

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, February 24, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/02/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that I would like to table. It's signed by 218 Albertans, and they are requesting:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 542 people from Lethbridge, Coaldale, Taber, Barnwell, Daysland, Nanton, Canmore, and High River. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by several hundred Albertans. The petition reads as follows:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to file a petition on behalf of 581 residents of southern Alberta from Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Coaldale, Hillcrest, Blairmore, Bellevue, Cardston, Pincher Creek, and Taber asking the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care" and undermining the public health care system. This brings the total today to 1,385 submissions.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to the support of public health care that I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday in support of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request the reading and receiving of the petition that I presented yesterday in the Legislature.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and it's fitting just before the new budget that as chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I do hereby submit five copies of the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Third Session of the 24th Legislature.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of my responses to written questions 197, 198, 204, 211 through 217, 237 and motions for returns 200 through 203.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the triennial report on the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. It's titled Progression and Excellence. It highlights the work of the HFMR and its substantial achievements over the last three years. It's my sincere hope that in just a few years we will have another report like this to be tabled from the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is from Ann Lockwood from Vermilion, who has sent a letter to all the Premiers across Canada requesting their help in stopping this Premier from privatizing our health care system.

The second is a report from New Zealand that indicates that the doctors want long waiting lists, that in fact what happens when you have private and public systems working side by side is that the public system ends up with longer waiting lists.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two sets of tablings. The first is a series of six letters from residents of Northern Alberta and Edmonton who have sent a letter to the Premier requesting him to protect the Little Smoky area in the northern part of the province.

The second set of tablings are letters from 10 Albertans who live in the Kananaskis area who are opposed to the Genesis land development there and make reference to a petition signed by 750 people in this province who would like the government to legally protect the entire Kananaskis County.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to file six copies of a letter that our Premier has written to the Prime Minister of Canada today voicing our concern about the fact that the Liberals in Ottawa are not treating farmers equitably across Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings

today. The first one is a leaflet that's put out by the Friends of Medicare, and it states: Say No to Private, For-profit Hospitals.

The second tabling today, on budget day, Mr. Speaker, is an interesting, exhaustive article that appeared in the *Construction Canada* magazine in July of last year. It's called Pine Shakes: The Whole Rottin' Story.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table five copies of a presentation recently made to the standing committee on health and safe communities by the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. They recommended that the government consider the staffing issues relative to the privatization of health care and in hand shared statistics about the increase in safety concerns being reported by registered nurses in the province over the course of the last year.

Thank you.

1:40

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of letters from Dr. Lue Russell, Gayle Lancaster, Madeleine Sabourin, and the Hansons expressing concerns with PDD funding in the province of Alberta.

The second are the appropriate number of copies of letters from Allan Bell, Paul Dornian, Richard Mercer, and Quenten Doolittle asking for more government support for the arts in Alberta.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three really special people I would like to introduce through you to the Assembly today. The first is a lady that runs my office here in this building. She's worked here for many years, over 10, 12 years, and I found out the other day she had never been introduced in this Assembly. She runs my office with an iron fist. Commonly referred to as "she who must be obeyed," I'd like to introduce Loretta Fontana.

Seated next to her is a young man that's come up from my constituency for today's budget. In addition to being my summer student since he started university four years ago – he's in fourth year poli-sci at the U of C now – he also works in my Airdrie office during the week on a part-time regular basis. We could not function without all of the assistance that we get from him, Mr. Jason Ennis.

The last person, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to introduce is my caucus director, who has been working with me since last June, when I got the job as government caucus Whip, and that's Mr. Joel Palmer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mr. Rob South, who is president of the students' union at the University of Calgary as well as acting chairman of the Council of Alberta University Students. The Minister of Gaming and I had the privilege of meeting with Rob at noon today, and we know he is here to listen with great interest to the budget. Rob is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you and to members of the Assembly Mr. Tom Ferguson from the town of Pincher Creek. Tom operates a very successful farm just outside of Pincher Creek, and in addition to those duties he had a distinguished service in public service as councillor and reeve of the MD of Pincher Creek, No. 9, for 20 some odd years, I believe. In addition to that he's also served on many community committees, particularly being very effective in his work with seniors on the Crest View lodge program in Pincher Creek. He's now continuing his public service, just being appointed as a member at large for southern Alberta on Mr. Treasurer's Alberta Tax Review Committee. He's here today for the budget debate, and I'd ask Tom, seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: M. le Président, je veux vous présenter aux membres de l'Assemblée législative Mme Corinne Sangret et ses deux filles, Caroline et Rachelle Sangret, qui sont la famille de notre députée d'Edmonton-Norwood, Sue Olsen. Je demande aux membres de l'Assemblée de leur accorder le bon accueil de notre Assemblée.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mme Sangret and her two daughters, Rachelle and Caroline, who are the nieces of our Member for Edmonton-Norwood, Sue Olsen. I'd like to welcome them to our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ray Reckseidler. He's the mayor of the village of Delburne, and he's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask Ray to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three separate introductions to make to you and through you to the members of this Assembly today. First, it's my pleasure to introduce Mimi Williams and Shannon Phillips. Both of them are graduate students in the department of political science at the University of Alberta. Mimi Williams is one of the seven contestants for the Edmonton-Highlands nomination. I'll ask them to rise and please stay standing.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is of Ken Nixon, a senior whom I've come to respect over the years for his continued involvement in matters of public policy and social activism. He's also in the public gallery.

The last two are Mary Heacock and Malcolm Smith, who are here on this very important day to witness Alberta democracy at work.

I would ask all of them to rise and ask my colleagues to give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Legislature three court reporters who have recently been advised they will be replaced by digital tape recorders in the courtroom. Would Brenda Fusco, Nelia Stephens, and Carol Hnidan please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a student of the University of Alberta who is a very astute observer of the political process. Her name is Michelle Mungall. She is in the members' gallery, and she's accompanied by her grandmother, who looks anything but grandmother age, Vivian Mungall. I'd like to introduce both of them and ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three guests that are in, I believe, the members' gallery. The first couple I'd like to introduce are Mr. and Mrs. Achilles, who are very active in terms of observing politics and being involved in important social issues, particularly the protection of universally accessible, comprehensive health care. I would ask them to rise and be welcomed by this Assembly.

Also in the gallery today is Mr. Con Duemler, who is a well-known Edmonton seniors' advocate and assistant to many of Alberta's seniors in terms of preparing taxes. I know he's well known to the former Minister of Community Development for some of his interventions. I'd ask Con to rise as well and be welcomed by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce some of the participants in a rally that's being held on a daily basis on the steps of the Legislative Assembly. They are members of the group Citizens Opposed to the Legalization of Private, For-profit Hospitals. I would like to welcome them to the proceedings in the Assembly. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. They're on both sides, I think.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like elected officials and senior public servants the people of Alberta need the best information possible to make the best decisions. Albertans are being asked by this government to jeopardize our public health care system and endorse this government's plan to undermine medicare. I can think of no more important issue on which the citizens of our province require complete and timely information or, in short, on which they deserve the truth. My first question is to the Premier. Will the Premier reveal the 30 missing pages of the private hospital information for the citizens of Alberta, and if not, why not?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I understand that that was a FOIP request. There is a procedure. Relative to appeal, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition feels that she's not getting the information, then she can appeal the decision. I understand that a lot of the information that was excluded was information as it pertained to participants in focus groups, who were promised anonymity on the basis of their participation.

Relative to her other comment about undermining medicare, Mr.

Speaker, I would ask this hon. member if she agrees with Alberta's commitment to publicly funded health care and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Does she believe in that? Does she believe in legislation that will ban private hospitals? Does she believe – and obviously she does because she okayed a whole bunch of private surgical clinics, so obviously she believes in it – in legislation that will bring surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. It will give health authorities one more option for delivering services.

Does she believe in this principle? Facilities will not be able to charge patients for medically necessary services. Does she believe in the principle that queue jumping will be illegal, that you can't jump the queue by paying more?

Mr. Speaker, I would think she would believe in all those principles. We do. That's not undermining health care. It's the right thing to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier now telling the taxpayers of this province that they can't see the information they paid for?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are procedures under FOIP. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition knows that there are some items that by law and by the very nature of the FOIP legislation are excluded. If the hon. member wants that information, she can appeal to the Privacy Commissioner. That's the process.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier used tax dollars to pay for his propaganda research and he won't let the taxpayers see that research, will he at least tell Albertans how much it cost them to be kept in the dark?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I hardly think the use of citizens from a broad spectrum of Alberta society is a propaganda exercise. Now, what is a propaganda exercise is the malicious campaign of misinformation supported by taxpayers' dollars and being launched by the Liberal Party.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his special backers want private hospitals. The health minister wants to cover up the private hospital research, and now the truth squad commander says that private hospital information should be released, but the Premier just ducks and spins. So just who is in charge of the private hospitals policy over there? Is it the Premier, the minister of health, the truth squad commander? Just who is it that's calling the shots?

MR. KLEIN: Well, interestingly enough we had a good discussion on this issue today at caucus, Mr. Speaker, and it was unanimous that all 64 of us are responsible for this legislation, and we're all behind it.

MRS. MacBETH: Okay. So now we know that the Premier said that he's in charge. Will he make sure that his name is on the bill when it comes forward in this Assembly?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, she is not listening. The Premier is not all 64 members of this caucus. This bill is the responsibility of the caucus collectively, and we speak with one voice on this legislation, because it is the right thing to do.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Has his position now changed so that he now supports the continued cover-up of the private hospitals documents?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, there has never been any cover-up of any kind. That's number one. But I'll tell you what there has been. There's been a very pointed attack to obscure the truth and to misrepresent some of the truth by some members over there, and that's the fact.

Now, the other thing I'll just comment on is that I said yesterday – and I'll say it again here so everybody hears it, including members of the media – was that I would support the release of whatever information is able to be released under the rules. If you listen to the whole clip, you'll understand that, and if you'd like it in another language, I'd be happy to provide it in any one of five.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rod Love

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, that was too good. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of the spin doctors the Premier's old friend Ralph Love is – Rod Love, rather. Sorry. That was a Freudian slip. Rod Love. His old friend Rod Love is back in the news, and lately he's been spending his time rooting out Communists in, of all places, Canmore, Alberta. So can the Premier tell the people of this province exactly what is the role of the health communications consultant to the Calgary regional health authority, Rod Love, in brokering his private hospitals policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what Mr. Love's role is. I know he consults with the Calgary regional health authority on communications matters, but Rod Love is no longer part of my staff, is no longer part of my government, and I can't speak for what he's says or what he doesn't say.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier share the position of his former aide that the people who stand for the public interests of a town council like Canmore are Communists?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't share the view.

THE SPEAKER: The interim leader of the third party.

Health Resource Group Inc.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has been recognized.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago Health Resource Group of Calgary lobbied the New Democrat caucus to seek our support for their attempts to open Alberta's first private, for-profit hospital. We told them an emphatic no and ended up getting sued for our position. HRG aggressively lobbied the Premier and the rest of his Calgary caucus, and before you can say two-tier health care, the government decided to come up with legislation giving HRG what they want. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, did the government bow to HRG's aggressive lobbying because it lacks the courage to say no to those at HRG who have close personal connections to members of the government?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is false, it is malicious for this hon. member to say that members of HRG aggressively lobbied me. I don't know the situation relative to other members of my caucus. The only lobbying that I know did take place was the lobbying of the two ND members, and I'm very happy that the hon. member at least admits that. But to say that I was lobbied by HRG is wrong, it is false, and I would ask that he apologize.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did the Premier bow to HRG's aggressive lobbying because he was afraid of being sued by HRG and their private shareholders for saying no?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't bowed to anything because I haven't been excessively lobbied. I have not been lobbied on this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation that will be introduced very shortly in this House is called the health protection act. It's legislation that is being brought about so that the minister will have some control over private surgery clinics. Right now there is no legislation to control these clinics. Everything that we want to do we want to do within the parameters of the Canada Health Act, to uphold and adhere completely to all the principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government can't say no to aggressive lobbying by a wanna-be private, for-profit hospital now, why would Albertans think this government will say no when private, for-profit hospitals aggressively lobby to award them juicy contracts for hip replacements?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again there's some assumptions there that are false, at least as they pertain to me. I have not been lobbied, excessively lobbied or lobbied in any way shape or form, relative to HRG. Yes, I'm familiar with the operation of the hospital insofar as they provide services, as I understand it, for WCB and some private insurance companies and uninsured services.

But this legislation is much, much, much broader than HRG. This legislation speaks to banning private hospitals. It speaks to bringing surgical facilities under the control of the public health system. It will give health authorities under very, very strict conditions one more option for delivering services under very strict conditions and under all the guidelines of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. It will absolutely prohibit facilities from charging patients for medically necessary services. The legislation will outlaw queue jumping. It will outlaw this notion that people can pay more to get faster service.

Mr. Speaker, I would think that even this hon. member will support the legislation once he sees it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Genesis Land Developers Corp.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Environment. Many constituents are raising numerous concerns about the proposed Genesis project up in Kananaskis Country. What they would like to know is why such a project in a very environmentally sensitive area like Spray Lakes is being allowed to go through a review process.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that this government will never allow development that threatens an area's environ-

mental integrity or wilderness character. The overriding principle in Kananaskis Country is the protection of the environment.

Now, as people are aware, in the past when developments have sought approval, there has been a very stringent environmental review and plenty of opportunity for public input. Mr. Speaker, as we are here at this very moment, we are gathering Albertans' views about development in the Spray Valley, information that will play a very vital role in the environmental review in determining whether this development is in the public interest.

Last December I ordered Genesis development corporation, the company proposing the Spray Lakes development, to combine the environmental impact assessments for their proposed heli-cat operation on Mount Sparrowhawk, the four-season resort, and also the downhill ski area at Tent Ridge. From an environmental perspective it only makes sense to look at the cumulative impacts of all three of these.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I'd have to say that there have been a great number of people who have commented on the environmental impact that this proposal would have, and that must be taken into account.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister assure me that the concerns of constituents and Albertans elsewhere are being considered?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I want to give that exact assurance to the hon. member that her constituents' concerns are being considered. Hundreds of responses have been given, not just from the hon. members constituents but from people from throughout the province of Alberta. I encourage those people to continue to have their comments brought forward through the hon. member, to the director of environmental assessments in the city of Edmonton here, to me, to the minister's office.

Albertans are expressing their views about Spray Lakes development proposals, and, Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat my assurance to this House and all Albertans that my overriding concern is the protection of Kananaskis Country's environment. I have heard many comments of concerned Albertans that there is a serious issue with respect to this. I have heard no comments in favour of this proposal.

User Fees

MR. SAPERS: The Premier has said that a user fee is not a tax, a fee for service is not a tax. He's also claimed that fees have been adjusted to reflect the cost of providing a service. Apparently, Mr. Speaker, he was wrong on both counts. In fact, hundreds of user fees in Alberta have been found to be illegal taxes, bilking Albertans out of millions and millions of dollars. My questions are to the Premier. When is the Premier going to return the \$80 million in user fees he and his government have illegally collected from the pockets of Albertans since the October 1998 Supreme Court decision?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, that court decision was an Ontario court decision and had nothing to do with legislation or fees for services here in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, relative to our program as it relates to fees for services, that will be outlined in the budget presentation later this afternoon. The Provincial Treasurer has undertaken a complete review of all fees and services, has given Albertans assurances that fees will not go up but in many, many cases will come down.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. For the Premier's benefit I'll send over a copy of the intervention by the Attorney General of

Alberta into the Supreme Court decision in the Eurig estates decision. So it's clear that Alberta felt it had a role and a concern in this regard. I will make a copy available.

If he can get on the right page, why has the Premier not been telling the truth to Albertans all these years about user fees when we know that at least 100 of these user fees are in fact illegal taxes?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. minister . . . [interjections] Oh, that's wishful thinking on his part, certainly not my part.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a legal question, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General respond.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, any question that asks for a legal opinion in this Assembly is prohibited under *Beauchesne* 411(1), 408(c).

MR. SAPERS: It was asking for a fact, for some truth. It wasn't asking for a legal opinion, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go on to my third question, because clearly the government doesn't want to answer the last question. Will the Premier agree to release the cost-of-service studies for each and every one of his more than 800 user fees, or is the only thing Albertans are going to receive for their tax money is more blank pages?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a complete review done of all the fees for services, and that issue will be addressed in the budget presentation later this afternoon.

I do remind the hon. member that it was he who brought up the point of legality, not me. He did.

MR. HANCOCK: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I could supplement by saying that under the Eurig decision, which was referred to, which was an Ontario decision referring to an Ontario case, Alberta voluntarily came forward with the fees and regulations review act, voluntarily decided to review all of its fees, and voluntarily brought forward fee reductions for Albertans and for Albertans' benefits which will be reflected this afternoon in the budget.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. GORDON: Yes, Albertans do want information on the whole health care delivery, but they want factual information, and as such I am seeking clarification on behalf of my constituents regarding the proposed policy on private clinics. They want to know the various players, the various roles, and how they are in regards to the proposed policy on private clinics. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What will be the role of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in this process, to this process? What is their involvement?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, under the policy statement that the hon. member is referring to, the role of the medical profession through the College of Physicians and Surgeons would continue to be very much as it is now. They would be responsible for the accreditation, licensing if you will, of the medical practitioners that would practice in a surgical clinic.

Further, Mr. Speaker, they would be responsible for accrediting, setting the standards, making sure they are met with respect to the nature of the facility, the supports that are available in that facility, the services that are provided, and all of the necessary plans to deal with any contingencies that might come up in the operation of the provision of that service.

So the College of Physicians and Surgeons would certainly, as they do today, play a very, very key role, a professional role as a professional association in doing this evaluation and providing for that accountability.

MRS. GORDON: What will be the role of the family physician in this process, and will they be sending patients directly to these private facilities?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the same process would be in place as is the case today. I would advise and I'm sure all members of the Assembly understand that the referral process would of course be one which in almost all cases would start with the family physician, the local physician, the general practitioner. Those individuals at the front line would refer through to the specialists themselves cases that needed that specialization, that expertise that specialists provide. They would assess the case. They would look at the best method of treatment and follow right through. The proposed policy that we have before Albertans and before this Assembly does not in any way alter that relationship among professionals in the medical system.

MRS. GORDON: What will be the role of the regional health authorities and you as minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, under the policy the regional health authorities would be responsible for assessing any proposal that might come in for a specialized surgical clinic. They would be responsible, as the policy indicates, to look at the overall benefit of the particular proposal. First of all, of course, they would have to decide on whether there was a need. They would have to look at the overall benefit of the proposal. They would have to make sure, in consultation with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, that any facility, any equipment, any supports that were going to be provided were adequate for the maintenance of quality health care and the protection of the individual patient and the public interest.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Seismic Drilling Holes

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the annual meeting of the Surface Rights Federation yesterday I heard from landowners across Alberta who are upset because the government is failing to monitor and enforce rules to protect the land and water from oil and gas well drilling. With the drilling of seismic test wells even the rules are unsatisfactory, particularly as compliance with these rules is not monitored or enforced. All of my questions are to the Minister of Environment. When will the government do its job and ensure that all seismic holes are filled and capped as many landowners and municipalities have ongoing problems that are not resolved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment has worked in collaboration with the department of energy on a number of different issues including approval processes and the issue of enforcement. I'd have to say as a general observation that the oil and gas industry has behaved very responsibly with respect to their access to the resource in the province of Alberta. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. It is our intention to work very strongly, again in collaboration with the Department of Resource Development, in dealing with those operators within the oil and gas industry that are not operating within the rules.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, he hasn't answered the question. The people in Alberta want to know when this government is going to do their job to ensure that all seismic holes have been properly filled and capped. We have ongoing problems in many municipalities, like Rocky View and Foothills, who have been working on this issue for literally years.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the question has been asked and answered.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the study on this issue in the Pine Lake area has taken so long and we've had absolutely no progress reports on what's happening there, will the government impose a ban on drilling seismic holes in ditches in the interim, as many people and many municipalities have asked him to do?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'll take the hon. member's question under advisement.

DR. WEST: Sometimes the opposition is very clever, because they lob the question in a direction where it shouldn't be handled. It should be handled right here. I'm responsible for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, which has looked at this over the years with many people doing research on it; that is, the filling in of holes from seismic exploration. The jury is out. A lot of the geologists and those in the geoscience of seismic have studied this intensively and have not agreed on the issues that have been brought forth by the Surface Rights Board.

Furthermore, throughout North America and throughout Canada in every province there is research being done on this very issue as it relates to the various structures, the various formations that we drill through and the effect that seismic has as we go into the aquifers. I would say to the hon. member that this province is probably more responsible than anyone I know in the follow-up and the study and research on this issue.

One other thing. Last year the EUB, who looks after that, filed 22,000 applications in this province with only 22 appeals that actually went to hearing. I would say the track record in this province, looking at all of these issues, is excellent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:20

Special-needs Education

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consulting with a number of teachers at various schools in and around my constituency recently, a number of concerns were brought forward to me regarding the program unit funding for students with special needs. My question today is for the Minister of Learning. Will the minister explain the present program unit funding formula relative to the qualifying criteria for students with special needs?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Program unit funding, PUF, is available to children two and a half to six years of age. Its intent is to prepare children that have severe disabilities for grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, and on into school. These children are eligible for very close to \$20,000 in funding. They must, however, have a severe disability, physical, mental, or deafness or blindness. As well, they must have an individualized plan tailor-made to that child. This is an excellent program that has been going on.

The other thing that I would say is that the handbook for program unit funding has been distributed to all school boards and is available through all school board offices.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: can the minister assure members of this Assembly that adequate staff and resources are available in Alberta schools to ensure that all students in integrated classrooms have the opportunity to reach their full learning potential?

DR. OBERG: I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. Today is budget day, and there will certainly be some announcements for children with severe special needs. I would ask the hon. member to wait and see what happens in the budget.

A couple of things I would say. Over the last summer I lifted the caps on special needs, on special education. A student health initiative was put in, which we anticipate will help the severe special-needs students considerably.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that the resources are there. I feel that it's something we have to keep being very vigilant on, and we have to ensure that these students get the absolute best possible education in Alberta.

MR. MARZ: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister may have answered my third question, but just to be more specific, can he assure my constituents that these programs will be available in the future?

DR. OBERG: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest to the hon. member to await this coming budget, and I think he will be very impressed and very happy.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I would add to this is that this morning actually I returned from the Canada Council of Ministers of Education.

MRS. SLOAN: Was that in Mexico?

DR. OBERG: No, that is not Mexico. It was the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada. When I say Canada, usually it means Canada. That's C-A-N-A-D-A.

One of the very important issues that we discussed as ministers was the whole issue of special-needs funding, special-needs education, and we certainly agreed that this is an issue all across Canada and is something that really needed to be looked at.

We are establishing a task force with ministers from across Canada to take a look at the issues surrounding special-needs funding and actually look into it more. This is a task force from across Canada that I really feel will help us get to the bottom of special-needs funding in two ways, in both forms of prevention and better ways of teaching these children and better scholastic techniques.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Calgary Herald Strike

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department of labour has disappeared, but the persistent troubles have not. Today there are over 200 employees entering the fourth month of their strike at the *Calgary Herald*. This is the second long, divisive strike that has occurred in the city of Calgary in recent memory. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given the disruption that this strike is having on the employees, what does the minister plan to do to resolve this long dispute?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, this strike has been gaining a

lot of attention, perhaps because it's one of the media outlets. Certainly in terms of the history of labour disputes in this country and in this province it is something that no one wants to see particularly, but I would remind the hon. member that we as a department and as a government are doing the things that are proper under the legislation. We've been providing mediators. Mediators have been accessible to both parties and are there, of course, when needed.

This is a part of democracy. As the hon. member knows the employees have the right to bargain collectively. They've chosen to accept that right, and of course the employer is also free, then, to bargain collectively as well. The hope of all of us – and I hope it includes the member opposite – is that the two parties will come to a proper agreement.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given that the government has intervened in the past to solve disputes, like with the Calgary public school board, why won't the minister consider binding arbitration to resolve this long strike?

MR. DUNFORD: No. The intervention that is being discussed by the hon. member, just so that we have the record clear, was a disputes inquiry board. The disputes inquiry board can be used. It's one of the tools that we have if there are misinterpretations or some misunderstanding about what the actual issues are. I don't think there's any misunderstanding in the dispute between the management of the *Calgary Herald* and the employees of the *Calgary Herald*. The positions have been clearly documented on both sides. Intervention at this time by the government would be extremely heavy-handed, and this minister is not about to do that.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the same minister. Is the minister so nonchalant about this strike because he is on the side of management, the same management that his government has signed sweetheart secret deals with to give the *Herald* scoops on stories whenever they're not to speak to the opposition about those stories? Is that what you're about?

MR. DUNFORD: Name names, Hughie. You obviously went off the script, Hughie. Name names. This situation, sir, requires a response. If he has some information that he'd like to present me, we'll be glad to look at it. Other than that, it's just simply some grandstanding on the part of a very good hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Gun Control Legislation

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. The Supreme Court of Canada heard arguments this week on the registration of guns under Bill C-68, which passed in 1995. There are many, many law-abiding, peaceful gun owners in this province and in my constituency who are very opposed to this federal government encroachment into their lives. To the minister: what have Alberta and for that matter other provincial governments done to oppose this unnecessary intrusion into provincial rights?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, an important question, and there needs to be, I think, some clarification. Bill C-68 contains a number of things, one of which is the gun registry process, but others

are amendments to the Criminal Code that strengthen provisions relating to the criminal use of firearms. Alberta supported the proper use of federal jurisdiction in proposing amendments to the Criminal Code and cracking down on the criminal use of firearms, but Alberta objects strenuously to federal intrusion in the area of provincial jurisdiction when it comes to property rights. The registering of guns is, in fact, a registering of a property right.

2:30

So Alberta took a reference case to the Court of Appeal. There was a split decision on the Court of Appeal, so we have appealed that to the Supreme Court of Canada, which, as the hon. member has correctly referenced, was heard on Monday and Tuesday. We oppose the federal government's intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, as Alberta always has opposed federal intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, and we oppose the colossal waste of money that the federal government has put into this in trying to control the property rights of Albertans.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: Ordinarily, hon. members, the chair would intervene as the matter might properly be viewed as being sub judice. We certainly do have a situation here where there is a court review of a matter. But in this case, because of the uniqueness of the question, the only prejudice that might be given to this case would go to those who are intervening.

AN HON. MEMBER: Which is us.

THE SPEAKER: Correct.

Gun Control Legislation (continued)

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What does Alberta propose as an alternative to this federal legislation, which is clearly not working?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not clear that we need to occupy this field, but if the Supreme Court were to rule that the federal legislation related to property rights and was unconstitutional, it may then be appropriate for Alberta to bring in legislation with respect to the licensing of firearms acquisition or the licensing of people who utilize firearms to make sure that there was proper training in place or that people who had criminal records, for example, didn't have access to firearms.

MR. THURBER: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Could you please reassure these law-abiding, peaceful gun owners that any policy that may be put in place in Alberta will not reflect the attitude or the intent of Bill C-68?

MR. HANCOCK: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we wouldn't bring in legislation without properly consulting Albertans about the nature and content of the legislation to be brought in. Secondly, we would be looking at the question. Quite frankly, all the people involved in this discussion, the responsible firearms association and others, have talked about the appropriate type of legislation in this area and the registration of firearms as proposed by the federal government being a colossal waste of money, money which could be better used fighting crimes if they did more to deal with the criminal use of firearms. We would not propose to waste resources in that manner.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Support for Voluntary Sector

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report *Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector* prepared by the federal government was released a year ago, in February 1999. The voluntary sector has joined the public and private sectors, becoming the third pillar of modern society and providing many of the programs formerly offered by government, including providing shelter and food, support services for health and wellness, recreation, arts, youth, et cetera. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. Will the minister tell us what action he has taken on multiyear funding commitments, or does he perhaps not agree with this?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Well, I don't quite know where the hon. member's question is leading. Obviously, we are committed to funding the programs that we endorse, and we do it year to year, and normally they increase. So, quite frankly, if she'd like an answer, then I'd ask that the question be a little more specific.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I think I got that answer.

To the same minister: what is the minister's response to recommendations on training, capacity for technology, and innovation in communications?

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, if I understand the preamble to the question, the hon. member raised it in the context of a report that was released by the federal government, which is clearly not a matter of administrative competence of this Assembly.

MS BLAKEMAN: If I might, there were specific recommendations to all governments included in the report, and I'm asking what the policy is that this government has on these areas.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, again, administrative competence in this Assembly deals with issues originating in this province, not elsewhere.

Now, if the hon. minister wants to take a shot at this, go for it.

Support for Voluntary Sector (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Again to the same minister: could I ask what policy and plans the department has developed to take into account the costs of core operations, including staffing, volunteer training, board development needs, and information technology? What's the Alberta government policy on this?

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would seek, first of all, Mr. Speaker, a bit of clarification on the question. However, having said that, if the hon. member would be so kind as to be a little bit patient, she'll see that we have three-year business plans. The budget is going to be brought down today. All these questions as presented, if they pertain to our activities in government, will be answered very thoroughly and to the minutest detail that she might have in mind.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Fishing Closures

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are avid anglers. Yesterday the Minister of Environment announced numerous spring closures. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is it necessary to put closures in place?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, our fish populations are under a tremendous amount of sportfishing pressure. Just the other day I was meeting with one of the biologists in the Department of Environment who was talking about the number of lakes that fish are in in the province of Alberta. There are approximately 800 lakes in the province of Alberta that have fish, compared to over 90,000 lakes in Saskatchewan and over 250,000 lakes in the province of Ontario. There are 350,000 licensed anglers in the province of Alberta, which means that the pressure is at the rate of 400 anglers per lake in the province of Alberta. In Saskatchewan and in Ontario it's approximately two anglers per lake.

So, Mr. Speaker, this spring we are implementing a complete fishing closure on the majority of lakes and rivers and streams and canals within the parkland prairie zone and the northern boreal zone. These closures for the spring are being implemented to protect fish species during this very important spawning period.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is also to the Minister of Environment. Why has it taken until now to put these management measures into place?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of different types of management techniques that we've used to maintain the Alberta fishery. Because of the tremendous pressure on our fisheries in the province of Alberta we cannot have the same kinds of rules and management techniques as they have in places like Saskatchewan or Ontario. The closures are important to help protect species now so that sportfishing opportunities will continue in the future.

Historically we've used techniques like size limits, bait bans, closures on a lake-by-lake basis or on a species basis. These closures for spring are another management technique. They will provide a maximum benefit for a wide variety of species over a large area. Mr. Speaker, it will cause disruption to some of our sportsfishermen, but it is a minimal disruption so that over the long run we can continue to have this sportfishing as an important part of the recreational experience in the province.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. Money from sportfishing is an important source of income for many of the people in my area. Anglers purchase fuel, use hotels, restaurants, and supplies and equipment. Will there be any major impact from the closure of these from an economic perspective?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, any impact should be minimal. The closures will last for approximately one month. They will be detailed in the 2000 Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations. I think that people will understand and most Albertans will agree that the long-term benefits of having a healthy and sustainable sportfishing opportunity are worth a short seasonal closure during this important spawning season.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have expressed how important fishing is to them both as anglers and with respect to the economic impact on their communities. We're confident that these are good measures that are for the long-term health of the fisheries in the province of Alberta.

2:40

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three hon. members to participate.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Big Valley Jamboree

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize that a wonderful event in my constituency, the Big Valley Jamboree, had its Festival 2000 kickoff today at Molson House. Since its arrival on the festival scene six years ago Big Valley Jamboree has earned the reputation as being one of North America's finest country music events. People gather at the Camrose recreational centre to experience four days filled with activities like listening to the best artists the country music world can offer, daily bull-riding events, lumberjack contests, and a trade show.

The Big Valley Jamboree is one of largest outdoor country music festivals held in North America. Sixty thousand fans gathered in Camrose last year for the August long weekend.

Today at Molson House this year's lineup was revealed, including such entertainers as Sawyer Brown, Tracy Lawrence, Patricia Conroy, Charlie Daniels, John Michael Montgomery, Lace, Danny Hooper, Dwight Yoakum, and many others.

What makes the Jamboree Canada's premier outdoor festival is that it is a family experience. Careful consideration was given to plan an event that would appeal to every age group. A family stage and separate family campground are available for those with young children, while the main stage and several festival events cater to an adult crowd.

This is a very important event to my constituents. Hundreds of participants from Camrose and the surrounding area come together to put on an event that has attracted fans from around the world. Many dedicated people including those of the Camrose Regional Exhibition and Panhandle Productions Ltd., the sponsors, have devoted countless hours of their time to make this weekend the wildly popular event that it has become. I'd like to thank them here today and congratulate them on their success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Vietnamese and Chinese New Year

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize and join in the celebration of the Vietnamese Tet and Chinese lunar New Year, observed earlier this month. The year 2000 is the year of the golden dragon, a very auspicious and special year under the Vietnamese and Chinese calendars.

Lunar New Year and Tet are celebrated as family affairs, a time for reunion and thanksgiving. Anyone who attended the Edmonton Viets society gathering at the Shaw Conference Centre in late January would agree with me that this was a family affair and a community celebration.

February 5 was the official lunar New Year for both Vietnamese and Chinese, and Tet also marks the beginning of spring. I always find the similarities between cultures interesting, and starting the new year with a clean slate, forgiving others, paying one's debts, and endeavouring to correct one's faults seems to be a universal approach to a new year. Events and celebrations have extended throughout February and are hosted by a variety of organizations.

I've mentioned before in this Assembly the great respect and value I have for the many people of Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese heritage who live in my constituency of Edmonton-

Centre. Individuals and organizations provide many services and programs in the community as well as contributing overall to the safety and vibrancy of our neighbourhoods.

I'd like to mention a few of the many organizations and individuals who share their rich cultural heritage with us and who continue to work to improve the quality of all of our lives. The Edmonton Viets Association, Changing Together, the Hai (Quang) Ninh Community Association, the Vietnam Chinese Senior Citizens Club, Edmonton Chinatown Multicultural Centre Foundation, the *Vietnam Time Magazine*, Association of Professionals and Entrepreneurs from Vietnam, Indochina Chinese Senior Citizens Association of Edmonton, the United Calgary Chinese Association, Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, and more than hundreds of others.

Thank you very much, and I wish everyone an auspicious year of health, happiness, and prosperity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

2005 Goodwill Games

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy and honoured to be able to stand and speak today about Calgary being awarded the 2005 Goodwill Games. This celebration will be a wonderful way to kick off the 100th anniversary of this great province that we all live in. At least \$160 million in economic benefit to Calgary and Alberta is expected to be brought about because of the Goodwill Games coming to Calgary and Alberta.

The structure of the games will be about 10 days. Fifteen or more sports are yet to be decided. A lot of them are decided, with others to be added over the next six months. One thousand plus athletes will be competing. The unique structure of this allows for only invited athletes. Therefore, only the best in each sport will be representing their countries here from around the world.

Ted Turner from Time Warner Sports, Mark Lazarus from Time Warner Sports, and Mike Plant, the president of Goodwill Games, said that it was an easy decision to be able to pick Calgary and Alberta because of the wonderful legacy of infrastructure we have left over from the '88 Olympics.

The Goodwill Games committee in Calgary has six months now to finalize the plans. The unique format that was experienced, as an example, in 1998 in New York, where it was the summer games, allowed for figure skating to be a participant sport. The potential for that is to possibly see summer sports in the winter games in Calgary if we feel that's the best way to present and see things happen in Calgary. Questions for the committee now are to make sure that we know what facilities have to be upgraded, what the costs are, and if we can afford to make it happen with the private sector and with government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Doug Mitchell, chair of the Goodwill Games committee, and the rest of the members of the committee for their many hours of time to bring the games to Calgary. I believe that over the next six months the committee will put together a proposal that will make 2005 the best Goodwill Games ever.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'd invite the Government House Leader to apprise us of the activity we will be undertaking next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted just to say the budget, but I'll go through it.

Monday, February 28, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders the introduction of interim supply Bill 9; motion with respect to subcommittees A, B, C, and D to establish committee membership; response to the budget; address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; and day 1 of supplementary supply. Monday evening we can anticipate finishing what of the afternoon's business we haven't completed.

On February 29 at 4:30 p.m. interim supply Bill 9 for second reading and Community Development main estimates. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, subcommittees of supply: in the Assembly International and Intergovernmental Relations, committee B, day 1 of main estimates, and in room 512, subcommittee of supply, committee A on Gaming. Post 10 p.m., Community Development main estimates, address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, interim supply Bill 9, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 1, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, in the Assembly, subcommittee of supply, committee C, Government Services main estimates; in room 512, committee D, Economic Development main estimates. Post 10 p.m. in the Assembly address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; interim supply Bill 9, Committee of the Whole; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 2, in the afternoon, under Government Bills and Orders, designated Committee of Supply as per the rules and interim supply Bill 9, third reading.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I was standing under Standing Order 13(2) hoping for some clarification. The basis would be that in the exchange from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre there was a question about a federal report about volunteerism apparently with recommendations to other levels of government, and you intervened at that point, sir. My question is this. Just seconds before, we had seen a question about a piece of federal legislation, the federal gun control statute. I've always understood that questions had to be confined to matters within the legislative competence of the government of the province of Alberta, but I had not understood before the proposition that questions could only relate to matters that arise within the province. I'm wondering if I could get some assistance from you, sir, in understanding that ruling you made moments ago.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, there was no ruling made several minutes ago.

What is really important in this House is that all members pay very, very careful attention to the questions that are being raised and, quite frankly, to pay as much attention to the answers being given. Oftentimes hon. members get up, raise their question, and members are chitchatting and talking to one another and there's a hum in here. One thing the chair does is listen very attentively. The chair even has access to an additional microphone in here so that he can listen to all of the words of all of the questions, and part of that attention to the question is to make sure that there's some connection between what is being raised in the preambles and the ultimate question.

There was an intervention with respect to the question from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Those questions, in terms of reflection by the chair, quite clearly had to do with the policy of the government of Alberta with respect to responses to certain things.

When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised a question, the chair rose as much for clarification in the chair's own mind as it was for an intervention. There was no ruling that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre could not proceed with her questions. The chair simply said: I hope that I understand all of this. The chair also has had some experience sitting on the front bench in the past and knows full well that questions can go in different directions, so the chair has learned to keenly listen with his own ear to all of the words. In this case there was no intervention, but the chair does appreciate the request for clarification with respect to this.

Now, hon. members, I do believe, that being the case, I'm going to exercise an authority that the chair does have, that perhaps the chair should exercise a little more often. So as to allow proper time for the necessary preparations to be made prior to the Budget Address this afternoon, the House is now recessed until 4 p.m. today.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:53 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to call you back to order.

The Hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Transmittal of Estimates

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm first tabling the government's consolidated fiscal and business plan, as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act. Budget 2000 also includes business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of this act.

8. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-2001 estimates and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-2001 lottery fund estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker . . . [disturbance in the gallery] Let the record show that my grandson interrupted me, Mr. Speaker.

10. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(2.1) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2000-2001 lottery fund estimates shall be two days.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

11. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 1999-2000 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

12. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 1999-2000 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

13. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

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

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: Budget Address

15. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2000 is the result of the thoughtful input of every government MLA seated here today, and it's input based on government MLAs following the instructions of our Premier, who above anyone else reminds us in a regular way that we need to listen to our bosses, our bosses being the people of Alberta. This budget is a budget from the people of Alberta. It's also the first budget to be tabled this century by any provincial or federal government. It's a first in that way, and we are told that it's also a first in terms of a number of things that are being accomplished or will be accomplished simultaneously with this budget.

This budget in a brief term will be reducing debt significantly, reducing taxes, increasing spending on priority areas like health, education, and people services. It will be freeing 132,000 low-income Albertans from having to pay any provincial income tax. It will be eliminating bracket creep, the first government to do that. It will be increasing by a quarter of a billion dollars the value of the heritage savings trust fund. It will be putting in place a half a billion dollar fund to encourage science and energy research and development in the province. Overall, Mr. Speaker, I think that's not a bad way to launch into the 21st century.

Now, we are told that we have been able to accomplish this, some

people would suggest, by luck or windfall revenues. I want to address that momentarily and bring our attention back to 1985-1986 when of all the corporate revenue that we took in as a government, approximately 60 percent came from the oil and gas sector. As we close out the books for 1998, we see that all of the revenue which we took in from the oil and gas sector made up approximately 10 percent of corporate taxes.

There has been a huge broadening of the base of the economy here in Alberta. There has been a huge diversification. It has not been luck. It has not been goodwill. It has been hard work, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier has led this particular initiative, and the government policies based on caring but limited government, leading to unlimited opportunity, have caused Alberta to be the most people-friendly place, we believe, in which people can pursue their hopes and their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, Stephen Leacock once said that he believed in luck and that he also found that the harder he worked, the luckier he got. We've been working hard on the priorities of Albertans, and the results are here.

We would also like to bring attention to some changes – I call it an evolution of sorts – in the entire budget process. There's been an evolving transformation. Budget days used to be and still are in some jurisdictions and with some governments the result, the culmination, of a year of secret meetings. Then budget day would arrive and there would be a revelation, a revealing of shocks and surprises and hopefully good announcements. The expectation from government was that citizens would be thankful that we had planned their lives for the next year and also consider that we would be eminently wiser and would have been able to figure all of these things out. That has taken on a different change under the direction of Ralph Klein, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

We work very closely and MLAs work very closely with our partners throughout the year. Budget day is no longer an announcement. Those announcements used to be especially scary at election time, Mr. Speaker. I won't suggest this government necessarily, but governments generally would use an election year budget, if this were to be seen as one – but every year is an election year in Alberta – would use those times to announce all kinds of goodies, sugar-plums that had not yet even danced in the heads of the taxpayers, and it was presented in a way to make the government sweet enough to re-elect.

Mr. Speaker, under the direction of Ralph Klein we clearly operate with an understanding that we do not buy votes. We work hard to earn them. We work hard throughout the year with our partners – municipalities, regional health authorities, school boards, people in the business community – to develop the kinds of things that need to be done and need to be said and need to be directed. We take those priorities, build them into a budget, a budget that now has three-year business plans. We project three years into the future. We don't want to see surprises. There's always the inevitable that happens, but we have three-year business plans, which we then monitor on the short term every 90 days. Every quarter we report on the progress of spending and on revenues coming in.

Budget day should not be a day of surprises. It should be a day in which government accounts for where they think the revenues will be going and where they think the expenditures will be going in the year ahead, and that's what this is all about, working closely with our partners, Mr. Speaker.

As we look at other things that need to be done, as we move to a discussion on the spending areas of this budget – and there is spending in this budget very clearly – I would like to suggest that we

may want to think of adjusting the language that we use when we talk about spending. We hear from critics from time to time, and it's good and positive to have critics there. It helps us to be even better and to respond. Sometimes the way some critics present spending is as if nothing is being spent at all in priority areas. It's as if everything is bleak and horrifying, and unknowing Albertans, vulnerable Albertans, are sometimes taken advantage of by the criticism. I think that just as we demand honesty in advertising, we need to demand honesty in criticizing. And when we look at spending, I would suggest that we put things in a better context. If we look at the areas of spending and if we're talking about spending increases, then we say to our citizens: what we're talking about is not more spending but even more spending. Even more spending. That puts it in context, Mr. Speaker.

As we look at that and consider the language of how we address this, sometimes I wonder if our critics fully understand from whence the money comes. There's a thought from time to time, as I hear some individuals, that there's a great vault in this building and in that vault are untold millions and billions of dollars and all that is required is that we go down to the basement and dig some money out of the vault and just pass it around or that there are bags of loonies on my desk or on somebody else's desk and that we toss those around.

Mr. Speaker, we need to have a clear picture of where the money comes from. The money comes from the people of Alberta. It's their money, it's their budget, and it's their security. That's what we're talking about. And every two weeks, as hardworking Albertans look at their paycheques, what happens is that we as government come up to them, albeit in an understanding way, and say: "We're from the government, and we're here to help you. We're here to help you carry that heavy load in your wallet and your purse. We're here to take some of your money from you." We say that every two weeks. In most cases Albertans recognize that some taxes need to be paid and that money has to come from them. But all the money comes from the people.

We need to remember that if we ask for even more spending, what we're saying to Albertans every two weeks is: "We need to take even more money from you. You're going to have to work even harder. From somewhere you're going to have to come up with more dollars." That's what we need to keep in mind as we talk about even more spending, and we are spending even more in some areas. We have tremendous growth in this province and tremendous pressures that come with that growth.

We are spending even more in the area of health. There are growth pressures that are coming from all sides in that particular area. With this budget we are not backing off the fact that we're seeing approximately just over a 9 percent increase in spending on health. That will increase to 21 percent over the three-year business plan. A 21 percent increase. Even more spending on health. We will be moving at the end of that three-year plan to the \$6 billion mark in spending. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker.

It means very definite things will happen this year and in the next two years following this year. It means that 2,400 nurses and frontline workers will be hired. It means that 90 more doctors will be hired. It means that even more procedures will be done. Shorter waiting lines is the goal of some of that spending. Mr. Speaker, 5,950 heart procedures. That's an increase of some 600 heart procedures. And 1,430 dialysis procedures. That's an increase of about 140. We'll see 161 bone marrow transplants. These are real things happening to real people that we can provide for. A 10 percent increase in the number of liver transplants that will be done. A 16 percent increase in the number of heart transplants that will be done. Add to all of this, Mr. Speaker, untold numbers, thousands of

joint replacements and then everything else that happens in the medical care system, hundreds of millions of dollars into infrastructure to build the hospitals, to do the renovations, to take care of the lodges, to do the extended care units and you can see how it's very easy to arrive at a spending of \$17 million a day to operate this health care system. We think Albertans are worth that, and we're committing those dollars to that.

As we do that, we look back, though, with some caution, because we see that 22 percent of our budget was based on health care spending in 1980. We move to 1990: 26 percent of our budget on health care spending. As we finish out this three-year business plan, 33 percent of our budget will be spent on health care. I recently met with a minister of finance from another province. In their province they are looking at 40 percent of all the taxpayers' money being spent on health care.

Any government that cares as much about the principles of the Canada Health Act as we do must look to ways of seeing efficient services delivered in innovative ways so that we can keep the growing costs of health care to a manageable limit. This is not just an Alberta situation, Mr. Speaker. This is right across the country. I can tell you that many governments are afraid to even address the issue. This is a new century. We need to be bold and caring at the same time, and this government is addressing the issues. The reason other governments are sometimes paralyzed with fear to address the spending issues around health is because of the accusations that often are heaped upon you when you say that you are trying to do something to improve the system.

It almost saddens me to comment that some people would even reflect that this government is actually trying to destroy health care, in fact to destroy Canada. We hear incredible things. I would ask people as we enter this debate to think of us as legislators, if it's possible, as human beings, because we are, and when we're in the debate, to look at us as legislators. We have children. We have grandchildren. We have aging parents who are facing the increased cost of advanced care in their sunset years. Do people really think anybody in their right mind would want to destroy the health care system that is there for their children, for their grandchildren, and for their grandparents? Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it's time to put away the political scalpels and to drop the name-calling and accusations and engage in positive, co-operative discussions on how services can be provided in a way that takes the cost increases away from every health care system in this country.

Here's what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about looking at approaches and solutions that will bring shorter lineups, better care, no cost to the consumer, and all within the Canada Health Act. We're talking about improving the health and life of Albertans. Anybody with solutions that don't meet those criteria need not apply, and we will guarantee that in legislation.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, we are doing even more in the area of learning and education. We have a huge increase in students in this province. We are looking at increases this year in education, in terms of a percentage increase in our spending, of 9 percent and stretching that to over 19 percent over the three-year period.

What does that mean in real terms? It means 2,200 new teachers and aides in the classroom. It means more money going to programs that will achieve higher levels of achievement: \$66 million going to programs directly focused on achievement and progress and learning, \$60 million for computers in the classroom this year. Sixty million dollars. That is very significant. We are concerned, Mr. Speaker, and we want to see our children moving into the global economy equipped to handle whatever they face.

It also means, as we broaden this out to the postsecondary area, that we'll be seeing a 9.2 percent increase in postsecondary spending, moving up to 16 percent. We will see 23,000 new spaces created in the postsecondary system. We will see assistance going to students who are faced with the weight of loans in order for them to be educated. This year we'll see a 22 percent increase in assistance to students. Mr. Speaker, by the end of the three-year plan we will see a 50 percent increase in assistance to students. We know that about half of the postsecondary student population in this province in fact do not access provincial student loans, but that means that half of the students do, and we're going to be there for them. We're going to be there as they move into the 21st century, and we don't apologize for that. We are excited about that.

Around the province people continue to move here in great numbers. We know that that puts huge pressure on infrastructure in our towns and in our cities. We had over 50,000 people again this year move into this province. Just think of it, Mr. Speaker, 50,000 people. That's like another city of Red Deer just coming right up out of the ground every year. It's a wonderful thought, but that brings with it some extra cost to government. We have said to our municipalities that with the growth rate that we are experiencing, a population growth rate that is twice what Ontario is growing, we are going to assist the municipalities to address those needs to the tune of \$725 million this year in this budget. That's on top of the \$1.1 billion that is presently being expended on infrastructure, and that's not just roads. That is water systems, that is schools, that is hospitals, and that is seniors' lodges, all of the areas of infrastructure which presently are dealing with the positive results of the Alberta advantage.

In agriculture we have seen across western Canada this year the results of several years in a row of low commodity prices and on a regional basis devastating weather conditions. We have seen our friends and neighbors and relatives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba going hat in hand to the federal government, asking for assistance, something that will help them with that. Mr. Speaker, we can't stand by and wait for the federal government to dither about this particular problem. We are stepping to the plate. In last year's budget and this year's we are expanding the abilities of the farm income disaster program to handle those pressures and disasters beyond the control of our farmers. These are global items that are beyond their control. As we negotiate at the world trade level, trying to bring down this whole issue of subsidies around the world and of tariffs on the agricultural side, as we work to do that, we will not – we will not – see our family farms moved to extinction. We will be there for them.

Murray McLaughlan sang a song, a tribute to farmers, some years ago. He said: thanks for the meal; here's a song that is real from a boy from the city to you. You know, that's a nice song, Mr. Speaker. That's a nice song, and I will resist the request to break into song at this particular moment, but I can tell you something. A song will not put diesel fuel into that tractor. A song will not buy the seed that needs to go into next year's crop. A song will not buy the silage that's needed over the year to feed the cattle and see them through the winter. We're doing far more than that, and we can say to our farm community a similar thing. We can say thanks for the meal; here's some help that is real from all over the province to you.

Mr. Speaker, our seniors, especially those on low and fixed incomes, have faced several years of slowly rising inflation and other costs. We feel it's time, that the Alberta advantage and the bold plans that we have for this century have given us the fiscal capacity to be able to address the need of low-income seniors, so we are announcing an increase in low-income seniors' benefits of 10 percent, which will assist our low-income and fixed-income seniors as they move through the years ahead. Those seniors have worked

hard. They've served well. They continue to be generous. We will be there for them. We will also see an increase of 16 percent in a special program just dealing with special needs for seniors. That is important, and we are there for them.

As we look from one end of the age spectrum to the other, in terms of children's services there's the Alberta Children's Forum that took place this year, chaired by Colleen Klein. Through that forum and that process we have seen and been brought forward insights and recommendations on how to deal with some of the items that are being faced by children and families today. We know, Mr. Speaker, that as a Conservative government we cannot invade the area of family. We cannot intrude in that area, and we don't want to do things that would increase dependency. We want to foster independency. With the recommendations that are coming from this forum, there will be a 6 percent increase in our funding for Children's Services. That will extend to 16 percent over three years. Children are our future. We're going to be there for them.

Mr. Speaker, we have through the year addressed a number of other areas. On the question of the Canada pension plan people continue to ask us what we are doing in that particular area. I want to remind people and update them that Alberta has come forward with suggestions on how that plan could be improved, that if they were adopted across the country, the plan would be improved for all Canadians.

But we can't wait while these plans, these items that we have researched and that we believe have some real possibilities for improvement sit on a federal shelf and gather dust, so we have asked the other provinces and the federal government to join with us in a working committee, which we now have in place for six months, to explore the Alberta approach to pension plans and to proper funding and to open up opportunities especially for young people who are working and investing in that plan and to guarantee the seniors who are already in the plan that their benefits will be there. We're working with the federal government and the other provinces, but it's a two-track system, Mr. Speaker. At the end of that six months we'll evaluate whether there is progress and ability to move ahead, and we will continue at the request of citizens to look at the feasibility of an Alberta plan.

We are not saying, Mr. Speaker, that we are pulling out of the Canada pension plan. We are not making that comment. This is not a threat. It is saying that we are responsible for the pension dollars that our citizens invest. We want to make sure they're properly invested in the best way. We'll be there for them. We're exploring those possibilities.

As we look at the area of investment, we're excited that we can report that we have just completed adding \$230 million, almost a quarter of a billion dollars, to the heritage savings trust fund. We have increased that fund. We will not allow inflation to erode it, and we will be there.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, that fund this year will earn in income for Albertans approximately the same amount of money we will take in from oil royalties. So here is this fund, that has been built up over the years from oil and gas royalties, now producing, the fund is producing, interest at the same rate that royalties are being produced in an annual way out of the ground. I think that's a firm platform of security for us in the 21st century.

We will continue to do even more to address debt and debt pay-down. We have just posted, as we move to the end of this budget year in which we are now, a record down payment on that particular debt, the remaining debt, \$1.6 billion being put down on that debt. This will be the first time in 12 years that the interest costs of our debt will be less than \$1 billion. We're moving in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

The reason we focus on that is because we know that debt costs; it does not pay. As we move to debt reduction, we lower the interest cost and we lower the cost to the bankers, as it were, Mr. Speaker, the creditors around the world. As we move to paying that down, we will create savings that we can then apply to health and education and other areas.

4:30

In 1994 our debt servicing costs were \$1.7 billion. This year as we move to under a billion dollars, that means we have three-quarters of a billion dollars of unborrowed money that we can be investing in health, education, agriculture, and the areas of people services. That is the track that we have been on. It's proven to be viable.

We do get questioned from time to time, Mr. Speaker, in terms of our ability to continue to pay down debt, and that brings into discussion the whole area of how we forecast. How do we know what revenues are going to be coming in in a given year? What will we put to debt, and what will we put into our various areas of program spending?

We are forecasting this year, in and after consultation with leading experts and analysts around the world, that the price of oil for the budget year, which will begin April 1 and extend to March 31, 2001, will average \$19 a barrel. In a day when we're looking at close to \$30 a barrel, I know some would say: you're budgeting too low; you should have that higher.

Mr. Speaker, we do our forecasting based on consultation with the analytical experts in the province, in the country, and internationally, and we were all together in our budgeting last year when we said that oil would be \$13.50. This day one year ago we need to remember that oil was \$12.61, and when we said \$13.50 last year and put it in the budget, we were accused of being too optimistic. As you can see, we were low. Now we are saying, as closely as we can after consultation, that we see \$19 oil; we see natural gas at a Canadian dollar price of \$2.50. Those items, again, are developed in consultation with the industry.

The way we make sure that we will have cushions in place – because, as we know, Alberta more than any other province has fluctuating income streams. Income goes up and down more radically than any other province. When we have a good year like this year, we forget a year like 1998, not long ago. In 1998 the amount of revenue we took in from our oil and gas royalties was 1 and a half billion dollars less than we had taken in the year before, in 1997, and the economy did not shudder to a stop. We did not come screeching to a halt because of the expansion that we have in the economy, but people forget that.

We will not base our budgeting on the mountaintop peaks of the price of oil. We will budget carefully on what we think it will be. To protect us from a fluctuation as prices plunge downward or as they rocket skyward, every year we estimate what all of our revenues will be, we take 3 and a half percent of that estimate, and we set that money aside in case we have a fluctuation.

We do get criticized from time to time because of the fluctuating revenues, and can't we forecast closer? The whole world was wrong last year at \$13.50. Maybe the whole world will be wrong this year, and we join most other experts in that \$19 to \$20 range.

I can tell you that our toughest critics, Mr. Speaker, are the credit rating agencies. Those people review every province's budget and the budget of every state and every sovereign territory, Standard and Poor's international credit rating agency being one. In their review of our budgeting, in the words of their own evaluation, they commend us for how we budget: the prudent fiscal management – this was in their latest review – and the fact that we take into account

the variability of the income stream. They not only gave us credit for that; they gave us the best credit rating in the country for how we handle the dollars of the people of Alberta.

There are other dollars out there, Mr. Speaker, that we take as a government. It's in the whole area of fees and charges. Earlier this year there was a court decision in Ontario which looked at a particular fee that was being charged because the protest was being made that the fee being charged was in excess of the service being delivered. In the process of the court's determining that, they said to the Ontario government and they said to all governments: you can do one of two things. They didn't say that you have to get rid of the fee. They didn't say that you have to lower it. They said: you could protect the fee; you could bring it into legislation and protect it, or you can lower it.

So far every other government has rushed to protect those fees that were determined to be too high. Premier Ralph Klein said: "Why are we rushing to protect the government? Why don't we rush to protect the people?" That's what we're doing with our fees and charges review.

So, Mr. Speaker, we did a review, an analysis, a huge review of all the fees and charges that are being assessed in various government departments. We found out that in the majority of cases most of those fees and charges in fact do not cover the cost of the service or only approximately cover the cost, but there was an area in which those fees and charges were considerably higher than the cost of delivering the service. We did not and we are not going to protect those high fees. We are going to lower them.

It is in the whole area of what it takes to register related to estates and wills, related to house purchases, land and property registration, and business incorporation, all of those areas, Mr. Speaker. We are announcing that effective midnight tonight we will be reducing approximately 100 fees, and in that process we will be leaving \$60 million in the pockets of Albertans. That's caring about taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, to give people an idea of which areas will be affected, for young home buyers, for instance, looking at a \$150,000 home with a \$140,000 mortgage, if you can get such a deal, before midnight tonight the fee, the charge that the government was allocating to those people to register that was some \$365. We are lowering that by two-thirds, to \$133. That's a significant saving for young home buyers.

We are also looking at the area of processing those probate letters related to wills and estates, something apparently we will all face at some time in our lives. For a modest estate value of \$150,000, there has been an assessment of \$600 to register the letters of probate with that. Six hundred dollars. We're lowering that to \$300, Mr. Speaker.

In the area of business incorporation, it has cost \$150 simply to incorporate. In a day when more and more people are becoming self-employed, when more and more people are becoming self-employed contractors and registering as such, we are lowering that fee from \$150 to \$50. We care about people, Mr. Speaker. We are going to see that this continues to be a vibrant economy here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the area of taxes is one in which I believe we see revealed the heart and nature of people when we get into a discussion on taxes. We are so pleased and excited that because of our fiscal situation we are able to accelerate and move up by an entire year a brand-new tax plan for Canada and definitely one that will be registered here in Alberta. When we asked Albertans about this, I believe Albertans revealed their heart and their nature when they responded in the area of taxes, because the first thing they said was that any tax changes had to be of immediate assistance to low-income families. We will make adjustments in this new tax system,

which begins only 10 months from now, that will relieve some 132,000 low-income, hardworking Albertans from having to pay any income tax at all.

That was the first response from the heart of Albertans, who said: this should be the first thing that you do. Then we saw the heart and nature of Albertans when they said that the system needs to be fair. They pointed out to us that we were taxing in an inequitable way the earnings of either a one income earning family or a two income earning family, and they said: don't punish or reward; leave that choice to families. By moving the spousal exemption from \$6,020 to \$11,620, a 90 percent increase, we equalized that playing field, Mr. Speaker, and we make family choices. Family choices, not government choices.

Then people went on to say – Albertans revealed their heart and nature by saying that a tax system needs to be honest. One of the areas in which taxes have not been honest – and this is at all levels of government – is this whole area of bracket creep, whereby exemptions have not been indexed to inflation. As people's salaries have been inflated, for years those exemption levels have not moved up also. Government has quietly reached around with a hand into the back pockets of people and slipped those extra dollars out and made as if they took nothing. In fact, it has cost Albertans, it has cost Canadians millions of dollars.

4:40

We looked around in this area of bracket creep. We said: how do we fix it? We looked in the mirror. We realized that we were the creeps. We are going to fix it, Mr. Speaker. We are tying these exemptions to inflation. We will be the first province to put an end to bracket creep.

The final thing that Albertans said about a tax system, again I think revealing their own hearts, Mr. Speaker, is that a tax system needs to be understandable. It was a famous person who said: the hardest thing in the world to understand is the income tax system. That person was Albert Einstein. If he couldn't figure it out, I sure can't and most of the people I know can't. So we are simplifying the system. That is why as of January 1, 2001, we will be the first jurisdiction in Canada where people can take all of their deductions and refunds on the federal side, all of their deductions and refunds on the provincial side, and claim all of those. There will be a single amount left, a net income, and to that net income a single rate of 11 percent will be applied. Openness and understandability in the tax system.

Mr. Speaker, the results of everything that we've been doing for the last few years mean continued growth here in Alberta. We are projecting growth of between 4.5 and 4.8 percent in the economy this coming year. That is very aggressive, very significant growth. That means 48,000 new jobs, most of which will be in the private sector: high-paying, high-tech, value-added jobs, long-term opportunities for Albertans. That's the type of growth that we will continue to see in this province as a result of the steps that we have taken.

Mr. Speaker, we haven't got it all right. We haven't got it all figured out. We still make mistakes, and as we do and as we are informed of those, we will move to correct them. You've heard about a 9 percent increase to health and 9 percent to education and 21 percent over three years. The overall increase from last year to this year in this budget that we are tabling today is slightly over 2 percent. That's not bad management considering all that we have faced and the continual pressures that we face in an annual, monthly, and daily way.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we are moving to a new era as we move boldly into this 21st century. I believe that we have a platform

of security that has been built because of certain policies. It's policies that will cause an economy to grow or to retract. If it's small "l" liberal – and this is not partisan; I'm talking liberal philosophically. We have enough history, as we go back through the 20th century, to know that small "l" liberal philosophy which talks about government moving to heal all the ills of the world, which talks about the growth of government institutions and government programming in every area of life – we know and we found out in an experiential way in Canada that that leads to increasing deficit, eventual increasing debt, to debt loads that eventually crush the air of incentive out of the lungs of private and free citizens.

It's time to reverse that thinking. We have reversed that thinking for a number of years. A small "c" conservative approach philosophically, Mr. Speaker, is an approach that recognizes limited but caring government, an approach that has faith in communities, families, and individuals, that moves to true freedom. When we talk about 132,000 low-income people no longer paying provincial income tax, that's a whole new definition of freedom. That type of freedom will be enjoyed by all of our citizens as we move this way.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we are now moving to a new era where once almost unthought-of dreams are within our grasp. We have seen the rate at which we have paid down debt. I don't want to optimistically raise hopes, but we have seen the aggressive rate at which we have paid down debt. We have seen that we have been able to reduce taxes continually year to year, incrementally some years but exceedingly more in the year ahead. We have seen the heritage savings trust fund increase in value. We can see other revenue streams where investment is happening now coming into this province.

4:50

If we maintain prudent fiscal management, the day is coming soon – will it be 2005, in time for our birthday? I don't know, Mr. Speaker – when Albertans will be the first to be able to consider if we should even have provincial income taxes. They used to laugh at us in Alberta when we had those kinds of dreams. You know what's been happening every year under the Klein government? Every year we say that things can be accomplished. Every year many people say: you will never accomplish it. Every year it gets accomplished.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the history of the 20th century for Alberta has been an epic of challenge and triumph. I believe it's that kind of boldness that moves us into the 21st century, and I'm absolutely convinced, understanding the heart and nature of Albertans and understanding the energy that comes from their heart and soul, that if we continue to harness that, if we continue to allow that to thrive and move ahead, if we understand and allow that to be unleashed, then combined with the providence of God and an understanding of divine and human nature, the dreams we have for ourselves, for our children, for our grandchildren are attainable. That's where we're going, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that we've heard enough hyperbole for one afternoon, so at this time I beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[At 4:52 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]