individuals who won a huge windfall of lottery, but in a short time all is gone, all is spent. So just imagine if Alberta could and should gain only 1 per cent in economical and effective spending of our \$25 billion, that would free up \$250 million to invest in other needs or to save for the future. I don't want to lose the big picture here, but, Mr. Speaker, I can buy a pen at \$2, \$5, or \$20, but the function is to write. So small things can add up very quickly.

9:10

Mr. Speaker, on the macro perspective my constituents are concerned with the fact that our public spending has been growing faster than our population growth rate, our economic growth rate, and our demographic changes, so I want to conclude by suggesting the government focus on the spending priority. As being ethical in spending is a must already, governments should also create a drive for being economical, efficient, effective in spending our valuable and huge public dollars.

With all of what I've said above, we should not forget that another purpose of public spending is to assist in or stimulate the quality of life in Alberta. In this area I would like the government to continue effective programs to help vulnerable fellow Albertans: seniors, children, people with disabilities. I also would like to see the government continuing investment in programs that develop our community spirit, our cultural and recreation activities because these are what make Alberta the best place to live, to attract people, to develop our economy further and higher.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to compliment the member on his excitement and the enthusiasm that he always shows to the House here. I have to ask the question. The members of the government continually bring up that we're the lowest taxed area in the country. I wonder if, in fact, he's one of those who felt that they needed to criticize our women's hockey team for excelling and reaching their full potential. My question is that after we've educated them we've lost many of our best that have left our country to places of lower taxation. Do we ever consider that maybe we need to lower our taxes to bring those that have gone to other jurisdictions back home? It's not about what we're doing here in Canada but on the world level and the fact that we have to compete with other countries. Does the member consider that in his thoughts?

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, for your compliment of my speech. I thank you for that.

Also, I want to agree with you that, yes, we need to compete with the whole global economy, and we need to have our taxes not just the lowest in Canada but over the world. To attract people to come to Alberta, sometimes we need to tell people not just to look at your income tax but your other taxes netted up, and you see your net income would be better if you stay in Alberta. I know it for a fact. My relatives live in California, earning much more, but their taxes on spending or other taxes gobble a lot of things there. The cost of living is higher too. So that's a very good point.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a pleasure to speak and reply to the Speech from the Throne. I missed the last time because of a curling accident, so I missed all the debate last time. This is the first time I've had to reply to the Speech from the Throne in probably – I can't even think back that far – 13 or 14 years, so I'll take my opportunity to do that.

An Hon. Member: We're keeping track.

Mr. Martin: Yeah, you're keeping track. The hon. member used to live to hear me all the time, and I don't want to disappoint him tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to talk just briefly about the riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. As do all city ridings, it ranges across a wide range of types of people. What I want to say is that in this particular riding, ranging from Beverly and Abbotsfield up over as far as Delwood, we have a lot of groups. You know, people get lost in the city. Both our major centres, Edmonton and Calgary, are growing larger, and without some focus and some groups that help in the city, the cities would be very hard to live in. We are fortunate in the riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to have a number of groups at work, the community groups that we all have. They do excellent work. Without community groups, I think, to make it almost like a small town, it would be very difficult for the city of Edmonton and, I would say, the city of Calgary to operate in a very efficient way. But we're fortunate in the northeastern part of the city and in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to have a number of groups that really provide some first-rate service for people. Again, I don't know what we would do without the work that these people do.

We all had the medallions that we could hand out; I believe 30 medallions for each of the MLAs. Rather than pick individuals, what I tried to do was pick groups because it's very hard to pick 30 individuals. We tried to pick groups and organizations that provide useful community service to people, and it was well received. I just want to list some of the places where the medallions were handed out because it's not only in my riding; they go into other areas of Edmonton: region 6 children's services, Candora Society, Wecan, Emmanuel Home, KARA, Belvedere Community League, Partners For Youth, ABC Head Start, Abbotsfield Seniors Stop In Centre, Bosco Homes, Delwood Community League, South Clareview Community League, Goodwill Industries, ACT Aquatic & Rec Centre, the Northeast Teen Centre, DECSA, Clareview Head Start, Active Claims, and then we had the people – and I won't mention the names necessarily – that deal with people with WCB, which is tough in itself, Planned Parenthood, Balwin Community League, Chrysalis, Boys' & Girls' Clubs.

All these provide a type of service, and if they didn't do it, a lot of these services would come back on government. I for one wanted to show some recognition. I'm sure all members would agree that it is important to recognize these people that do very difficult work. They don't often do it for the money – that's for sure – because they're vastly underpaid, generally, the people that work in these organizations. They provide a very important service, and I just want to take the opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to recognize them again in the Assembly.

Now I will move to the Speech from the Throne. It may not surprise you, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to be less complimentary than some of the previous speakers. I watched the Premier's TV address, and then the following day we got the Speech from the Throne, delivered very well and very ably by our new Lieutenant Governor. You know, if we were looking for sort of the direction we want to go and were looking for substance, we didn't see it. I watched the TV address, and it was so complimentary and self-congratulatory that I would have thought the Premier would have worn out his arm slapping himself on the back. The point is that the rhetoric becomes over the top.

You know, I used to tease people opposite because everything was always the best here. We're the best in everything. They'd say the best in Canada, and then it was the best in North America. And I'd have to yell: we're the best in the world, the best in the universe. It's all right to be proud. It's all right to be proud of our province, and

so we should be, Mr. Speaker, but to sort of have this self-congratulation over the top serves nobody well. In fact, it gets downright embarrassing after a point. We think everything is perfect here, that there are no problems, that it's the most perfect society that was ever brought on God's green Earth just because we happen to live here in Alberta and we have oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, I think that adds to sort of the first general theme I want to talk about, and it's ethics and accountability. The last federal election was fought on ethics, and Stephen Harper did a very good job during that election campaign nailing the federal Liberals on ethics. I won't go into what he has done after, but during the election campaign it was a very effective campaign. He talked about the culture of entitlement, and he went after the public inquiry there with Gomery. Of course, we should be outraged about that. When I heard the Premier say in the House the other day that, oh, he would be hanged or he'd be kicked out, well, we'd never even come close to ever having an inquiry. We'd never do it in this province.

9:20

So that's the reality. It's not that things don't happen here. To say that this is such a perfect, ethical government is just absolutely ridiculous, and people know that. The only reason we know it with the federal government is because we had the Auditor General that dug it out. There are serious ethical problems here, and I just talk about ethics in a broad sense, just what we've seen dealing with health care. We did not debate this during the provincial election. In fact, the premier said: we will not talk about it, and if I ever was going to do anything in health care, I would consult the people. Well, we saw what consultation is: we put out a little book and a website to get beyond the leadership convention of the provincial Conservatives.

Now, I say that that has to do with ethics. It has to do with why there's so much cynicism in politics today, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier had run, laid out what he planned to do a year later and said that this is a mandate, then he would have the mandate. I may not agree with it, and probably we'd still fight it in the Legislature as an opposition, but at least he would have a legitimate reason for going ahead. We wonder why people are cynical. Here it is; I guess it's a legacy of one of the people that helped destroy a medicare system that we're very proud of in Canada. That's a legacy that we want?

What's so frustrating about it is that the Premier is not accountable to anybody. He's not running again, and clearly the provincial Conservatives aren't going to do anything about it. So we're going to be in this debate, Mr. Speaker, about health care and privatization and doctors operating in two systems and private health care and the rest of it. Where was that in the Speech from the Throne? Where was that in terms of the TV debate? I say to you that ethics in government: you tell people what you're going to do, and you try to follow through with it. Then we wonder why, as I say, people are cynical.

Mr. Harper talked about the culture of entitlement. Well, that was true, frankly, and I think that even some people out here would agree that with the federal Liberals, when people are in power too long, maybe that happens. But there certainly is this culture of entitlement here and this idea that if you disagree with the government, somehow you're un-Albertan. Mr. Speaker, I say to you that this is frightening to me as a parliamentarian. I want to say to you that I've sat in the House before with Conservative governments, and it's much worse now than it used to be with Premiers Lougheed and Getty. Sure, you'd have the debate, but it wasn't nearly the situation that it is now, and I speak from generations of having been in this House before.

The Conservatives here should take a look at what happened back

in those days. This culture of entitlement is there, this arrogance that somehow you're going to be here with absolute power forever. I would remind the government that last election the 21 of us over here had more votes than all of you over there. To think that you speak for all Albertans is insulting. It's not the case. I say to you that you may think that you're invulnerable, some of you people that have never lost or seen any other governments. Mr. Speaker, that's an attitude that will come back to haunt you. Just ask the federal Liberals.

I say to you that this whole idea of the democratic deficit – my God, what we elect here are four-year dictatorships. Our House doesn't work. We complained about what was happening federally, but at least they have a Public Accounts that meets outside the House. They have a Public Accounts that can bring people in and do the job. Even Member of Parliament Mr. Williams sort of laughs at the one we have here, a lapdog. In fairness to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, I understand that he's going to bring in a bill to try and make this a better situation in terms of our budget. It's ridiculous. We spent \$7 billion in November, you know, just with two or three or four days' debate.

What really makes me angry about it is that we refuse to look, as other provinces are doing, at a different system rather than the first past the post. Other provinces are looking and, I expect, the federal government will look at perhaps automatic four-year dates for elections, proportional rep, and other things. But do you know why they don't want to look at it? Precisely because they'd have less votes. They have 61 seats. They don't care about democracy, Mr. Speaker. They don't care about democracy because the system works well for them, but I'll tell you that it doesn't work well for all Albertans, and you see more and more people complaining about it.

So I'd just suggest that there are a lot of areas. When you say that everything is perfect, Mr. Speaker, well, there are a whole bunch of vulnerable people out there that don't think everything is perfect. We talk about the people with developmental disabilities. We've had that debate. We talk about seniors and long-term care. The money that they gave out last time: most people know that that's not going to begin to solve the problems. We have a class action lawsuit that was brought against this government and won. We have AISH people still with no indexation. We can index our own salaries, but we don't index for them, the poorest people in society. Ask them what they think about Alberta right now and their opportunities. Not everybody lives in downtown Calgary, where there's a lot of money being made. There are still a lot of people falling behind in the Alberta advantage.

We have the worst labour laws in the country for working people, absolutely no doubt about that. We saw what happens in Brooks if we don't begin to deal with some fairness. We wonder why there's a labour shortage. Well, people want decent labour laws. They want to have some respect in the labour place.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. I just want to go to education, public education. Now we're going to have a round-table. We can't make a decision about the remaining items on the Learning Commission. We know that certain things work in the high-needs area. We don't need to start throughout the province with junior kindergarten and kindergarten: it's absolutely crucial for high-needs kids. Absolutely crucial, and we're sitting there. Where is the Alberta advantage for them?

Now we're going to have a round-table. We're worried about high school completion rates. Rightfully so, Mr. Speaker. We're worried about that. What do we do? We set up a round-table. In Edmonton public, for example, we look at what's happened. We used to have 99 counsellors in 1991. That's down to 43.8. Learning resources, librarians, those sorts of people: from 81 to 12. That tells

you some of the reasons. If we don't deal with the kids, as I say, at the junior kindergarten/kindergarten level, those rates are going to stay high because those kids will not have a chance. We know that if they're behind one year in reading by the time they hit grade 9, they're not going to complete their final years. We know those things. We don't need a round-table. We should get on with it.

I realize that I'm running out of time. That's, I think, an appropriate place to end my thoughts. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and put some thoughts on the record about the throne speech and its anticipated effect on the people who live in Edmonton-Centre. One of the things that is an offshoot of this, I'm hoping, is that I represent the constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and I'd like to see the name Edmonton reclaimed. I remember being told by one of the government members who is no longer elected that the reason that everybody was calling it the capital region was that the governing party had not been successful in getting very many people elected in Edmonton, and they needed to have some kind of a showing and wanted to be at the table, so they just lumped everything around Edmonton and were able to call it the capital region. It brought in Sherwood Park and Spruce Grove and Stony Plain and a number of other ones, and in that way they were able to get a number of their MLAs at the table. But now the name has stuck, and as a native Edmontonian I'm seeing the name "Edmonton" disappear, and I'd like to see that reclaimed from the capital region. It's somewhat reminiscent to me of having Edmonton Tel and AGT, and then that morphed into Telus, and then Telus moved away. So there was a resource that we'd invested in and took a certain amount of local pride in, I think, and now it's totally distanced from us. Frankly, I think they broke a deal, but that's aside from what we're talking about with the throne speech today.

9:30

I still see a bias for Calgary in this government, and I hope that that's going to be addressed. You know, I noticed that this year the Great Kids awards are in Edmonton, but I'm struggling to remember the last time that it was. I was expecting it to sort of go back and forth, and it didn't seem to do that. The first couple of ones were in Calgary. I was waiting for it to move to Edmonton, and I noted they were in Calgary.

Something else I noticed was the Alberta centennial money that paid for the cowboys to descend upon the New York Stock Exchange, a big promotion for Calgary and paid for out of the Alberta centennial budget. Not one mention of the rest of Edmonton. Not one mention of the capital city of this province, which is Edmonton. Very interesting because that was supposed to be promoting the whole province, but it wasn't. It promoted Calgary, and that was Alberta centennial money that paid for that. I remember seeing the banner behind the shot that they had of them inside the New York Stock Exchange.

I always notice the government's announcements. The very good announcements and the very bad announcements all happen in Calgary. If they're going to announce that they paid off the cash debt, not the infrastructure debt, not the social debt but the cash debt, they do that in Calgary. Or if it's an announcement that they don't want people to pay very much attention to, then that happens in Calgary, but the rest of the time they can manage to do it in Edmonton.

I'm just hoping we'll see a bit more reclaiming of the name of Edmonton but also the important position I think this city holds in the province. It is the capital city. It is where the Legislature is. I'm proud to have the Legislature in my riding of Edmonton-Centre. I know I take a lot of teasing – and I deserve it – because every time I'm introduced in a committee or at some function of the government, I'm very proud to welcome everyone to my constituency of Edmonton-Centre when they're visiting the Legislative Assembly.

When I look at my riding, I am so blessed to have a constituency whose constituents are so very diverse. I truly treasure that, and I am so pleased to be able to continue to represent the people that live in this area. It is a very dynamic constituency. In between any given election 50 per cent of my constituents will have moved away, so when I go door-knocking, the chances are pretty good that I'm pretty much starting over every time. It's getting a bit more stable now as we have more people buying lofts and condominiums, and there's a bit of a shift to more of a sort of urban/metro mentality in downtown Edmonton, but it is very wide-ranging. This is, I've been told repeatedly, the most economically diverse riding in the province. We really go from the homeless guys that are living underneath the bridge behind my office to the million-dollar-plus apartments that are along the top of Victoria Golf Course there on Victoria drive and everything in between.

I have a lot of older housing stock, and with the older housing stock are lower rents, quite frankly. So we have a lot of people here that are really watching their pennies, a lot of students attending the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan, NorQuest, Alberta College, NAIT, just about any postsecondary institution you can think of in Edmonton, and they're likely to be living in the downtown area. Lots of seniors are living there, artists, new Canadians, and immigrants newly arrived to the country. We have a really diverse community. I'm looking through the throne speech and thinking: "Okay. How does this affect the people that live in my riding?" Let's start with the seniors.

Long-term care is a big issue. The government is certainly well aware of it, but I don't think any of the seniors that live in my constituency are going to be very happy with the glacial movement on long-term care and strengthening long-term care. If anything, what I'm seeing is a move for the government to divest itself of responsibility and funding in long-term care as they reclassify a number of long-term care facilities to assisted or supported living, which doesn't have a medical component to it, so it doesn't get the same kind of funding from the government, if at all, and not the same kind of legislative overlay or standards for it, and standards is one of the things that we were most aware was lacking from this government. It's certainly an area the government needs to continue to work hard on because it has not come up to the mark on that one at all.

One of the issues that's been raised by my constituents in a number of different sources, both from home-care providers, those that are representing organizations that hire home-care workers and contract with the government, and also from individuals who are under self-managed care programs who hire home-care workers on their own to organize that – the availability of home-care workers is at a crisis state. We just can't get them. We don't pay enough to home-care workers. People are not willing to do it.

The most recent thing that came across my desk was the price of gasoline to put in their cars to drive from place to place. Nobody is increasing a home-care worker's wages to cope with the increasing cost of the gasoline, and they're just looking for other jobs and moving to other sectors. When you've got a hot economy like we've got, they can find another job, and off they go.

So we're saying, "Don't worry; we're going to look after you" to

a number of the vulnerable in our society, but then we actually haven't made sure that we've got the systems in place to in fact look after people, and when we can't get workers who are willing to be home-care workers, I think our systems really start to fail the vulnerable.

We on the Liberal side do have Bill 205, which is coming forward later, sponsored by our critic for seniors, the Member for Lethbridge-East, which is in fact proposing standards for long-term care and additional framework to allow for an ombudsperson or someone to whom complaints could be directed and would be investigated. So I'm hoping that the government, if they're not able to follow through on their own promises for home care, can support the Liberal bill that's coming forward.

I have a large gay and lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual community that lives in Edmonton-Centre. I'm very proud of them. The feedback I've had from them on the throne speech is that they were pleased to see that the government did not go forward on any kind of action around changing the marriage commissioner requirements. They're pleased to be going on with their life and with their families and are glad to have the recognition that they now have federally for their marriages and are pleased to see that the province has stayed out of it.

The students that I talked about earlier are not getting any certainty around tuition increases, certainly not whether it's going to drop but how much it's going to increase, and I'm countering that against the Liberal idea of looking at providing 16 years of public education. I mean, it's very hard to get a good job now without a minimum of an undergraduate degree. So if that's the status, then why aren't we looking at supporting education to that level? I challenge the government to start looking at that.

I have a couple of organizations and agencies in my constituency which are experiencing some change, and I thank the government for their support of them, and that would be the new YMCA downtown. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has been a long-time supporter and I know was really pitching strikes for them in the cabinet, so I thank him for his support of that project. I think it's very important to the people that live in the downtown centre but also beyond that, and the YM has worked with the communities to try and address some of the concerns that have been raised about access and location and things like that.

9:40

Also, the Edmonton Art Gallery, now the Alberta Art Gallery. Once again we lost the name of Edmonton, but we'll give it up for the sake of Alberta. Again, I thank the government for finally coming through with some additional funding to help us get a wonderful new art gallery. It is an art gallery for all of Alberta, and it does house the Alberta collection of art, so thank you for that. I'm proud to have both of those in my constituency, and I thank the government for recognizing how important they are to their communities.

A number of people, a lot of people actually, in my constituency are on AISH, particularly with mental health issues. They tend to cluster downtown because of the cheaper housing stock but also the access to various social agencies that assist them. They have experienced a great deal of uncertainty and some very hard times. I know they're glad to see the increase that has been offered by the government, moving them up to I think it's \$1,000 now, but there still continues to be uncertainty about whether they will be subjected to asset testing, whether that level would be raised. They continue to point out how difficult it is to try and live with a disability. That's why they're on AISH, Mr. Speaker. You know, that's why they qualify for that program. They have certain needs and requirements and are not able to function in a Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 working environment.

They qualify for this money, but, boy, is it tough to be an able-bodied person out there living on a thousand bucks a month, never mind somebody that has some other disability that is a barrier to them. That's really hard. I think that keeping them in constant poverty is not the most positive thing we could be doing with the vulnerable in our society. I continue to urge the government to recognize the immense contribution that they make through their volunteer hours but also as members of our community and to try and support that.

I was very pleased to be appointed by the minister of infrastructure to the new design committee around the Legislature Grounds. I'm looking forward to working with that committee. I've got some great and exciting ideas on incorporating designs for winter cities, the importance of connecting to the surrounding community, including particularly Rosedale, looking at environmental design, safety through design, and public places as gathering spaces. I'd love to see a public art policy, with 1 per cent of the budget going to public art. Just think of all the sculpture and neat stuff we could have if we incorporated something like that and also to be able to maintain as many of our heritage buildings as possible.

The last thing that was mentioned to me about that was: could there please be some bike lock-ups worked into that? I thought: "Well, yes, that's true. We could, and that would certainly be working with an overall support for public transit." Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:45 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]