

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Wednesday, February 27, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/02/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away since we were last in the House.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. John Dubetz**July 7, 1916, to February 12, 2002**

THE SPEAKER: On Tuesday, February 12, 2002, John Dubetz passed away. Mr. Dubetz represented the constituency of Redwater for the Social Credit Party. Mr. Dubetz was first elected in the election held on June 18, 1959, and served until May 9, 1963. During his years of service in the Legislature Mr. Dubetz served on the select standing committees on Private Bills; Public Accounts; Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Municipal Law; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family, who shared the burdens of public office. Members of Mr. Dubetz's family are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember the hon. member John Dubetz as you have known him.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the family of Mr. John Dubetz, former MLA for the Redwater constituency. They are Mrs. Doris Dubetz, the widow of John Dubetz; Mr. Alvin Dubetz, son; Ms Bonnie Dubetz, daughter; Ms Evelyn Krawchuk, daughter; Ms Karen Bodner, daughter; Mr. Henry Bodner, son-in-law, husband to Karen Bodner; Mr. Darcy Dubetz, son; and Mrs. Donna Dubetz, daughter-in-law, Darcy's wife. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 40 grade 6 students and their teachers Mrs. Natalie Gago-Esteves and Laurie Ewald from the Brander Gardens elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our government, and they're seated in the members' gallery. I must say that I was advised by the tour guides that these are exemplary students and showed a

great deal of interest and respect as they had their tour through the Assembly this afternoon. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to our colleagues in the Assembly a gentleman from the fine town of Castor, Alberta, from the constituency of Wainwright. He's a teacher, a longtime rancher, and our brand-new PC candidate for the area of Wainwright. We're all very hopeful that he will work hard and win the respect, honour, and privilege of representing that riding and be able to join us in this Assembly. Would you please welcome with me Mr. Doug Griffiths, and I'd ask him to 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 my privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 57 visitors from Albert Lacombe school in St. Albert. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the general gallery, and they are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Trish Lema and Ms Connie Ohl and also by parents who are accompanying them today on the visit, the tour, Mrs. Marlen Duval, Mrs. Ruth Robinson, Mrs. Jacqueline Harlton, and Mrs. Cathy Pavelich. I would ask that everyone here extend a warm welcome to these visitors as they rise, please, in the galleries.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two sets of introductions. One is students from St. Martin Catholic school whom I'd like to introduce through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. They are accompanied today by their teacher Mrs. Olia Libicz and two parents, Mr. Greg Ostopowich and Mrs. Diane Marshall. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The other introduction is some special visitors who are here today to watch the Legislature's debate on education and schooling in Alberta. Their names are Patti Lynn Chevalier, Valerie Warke, Verne Workun, Jean Hodgkinson, and Sherry Robbins. I'd ask them to rise and receive our welcome.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a guest of mine whom I've had the pleasure of hosting for the past two days. She joined us in the House yesterday for the speech from Her Honour, and she's joining us today for question period. Jennifer Davies is a teacher from Medicine Hat who teaches grade 8 social studies. She's looking very much forward to returning to her classroom tomorrow and sharing the experiences that she's had in the Legislative Assembly over the past few days. I would ask that Jennifer rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very

pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the following three guests who are seated in the public gallery. These are Albertans concerned about education, and they're here to listen to the discussion on education this afternoon. I would ask them to rise as I read out their names: Lorne Sparks, Noel Somerville, and Glen Huser. They're joining us, and I ask you to give them a warm welcome, please.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce four guests that are in the public gallery. These are Albertans that are concerned about education. They're Rabinder Sara, Kevan Rhead, Olive Thorne, and Gordon Health. I'd ask them to rise and be recognized by the Legislature.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the following visitors, which include some educators who are here to watch over the government's actions on education. They are Fran Losie, Jean Rogers, and Linda Howitt-Taylor. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a special guest visiting us today from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. Many hon. members will recognize Debra Lozinski as the former reeve of Lakeland county. She has always been a strong agricultural supporter and farms in the Hylo community. Debra Lozinski is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three very keen and experienced educators: Marguerite Meneely, Lynda Somerville, and Gail Gates. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following guests. These are Albertans who are very concerned about public education, and they are here to monitor our discussions on education today. They are Merv Rogers, Christine Witherspoon, and Joanna Weston. They are seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you my daughter Jackie, who is seated in the members' gallery. She dropped by to watch question period. I'd like to ask her to stand at this time and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly four Albertans. These Albertans are concerned about the state of public education in Alberta and have been kind enough to join us this afternoon for the discussion. These Albertans are in the public gallery, and I would ask them to now rise as I call their names: Clarence Collins, Prem Kalia, Aileen Taylor, and Bill Kobluk. If they would now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, I would be very grateful.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two special guests who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. Mr. Peter Bray is the legislative comptroller with the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, and Ms Pat Bryant is with the office of the legislative comptroller of British Columbia. They are visiting Alberta to review how the Alberta Legislative Assembly deals with financial issues, and I would ask them now to both rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two longtime residents of Sherwood Park, Philip and Brenda Welwood. Philip has been in the banking industry for over 25 years and is currently the regional investment manager of Clarica. Brenda is the exemplary administrative support for the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House. I would ask that they rise now and receive a warm welcome as we applaud their attendance here this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a gentleman who's becoming very well known in the province in the last few months, and he's here also to observe the proceedings of the Legislature. I'd ask the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Mr. Larry Booi, to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Standing Orders Amendments

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we progress too far in the proceedings, the chair wishes to remind everyone that today the Assembly will be operating under the amendments to the Standing Orders passed last November. By looking at the front page of the Order Paper on desks today, members will note that the daily Routine has changed. Many of the items of business that took place before Oral Question Period will now occur after question period. I refer specifically to presenting reports by committees of the Assembly, Presenting Petitions, Notices of Motions, Introduction of Bills, and the tabling of returns and reports.

Immediately after question period on Mondays and Wednesdays we will have Recognitions. On Tuesdays and Thursdays Members' Statements will follow question period. Consideration of points of order and privilege will be considered after the business in the daily Routine but before the calling of Orders of the Day.

With respect to petitions, members will note that there is no longer an item of business for Reading and Receiving Petitions. Under the amendments of Standing Order 83(3) petitions must now be approved by Parliamentary Counsel at least one sitting day prior to the petition being presented. Only those petitions that are in order can be presented.

The fact that tablings now follow question period in the daily Routine may require some adjustments in how members conduct themselves. The chair does not want to see question period become the time for tablings. If members have items that they want to table, it should be done under tablings, not during question period. If there are documents referred to during question period, then they should be tabled but at the appropriate time in the Routine.

The chair realizes that it may work an unfairness for members not to have the ability to review a document referred to by another member in a question or answer. It should be pointed out that the chair did not set these rules but must try to enforce them as passed by the Assembly. As with all new procedures members and the chair will have to see how they work.

The chair would also remind members that the amendments to the Standing Orders make it clear that items tabled must be in printed form. Under the new Standing Order 37.1(1) any member, not simply cabinet ministers, may table a document by providing it to the Clerk's office before 11 a.m. on any day the Assembly sits. However, the document will not be considered tabled until the Clerk reads the title of the document at the appropriate time in the daily Routine.

The chair will have some additional comments concerning the operation of business when we proceed to Orders of the Day.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

Olympic Athletes

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer the congratulations of the government of Alberta and of all Albertans to the Alberta-based athletes who represented the province and the nation with such distinction at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. At the appropriate time today letters of congratulations that I sent to medal-winning Alberta athletes will be tabled in the Legislature. It will be a big stack of letters, 21 in all.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that so many of Canada's medal winners are from Alberta or train in Alberta is a tremendous credit to the amateur sports programs offered in this province. It is also a credit to the skill of Alberta coaches and trainers and to the dedication of parents, families, and volunteers, all of whom make a vital contribution to the success of the athletes in this province. The work of those people and people like them across Canada was never more rewarded than by the exciting performances of our Olympic athletes in Salt Lake City during the Winter Olympics.

Canadian athletes set records for medals this year, an achievement that has made all Canadians exceptionally proud, but the athletes did more than win medals. They represented our country with utmost dignity and class. Whether they won medals or not, Canadian athletes showed the very best of the Olympic spirit and the qualities of teamwork and perseverance that distinguish the Olympic athlete.

Here in Alberta the Olympic Games were followed with intense

interest by people in all parts of the province. This pride was based not simply on where an athlete finished in competition. It was based more on the fact that every athlete gave his or her best. That is the true value of sports, and it is a value that all Alberta athletes brought to their performances.

Canadian pride was not only evident in the performance of the nation's athletes. It was also fueled by a mischievous act of true Canadian spirit. A young gentleman by the name of Mr. Trent Evans, as members of the Assembly have probably heard, is the renowned Edmonton icemaker who was part of the ice crew for the Olympic hockey tournaments. In the course of his work Mr. Evans quietly planted a Canadian loonie beneath the surface of centre ice.

1:50

Now, I don't know if this act brought good luck to the Canadian hockey teams. The fact that both teams won gold suggests that they didn't need any good-luck charms, but the gesture by Mr. Evans was a true indication that the Canadian spirit is difficult, if not impossible, to repress. I should also add that the Alberta and Canadian pride shown by Mr. Evans clearly was inherited from his parents, for his mother is none other than the hon. Minister of Children's Services. So congratulations, Minister, for raising a son who has earned international recognition not only for his icemaking skills but also for his national pride.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I again extend my congratulations to all Canadian Olympic athletes. I extend those congratulations on behalf of all members of this Assembly and all Albertans and my thanks to them for making all Canadians so proud of their country. We will always remember the thrills and excitement they brought to all of us.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer congratulations from the Official Opposition to Canada's Winter Olympics team. In particular we can be proud of the Albertans and Alberta-based athletes who participated in the Salt Lake City games. In fact, Alberta athletes made up almost a quarter of Canada's team.

The success of these athletes is something we all take pride in. They are driven, determined young people pursuing a dream that embodies a relentless Canadian spirit. We commend our Olympic team for their commitment, dedication, and fortitude in pursuit of personal excellence. A province and nation watched and cheered with untold pride, patriotism, and respect.

We would also like to commend those parents, family, friends, and communities that have supported our athletes in their quest to get to the Olympics. They, too, exhibit Olympic spirit and are an important part of this success.

The passion of the athletes and their supporters has captured this nation. We will all remember the excitement of our gold medal women's and men's hockey matches, the heart-stopping events in figure skating, and the thrill of seeing so many of our athletes achieve medal performances or their personal bests. The recent Olympic performances will help to make the winter of 2002 memorable.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by again congratulating our Olympians, their families, their communities for a job well done. They have stirred a pride and patriotism that many of us did not know was there. Their efforts do embody a true north strong and free.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we proceed to the next

order of business, I must apologize. I neglected to call on an hon. member during Introduction of Guests. Might we revert briefly?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two friends of mine who are also representatives of the Progressive Group for Independent Business who are here today. This is a group that is very involved in trying to address the many important issues affecting small businesses throughout Canada. Today seated in the members' gallery we have the admittedly controversial national president, Mr. Craig Chandler, who has come here today to see for himself what a great government we have here in Alberta, and team member Mark Lachance as well. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Education System

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has ordered teachers back to work. For all the day-to-day issues in our education system this move provides nothing but a quick fix, but it does not provide a cure. The public needs to know if the government has a plan for addressing the issues that led to the job action in the first place. My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, does the government have a plan for reducing class sizes?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we do have a plan for education, and it is a plan that has evolved to certainly give our students the opportunity to excel in education, as has been pointed out by the minister on a number of occasions relative to the way students score on international tests.

Relative to the specifics of the question, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In about September or October of this year we undertook a survey of all schools in Alberta to determine exactly what the class size was. From the kindergarten to grade 6 age group the average class size was 23. In kindergarten it was 19.7. In grades 1 to 6 it was 23.6. So we feel that the flexibility that is given to the school boards is by far the most important issue, and indeed in talking to the school boards since that time, almost to a T the school boards say that they want the flexibility to be able to determine what the class size is.

We have visitors from British Columbia here today, and they are probably one of the best examples of what happens when a Legislature legislates class size. In British Columbia the Legislature legislated a class size of around 23, I believe, and it was going down to 22. Well, Mr. Speaker, if your child was child number 24, your child didn't get into that class. That child would be bused to another school down the road. That is the fact of what happened, and we have evidence of that here today.

So, Mr. Speaker, we feel that, yes, class sizes are important, that smaller class sizes are important, but we also feel that what is

equally very important is the flexibility that our democratically elected school boards have to determine the class size.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Resources are necessary to implement that flexibility. My second question to the Premier: does the government have a plan to give schools the resources they need so that parents no longer have to fund-raise for basics?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would point out that certainly there's been an increase, a substantial increase, over the last five years for educational funding. For the first time, as I've pointed out many times, a line item was put in last year's budget guaranteeing teachers at least 6 percent, an unprecedented step, if I may say, in terms of budgeting with the ability of the teachers, of course, to negotiate – that is, the unions of the various locals to negotiate – with the various school jurisdictions for more if indeed that's where the school jurisdictions feel that they want to spend their money. It's the opinion of the members of this government caucus that, indeed, sufficient resources are being allocated to education. In fact, we have identified education as a priority, one of the top priorities of this government, and the increase in funding – I believe it's 40 percent over the last five years – is indicative of this government's commitment to education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier tell Albertans also that that increase that you're talking about was not enough to cover the cost of increased enrollments or the cost of increased input costs associated with providing education?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is all taken into account before and during the budget process.

Relative to the specifics as it relates to three-year business plans and so on, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think what the Premier said needs to be underscored and continued on with this statement. First of all, since '95-96 funding for education in this province has increased by 41 percent. The hon. opposition is talking about '92-93. The system today is much different than it was in '92-93. We had 165 school boards, some that had no schools. So obviously it is a different system here today. It has gone up 41 percent. Teachers' salaries have gone up 17 percent. Enrollment has gone up around 6 percent. So, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues that are out there. We feel very strongly about education on this side of the House. It is important, it is our future, and we will continue to assure that our students will always get the best results in the world, as they did this year.

2:00

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the teachers' strike the government said over and over again: there is no more money. This isn't exactly true. According to the latest quarterly fiscal update, the government has almost \$2.5 billion set aside for future debt repayment, and at least half a billion dollars of this won't be used until the end of the next fiscal year. Will the government use just a fraction of this to solve the crisis that's in our education system right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to that specific question I believe that the hon. Minister of Finance has a very good answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hello?

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No, I won't start this term off with "Hello?"

We did do a briefing today on the third-quarter update, that all members have received and which I will be filing at the appropriate time in the House this afternoon. The hon. leader opposite was present. What he is actually talking about is that last year, not this current fiscal year, we were able to put aside money to pay off the debt of this province and free up that burden from the very children that we're talking about in the future and bring down the debt servicing costs in the future for Albertans so that those debt costs could be freed up forever.

The concept that he is putting forward is that we renege on that and go back and take those dollars out, increase the debt, spend beyond our fiscal framework – in other words, run us into a deficit – to resolve an issue that is already dealt with within the fiscal framework of this province.

Now, to bring this analogy close to home, that's what went on – and I hate to say it – in our neighbouring province of British Columbia, just across the mountains, and that's why they have moved from the position of being a have province to a have-not province and running \$4 billion of debt on an annual basis and legislating major things. So the concept of what they're putting forward is to take the money that has already been put away to pay off our debt, pulling that back, increasing debt, increasing spending, running deficits, and putting it all on the backs of our children and our grandchildren. That's their policy, Mr. Speaker.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, bad education affects our children as well.

My question is to the Premier. Will the government finally make an official offer to fund the teachers' outstanding pension liability without taking the money out of the classroom?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that was on the table, notwithstanding what the union boss might have told his membership. That was on the table. It is now off the table because job action has been taken. It was made quite clear before the job action that that would come off the table. It is now off the table, unfortunately.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you. I just want to add one point, Mr. Speaker. In the hon. Leader of the Opposition's preamble he mentioned bad results for students. In the recent exams – I just really need to reiterate this for this House – we finished number one in the world. That isn't just in Canada; that's the world.

Mr. Speaker, there's one other very key component that came back from those studies. In Alberta we were the only jurisdiction in the world – in the world – where the public system did better than the private system, and we're very proud of that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: is the government planning on biasing the negotiations again by putting a line item back into the education budget in the next budget period?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, well, I'll announce it now. The budget

will be tabled, I believe, on March 19, so wait and see. I'm not going to discuss the budget now. There will be plenty of time after the budget is tabled to debate the budget and question the budget, and I'm not going to speculate at this point whether there will be any line items related to any salary relative to any sector at this time.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Teachers' Hours and Remuneration

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Surprisingly, given their actions this past year, the government believes that goodwill is important on the part of all parties in the education system. We learned that yesterday. My questions are to the Premier. By lobbing insults from Japan at our teachers about their working hours, was the Premier fostering goodwill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad, I'm very, very happy that the hon. member has raised this particular issue, because not everything was reported. The main thing that wasn't reported was that there was a challenge in one of the newspapers in a letter to the editor – it wasn't the *Sun*, but it was the other paper – where the writer pointed out – and I don't know if the writer was a teacher or not – that I was going to Japan and I should probably investigate how respected teachers are in Japan. So I asked the question of one of our staffers whose wife happens to be a teacher. She's been a teacher in Japan for 30 years, and I reported that. This is what he told me: that his wife works eight hours a day in the classroom – right? – five days a week and two weekends. Two weekends. That is mandatory. She earns the equivalent of about \$50,000 Canadian a year, after 30 years of teaching. I said, "Do teachers go on strike in Japan?" and he said, "No, that is out of the question."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No matter what the spin, teachers considered it an insult. Mr. Premier, will you begin rebuilding that goodwill with teachers by apologizing to them now for those comments?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, why would I apologize for simply reporting what someone said to me? The husband of a teacher who obviously should know what his wife makes and the conditions under which his wife works. Now, what is wrong with that? Nothing.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again. The teachers considered it an insult. Will you apologize to them?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, why would a teacher consider it an insult if I report what the husband of a teacher told me: that teachers in Japan spend eight hours of classroom time a day, work two weekends a month, and that his wife after 30 years of teaching earns approximately what a teacher in Alberta would earn after 30 years of teaching? What is insulting about that?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Health Care Premiums

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier and his Tory government pride themselves on cutting taxes, yet in yesterday's

throne speech this government promised to implement higher health care premiums. If it looks like a tax, if it walks like a tax, if it quacks like a tax, then it is a tax. To the Premier . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: It's quite okay for an hon. member in raising a question to have colourful expressions.

The hon. member.

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

2:10

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. Premier, the problem here is that the unrehearsed solicitations of expression didn't allow the hon. leader of the third party to conclude his question. We still have to get to that point.

DR. PANNU: Thank you. My question to the hon. Premier: since he promised Albertans tax reductions, why is this government now proposing a massive increase in the most regressive of all taxes, namely health care premiums? Duck that one, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I will go on to repeat what I said earlier. There are two provinces in Canada that have premiums as opposed to a payroll tax. The reason we have premiums and the reason British Columbia has premiums is to point out to the population that health care is not free. You know, unlike the socialist way of sort of hiding it as a payroll tax and increasing taxes like the NDs do all the time, we're saying that there is a cost to health care, and premiums clearly identify that cost, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking to the extent to which health care premiums will be raised, I won't be specific at this particular time because that is a matter for the budget, which, again, will be tabled on March 19. At that time the Finance minister will outline what the increase is going to be and the rationale for the increase, but I can give the hon. member some hint as to the rationale. First of all, it was clearly recommended in the Mazankowski report that health care premiums be raised. [interjection] Yes, it was. Read the report.

Mr. Speaker, secondly, health care premiums have not been adjusted for a number of years. It is time to adjust those rates to reflect the true cost of insuring services that are insurable services under Alberta health, and that hasn't been done for some time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the Premier: why has the Premier turned his back on seniors, on municipalities, and on business groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, all of whom strongly oppose hiking health care premiums?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we haven't turned our backs on anyone. What we are proposing to do is the responsible thing and, I would point out, the reasonable thing, not only responsible but reasonable. It's a plan that will protect seniors, that will protect low-income Albertans.

AN HON. MEMBER: And the NDP.

MR. KLEIN: I don't know. There are some rich members of the NDs.

Mr. Speaker, it will reflect the real cost, the real and reasonable cost, of delivering health care services, especially as it relates to those services that are covered by health care premiums.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify targeting seniors and average Alberta families by hiking their health care premiums just so he can pay for further reductions in corporate income taxes in the next three years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the third party alluded to seniors. I specifically pointed out that seniors, as they are protected in a number of other instances, will be protected, at least the low-income to middle-income seniors, relative to health care premiums.

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

Teachers' Labour Dispute

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see this government take action to help Alberta students to obtain the education that they need and deserve. My question is for clarity purposes only, and it's to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How does this order affect the boards and locals that were not on strike on February 21 but have since taken a strike vote, such as the Timberline local and the Wild Rose school division teachers in my constituency?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the order in council was quite clear, declaring the unreasonable hardship, but also to the appendix it listed 22 particular disputes that were in progress. That order does not impact or reflect on any of the other ongoing disputes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if a strike should occur in some of these other unaffected locals, will the minister consider declaring an emergency after a similar time period has elapsed, as in the first order?

MR. DUNFORD: I'd like to point out to the hon. member and to other members here in the House that it's not the minister that declares the emergency. The Labour Relations Code contemplates that in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, thus meaning the cabinet. It's cabinet that would make that decision.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you for the clarification.

My second supplemental is to the Minister of Learning. Is the minister prepared to bring legislation forward to protect the education of Alberta students in the future?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday of this week we will be having a very important court challenge that has been initiated by the ATA. We will wait for that, but I have given my assurances to the 37,000 grade 12 students, to the 550,000 students in Alberta that we will do what it takes to ensure that the teachers are not out on strike but, rather, in the classroom.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government had

a chance to find a solution to the teachers' concerns before a strike began. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why didn't the minister strike a disputes inquiry board to try and negotiate a solution before February 4?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Disputes inquiry boards of course are part of the Labour Relations Code and have been used in the past in various disputes that were either ongoing or had actually gone into a strike situation. I want to point out to the hon. member that a disputes inquiry board would look at a situation to see if there was anything that was unclear, anything that was confusing about a particular issue, and if there was any particular hope in being able to cause a recommendation that might bring the parties to an agreement. I think that not only at the time but in retrospect we can see that a disputes inquiry board would only have delayed the situation. I would think on behalf of all teachers, of all parents and children that if we were to have a situation develop, February would probably be the month to have it happen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Learning. Did the hon. minister oppose a disputes inquiry board because it would not take away the teachers' right to strike, which is ultimately what this minister and this government wants to do?

Thank you.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member I'm sure knows and as the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment just alluded to, the disputes inquiry board is a mechanism for mediation. The contracts between the teachers' union and the school boards were up in September of this year – that is when they ran out – so they have been without a contract for roughly five or six months. They had that time in which to undertake mediation, and indeed many of them did undertake mediation. Because of one means or the other the mediation efforts were stonewalled, so I did not make the recommendation. Obviously, it is the Minister of Human Resources and Employment who makes this decision. But I think we have to be realistic. Mediation was going nowhere. To give it another month of mediation, to cause a month of undue hardship to students I think is a problem.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question this afternoon is to the Premier. Is the Premier planning any punitive action in legislation against the ATA?

MR. KLEIN: No.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:20

Kyoto Accord

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Recent studies and reports by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters indicate that severe economic pain will be inflicted on the Canadian economy as a result of the

implementation of the Kyoto accord. Could the Minister of Environment advise the House and Albertans as to what the impact will be on the provincial economy if the accord is ratified by the Canadian government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much. The issue is one of a range of risk, and certainly in Alberta we've done a great deal of analysis. We've used some Australian modeling groups called ABARE. We've used our own modeling groups and different modeling groups, plus we've had these numbers validated or examined by university economists inside the province. What we have is a number in a range. What we're estimating is our range of risk based on a 200 megatonne, or 200 million tonne, gap between the Kyoto target and where we are today. In fact, the gap is much larger than that. We know and the federal government just has admitted that the gap is not 200 million, not 160 million, but 240 million tonnes. So for Alberta what this means at a 200 million tonne gap – and we know it's already bigger than 200 million, and by the end of the year we'll be able to validate the gap of someplace around 280 million to 300 million tonnes. We already know the price to Alberta, based on 200 million – so we know it's a conservative estimate – in a range of risk will be someplace between \$2.9 billion and \$5.5 billion, and that's a conservative estimate. We know that will cost Alberta someplace between 40,000 and 70,000 jobs. Now, are these numbers right? Well, just yesterday we had an economist from a university in Ontario, who is not associated with us in any way, who has done his own analysis and reported: Alberta's numbers are right; it is the federal government and the federal Ministry of the Environment that are flat wrong.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Since the United States of America, our largest trading partner, did not and will not sign the accord and opted for a made-in-America solution, did the Minister of Environment suggest to his federal counterpart a made-in-Canada solution?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only did the U.S. not sign the accord, but 92 percent of Canadian trade and 92 percent of Canadian trade partners are in noncompliance. So only 8 percent of our trade is in compliance or will be in compliance with the Kyoto accord. That's one thing.

In terms of a North American policy, we have encouraged the federal government to seek a policy that would cover the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. The Europeans can meet their targets because they have what is called a European bubble. For instance, Portugal can increase its emissions by something in the neighbourhood of 37 percent. So what they've done is they've just moved that around Europe and given it to Germany and given it to the U.K. and said, "We're meeting our targets," without any significant, real reductions. So that's why we're arguing with the federal government: because our major trading partner is the U.S., Mexico is a major competitor, and Venezuela is a major competitor, we need a North American or even a hemispheric model.

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

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question today is to the Premier. Why is your government planning to use Alberta's nest egg, the heritage fund, to cover your government's mismanagement of the province's finances?

MR. KLEIN: I really don't know where you get that notion. You know, perhaps it comes from my media scrum yesterday, where I said – and I've said it many times before – that if there's one thing that's true in politics, it is that yes means yes, maybe means yes, and no means maybe.

Very simply I said that, yes, there's been some informal discussion about what should be done with the heritage savings trust fund. All members of caucus have different ideas as to what should be done with that fund, but the hon. Minister of Revenue has the matter under consideration. There's been no formal discussion in caucus or cabinet about the future of the fund, and as I pointed out yesterday in the media scrum, the status quo prevails. Today the status quo prevails. Nothing has been decided relative to the future of the fund, but I imagine that down the road it will be a topic of discussion certainly amongst government caucus members and perhaps eventually in the Legislature. Who knows?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. As of last night the Premier said that there were rain showers in Alberta. What has caused this drastic change in weather in government policy from last night until today?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Again, what radio broadcast was he listening to? Did he question the reporter as to whether the reporter was perhaps paraphrasing or interpreting something that I said? I'll tell you precisely what I said in the news conference yesterday. I was asked specifically: is it raining? I said: in my mind it's not raining, but we've had sprinkles from time to time. But, no, we're not experiencing a rainstorm right now.

Unlike virtually every other jurisdiction in this country we're still budgeting, according to the third-quarter update, for an \$18 million surplus. Albeit small and a lot less than last year, nonetheless we're in better shape than virtually every other jurisdiction in this country, Mr. Speaker. So it's not raining.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again. Will the Premier be sending a note to the co-chairs of the Future Summit and asking them to remove any recommendations about spending the heritage fund from their final report?

MR. KLEIN: No. If I get into that, Mr. Speaker, then someone else might say: Mr. Premier, you write the co-chairs and have them remove or add something. The Future Summit was an Albertans' exercise, and it was open and accessible to all the delegates. What made the summit so successful was that it was open and everything was on the table. We'll go through those recommendations and give them our fullest consideration.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Revenue supplement the question.

MR. MELCHIN: Mr. Speaker, the Future Summit was an outstanding conference of delegates, a great cross section of Albertans. It was a chance for them to voice their opinions on a whole variety of topics. There was a chance for them to even talk about things such as the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. I would find it quite offensive that we would then go back to delegates and tell them that we didn't listen, that we don't care to have the recommendations even written up in a report.

It is imperative that we allow through a summit the voices of Albertans to come forward. That report will be completed by the end of April. We're looking forward to analyzing all those recommendations and will report to it in due course.

Thank you.

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

Bighorn Wildlife Recreation Area

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question today is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The Bighorn backcountry area is a very large area, rich in resources, and a very popular spot for many recreational activities. I've recently received many calls and letters and another 52 letters just today from various recreational user groups including off-highway vehicle users, trail riders, and environmental groups, all with a very diverse set of opinions on how this pristine area should be managed. Now, with all these competing demands, how is this government going to resolve the issue of responsible access to this area in a way that meets the needs of Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course the Bighorn backcountry is a very important area in Alberta. The area covers over 4,000 square kilometers, and about 80 percent of that, of course, is in the prime protection area of the eastern slopes policy.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, there are competing interests, of course, as far as access to the area, from environmental to recreational to industrial development, so what we've done is set up a committee of 15 independent members along with seven departments to look at laying out a plan, looking at areas such as the existing usage and looking at how we may minimize the imprint we leave once development takes place, and also to achieve a balance for Albertans between the economic development and the environmental management.

I just want to mention a few of the representatives that are representing the public, Mr. Speaker. One is the petroleum industry, trail riding, fisheries, environment, off-highway vehicle users, and residents of the Clearwater area also. So it is a very important area, and keep in mind that there will always be a balance.

MR. MARZ: My second question to the same minister: what is this 15-member advisory group or panel specifically doing to consult with Albertans about the use of this area?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, first of all, these 15 members are well qualified, and some of them represent agencies that already do a lot of work in the regions, in all the sectors in fact, and this group, of course, has developed a web site where individuals can contact the group. In addition to that, we are setting up a meeting on March

14 in Rocky Mountain House, where the public will be invited to attend and participate in the design of the process.

MR. MARZ: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. When will Albertans know what the advisory group is recommending, and will there be an opportunity to respond to those recommendations?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. What I expect is the recommendations to be finalized later this spring. They will be made available to the public, and we will respond immediately to the recommendations, of course, keeping in mind again that there will always be a balance between the economic development and the environmental management of our lands.

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

Community Lottery Boards

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last fall in a panic state the government cut community lottery board allocations by 1 percent. The timing and notification regarding these cuts resulted in hardship for the agencies that rely on these funds to do their good work. The government has now put the community lottery board allocation process on hold. My first question is to the Minister of Gaming. When is the minister going to be forthright with the lottery boards and their agencies and tell them how long they can expect to be kept on hold?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this particular fiscal year, that is 2001-2002, some \$53 million was allocated to community lottery boards.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. STEVENS: Actually, \$53.3 million.

As a result of the belt-tightening that was necessary this past fall, Alberta Gaming did its share, and there was a minor reduction in the amount of the allocation at that point in time by some 2 million or so dollars. The balance of the money has been allocated to community lottery boards, and the cheques are going out to the various recipients.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Can the minister confirm if the reductions were levied across the province without preferential treatment; in other words, did all boards get cut the same?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that community lottery boards have different ways of dealing with the allocations that are provided to them. There are some 88 boards. Some have one meeting and one allocation. Others have two meetings and two-stage allocations. Accordingly, when it was necessary to make the deduction this past fall, some accommodation had to be made at that point in time to reflect the fact that some of the boards had in

fact expended all of the moneys that had been given to them. We indicated at that point in time very clearly to the boards what the process was, and all of them know exactly where they stand with respect to how they were treated, but it was necessary to take into account the different ways that each of those boards had set up their allocations in making those deductions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Gaming: why are there indications being given to organizations that the community facility enhancement program has run out of money and that there's no point in putting in an application?

MR. STEVENS: Well, the community facility enhancement program was started in the '80s and, in fact, is in its 13th or 14th year and fourth iteration. Each year there is some \$25 million that is allocated to that particular program, as we are at this point in time – that is, with March 31 being the end of this fiscal year and with March 31 also being the end of this fourth iteration of the program – you come to a point where there is very little money yet there is a significant demand. Accordingly, what has been told to applicants is that we will be addressing the continuation of the CFEP program going forward into the new budget, and in the meantime we will continue to allocate what funds there are available based on appropriate applications. So that is the message, Mr. Speaker, that has been given to people who are interested in this program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Teachers' Remuneration

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to the government's claims the 4 and 2 percent line items in last year's budget for teachers' salaries thwarted the collective bargaining process. It forced school boards to choose between a wage settlement for teachers well below those of comparable groups such as nurses, provincial employees, or even MLAs or to take resources away from students. The result now before us is a teachers' strike of unprecedented size and bitterness. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government arrogantly interfere with the lawful rights of teachers' locals and school boards to freely engage in collective bargaining through its imposition of a line item for teachers' salaries in the budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if I may be permitted, I would like to begin the answer to the question with a question. Would the hon. member have been satisfied had we put absolutely nothing in, that they were guaranteed nothing, rather than 6 percent? Is that what he's saying, that he would have preferred that we guaranteed nothing rather than 6 percent? Now, I know I can't ask him a question, but perhaps the media can ask him the question after the session.

Mr. Speaker, we felt that we were doing something for the teachers by taking the unprecedented step of guaranteeing them at least 6 percent, 4 and 2, by making a guarantee, unprecedented, with the ability for the union to negotiate with the various school jurisdictions for more if indeed that's where the jurisdictions decided they wanted to spend their dollars.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier be straightforward with Albertans and acknowledge that there is a clear link between the

government's unprecedented decision to impose wage controls on teachers through the budget and the resulting unprecedented provincewide job action by teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, had we made no comment in the budget and said that we will put zero in the budget for teachers' salaries, that would have been wage control, that would have sent a very serious message. Putting a minimum of 6 percent in the budget guaranteed that amount at least, and as has been the case in various school jurisdictions throughout this province where there have been settlements, teachers were able to negotiate for more in some cases if not all cases.

2:40

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, is the Premier trying to suggest that since previous budgets, going back till the foundation of this province, did not have line items for teachers yet teachers had significant increases in their wages and living conditions, that was a less satisfactory approach than this wage control through the budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is not wage control. This is guaranteeing a minimum. You know, my math is not that poor, but a 6 percent increase is better than zero. Any of the university professors over there agree that 6 percent is better and greater than zero?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Osteoporosis Program

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta I have become very familiar with health issues facing older Albertans. A problem faced by countless seniors in our province is osteoporosis. In fact, 1 in 4 Alberta women over the age of 50 and 1 in 8 men suffer from osteoporosis. A number of my constituents have suffered broken bones as a result of what should have been minor falls. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps is his department taking to reduce the number of seniors who suffer these unnecessary setbacks year after year and to reduce the related costs to the health system?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the cost of our health system will increase as the average age of our population continues to increase over the next 10 to 20 years. As an example, in the area of osteoporosis we spent \$14.2 million in the last fiscal year just for diagnostic tests to determine osteoporosis. The Department of Health and Wellness will be working with the Osteoporosis Society to develop a public awareness campaign around the relationship between nutritional, lifestyle, and activity habits and the development of osteoporosis, and I'm pleased to advise members of this Assembly that the department will be providing \$100,000 to the Osteoporosis Society to administer the campaign. The focus of the campaign will be on women over the age of 35 who are approaching or who have entered the menopausal years, when decreases in estrogen put them at risk of losing one-third to one-half of their bone density. This group is open to changing health behaviours. I think that this is a very good example of wellness initiatives that the government of Alberta intends to promote.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Calgary and Edmonton

have strong osteoporosis programs. Will this campaign include any specific activities to address the needs of those seniors and others who are living outside the province's major cities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that this is an important point to make, that we need to conduct an environmental scan that is a first step to a public awareness campaign, and the purpose of the scan is to identify the most effective ways of reaching groups within the province that could be better served by osteoporosis education. Again, within the context of the Mazankowski report this approach to the promotion of wellness and giving Albertans access to credible, reliable information on how to look after themselves is critical.

Certainly the issues of those who are living in rural parts of Alberta will be addressed. The scan also must consider the harder to reach populations within urban areas. Examples of that may be certain cultural groups, recent immigrants who perhaps do not have facility in the language. Lower income groups would be another good example, Mr. Speaker. Based on the information that we gather through this environmental scan, we will develop a strategy to inform these groups about lifestyle, nutrition, and activity choices that will best protect them from osteoporosis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary also to the Minister of Health and Wellness: does he have any further plans that would also contribute to the prevention of osteoporosis, say in the area of learning with young students in the school system, in the area of diet and nutrition?

MRS. NELSON: Good question.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, next to me, commented that that's a good question, and I agree. Clearly, one of the recommendations in the Mazankowski report that we intend on proceeding forward with is the improvement of curriculum in our schools as it relates to health. I think that that would be a very, very important point. The setting of the right trends in young people is absolutely critical to establishing lifelong trends for activity, proper nutrition, and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes. It is our intention to be working with my colleague the minister from the Department of Learning to proceed on developing curriculum, and certainly education as it relates to osteoporosis within an overall context of health education curriculum would be important.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Seven hon. members have advised the chair that they would like to participate today, so we will go in this order. First of all, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, Edmonton-Castle Downs, and Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Town of Lacombe

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lacombe, a growing, vibrant community situated adjacent to highway 2 in central Alberta, has something to brag about. *Harrowsmith Country Life* magazine has chosen Lacombe as one of the ten prettiest towns in Canada. No other Alberta towns were selected. *Harrowsmith Country Life* editor, Tom Cruickshank, stated that articles such as the one

Lacombe will be featured in in April's publication have been a huge plus for past winners, attracting large numbers of interested tourists.

Congratulations, Lacombe. I have always known that you were a special place. I am very proud to be a longtime resident and to represent your citizens' interests at the Alberta Legislature.

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

Peter Mercer

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to recognize and honour the work of Peter Mercer as he prepares for his March 1 retirement from the Downtown Business Association. I met Peter within a few weeks of first being elected. He was knocking on my door to let me know what I could do in partnership with the DBA.

We have much to thank Peter for. He promoted and publicized the 1995 capital city downtown plan. This, in turn, brought us the demolition of the Rat Hole, the one-way to two-way changes for downtown streets, safety audits of downtown parkades, and the first two-hour parking meters.

Peter is also a huge promoter of the Fourth Street Promenade streetscaping and the installation of Roy Leadbeater's *Aurora's Dance*, also on 104th. His publicity made this a going concern. In fact, that is the comment I heard the most: Peter's ability to get stories about revitalization into the news and that Peter is a great party animal. He brought us all the best parties downtown: festivities around the Canadian Finals Rodeo, the longest line dance, and the chili cook-off, a great Santa Claus parade, and lots of downtown activities for Family Day.

Thank you Peter, and best wishes for your new endeavor.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer's Olympic Athletes

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to recognize the Olympic champions from Red Deer. All members of the Olympic team from Alberta and Canada have made us proud and grateful for their honest, drug-free efforts, their graciousness, and their classic Canadian dignity.

I'm very proud to congratulate Jamie Sale from Red Deer and her partner, David Pelletier from Quebec, for their beautifully exciting and flawless pairs skating and their great Canadian attitudes. Our congratulations to Diedra Dionne of Red Deer, who, through persistence, determination, and faith, flew through the air with grace and beauty to win a bronze medal in aerial free-style skiing and to Ryan Smith from Red Deer, a member of the Canadian men's hockey team, who showed the true grit of Alberta hockey players, who never give up and always put their heart and soul into our great Canadian sport.

It is my pleasure to also congratulate our Olympic athletes from Red Deer, who competed with great talent and effort, our world cup champion speed skater, Jeremy Wotherspoon, and another great speed skater, Stephen Elm. In women's luge racing we are very proud and pleased to claim Regan Lauscher as our very own.

Congratulations to all these Red Deer athletes and to our entire Canadian Olympic team, their coaches, families, and sponsors. You have given a gift to all Canadians of an unforgettable 19th Winter Olympic Games of 2002 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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

2:50

Canadian Forces Battle Group

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year members of the Canadian Forces Battle Group, which consists of two infantry companies of the 3rd Battalion of the PPCLI, 1 Reconnaissance Squadron from the Lord Strathcona's Horse, and the logistics group from the No. 1 Service Battalion, all from Edmonton, were deployed to Afghanistan. They are part of Operation Apollo in direct support of the coalition against terrorism.

Our Canadian Forces have a long history of peacekeeping around the world, but they face real threats during this mission. They will conduct a variety of tasks where their safety will be threatened by land mines and resistance from the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

To all our soldiers who serve in Afghanistan, you honour us as a nation. Know that our thoughts and prayers are with you and that we wish you every success in your mission and a speedy and safe return to your loved ones. Thank you.

Walt Healy

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to pay special recognition to an outstanding Calgarian who passed away in January. On January 12, Walt Healy, who was known around the world for his love of motorcycling, passed away.

Walt was an honoured resident of the Calgary-Bow constituency and the owner of Walt Healy Motorcycles, which he owned from 1931 until the day he died. Walt also loved to act part-time, appearing in several movies, including *One More Mountain*, where I was honoured to work with him. Walt won several awards and honours but may be best known for his commitment to safety while riding. His learn-to-ride program, implemented many years ago, has since become the Canada Safety Council motorcycle program and allows Canadians of all ages to share his passion for cycling and, at the same time, stay safe.

Walt was known as an outspoken, no-nonsense man with a heart of gold who lived life to the fullest. To quote from Walt: "On a motorcycle you smell, you feel, and you understand what's going on. It's a different feeling. You're a free individual, a free soul."

He was a true Albertan, a great friend to us all. We will miss him. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Canada's Armed Forces

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry in acknowledging the brave Albertans who are currently maintaining the peace efforts in Afghanistan. On January 31, 2002, 750 men and women stationed at the CFB Edmonton Namao joined other members from Canada's armed forces on a mission to Kandahar, Afghanistan. We have complete confidence in their skills. It is with pride that we support them during this peacekeeping effort. The difficulties and dangers that they will face as they complete their tour of duty is a testament of courage and their devotion to Canada and her grateful citizens.

We also acknowledge their selfless families and friends, who are asked once again to put their fears and worries aside and accept the frightening task that lies ahead of their spouses, siblings, children, and parents. It is with the utmost gratitude that we honour them as well.

Canada is part of a coalition that will defend the fragile freedom in Afghanistan to ensure that this war-torn country, in despair for so long, has a chance to rebuild. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the people of

Afghanistan are depending on this coalition to provide them a chance of finally building a peaceful nation.

To our military personnel, Godspeed. To the families and friends, we join you in prayers and hope for their safe and quick return home. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

The Scott Family from Vermilion

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour today to rise in the House and recognize the Scott family from Vermilion. Now, all of us have heard of Becky Scott, who recently became Canada's first ever medal winner in a cross-country skiing event. It was a bronze medal, but more importantly or maybe just as importantly, it was done, unlike some of her competitors, drug free. I think you would all agree with me that she should be awarded the gold medal.

Mr. Speaker, Becky would be the first person to acknowledge that her parents were instrumental in her success. Walter and Jan Scott from Vermilion are truly gold medal parents. Becky has stated that when you take on a goal and put your heart and your soul into doing everything it takes to accomplish that goal, that is excellence. Well, Becky Scott truly is excellence.

On behalf of all her friends and supporters in and around the town of Vermilion: job well done.

head: Notices of Motions

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise now to give notice that preceding Orders of the Day, I will be rising on Standing Order 30. Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Bill 2

Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act, 2002

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act, 2002.

The consultation that preceded this was, in fact, a comprehensive review taking place in the fall of 2000. The intent of this bill will be to clarify the nomination process for boards to address governance roles of the boards and their accountability to the ministry. Mr. Speaker, we have also had significant consultation with partnering departments of Justice, Learning, Health and Wellness, Community Development, International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Bill 3

Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2002

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, this will accommodate small-volume water users who wish to use water without the necessity of obtaining the water licence under the current act.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 4

Public Health Amendment Act, 2002

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being Bill 4, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2002.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 5

Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 5, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act.

Mr. Speaker, if this act is adopted by this Assembly, it will replace the existing Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, eliminating the need for the provisional orders and therefore two court applications in most support cases. A claimant who commences a support application or a support variation application under provincial or territorial legislation in another Canadian jurisdiction would have the application forwarded here, where an Alberta respondent would then present his or her evidence at a single court hearing. Claimants in Alberta would similarly have their paper applications forwarded to the respondent's province or territory for a single court hearing there.

I encourage all hon. members to support Bill 5.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

3:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 5 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Bill 7

Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2002

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2002.

The bill updates the current act to reflect the merger of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 7 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Bill 9

Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2002

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2002.

This will amend current legislation to allow for interprovincial movement of children involved in child welfare, will streamline telephone applications, will in fact address amendments to enable a justice of the peace to handle telephone applications for apprehension orders, and will help us with the introduction of amendments to allow the Child Welfare Appeal Panel to be bound by the policies of the resources for children with disabilities program. Mr. Speaker, these amendments will allow for smoother co-ordination of issues and efficiency in the Child Welfare Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

Bill 10

Public Works Amendment Act, 2002

MR. SNELGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 10, the Public Works Amendment Act, 2002.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 11

Energy Information Statutes Amendment Act, 2002

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Energy Information Statutes Amendment Act, 2002.

The following acts will be amended by this bill to retain and improve paramouncy of confidentiality provisions for those acts over the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act: the Mines and Minerals Act, the Natural Gas Marketing Act, the Electric Utilities Act, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, the Oil Sands Conservation Act, and the Coal Conservation Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier I'm pleased to file with the Assembly the appropriate number of letters of congratulations that the Premier has sent to Alberta-based Olympic medal winners. Many of those Olympians have been mentioned in statements here today. I will not read the names on all of the letters, but I do believe that these letters capture the pride that all MLAs and all Albertans have in these tremendous athletes.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Deputy Premier, did you have tablings on behalf of your other position as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I do, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today copies of the report on university animal facilities for the year 2001 as required under section 52(5) of the Universities Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning I provided the government's 2001-2002 quarterly budget report for the third quarter to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. I am now wanting to file and table in this House the quarterly budget report as amended – in other words, the consolidated fiscal plan – as required under section 8 of the Government Accountability Act as well as the third quarter activity report for 2001-2002.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for tabling the requisite number of copies of a listing of the expenses and costs for the Premier's Advisory Council on Health. I note that for its 17 months of activity the total cost came to \$326,454.30.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly two reports: the Appeals Commission for Alberta Workers' Compensation 2000 annual report and the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta 2001 annual report.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon at the request of Mr. Barrie Schulha of St. Albert I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter that he sent to me requesting that they be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand now to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter that I've written to Mr. Michael Chambers, president of the Canadian Olympic Association, congratulating him on the great work that Canada's team and Albertans did in the Olympics in Salt Lake City, expressing our

thanks for all the entertainment and enjoyment that they provided for us for the last couple of weeks.

THE SPEAKER: Are there additional members?

Hon. members, the chair has three tablings today. First of all, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I table with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: service order 7/01, Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 9), and 8/01, Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 10).

I also table with the Assembly the report by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the hon. former Member for Wainwright, Robert Butch Fischer, dated January 9, 2002. The report was distributed to members on January 9 of 2002.

As well, pursuant to section 32 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1980*, chapter E-3, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 24th annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2000 and the 2001 general election.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

THE SPEAKER: Now, on our routine, having no points of order, no questions of privilege, we come to recognition of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on a Standing Order 30 application.

Education System

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to propose the following motion to the Assembly:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the actions needed to resolve the problems currently faced by Alberta's schools.

It is critical that we have this debate now. The discussion, the give and take that goes on, and the exchange of ideas has to be conducted beyond the scope provided by question period. It has to go beyond that scope where we can deal with it in the context of debate, because we're having a situation arise right now where there's potentially additional school jurisdictions that may enter into a strike position.

3:10

We have to have a clear definition from the government: what are the parameters, what are the expectations, and what are the future projections of where we expect to see our public school system moving? It's not enough just to say that the solution has to be achieved today. It has to be dealt with in the context of a long-run commitment to our education system, a long-run commitment to how we as Albertans want to see our education system supported, and those are the kinds of issues that we have to bring into this debate. We have to look at: what are the kinds of parameters that we as the decision-makers for this province want to put into the commitment on funding? In terms of class size what debate will go around creating class size parameters within the context of feedback from those school boards, from the teachers in terms of what is appropriate? What additional resources are available to possibly support a teacher in the classroom, whether those are computers, whether those are teacher aides, whether those are the kinds of access to textbooks that appears not to be there.

We also have to look at the overall commitment that we have to education in the context of the resources that we provide. How much of our education system is going to have to be funded from parent fund-raising, from community fund-raising, from partnerships with the business community? These are the kinds of things that we

have to be able to discuss now in the open, in a public area like the Legislature so that we can effectively send signals to Albertans about what to expect we have as a commitment to the education system.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to clarify for Albertans the kind of expenditures that we currently have in our education system, how it compares, how it's keeping up to the changing number of students, to the changing costs of providing the learning environment. This has to be reflected in the concept that we have conflicting numbers out there. You know, it's easy to say that there's been an increase of 41 percent, but we also have to look at it in the context of: how does that keep up with the number of students and the cost of providing it in terms of computers that are necessary, the increasing cost of textbooks, the increasing cost of providing library services?

All of this has to be built into that debate, and we have to have the opportunity to address those issues here in this Legislature so that Albertans understand the parameters. They then will better understand what they're hearing when school boards or when teachers' local associations get involved in their negotiations. They'll also understand better what comes out of this Legislature when we hear the Minister of Learning or the minister of human resources or the Premier make comments about the parameters, what's available for discussion, what is on the table, what has been offered, what's being withdrawn. These are the kind of parameters that we have to be able to provide Albertans with so that they understand fully the debate that's going on.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to look at how we fund education in the future. We have to look at it so that the system will provide opportunities for all of our students. Do we have enough support for our special-needs students? How do we go about creating special-needs classifications? How do we go about dealing with population changes, community growth? How do we deal with making sure that adequate school facilities are available? This is the kind of thing that has to be looked at in the context of where we want to go so that Albertans understand and can basically feel comfortable that they appreciate the arguments that are being put forward by both sides in this discussion right now, whether it be the school boards or whether it be the teachers' local. These are the kinds of things we have to be able to look at.

We also have to look in the context of: what is a government's role in the event of the kind of teachers' strike situation that we've seen in the last few weeks and potentially could see more of in the future. We've seen the government in effect become involved when it shouldn't have in the negotiations. They have set parameters on what are expectations from the messages that they're sending out to the public. That, Mr. Speaker, needs to be clarified. Is this going to be the common practice of the government? Is this going to be something that all groups who deal with public dollars are going to have to expect in the context of how they negotiate for their contracts? Will there be public legislated guidelines put in place about these kinds of settlements?

The other aspect, then, is: how do we deal with the responsibility once those signals are sent? You know, we've heard now from the budget last year of a 4 and 2 offer to the teachers as a base, but what happens now if the local school boards decide they want to deal with a different kind of a settlement? Where can they get the resources? Are they free to deal with that? We've heard through public debate that the minister has essentially suggested very strongly – now, some people see it almost as a threat if the school boards use their reserves to provide for settlement in this context. What is the role of a reserve? What are the options for using that reserve? These are the kinds of things that we have to be able to talk about and to question the government on to clarify so that, in effect, we can have a true understanding by the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, that outlines very briefly why we see this being critical to the debate today, because it's a matter of importance that the public sees a need for clear definitions so that they can interpret the actions that are going on on both sides and they can basically better understand the solution as well when we see either a negotiated solution or after the 15th of March mediated solutions that are being put in place for schools.

We also have to be able to convince them or convey to them that as a province we will respect that, that we will provide the resources to the school boards so that they can deal with the settlement, whatever it is, especially if it's a mediated solution where the school board, then, is left with no choice but to make some drastic decisions. What are the implications of that? What are the support systems in place if they end up having to make, in effect, classroom cut decisions?

So that, Mr. Speaker, is why we think it's very critical that this debate be conducted today, that this debate be conducted this afternoon, and that this debate be conducted in this Legislature.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning on the Standing Order 30 application.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I would urge that this application is not in order, and I will do it for several reasons. First of all, the application, if I may quote, addresses "the actions needed to resolve the problems currently faced by Alberta's schools." As Minister of Learning it would be extremely naive of me to stand up here and say that there are absolutely no problems in any school at any one time. I think, equally, it would be naive of me to say that there aren't potential problems, that the teachers' strike has not been a problem, and I will address that a little later.

I think that any school jurisdiction, any jurisdiction in Canada, should be measured on its results. It should be measured on the outcomes that the students coming out of the system are showing. In Alberta we have unprecedented results. Prior to this motion in question period I talked about the results from the PISA exams, where we scored essentially the top marks in the world. I will say that it's for three reasons.

First of all, it's our students. I think we have excellent students in this province. I think our students are well motivated and are doing a great job. Secondly, I'll say teachers. I think that our teachers are doing an absolutely excellent job in this province and again are equally well motivated and doing a great job. And, Mr. Speaker, the third thing that I will say – and I will congratulate my department – is the curriculum. The work that my department does in curriculum with field testing, with diploma exams – all of these types of things are second to none in this world, and again I will repeat for the third or fourth time today that we finished number one in the world.

Often – and I believe too often – a jurisdiction is graded, so to speak, on the amount of dollars that they put in, and although I don't agree with that, I will state some facts. The fact is quite simply – and I'll use Stats Canada – that in the year 2000-01 we were ranked fifth in the country. We believe that in our ranking, using the same procedures, we are fifth again this year. However, Mr. Speaker, it is an apples and oranges argument, because, for example, in Manitoba they have included capital expenditures on a onetime basis within their budget. So if we were to include our capital expenditures of \$613 million for schools this year, we would be sitting approximately third in Canada. By no means an emergency.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the other point that I wanted to make quite simply –

and the hon. Leader of the Opposition made this point as well – is that there has been a 41 percent increase in the dollars that have been allocated to schools since 1995-96. In the two budgets that I have brought down, 9.8 percent in the first budget and an 8.4 percent increase in the second budget – last year alone that amounted to an extra \$245 million that has gone into the school system. Special needs were raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We have more than doubled special-needs funding from '95-96 to 2001-2002, to the tune of around \$327 million.

Another very important point – and I want to reiterate this – is that the surpluses that are existing within the school system today amount to around \$180 million, according to their statements. Mr. Speaker, these have been arrived at by good judgments by the school boards. I don't want to belittle that in any way, but the point I want to make here is that that money is available to be used within the school system but more importantly that number has increased. That number has not decreased. Last year it was around \$160 million. It has actually increased the amount of surpluses that are available to the schools. So I believe that it's something extremely important.

Another point that I wanted to make is the Alberta initiative for school improvement. This is something that is unprecedented anywhere else in the world; \$68 million per year is put in for 734 projects on how to improve schools. No other jurisdiction in the world is doing this. We are by far – by far – ahead of any other jurisdiction in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I will say, though, that there was a problem facing the system, a very major problem, and that was when the teachers were not in the classroom, when our students were not learning, when our students were not having their right to education being upheld. This Minister of Human Resources and Employment made the correct step and put those students back into the classroom, back into the learning environment. I will also argue that this is a case of sub judice – and this case will be heard by the Provincial Court on Friday of this week – that the whole issue about the strike is a sub judice case and should not be discussed in this Legislature.

So I guess, Mr. Speaker, what I would state quite simply to close is that the main problem that has been faced by the school system in Alberta has been the teachers out on strike. It has been the teachers not in the classroom teaching students, students not learning. That has been resolved, plus on Friday of this week there will be a court case, a very important court case, where the Alberta Teachers' Association has challenged the right of students to learn. We feel that that is extremely important, and we'll be there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I feel that the Legislative Assembly and yourself in particular should not rule, should not vote in favour of the Standing Order 30 and that this is not an emergency of the proportions needed to adjourn the debate of today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, I've now listened to two petitions with respect to this. I would ask hon. members to get the Standing Orders out, please, because so far I've heard no arguments from anybody with respect to urgency. Maybe I'll get one. I'm going to allow two more, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands and the hon. Government House Leader, and then I'm going to make a decision with respect to this Standing Order 30 application.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly take your point that the test of whether or not this debate ought to be allowed is whether it is, in fact, a matter of urgent public importance. I would argue that it is both urgent and a matter of very serious public importance.

The government has taken action, Mr. Speaker, to order the teachers back to work, and that is currently before the courts and will be resolved, we hope, by the end of this week. So, in fact, that particular decision is going to have a very great effect, particularly if the court rules against the government, in which case immediate action of some sort will be taken by the government. It's very important that this Legislature have a debate before that happens.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, there are a great deal of school jurisdictions that still may be in a position to strike, and that may in fact happen very soon. These are not covered under this application, so that is another matter of very urgent debate. I think that it's important to recognize that even if the government is successful, based on what we have understood in the public debate around this issue, there may be long-term and immediate consequences in the schools even if the teachers are forced against their will to go back into the classrooms. There may be, in fact, very serious impacts that will make themselves felt very, very quickly.

I would indicate that there have been 350,000 students in 22 school districts out of school, and the chances of them not being affected simply because the minister orders the teachers back to work is, you know, remote, that there will be no ongoing impact that we will be seeing. The government seems to feel that it can snap its fingers under its very broad legislative mandate and the problem goes away. Mr. Speaker, the problem has not gone away. It's a serious problem affecting almost every student in this province, and this Legislature has a duty to deal with it.

I've seen time and time again the burning issues facing Albertans. The burning political issues are not debated in this Legislature in a timely fashion because the government doesn't want it. Well, Mr. Speaker, what's the use of this place if it's going to be dealt with in that fashion by the government? The important question we have is: what is going to happen to the students in Alberta schools? Quite frankly, the fact that the government would say that this is not a matter of urgent debate beggars belief.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on the Standing Order 30 application.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will be succinct. There are some very clear points that need to be made. Standing Order 30 provides for suspending the normal business of the House for a matter of "urgent public importance." Well, there's no question that education, public education, is certainly an issue of public importance. In fact, it was highlighted yesterday in the throne speech, which we will get to debate later on this afternoon if we're allowed to continue with Orders of the Day.

I would think it would be entirely appropriate for members, in debating the throne speech, to deal with the issues that were raised in the throne speech, and there are matters in the throne speech dealing with education, so it's not urgent to move off the normal Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the normal Orders of the Day allow for debate on those public issues of importance in Learning as well as those public issues of importance in health care and other areas.

Also, we heard the Premier today indicate that the budget would be available on the 19th of next month. Some of the issues that were raised – and I agree with you, Mr. Speaker, that none of them previously raised any issues of urgency – related to spending in education. Well, there's no better place to deal with the spending issues and the amount of resourcing and the way that resourcing is done and, in fact, the business plan of Learning except in Committee of Supply and in the debate under the appropriations bills which will be before the House.

There were questions about government getting involved when it shouldn't have, and that comes to my final point. The urgency that was apparent last week was relative to our students being out of school and needing to get those students back into school before undue hardship was caused. That was dealt with by the government. There was an action brought before the court. That action is before the court as we speak. The decision is to be made on Friday. It's premature for this House to get into that debate while that matter is before the court, and, Mr. Speaker, that really is the only issue where urgency was in question at all. The rest of the issues relating to public education are very important issues and very important issues for this House to debate, and we should get on with that debate under the debate on the Speech from the Throne. We should get on with that debate under Committee of Supply when the budget comes down. We should get on with that debate during the interim supply, which obviously will be necessary because the budget isn't coming down until the 19th of this month.

So there will be plenty of opportunities in this House to deal with the issues of public importance, including the very important issue of public education. But it's not an issue that meets the test, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 30 to abrogate Orders of the Day. In fact, we should get on with Orders of the Day and reply to the Speech from the Throne and address the very urgent issues of public importance that were addressed by Her Honour yesterday.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has listened carefully to the arguments with respect to the issue of emergency debate and this application to adjourn the ordinary business of the House as brought forward by the Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

First of all, the chair received notice that this application would be made at least two hours prior to this afternoon's sitting in the Assembly, so the requirements, at least the filing requirements, of Standing Order 30(1) have been met. At this stage the role of the chair is to determine whether or not the request for leave is in order, and that's what this discussion has been about: whether or not the request – the request – for leave is in order, not if the subject is in order.

The request for leave would be that under the Standing Orders the person who sponsors the request would "briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave" – I might point out that the brief request for leave was nine minutes in length – "and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and then shall rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order." It has to do with "considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate," not at all with the subject matter before us.

So having listened attentively and having seen the words that were presented and recognizing that the sponsor of the motion went from 3:09 to 3:18, which was nine minutes – oh, by the way, to speculate for just 30 or 40 seconds or a minute ahead in the future, should the chair rule that this is in order, the amount of time eligible, then, for discussion would be 10 minutes.

The chair has great difficulty in determining any arguments that were put forward for urgency; that is, what we would take away from the general Routine for today, which has been posted. The Routine for today would see debate on Her Honour's speech, would allocate and afford members 20 minutes' participation for the mover and the seconder, would allow the Leader of the Official Opposition 90 minutes to participate if he chooses to participate, would allow other members 15 minutes to participate, and would allow for a five-minute exchange after that. That would provide considerably more time allocation, in fact, for debate on this subject than there would be if there would be a successful Standing Order 30 application.

The assessment is this: in the chair's view the criteria for the matter constituting a general emergency as required under subsection (7)(a) are not met on this application.

While the education system is a very important issue for this Assembly, within the technical meaning of Standing Order 30 it would be very subjective to determine that a genuine emergency exists at the present time. Moreover, the wording of the motion is such that it is very general, as it refers to "the problems currently faced by Alberta's schools," rather than to a particular emergency that would require the immediate attention of the Assembly. Of course, this could change if events unfold differently in the next few days. As the chair indicated in granting the request by the then Leader of the Official Opposition on May 24, 2000, things can change in a matter of a day to make something a genuine emergency that was not one the day before.

The chair again would also note that there will be an opportunity for members to discuss the state of education and other subjects during the debate on the address in reply, which is scheduled to proceed this afternoon. The chair again would note that the Leader of the Official Opposition is afforded up to 90 minutes under the rules of this Assembly to speak on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, which is more than the 10 minutes he would have been allowed under Standing Order 30 debate.

Accordingly, the chair will not put the question, and the request will not proceed.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Standing Orders Amendments

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. members, before we proceed with calling Orders of the Day, I indicated earlier that I wanted to make some additional comments with respect to the administration of the rules as we go forward now. Before we proceed to the business under Orders of the Day, the chair wants to remind members of some of the changes to the Standing Orders adopted last November that will affect the operation of the Assembly.

As a result of those amendments, this will be the first time since September 1993 that a Wednesday afternoon is not devoted to private members' business. Monday afternoons will now be spent addressing Written Questions, Motions for Returns, and private members' public bills. Commencing Monday evening at 8 p.m., one hour will be devoted to Motions Other than Government Motions.

In terms of planning speeches, members should refer to Standing Order 29, concerning speaking times in the Assembly. The mover of a government bill or motion will have 20 minutes' speaking time but will be limited to 15 minutes in closing debate. The member who speaks immediately following the mover will also have 20 minutes. All other participants will be limited to 15 minutes' speaking time. The Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and the mover on the occasion of the Budget Address will still have 90 minutes.

The five-minute reduction in members' speaking time is replaced by a question and comment period, which is a new feature of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This period will be available at second and third reading following every member's speech except for those of the mover in opening and closing debate and the member who speaks immediately following the mover. This question and comment period will be an opportunity to ask questions of the member who has just spoken or make a statement about that speech. Participation in the question and comment session must be relevant to the preceding member's speech and will be governed by the normal rules of the Assembly concerning the content of speeches as, for example, found in Standing Order 23.

The Canadian House of Commons has a 10-minute question and

comment period where this rule of relevance applies. Members may wish to review chapter 13 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edited by Marleau and Montpetit, particularly pages 530 to 531.

The difficulty with the question and comment session comes in determining how the five-minute period will be apportioned. Of course, for every member who wishes to ask questions to or comment on a member's speech, there must be an opportunity for the member to respond. What if three members want to participate? When combined with the three responses allowed, the member would see five minutes divided by six.

The chair is always a timekeeper of sorts, but unless the Assembly decides to get a time clock in the Chamber like the one found at sporting events, it would be difficult for the chair to calculate the apportionment of time for members. Furthermore, the chair would be so intent in making sure that he or she had caught all members who wished to participate and had calculated the time correctly that the chair would not be able to focus on the member's speech.

Therefore, the chair will allot 30 seconds to each member who wishes to participate in the question and comment session. The member whose speech has generated the questions or comments will have 30 seconds to respond. As many members as possible can participate for up to 30 seconds in the five-minute period. Unless participating members use considerably less than 30 seconds, it will mean that five members may participate in addition to the original speaker. If there are not enough members who wish to participate, then a member can be recognized more than once. The new rules concerning speaking times in the question and comment session will apply to the debate on the address in reply, so they will go in effect this afternoon.

This question and comment period is not available for private members' business. The time limit on speaking for members' and private members' matters is now 10 minutes except for the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, with 20 minutes each. The chair will review these matters on Monday, the first day of private members' business under the amended Standing Orders.

The chair also would like to take this opportunity to note a few other matters not related to the Standing Orders amendments. The first is that the new committee rooms are now operational. They are located on the fourth floor of the Legislature Annex, and of course they form part of the precincts of the Assembly. For those members that have not had a meeting there yet, I would encourage you to go and look at these exceptional facilities.

On another matter, members are aware that the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* are now in effect. I want to let members know that when the Legislative Assembly Office received notice of the cost of purchasing the *Revised Statutes*, the chair wrote the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to say, basically, that as the Assembly is the body that makes the laws for the province of Alberta, shouldn't the members be able to find out what the law is without having to pay for it?

3:40

The Minister of Justice wholeheartedly agreed and, on behalf of the government of the province of Alberta, donated three sets of the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000* for use by members and table officers in the Chamber. On behalf of the Assembly the chair would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister and also remind him that in previous days and on previous occasions all Members of the Legislative Assembly, the lawmakers of the province of Alberta, were provided with the complete *Revised Statutes* of the province of Alberta from the overall Minister of Justice in a gratuitous fashion.

Thank you very much.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

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

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour that I have been given leave to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. The speech presented by Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole, opened the Second Session of the 25th Legislature, and it is my pleasure to address the Assembly on behalf of my constituents from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

I would like to take this moment to send regrets to Her Honour and the province in respect to the passing of Princess Margaret and our former Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. H.A. "Bud" Olson.

I would also like to join Her Honour in expressing the pride and the great support for our soldiers who are serving in Afghanistan. I would like to thank these Albertans for the great job they are doing in protecting our nation and the principles and values we are so fortunate to be governed by. We all join in the prayers of their families and friends that they will be kept safe while they're there on duty and will return with speed once they've completed their mission. Albertans are proud of what they are doing and the sacrifices that they are making to touch the lives of others.

Her Honour's speech touched on many important issues our government is facing in the upcoming year. Because the issues of health care and education are in the forefront of most of our minds, I am pleased that a great portion of Her Honour's Speech from the Throne discussed what goals lay ahead for our government.

If we are to continue developing our Alberta advantage in the future, we must work together as a unified province to create the new paths that will take us where we need to be. Last year at about this time, as I gave my maiden speech in this House, I said that I am here to represent the concerns of my constituents and speak within our government on their behalf. As a government we have promised to listen to Albertans. My constituents have made their wishes concerning health care known. They would like to see this government committed to a sustainable publicly funded system, a system they can trust to sustain their needs and the needs of their children into the future.

As a province we're once again in the spotlight of our nation to see how we will define the health care system that will sustain our growing population, allow for comprehensive and accessible services, and, above all, keep Albertans healthy. After a decade of public consultation and study on the challenges we are facing to preserve affordable public health care, a report was presented to this government by the Advisory Council on Health. This report will inevitably provide the direction to many of the solutions for the problems we are facing with our health care system.

I know that the commitment of this government is to work together to find the answers which best suit all of our needs. However, I firmly believe that in order to do this, we must continue to work as a team. In order to provide us with sustainable health care

that works for all Albertans, we need to work with the regional health authorities, health professionals, and Albertans to ensure that we maintain the right direction.

Last year the throne speech stated that the government's priorities for health care would focus on access to health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance. The council's report has focused reform on how this province spends our health care dollars. The promise of access, illness prevention, and effective regional governance are some of the concerns that Albertans have, and I strongly believe that we need to keep these in mind as we work through this process.

Mr. Speaker, to be effective, a government cannot support the status quo in a time when change is necessary. We cannot afford to build pillars to simply prop up long-standing and failing systems in this province. In order to move ahead and build effective systems that truly help people, not just catch them as they fall, we're going to have to work together to develop a better system. In health care all eyes are upon us to see what directions we now choose.

All eyes seem to be turning to our province for other reasons, as well, one of these being the ability of our students to excel in their studies and the commitments we have made as a province to ensure that every student receives the education they need to get ahead and enjoy a prosperous life and healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I grew up as the youngest in a family of five boys, and many will attest to the special relationship which exists between the oldest and the youngest in a large family. My oldest brother has been there for comfort in bad times, and we've shared a great deal of mirth in the good times. His sage advice to me when I got married at a very early age, and even when I decided to enter the service of Albertans, has stayed with me.

My oldest brother, Mr. Speaker, has spent his career to date in a profession which I and I know all of my colleagues respect a great deal. It's a profession where people care, and they work very hard to achieve the results they do. I'm very proud of my brother; he is a teacher. We may not always agree on some of the issues or on management style, but we certainly respect each other's contributions and careers.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said in the media and around the province in the coffee shops and the constituency offices about education recently. I would like to express a key element of what my constituents have told me. They tell me that we need to review our policies as they relate to special-needs education and integration. Are we doing the right thing with the resources that we have? Have we swung the pendulum too far? Is there a better way? We need to answer these questions, and we need to involve the students, the parents, the teachers, the school boards, and the government.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, we may well find the answers to some of the concerns which have been expressed during this labour dispute, but through all of this we must ensure that management of the system stays where it is supposed to be. That means there probably should be some changes made. I'm not going to detail to this House what has been suggested to me in my constituency office, but on all sides perhaps change is due.

Education is a top priority of this government. School boards want to put funds where they deem they are necessary, and maybe we should look at ways that school boards could raise additional revenue. Mr. Speaker, the throne speech pointed out that this government will continue to stay ahead of inflation in enrollment and funding and that this government will ensure that resources are there for our students.

As a province we have the ability to set new standards for education across Canada. Alberta students scored significantly higher than the national average in math, science, and reading. We

scored top marks internationally in reading and placed third in math and science. Scoring so high on international standardized tests given to 31 other countries shows a great deal about the quality of education and the dedication of the teachers in our province. It also shows, as has been noted today, the dedication of our students and the commitment that they have made to focus on their futures. As a province it's my belief that we must remain committed to our students.

An exciting advantage for Alberta students is the projected completion of Supernet by 2004. By this time every library, school, hospital, and provincial government office will have access to high-speed broadband network, closing the digital divide that is prevalent between rural and urban areas of Canada. With the development of Supernet, Alberta will be the most wired jurisdiction in the world. This will allow endless possibilities for our students and create opportunities for greater technological and communication services to be provided to rural communities by building such a network. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is akin to when telephones came to our province. The dramatic effect that this will have on bringing Albertans together is very exciting.

Internet services and advanced communication technology have changed our lives, and Alberta will be in the forefront of providing e-services, e-health, e-education, and e-commerce to help bring even the most remote parts of our province into the gateway of trade and services without ever leaving their communities. We have taken the first step in our country to fund a provincial Internet initiative, and the whole province is excited about the opportunities it will bring and how it will help us rise to the top of the knowledge-based economy.

The innovative ideas put into motion in Alberta, like the Supernet, have not only turned attention to our province but have successfully drawn investment and spurred great economic development. The advantages we have developed as a province have created an amazing pull for all kinds of investments. Our government has been actively seeking international investment and stirring up quite a response from countries like Germany and the United States. Overall investment in Alberta has increased 85 percent since 1996. We have created such an amazing atmosphere for business investment through the Alberta advantage, including our access to the NAFTA markets, favourable operating costs, and significant opportunities for business growth, that companies are finding it hard to resist, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta is such a diverse province. We have the capability to develop and advance technology in a huge range of areas. Our economy is driven by virtually everything: oil and gas, forestry, natural resources, agriculture, and technological development in communications. Alberta has it all. We are fortunate to live in a province that can pull from so many areas, giving us the unique ability to combine them and produce new and innovative ideas for future marketing.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we are also developing the human capital in a knowledge-based economy, and we need to continue in that direction. Specialized skills come in many forms, even to exporting our experts on the maintenance of indoor ice surfaces, as the Premier mentioned earlier today. At the Olympics it was reported that an Albertan was in charge.

Value adding to our industries and finding ways to diversify our economy even further is having a very positive impact on our economy and is something we all realize we must maintain a focus on. Researching and developing value-added products could result in finding that innovative idea which could stimulate the agricultural

industry and maintain the oil and gas industry as front-runners in the Alberta economy. In order for Alberta to hold steady in the international marketing of agricultural goods, we need to develop beyond production, and that same situation is necessary in our oil and gas industry.

International events like September 11 will continually threaten to upset our economy unless we diversify within our industries and are prepared to react proactively. Agriculture is very important to all Albertans. More than 82,500 people are employed in the primary ag and food and beverage industry in this province. Last year Alberta exports reached an estimated \$5.8 billion in primary and processed agrifoods, and we exported our agricultural goods to 110 countries around the world. We were able to export close to \$10 billion worth of manufactured food and beverage products, which is close to double that of primary production. All of this, Mr. Speaker, points to excellent opportunities for our province and for our farming communities in rural Alberta.

Research for our energy sector has exciting possibilities for developing Alberta as well. We have one of the largest reserves of tar sands in the world, and we are presently looking at economically viable technologies to develop these areas. Because of the vast oil and gas reserves we have in this province, we have the opportunity to take the lead in petrochemical research and development as well as nonconventional natural gas or coal bed methane research. Every day it seems that new advances are made and research is opening doors to develop and utilize oil and gas products that were either deemed impossible to capture for production or were not economically feasible for production. There perceptions have changed so much in the past decade that we must continue to invest in developing new and innovative products. We must find a way to stabilize our economy, and we need to look at ways to stabilize our provincial capital spending and diversify the resources we have available to us.

We live in an exceptional province. No longer are we the country bumpkin cousins in the west but a province with a growing population and a thriving economy.

I know I said in my maiden speech a year ago how honoured I am to be the representative in this Assembly for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. In my constituency I'm very proud of the relationships which have allowed so much co-operative effort between municipalities. Two examples are the intermunicipal planning being done by Sturgeon county and the city of St. Albert, which I share with my colleague, the hon. Member for St. Albert, and the Tri-Municipal Leisure Centre in Spruce Grove, which is something that my colleague the hon. Minister of Seniors and Member for Stony Plain and I share. The three municipalities of Parkland county, the town of Stony Plain, and the city of Spruce Grove had not only the vision but also gained the community support to make a grand facility become reality through partnership, planning, and co-operation.

The constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert sends our heartfelt congratulations to all of Canada's Olympians, and we are very proud of two from Spruce Grove who put their hearts into a magnificent effort. They are Jennifer Heil, Canada's youngest Olympian, competing in the freestyle moguls and coming in fourth in the finals by only .01 of a second away from bronze, and, Mr. Speaker, Don Bartlett in men's curling, coming home with a silver medal. Our congratulations to them, their families, and all of Canada's athletes for a job well done.

The Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency is made up of growing, diversified communities, both urban and rural, with economic action from agriculture to e-commerce. But with growth comes challenges and a need to ensure that government is there on an ongoing, stable basis.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency is an amazing place. If you look at

the map, we're right in the centre of the province. There's so much happening in my constituency right now with economic and residential development, investment in technologies. You name it; it's happening in Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Not only are we on the centre of the map, but because of everything we have to offer, we're quickly becoming the hub of development in Alberta as well. Spruce Grove, Sturgeon county, and the city of St. Albert are great places for Albertans to raise their families because we have maintained that safe community feeling.

As a government, we need to continue to make the right and tough decisions about our investments. This is our future. This is the future of our children. I'm proud they will grow up as Albertans, as I am proud to be an Albertan. I am honoured and privileged to represent Albertans in this House, and it's my firm belief, Mr. Speaker, that as each one of us pledge to make a positive stand for our future and our children's future, there is nothing that we as an Assembly cannot accomplish for our province.

Thank you very much.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to second the motion for consideration of Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. It is, indeed, an honour and privilege to rise this afternoon and reply on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is one of the more important documents that we as members of the Legislature address in this House. It highlights our government's plans for the coming year and reflects the hopes and dreams of Albertans. Our job as elected members of this Assembly is to turn these hopes and dreams into reality.

To begin, I would also like to express to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to all members of the royal family the heartfelt condolences of Albertans for the loss of Her Royal Highness the Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon. She was very involved in charity work, community support, and goodwill missions. Her contributions to the Commonwealth and her spirit will be missed.

This year is a prominent year for Alberta, as 2002 marks the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II ascending to the throne of the United Kingdom and Canada and assuming her rightful position as head of the Commonwealth. This golden jubilee is even more special for me because I had the opportunity to take part in the silver jubilee in 1977 in London, England, which was an amazing experience. From the beginning of our Queen's reign and even from our first year as a province, the leadership, character, and value of our people have charted the unique destiny of Alberta.

As we all know, Alberta has royal representation that reflects our traits. The Honourable the Lieutenant Governor is the representative of the Crown in the province and exercises the monarch's powers and authorities with respect to Alberta. In the early years of Confederation the Lieutenant Governors were agents of the federal government and were expected to advise the provincial government as to their intent on federal legislation and to ensure that provincial legislation conformed to that of senior government. Over the years, however, with the gradual increase in the authority of provincial governments, the Lieutenant Governor's role as a federal agent is now focused primarily on the responsibilities as the sovereign's representative and the chief executive officer of the province.

Canada's Prime Minister appointed Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole as Lieutenant Governor of Alberta on December 9, 1999. Before her appointment she excelled in careers as a successful businesswoman, best selling author, education advocate, and community supporter. Her Honour is Alberta's 15th Lieutenant Governor and the second woman in Alberta's history to serve Alberta in this capacity.

Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole served as school trustee for St. Albert school district No. 6 from 1981 to the fall of 1998. She previously served for 14 years as a trustee and chairperson for the Sturgeon school division and for 11 years as a member of the Athabasca University governing council. Her Honour served as a director of the Farm Credit Corporation and as honorary chair for the 27th Canadian Congress on Criminal Justice as well as the children's millennium fund. Her Honour also served as a board member of the Canadian Heritage Garden Foundation, the Child and Adolescent Services Association, and the Quality of Life Commission.

Along with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor I am very proud of the Albertans who are contributing to the pursuits of safety, goodwill, and achievement. I agree with the Honourable Lieutenant Governor that for thousands of Albertans the men and women from 4 Wing, Cold Lake and the Edmonton Garrison serving in Afghanistan are husbands or wives, sons or daughter, fathers or mothers, friends or neighbours. For all Albertans these soldiers are living symbols of courage and high principle. All members in this Assembly send our prayers to all of them for a safe and speedy return. I would also like to send thanks to the families of these men and women. We know this is a difficult time for them.

We have had many other Albertans recently return from another mission of contribution, only this time for peace and goodwill, at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Alberta was represented by 38 of the 157 Canadian athletes at the Olympics. All of our Canadian athletes exemplified dedication, commitment, and confidence, three traits that all Albertans should endeavour to attain.

4:00

Alberta's 38 athletes' commitment to athletic excellence should also be viewed as examples of this province's commitment to wellness. There has been a great deal of debate and discussion regarding funding of our health care system when more talk should focus on the positive aspects of clean, healthy living. In addition to a healthy lifestyle, the Lieutenant Governor explained that Albertans know that people's health can be improved by events as complex as a redesign of an ambulance system or as simple as a comforting hand to hold during an ambulance trip.

I was honoured to be appointed chair of the MLA review of ambulance services on May 2, 2001. I had the pleasure of working with the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to review ground ambulance services and provide recommendations regarding future governance and delivery of emergency medical services. While recognizing that significant improvements have occurred with Alberta's ground ambulance services following previous reviews, my intention was to build on the successes of these reports.

Although Albertans receive excellent care from ground ambulance services, the system faces challenges in meeting the demands of a growing, aging, and increasingly urban population. These challenges place considerable pressure on municipalities, ambulance operators, regional health authorities, and the province to provide Albertans with access to well co-ordinated and responsive emergency medical services when they need them. Our task was to meet with stakeholders and provide advice and recommendations addressing the future governance and delivery of ground ambulance services in Alberta. Our review team firmly believes that the current structure is cumbersome and lacks accountability. The recommendations contained in our report to the hon. ministers of Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs, and Human Resources and Employment recognize that ambulance service is an integral component of the health care system where municipalities and regional health authorities can work together.

In conducting this review and maintaining our focus on patient

care, we attempted to strike a balance between guaranteeing quality service for all Albertans while controlling costs. To ensure a thorough examination of Alberta's ambulance system, we traveled thousands of kilometres and met hundreds of people throughout Alberta. The opportunity to see firsthand how diverse Alberta and its people are was truly remarkable and made me feel honoured to contribute to this province and to work alongside all my colleagues in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my travels around Alberta also reminded me of how last spring you described how diverse the members are in this Legislature. Sixty-eight members have a business and entrepreneurial history, 24 were educators for a period of time, 16 are or were involved in the farming and agriculture industry, 13 have accounting or financial management experience, eight have oilfield experience, five have experience in computer technology, five are lawyers, five have experience in the real estate field, four have experience in the construction field, and four are professional authors. There are two members each with experience with the police service, nursing, and the forest industry. There is also a single member in each of the medical, floral, television and radio reporting, and social services fields. One is a pastor with the Faith Covenant church, one is a deacon and elder with the Christian Reform church, and one is a bishop with the Church of Latter-Day Saints.

It's fantastic that the diversity of nationalities and cultures in Alberta is reflected in the Alberta Assembly. Diversity is something that we must cherish. In Calgary-Buffalo Chinatown is one of the most dynamic and positive contributors to the community, and it's also one of the oldest communities in Calgary and Alberta. The first Chinese families arrived in Calgary over 140 years ago, and this wonderful culture has defined what it means to be an Albertan: hardworking and passionate, with strong convictions and a dedication to their family and community. I have had the pleasure to meet hundreds of residents of Chinatown over the past years and have cherished the occasions I've had with this vital community. I would like to thank them for their gracious invitations to numerous functions and their hard work in their community and wish them [remarks in Chinese] for a prosperous and happy year of the horse.

I was honoured by the presence of Mr. Winston Chow and Mr. Fei Hong Cheng, who attended yesterday's Speech from the Throne for the first time and were very moved by the messages from this government. The hon. Lieutenant Governor talked about this government's commitment to ensuring that Albertans continue to live, work, and raise families in safe, tolerant, diverse communities.

Given the new and sombre concerns about security, the government will introduce legislation this session to improve Alberta's ability to protect Albertans, their property, their infrastructure, and their environment from potential security risks. I, too, have been working on legislation that touches on what I refer to as the four points of safety in Alberta.

The first point of safety is preserving the overall protection of Alberta. I have prepared a motion, to be introduced this session, that will urge the government to work with Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta to enhance collaborative partnerships and co-ordinated programs with various levels of government, policing agencies, and the public. CISA will pursue effective strategies to detect, combat, and control organized crime in Alberta. Intelligence information sharing, joint forces, top-up funding, training, and investigative networking will augment a united policing front to attack organized crime groups. I believe that expanding Alberta's work with CISA will help this province effectively combat organized crime and terrorism and preserve the wellness, safety, and security of our communities.

The second point of safety focuses on our citizens. The govern-

ment of Alberta has a vision of a safe society where justice prevails. Accordingly, goal 15 of the Alberta government's business plan for 2001-2004 is that "Alberta will be a safe place to live and raise families."

One of the biggest safeguards for this goal is Alberta's Police Act. The present Police Act came into effect in 1988, and over the following decade a number of issues were raised that led to the formation of a legislation review committee. In October 2000 the Minister of Justice and Attorney General appointed an MLA committee to conduct a public review of policing in Alberta. Following the 2001 provincial election, the committee was restructured due to the appointment of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to Solicitor General and the retirement of another member. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler continued to chair the committee, and I was honoured to become a new member, along with the hon. Member from Dunvegan. The committee chose a three-pronged approach to the review of the Police Act: solicit public and stakeholder submissions in response to a discussion paper, review the findings of the police strategic vision project, and consult with experts on issues arising from these submissions.

The major themes arising from the submissions centred on levels of service and cost of policing. Many respondents see an inequity in policing either in service levels or in policing costs. There was also a general concern about oversight of policing, including responsiveness to provincial and local priorities as well as the investigation of complaints about police. A third common theme that emerged was the need for general policing standards established and monitored by the province.

From the perspective of policing itself, there are a number of challenges. Changes in policing environment include technological advancements such as the Internet, photo enforcement, and information technology. We have a highly mobile society, including criminals, which requires a greater sharing of information and more co-operation among Alberta's police agencies. This implies the need for more standardization among police and a requirement for more highly trained and educated police officers. This is further dictated by the development of global issues, including organized crime and international terrorism using high technology.

The committee tried to focus on overall themes and principles, only dealing with specific details where the issues demanded it. Many of our bold and innovative recommendations will raise questions about implementation and procedural details. Likewise, we have made a number of recommendations for areas that require further study. These are technical or long-term studies that require expertise and resources beyond that of the committee. The MLA policing review committee submitted our final report and recommendations to the Solicitor General just last week.

My third point on safety involves a private member's bill that I will introduce this session which will allow peace officers to seize vehicles involved in prostitution-related offences. I have met with community organizations, members of the public, and policing agencies regarding this legislation, and I have found that prostitution evokes strong and wide-ranging reactions and opinions. Some people strongly oppose the exploitation and violence associated with prostitution, while others resent the damage inflicted on their neighbourhoods. A number of these people want stronger laws enacted and fewer leniencies shown by the courts.

4:10

The variety of approaches taken to deal with problems associated with prostitution reflects the urgency felt by many stakeholders for solutions. Innovative strategies aimed at prevention as well as enforcement are being developed, and many affected communities

are applying these strategies to deal with these problems.

Many people who live in areas far removed from prostitution tend to make a couple of false assumptions: first, that prostitution is covert or largely confined to industrial or commercial zones; second, that it touches mainly on the lives of adults. This is not the case. Prostitution is openly carried out in residential neighbourhoods near schools and playgrounds in my riding of Calgary-Buffalo. For families living in these neighbourhoods, raising children gets that much tougher when the world of prostitution meets society's youngest members: school-aged children who see prostitution near their homes and outside their schools. Dealing with these concerns requires special initiatives, particularly when it comes to their effect on children.

Prostitution teaches several wrong messages, among them the legitimization of females as victims. Prostitutes are stigmatized and disdained while their customers seem to be forgiven of any involvement under the current climate of public opinion. Prostitution also seems to create an attitude among men that women are inherently inferior. Any antiprostitution activities should include a re-education component that counters this attitude. I can assure all members that my private member's bill has an acceptable education component in place as a result of consultations with both the Calgary and Edmonton police services and over a dozen community groups affected by prostitution.

My fourth and most important point of safety for Alberta is directed at our children. Last spring I was honoured to take a leadership role chairing the review of the Child Welfare Act. The act has a very profound and direct impact on the lives of thousands of Alberta's children and families, and the protection of children is a top priority for all of us. The Child Welfare Act must achieve a balance between promoting and ensuring the safety and well-being of children while also respecting the fundamental responsibility of parents for their children. It must reflect the values and principles of the people of Alberta, and it must carefully counsel people motivated by the Child Welfare Act to perform their duties in the best interests of the child. We have just completed the majority of stakeholder and community consultations and have now begun to review several hundred submissions, which will provide us with recommendations and new legislation focusing on early intervention, prevention, child protection, family group counseling utilizing the extended family, fostering and adoptions, and services for children with disabilities.

The four points of safety for our province, its citizens, our streets, and our children will ensure that Alberta remains a safe place to live and raise families. I can assure all my constituents that I will pursue this goal to the best of my ability as one of my duties as their elected representative.

I was extremely proud to be elected as the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo last spring. Calgary-Buffalo constituents cover a wide array of cultures, the most in any one constituency in the province. It's also home to young families, single moms, postsecondary students, young professionals, seniors, and, last but not least, a number of homeless people. The residential concerns span from homeless shelters, low-income units, rental apartments, and single-family homes to million-dollar condominiums. This constituency is home to Calgary's largest arts and theatre community, which adds a unique vibrancy and culture to the inner city. We are also home to the second highest number of corporate office headquarters, with a downtown skyline that is the most beautiful in Canada if not North America. It's an honour to serve the residents of this extremely diverse inner-city community as their voice in the Legislative Assembly of this great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me as representative of the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona and as the leader of the New Democrat opposition to once again respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to begin my comments by expressing my appreciation for the hon. Lieutenant Governor's presence yesterday in this Chamber and for her continued leadership, grace, and dignity. I know that she's highly respected by all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we're heading into interesting times in Alberta. For support of public health, education, and the environment we are heading into dangerous times. Yesterday's Speech from the Throne, though rife with pleasantries and rhetoric, was a mask for the government's true agenda. The government would like to cloak its agenda with talk of creating a healthier Alberta, yet its actual policies and its legislative agenda show no such priorities. I'll touch on four major policy area issues: health care, education, environment, and reduction of poverty.

This throne speech identifies health care as Alberta's first priority. Albertans are told that our health care system must not be lost or impaired due to inaction or fleeting comfort with the status quo. The New Democrats are well aware that the status quo is not an option for health care, but the real danger is posed by the government's determination to turn Alberta's health care system into a market commodity. The real danger to health care is posed by this government's determination to base health policy on profit instead of on wellness. We know that in the United States 20 cents of every dollar spent on health care goes to company profits, rich executive salaries, and administration. In Canada only 3 cents of every health care dollar goes to those items. What's the source of the discrepancy? Profit, multimillion dollar paycheques for CEOs, and an added layer of administrative cost.

The government is under the delusion that increases in costs to make room for profit will somehow save money. Is this why health care premiums are proposed to be increased by as much as 50 percent? Health premiums do nothing to promote the long-term stability of our health care system, and any increase will unfairly burden Alberta's seniors and every Alberta family. Health premium increases also represent a significant burden for small businesses.

The position of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is made very clear in a letter dated February 13 of this year, the letter from Dan Kelly, the prairie region vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and Corrinne Pohlman, the business association director for Alberta and the Northwest Territories. In that letter they state, and I quote: our members are willing to engage in the debate on new ways of administering and financing this important service; we are very concerned, however, that the first major health care reform made in Alberta following the Mazankowski report would be to dramatically increase the tax associated with health care. End of quote.

Indeed, health premiums are a tax, and they are the most regressive and unfair sort of tax possible, but there's not likely to be the debate on health care that the CFIB and many other Albertans would like to engage in. Instead, the major decisions about health care are going to be made by committees, task forces, and commissions. Millions of dollars will be spent so a decision can be made about health care, but by whom? Will these committees be made up of average Albertans? Will they consist of people who are struggling to pay health care premiums and who are afraid that the government's plans to shift costs onto the sick and the injured will leave them unable to pay for necessary medical services? I think not. It wasn't mentioned in yesterday's Speech from the Throne, but these

commissions will largely be either Tory MLAs or handpicked government appointees. These committees will be a continuation of the same kind of closed door process that resulted in the Mazankowski report.

While the Premier's Advisory Council on Health includes some excellent people, it also includes people with a clear bias towards expanding private, for-profit health care. Don Mazankowski, for example, sits on the board of an insurance company which stands to increase their profits if services are delisted and demand for private health care insurance increases. Another committee member, Dr. Brian Crowley, has authored a study for the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, sort of an eastern Fraser Institute that advocates full-scale privatization. It's no wonder the committee advocated increasing the role of the market in our health care system.

If the government's prior strategy is any indication, then the seven committees being established will not only be a waste of time and energy, but they will also be handpicked to provide the response the government has predetermined. These committees are a smoke screen. They're a way for the government to avoid serious debate about the direction of health care and a way to avoid listening to the concerns of Albertans, just as the Speech from the Throne was also a smoke screen. It dealt in platitudes about health care instead of pursuing the real changes that need to be made in the health care system.

4:20

There was no mention of a much-needed provincial pharmacare plan. Such a plan would reduce the impact of our fastest growing health costs: prescription drugs. There was no mention of increasing the number of special or surgical clinics, such as the Royal Alexandra centre in Edmonton, within the public system, and there was certainly no commitment to prevent the intrusion of profit-based service delivery in our health care system.

It's time for this government to end this fear mongering about the sustainability of health care. It is also time for the government to come clean about its real spending priorities. A one-third increase in health premiums will raise about \$220 million a year. Canceling or postponing a corporate tax cut planned for April 1, 2002, would save government coffers \$275 million or near about. Clearly, the government is more interested in shifting costs onto the sick, the injured, and the average Alberta family than it is in the sustainability of the health care system.

Turning to education now, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Speech from the Throne pointed out quite correctly that a key component of a healthy province will help the citizens with a strong education system. We are told that the government believes that there's a great deal of goodwill among all partners in the education system and that "this goodwill guarantees that the long-term health of the public education system will be protected." Fine words, but let's take a look at reality.

I recently received a letter from a former member of the Conservative Party who is extremely frustrated by the deterioration of classroom conditions in Alberta. In the letter he points out that the lack of funding, large class sizes, and teacher burnout have created an Alberta disadvantage. These are his words. He goes on to admonish the Tory government. He tells them, and I quote: you should be ashamed to call yourselves Conservatives; you are conserving nothing, trading culture for business and blighting the futures of the children you are supposed to support. End of quote. I believe he is absolutely correct.

This government has done nothing to foster goodwill around education and everything to undermine it. For example, this government has failed time and again to take positive steps to

resolve the current dispute of the teachers. One of the major issues in this strike is the growing size of Alberta classrooms. It has the studies that have the numbers but is not willing to take action. What's worse is that the government waited four months, until the last provincial election was safely out of the way, to release a significant study telling the government that large class sizes are detrimental to learning. This government has done nothing to address this concern in the past year, and if yesterday's throne speech is any indication, it plans to continue neglecting this problem.

Another letter I received recently, this one from a senior citizen in rural Alberta, captured the current state of our education system quite precisely. I quote. The writer says: I believe that teachers are undervalued; they are the educators of my children and grandchildren and need tools which are now inaccessible; classes are too large, and many students need extra attention, which is not always possible. End of quote.

This government would convince us that large class sizes and teacher burnout are key to fostering goodwill among students, teachers, and parents. Goodwill was further deteriorated or undermined by the 2001 budget when attempted wage controls were introduced via a line item for teachers' salary increases. These wage controls are an affront to the independence of school boards and to the teachers' right to collectively negotiate salary increases. Since then the government has tied the hands of school boards, concocted a phony pension offer, and fostered an air of confrontation between teachers and government.

The government's approach to fostering goodwill was capped by the Premier's recent insensitive and insulting comments made while on a trade mission in Japan. Accusing teachers of being lazy and claiming that they worked only four or five hours a day does nothing to promote goodwill, Mr. Speaker. If the government cannot foster a healthy sense of goodwill among educators, how does it expect to foster growth of a healthy education system and a healthy Alberta and Albertans?

Turning to postsecondary education for a moment, Albertans were told yesterday that postsecondary education is also vital to the economic and social health of Albertans. I couldn't agree more. I wonder, however, how serious this government's commitment to postsecondary education is. This government has refused to address the fact that tuition fees tripled during the '90s. Alberta now has the third highest tuition costs in the country. Combined with housing pressures and other costs such as books and supplies, skyrocketing tuition has placed postsecondary education well out of reach for many young Albertans.

On the environment yesterday's speech was also chillingly scarce on any real details about this government's plans. In the last session Albertans bore witness to this government's callous disregard of the potential devastating impact of intensive livestock operations on the quality of air and water. In this session we are being promised a comprehensive water strategy. I shudder to think what the strategy might entail. Based on the government's record of environmental shortsightedness, Albertans can expect the question of interbasin water transfers to be resurrected. Will we also see the futile pursuit of the Meridian dam project? Both these proposals have been soundly decried by Albertans because of their environmental implications.

Albertans are increasingly aware of how intimately their health is affected by the quality of air and water. One cannot blame Albertans for becoming increasingly skeptical of this government's willingness to protect our environment. Instead, they are concerned that this government's water strategy is the same as the health strategy. Package our health care, package our water, add price tags, and ship them south for American profiteers. This is not a strategy for a clean environment and a healthy Alberta.

Now, the last point, Mr. Speaker, that I want to touch on is the issue of poverty. Perhaps the most scandalous absence in yesterday's speech, however, was the lack of any commitment to address the frightening increase in Alberta's poverty. Although it received a great deal of hype from the government when it was started, Albertans have heard nothing about the low-income review. We were promised recommendations and action in October, but not a peep was heard during last fall's session. Once again Albertans are being left in the dark about what the government will do to support Albertans living on low incomes. Not only do we have a responsibility to ensure that all Albertans are able to live with dignity; we must also remember that poverty has an extremely negative impact on people's health. While the flat tax has certainly made life easier for Alberta's top 1 percent of income earners, many Albertans find themselves losing out and falling behind.

School fees, delisted health services, and increased health care premiums are all putting financial pressures on Albertans. This pressure has been exacerbated by recent disastrous cuts in Children's Services. Despite clear evidence that early intervention prevents long-term involvement in child welfare, this government has clearly restricted the ability of community organizations to provide early intervention and support to families. To make matters worse, Mr. Speaker, the government is now prepared to blame parents instead of working to support families in a positive and timely manner.

To conclude now, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne has shown itself to be a smoke screen for the government's real priorities. While putting on a show of concern for Albertans' health, our education system, and our environment, their real objective is clear. This government is intent on tilting the Alberta advantage in favour exclusively of the wealthy and at the expense of average Alberta families. The New Democrats will continue to make health care our top priority in these coming months because we know that health care is also a top priority for the vast majority of Albertans, and we'll continue to fight for improvements to a public health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McCLELLAND: Questions and comments, Mr. Speaker. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, my friend, on his speech. The hon. member mentioned classroom size and conditions, and I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona would advise us of his intention or his thoughts in this area. I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona feels that children with behavioral disorders should be part of an integrated classroom. Do you think that's a good idea?

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The class size problem, that's well recognized by most stakeholders in this province, is exacerbated further. It's a serious problem as is. It's further exacerbated by the presence, by the integrative strategy of putting children with high needs into the classrooms of normal children. My own view is that integration is good, but we need resources to make sure that class sizes . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, did you want to proceed? Another one?

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona spent a good deal of time on health care. Because in virtually every other enterprise competition leads to a better product at a lower price, why would that same truism not hold in the delivery of health care?

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. There are health care systems which use the market as a mechanism to reduce costs. All those systems that are based on market-driven strategies are far more costly than systems like ours, which to this point have avoided the market mechanisms as a lever to reduce costs.

4:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Red Deer-North includes teachers who work in Chinook's Edge, and River Glen school is part of Chinook's Edge as well. Although Red Deer teachers did not go on strike, Chinook's Edge teachers did. I received numerous calls from Chinook's Edge teachers who wanted to return to work. I wonder if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona can explain to me why teachers were more concerned about returning to work than staying on strike.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, teachers have a legal right, a lawful right to engage in collective bargaining and to withhold their services as part of that democratic right and process. I think the teachers everywhere in this province have exercised that right and duly done so.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to speak today replying to the Speech from the Throne.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. member, please, we're into the question and answer comment time.

MR. CAO: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, if there are no additional questions or comments, then we'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to proceed with the Speech from the Throne debate.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also an honour for me to be able to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and I would like to begin my comments by congratulating Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor on a job well done again yesterday. Certainly I concur with the comments of my colleague who said that she is well respected and loved by everyone in Alberta. I think that is certainly the feedback that I get. She is probably the most well known Lieutenant Governor we have had in this province, and that is also to her credit.

On behalf of all my colleagues in the Official Opposition I would also like to congratulate Her Majesty Elizabeth II on her 50th anniversary.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I'm looking forward to the debate on the bill that the government has brought in as their first bill, which will talk about the golden jubilee scholarships for the visual and performing arts. I think this is an excellent way to recognize this particular anniversary, and it will be interesting to follow the debate in the Legislature.

Unfortunately, it isn't quite as interesting to follow another Speech from the Throne as delivered yesterday. This is the ninth time I have heard speeches from the throne, and while they generally tend to consist of motherhood and apple pie kinds of statements, this one has particularly little substance in terms of setting out a direction

for this province over the next year or over the next course of years, so that was somewhat disappointing.

We were certainly expecting a little more stuff between the pages that wasn't there, even though, Mr. Speaker, this government acknowledged on page 4 of the Speech from the Throne that change is needed. Unfortunately, as the pages unfold, we don't see much of a commitment to exactly what that means. What we did hear were platitudes and promises. What we didn't hear was leadership or direction. We heard things like working harder, will examine, will review, with no specific direction on where they're going and how they're going to do it. This is really too bad, because this government has done a very good job of making huge messes in both health care and education, and we were expecting them to take some time to explain how they were going to solve those issues, notwithstanding the fact that they have over \$21 billion to spend in this province in a given year, which should be more than enough money for even the most inept managers to figure out how to do things, but apparently not.

MR. MacDONALD: Are they inept?

MS CARLSON: Well, a lot of people would say so, including many people on this side of the House.

DR. TAYLOR: There are not many people on that side though.

MS CARLSON: There are quite a few of them. Take a look, Mr. Minister. There are quite a few of them. So we'll see what they have to say. [interjection] I said: on this side. I didn't say that they'd be on our side. I think that you're going to find more and more, day by day, as the ineptness of this government unravels, we have more from this group agreeing with us than they are agreeing with the direction that you're going in.

I think that it's going to be very interesting to see what proceeds here. What we were looking for is a government that would take the bull by the horns, that would show some strong leadership and some strong strategic direction for today, tomorrow, and the future, and it hasn't happened. What do they do? They consult, they consult, and they consult. They hold another summit. They talk about examining. They talk about reviewing. [interjection] Well, there's no doubt that this government likes to promote the idea of asking Albertans what they'll do. Too bad they don't actually do what those recommendations would be. We've had a series of consultations over the course of the years that I've been in here where they talk, talk, talk, talk, and then go and do exactly what they want to do at the end of the day. That looks like another case here. This is a government that doesn't govern by strategic direction. How they govern is really by the latest popularity poll, and that does not bode well for us in the long term or in the future.

Our role as Official Opposition then becomes even more important, I believe, when we have a government that isn't sure of where they're going. If they were sure, we would have seen it in the throne speech. They are not sure, so they need some help. This government can certainly look to the opposition not only to oppose alternatives that they're promoting that we feel don't meet the best needs of Albertans through the kinds of filters that we use but also to propose alternatives. In opposing, I would like to remind the government in this Assembly that 75 to 80 percent of the time we actually vote with them. That doesn't mean that we blindly vote with them. We bring forward alternatives, new ideas, options, amendments that sometimes aren't adopted by the government, most often not, but that sometimes are. The intent of those is to strengthen what the government is doing and to sometimes help alter their

course in a way that will facilitate the needs of Albertans in a little better fashion.

That's what happens when we oppose, but then we also have a responsibility to propose alternatives. We have done that many times over the course of the years that I've been here, and in fact ultimately the government sometimes adopts those proposals. I would refer members to just a couple of instances. One would be the freedom of information act, which was our former leader Laurence Decore's first bill when he came into this Legislature. He brought it in two sessions in a row as his first bill, and ultimately in 1995 this government adopted that idea and made it their own, bringing it in as their own number 1 bill.

Many of us in this Assembly were around to remember Alice Hanson's good work on social issues that was ultimately defeated at that level and brought back as a government bill and passed. Now we hear lots of talk about an idea that we've brought three times into this Legislature, which is the stability fund. We hear lots of feedback from the government and from people in the community that it's a pretty good idea and that we could easily see some form of that bill being brought into this Legislature in the future.

So I would suggest to government members that instead of just viewing us as opposition, they need to take a little broader look at what it is we do and how we can perform those duties. This government is very fond of looking at business-case kinds of models to adapt in what they're doing and to explain how they're carrying out their actions. So I would suggest to this government that they take a look at opposition as more of an advisory board in terms of role and function than they do as a traditional opposition sense.

If we take a look at what advisory boards do in the private sector, they are put in place not to have ultimate influence on decision-making but to advise on which direction the organization should move in terms of facilitating long-term strategic goals. What are those kinds of goals for Alberta? They're good government for the people at the lowest possible cost, providing the basic services that we as Canadians expect to have supplied with tax dollars, essentially health care, education, justice, and infrastructure, both hard and soft types of support. If the government would change the focus in how they see us and take a look at us more in terms of an advisory capacity, then I think we could see this government moving towards a more long-term strategic direction, because they don't seem to be able to do it without that kind of support.

4:40

So just don't think of us in terms of opposing and once in a while coming up with a bright idea that you'll adopt two or three years down the road, but work with us on an ongoing basis. That would mean some changes in legislative function. We would see things like more all-party committees, particularly the standing policy committees, where, as those members in this Assembly have seen, when opposition members are included on committees, we sometimes have some really good ideas. More often than not, we're much happier to work co-operatively to get a good idea brought forward than we are happy to work in opposition. This government, with the manner and format in which they run the government, force us into a position where it looks like what we do is oppose at all costs, but in fact they would be a much stronger government if they would work co-operatively with us in many areas. We have seen some good examples of that happen in many of the committees that I have participated in over the years, not the least of which would be PNWER, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, and the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee. Now we see a FOIP committee being formulated that did really good work as an all-party committee in its last review, and we would expect the same thing to happen this time.

There are some real strengths and benefits to working with us.

You get better ideas and stronger direction if you include some opposing views or alternative views at the ground floor of building ideas and frameworks and legislation, much better than if you just surround yourself with people who think exactly like you. We have seen some true disasters in terms of legislation that has come into this Assembly when the government doesn't lift its head up and take a look in the broader community for input.

So I put those ideas forward to the government and hope that they will incorporate them into the kind of planning that they're doing, because if they don't take a look at some of those options, then we're going to see more of the same: \$21 billion and it's not enough money for them to manage on in a province where our population barely tops 3 million people, where we have a strong basis in terms of basic programming. We're going to see that eroding in health care, in education, in infrastructure. We're starting to hear the concerns and the complaints from people now. What we see is a government who likes to take a band-aid approach, and a good example of that is what they're coming forward with again in terms of the task force that's going to examine options for new revenues and long-term funding for health care.

Why is it that they wait until we're in crisis mode before they take a look at putting some of those kinds of ideas into place? Why is it that this government can't do what businesses do and have ongoing think tanks working around these kinds of issues that we know are emerging, that we know are going to be critical to our future as a province in the short term and the long term, and have ongoing information flows with people who are outside of government who have got the kind of expertise that they can provide substance and good ideas to them? So why wait until the last minute, until we're on the brink of disaster in some of these areas, before they start to think about what they should have been doing in the past?

So, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments by saying that there is only one thing that I completely agree with the government on in terms of this throne speech, and that is on page 4 where they say "Change is needed."

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My friend opposite in her comments mentioned – and I agree with her – that standing policy committees of the Legislature with opposition members can be very, very productive, in my experience. I'm wondering, though, if the hon. member has any specific committee in mind. What committee, in her estimation, would be the best to afford her attentions?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to respond.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've waited nine years to be able to answer a question in this Assembly, and so I'm quite happy to be doing so.

In response to the member's question, certainly I think it's a model that would work well with all of the SPCs, and I would be quite happy to take direction from the government on that and take one committee as a pilot project.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie says that this is her ninth Speech from the

Throne, but she charges that it shows little direction. Yet I read about 10-year targets to reduce diabetes, obesity, chronic heart and lung disease, and preventable injuries. I also read about a task force reporting by September, about an expert advisory panel being formed. These are specifics. My question to the member opposite: what would the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie specifically propose to sustain the health care system in Alberta?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to respond.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about performance measures as an instance. We've seen repeatedly that the Auditor General has said that this government is not able to meet its own performance measures.

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has said that she's waited nine years to answer a question, yet I just posed her one that I didn't get an answer for.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, for nine years I've also been listening to cabinet avoid the question, and this was also my first opportunity to do that.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm chagrined to hear the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie indicate that she's listened to throne speeches for nine years and that this one contained the least substance, because this throne speech set a policy direction, which is after all the sublime role of government: to set the policy direction for our province and to provide a sense of where we're going and what our vision is. If this throne speech didn't do that for the hon. member, I am wondering if she would prefer a dull litany of program-by-program detail of what we should be doing, if she thinks that is the type of vision, the type of direction, and the type of enthusiasm.

MS CARLSON: I would like to thank him for his comments.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. We shall resume debate again. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I thank the hon. Lieutenant Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne announcing to the House and this province the government's most important objectives or direction this year.

I believe that the Speech from the Throne reflects the priorities of all Albertans. It is necessary that as a government our priorities are in line with the people of Alberta, but much more is required. Our government must work very hard, ask some very difficult questions, and make bold decisions in guiding this province forward. I will be working hard with all my colleagues to ensure the most effective representation and the most efficient responses to Albertans' ongoing concerns.

As mentioned in the throne speech, the recent Future Summit provides a good measure of Albertans' views for the future. The people of this province and their government are on the same page, Mr. Speaker. We are not satisfied to sit idly by. Albertans can and will decide their own future. The Future Summit held earlier this month was a provincewide consultation on what Albertans would like our province to look like once the province's debt is retired. Information and opinions were collected and compiled from Albertans at regional forums and throughout the province.

We recognize that, despite recent economic volatility, Alberta

remains in an excellent position to chart a course to continued future prosperity. A strong economy will allow ongoing support for an accessible, affordable, and high-quality education system; a clean and healthy environment; safe, caring communities; and a first-class health care system which offers affordable health services whenever Albertans need them. These are our major priorities for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, and this government is listening.

4:50

At the summit Albertans spoke strongly that they would like to see a robust, stable, resilient, and diversified economy. Mr. Speaker, we are on course. Our province is heavily involved in trade. We are a diversified economy, but we are also at the forefront of energy prospects in Canada, throughout North America, and around the world. Because of this leading position, all Alberta's objectives are linked to maintain and continue to grow our province's solid financial and economic position. Our hon. Premier has just recently returned from a Team Canada tour, a champion of Alberta. He will bring attention and investment to the fertile economic environment we inhabit. Alberta has long been known as attractive to foreign investors. Our Premier's trip it is sure will pay off.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's taxes are the lowest in the country. This government is committed to managing our expenditures within a set agenda of fiscal responsibility. During a time of general economic drop-off throughout the world, our tax rates and our commitment to fiscal responsibility puts us front and centre. Across the international commodity and financial markets a strong recovery is forecast. Alberta is in an enviable position to take advantage of this trend. By keeping taxes the lowest in Canada, we ensure that our small and large businesses have the tools and the freedom to orchestrate a leading and profitable economic drive. By giving individual businesses more control of their funds, they are able to invest smartly, creating jobs and marking a landscape for outside investment. This game plan benefits all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has big expectations, and our government has big plans to meet them. Our ever growing economy is continually bolstered by our commitment to innovations in science. Introduced in phases, the Supernet will be fully constructed in 2004, making Alberta the world leader in information technology and connectivity. In addition to connecting every library, school, hospital, and provincial government office to a high-speed broadband network, the Supernet will make the broadband services available to commercial service providers, which can then provide competitive services to every community in our province.

Throughout this government's extensive aims and initiatives, Mr. Speaker, our method of foresight and strict fiscal responsibility also extends to our natural environment. Indeed, Alberta has its eyes set to the future. A profitable, sustainable development of its natural resources is a government commitment.

We are absolutely committed to ensuring first-class health, education, and infrastructure in a growing economic environment. That is to say, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans' standard of living is key. This means ensuring safe and future-minded resource development. Alberta is concerned with maintaining a healthy natural environment. Our energy interests are subject to our conviction of not shortchanging our future and, more importantly, our children's future.

Mr. Speaker, serving my constituents in this session of our Legislature, I will present a private member's bill to reduce environmental risk for the health and wealth of our citizens. I will also introduce two motions. One is to institute continuous improvement measurements in our government operations and publicly funded organizations. The other motion is to look into the feasibility of

delivering some government services through community association facilities, especially in the urban areas. This reflects suggestions from my constituents. In serving my constituents, I have also received opinions, queries, information, and I want to share them with all of you here today.

The Alberta government has invested significantly in education. From 1995 to 2002 the K to 12 spending has increased by about \$1.1 billion or 41 percent, from \$2.6 billion to \$3.7 billion now. Enrollment growth during the same period is just around 7 percent. There are about 560,000 funded students enrolled in kindergarten to grade 12. The pay raise the government put in the 2002 budget is to make Alberta teachers' average salaries the highest in Canada. Now, never before has any salary increase for teachers been guaranteed in advance.

In addition, there is an outlay of around \$1 billion for school facility upgrades and construction in the coming years. Albertans can rest assured of the fact that the government values the education of youth, our future, and appreciates the profession of teaching by our public investment, an increase in a time of shortfall, and by positioning the professional salary level as the highest among the provinces.

It's largely up to the school boards to decide how to spend those \$3.7 billion. Spending beyond that in other areas such as health care, social services, road construction, and so on will be trimmed or affected, and people's jobs will be affected. By the way, a 1 percent increase on \$3.7 billion is \$37 million.

The downturn of the world economy and the sagging commodity prices have reduced the amount of money available for many public projects and private investment as well. In reality, many hardworking Albertans working in construction and manufacturing services could potentially get laid off, many workers will not receive a pay increase at all or may even face reduction, and many businesses were closed because of the downturn of the world economy.

So when public money is tight, we need to ponder the question of fairness and timing. Should one profession receive higher than the highest pay when it means job losses for others or lack of money to assist the less fortunate? As an MLA my vision is to ensure that Alberta has the highest employment rate, that Alberta has the lowest tax regime for workers, who can have a bigger net pay, and that Alberta's workers are rewarded for their quality performance to be among the highest paid within their occupation across the country.

What counts is the position of the salary level among peers in the same occupation, not the percentage of pay increase. By all indications Alberta's professionals, especially in the health services and teaching professions, enjoy the highest average pay across the nation. By the way, my aim is never – never – for Alberta's MLAs to receive the highest pay among their peers across the country, and they do not.

Reflecting the fact that Albertans are very pragmatic, I call on the leaders, especially union leaders, to settle with what's now available in the public budget and plan to surf the next wave of our economic upturn as part of their contract agreements.

In the broader perspective, in a longer term view I feel that we need to find innovative ways of funding and spending for public programs and services. First, we need to find ways to deal with the reality of high fluctuations of Alberta's public revenues. One possible way is to call on the private sector to provide capital finances and assume the debts and the public sector to pay the much smaller and steady amounts of this annual operating budget. This certainly would require changes in our financing legislation and regulations.

Albertans deserve better ways to share the wage increase among the stakeholders groups than the archaic employer/union confronta-

tion model. This model always drags out the negative feelings and pits one side against the other. In the public's eyes it is wasting our valuable and scarce resources in those fights. I would venture a concept of a sharing summit, where representatives of stakeholder groups gather and work out together their wage increase shares.

5:00

Now, I would imagine a gathering of the local organized labour unions of doctors, nurses, teachers, public employees, and other stakeholder groups who are what I call sharing our public pizza. May I use the word "pizza" as an analogy? The representatives of these special interest groups would gather together, say, in Banff for a summit to come up with their agreement on slicing the percentages of increase of the pizza. This increase agreement will become the recommendation to the government to take into consideration in their budget development. Of course, the sharing summit concept needs to be thought out with further details. I have been told that 70 percent to 80 percent of public expenditures are for salary and wages. The sharing summit would provide fairness, balance, and understanding among Albertans' stakeholder groups.

Relative to other provinces Alberta is so fortunate that we still have quite a big pizza, may I say, to share, be it a notch smaller than previously predicted. Let's find a better way to share than to argue or fight over slices. However, regardless of the size of the pizza, a bigger share for one means smaller shares for the others. Our common aim is to work together to make a bigger Alberta pizza.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Alberta's economic horizon, alongside Alberta's other fundamental priorities, is being paid close attention, and I do see a healthy, prosperous Alberta.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members now have five minutes for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I have a question for the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Now, in the Speech from the Throne it is mentioned on page 11 in describing for this province, which is a noteworthy goal, a clean and sustainable environment. The direct quote here is:

In 2002 the government will further encourage practices that prevent pollution and other environmental problems. Be assured, however, that government will continue to move firmly to punish offenders who fail to live up to their environmental obligations.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to respond. [interjections]

Hon. members, there was an understanding that questions will be for 30 seconds and the response will be for 30 seconds. For the chair to be fair to everyone, we are going to adopt the 30-second rule.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to respond.

MR. CAO: I would love to respond to the hon. member. I don't hear your question related to what I said in the speech.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Now, in response to what has occurred with the fire and explosion at Hub Oil, does this Speech from the Throne protect not only your constituents but the hon. Member for Calgary-East's? Is this enough to protect them?

Thank you.

MR. CAO: Still I don't see it related to what I said in the speech. My recommendation to you is that those questions probably should be directed to the question period.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. A question to the hon. member. He seems to be very knowledgeable in the area of technology. He mentioned the Supernet. I'm just wondering how he feels this will help his constituency.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to respond.

MR. CAO: In my constituency, hon. minister, there's a Calgary public library and also many schools. There's even a college and the city hall. So all of those will be served by this Supernet.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you. To the Member for Calgary-Fort, Mr. Speaker. The grant for technology allowance is \$40 per student.

AN HON. MEMBER: Forty-three.

MR. BONNER: You're correct; it's up to \$43. But this is nowhere enough to meet the schools' needs in funding. Where do you propose we get the extra funding required?

MR. CAO: Well, again, it's not reflecting that in my speech, but I'd just venture my idea that the funding issues will be discussed with the minister responsible for the department.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you so very much. We shall resume debate.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I had another question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much. Then in response to the speech yesterday afternoon by the Hon. Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor, there are many issues that I want to bring forward in the time that I have. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to note that this fine province will celebrate its hundredth birthday on September 1, 2005, and it began its existence with 184,000 inhabitants.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to respond. [interjections]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was recognized with an understanding that this was a question, and there was time left in the five-minute time period that was allocated. If this is your response to the Speech from the Throne, the chair will now recognize you to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There was noise coming from the Environment minister, just noise, and I thought it was time to respond to the throne speech.

However, it began its existence with some 184,000 inhabitants, of whom some 80,000 were First Nations people. Revenue for the first fiscal year of this province was barely \$2 million, of which half

came by grant or, as some would say, subsidy from the federal government. Mr. Speaker, \$175,000 was from fees on land transfers, and \$130,000 was from the sale of butter. Now, so many years later Alberta has over 3 million citizens and revenues of over \$21 billion, of which roughly 28 percent comes from nonrenewable resources. The future of Alberta will be based on the foundations laid out in this Speech from the Throne, delivered yesterday, as I said earlier, by Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole. But birthdays such as our upcoming centennial are noteworthy events in the history of the province. Now, I don't know what we should do to celebrate this, whether we should, for instance, build arenas or build libraries or if we should just have very simple, inexpensive programs to recognize it, or if we should go on a massive public works program; for instance, start building things like, as they call it around Medicine Hat, the Taylor dam. Now, perhaps this is what should be done for centennial year. Who knows?

We have gone in a hundred-plus years from Rupert's Land to Ralph's world. The growth has occurred. It's certainly dramatic growth, but at the same time there's hunger in the inner cities. There are children going to school without food. [interjections] Other hon. members of this Assembly may laugh, but that is not growth. That is not a satisfied population.

Now, in listening to the throne speech . . . [interjections]

5:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. I would request everyone to please allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to deliver his response.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In listening to the throne speech, one must remember and consider what happened only last year. We are told now that there is no money, but last year there was no end to the money. There was no end to the money because it was an election year, and we had introduction of rebate programs that cost \$800 million for four months. We had another program – and this was also tax dollars – of \$350 million for electricity rebates. Now, is this progress? Is this what sort of growth the public expects? I don't think so, and I think it was a very poor use of funds when you look at a year later. When there are children that are hungry, when there are seniors that can't afford their electricity bills, can't afford their heating bills, that is not, in my view, management.

Now, as I said before, a year ago, before the election, the government also instructed regional health authorities to increase access, reduce waiting lists. There were to be more MRI scans. There were to be beds opened and made available to the sick, and there were to be more operations. Now we have a full campaign, paid for by the taxpayers, to privatize our health care system. That wasn't mentioned in this document. That wasn't mentioned in this document last winter, this document here, A Positive Future for Alberta.

We talked about many fundamentals that were going to be improved, Mr. Speaker. There was to be paying down of the debt. We could no longer think of education as being only kindergarten to grade 12. We had to make commitments to lifelong learning. We had to develop programs for the whole student, whatever that is. Then we were going to increase – this is an interesting one – supply and choice and therefore lower prices for our electricity. If any hon. member can tell me, anyone, any household in this province who is enjoying electricity prices that are lower now than they were before electricity deregulation, well, then I think that they should bring these individuals to the Assembly, and they can tell us all how

they're enjoying a cheaper price for their electricity since deregulation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in this document there is no mention of the government policy – we're talking about the future here. There is no mention of electricity exports and which direction this government would like to take. There is no mention of how much longer we can rely on our natural gas supplies to provide revenue for the government. Where are we going to be in 10 years with our natural gas fields, or are they all going to be developed for the Alliance pipeline on the other side of the border into northeastern British Columbia? There's no mention of this.

Kyoto. Now, we're essentially watching our world melt away. [interjection] I hear an "oh." There are glaciers in the national parks which are the source of water for this city and, as a result, for this Assembly. The glaciers decade after decade are getting smaller and smaller in size. There are shorebirds that go to the Arctic to nest. They're going further and further north. There is conclusive proof that global warming is occurring.

Now, all hon. members, Mr. Speaker, are going to wonder: well, what does this have to do with the teachers' strike? It has this to do with the teachers' strike. The government doesn't want to put money on the table to end the teachers' strike because they're afraid they're going to need it in a big way not only to fight forest fires this spring and summer but also to provide drought relief for Alberta's farmers. This is what the money is squirreled away for, and I'm not saying that's not prudent, but all this is related. The teachers deserve some of that money that you have set aside, as well as drought-stricken farmers, as well as contractors who are going to have to fight the forest fires.

Now, with contract negotiations I was pleased to see in the update that was presented to all members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, about the labour relations in this province and how because of mediation processes we have stable labour relations. One of the performance measures is to have the lowest number of days lost to job action or strikes in the entire country.

The form of mediation that may have worked in the teachers' strike was the disputes inquiry board. It worked twice in the past three years, once in the city of Calgary with the public school division and once with I believe it's called the Buffalo Trail school division in Wainwright. So in the last three years this worked twice, the disputes inquiry board, yet on the eve of the largest strike in the history of the province the government saw fit not to use it, and I was disappointed in that. I think it was an appropriate time to try to resolve that series of disputes.

Why the confrontation and why no negotiation? I don't know. The only thing I can think of is the fact that in 1999 this government at its party policy convention decided that teachers should become an essential service. Now we have a government that's putting its own policies, the policies of the party, before the parents and the pupils of this fine province. The government, whenever they do that, disappoint me, Mr. Speaker.

Now health care. In the time that I have left we have to talk about the unfortunate direction that we're going towards: further privatization of our health care system. There are economic issues that we have to discuss with health care. There are certainly fiscal issues or demographic issues. There are issues relating to special service delivery. But Albertans believe, Mr. Speaker, in the fundamental principles underlying the Canada Health Act. Everyone deserves equal access to the health care they need regardless of the ability to pay.

When we get back to the settlement of this province, whenever it was Rupert's Land, everybody chipped in and co-operated. They worked together. From what I can understand and from what I see

in the Mazankowski report, that's no longer going to be the case. We are no longer going to pool our resources so that if someone on Main Street has a very high health care bill, everybody shares in that. All the taxpayers would share in that bill. But with this system that is being currently proposed, that would no longer be the case. I think we are going against the spirit of co-operation that was evident whenever people worked together to settle this province and raise their families and build a basis which our prosperity is based on.

5:20

Now, I believe that this government should acknowledge its duty to provide effective health care in the most efficient manner possible. We need to take into consideration all spending on health care, both public and private. We all know that in the U.S. public-sector spending on health care is higher than in Canada. The public health care system that we currently have is one of our distinct economic advantages, and perhaps it'll be easiest for the hon. members across the way to understand, Mr. Speaker, because even Bart Simpson gets it.

Bart Simpson gets off the airplane in Toronto – I see the promo for his show – and he decides that he can walk cavalierly because health care is provided. Now, I don't think that's the right attitude, but it was noticed by the writers of that popular American show that this is what goes on in this country, and that distinguishes us from the Americans. The automobile manufacturers realize that, Mr. Speaker. Many bankers – in fact, the Toronto-Dominion Bank did a study, and they acknowledged the competitive economic advantage we have with our public health care system. To see it dismantled in any way, shape, or form is wrong.

With the Mazankowski report I don't know why we have to hurry. There's talk that this is not sustainable, but this is not true, that our system is not sustainable. We are spending a modest sum on providing public health care. We don't have an aging population. It just doesn't fly, the arguments that are presented to encourage and increase the participation of private health care providers. I have to question now: why does private health cost more? Well, Mr. Speaker, private businesses by their nature work hard to maximize growth and profitability. Neither goal is compatible with reducing the demands on our health care system or with keeping costs down. It takes more time and money for administrators to deal with a multitude of private. . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, you now have five minutes for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member opposite talked a lot about our current challenges. Criticisms are easy, but I will give the Liberals one more chance. What would the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar specifically propose to sustain the health care system, to lower the energy costs, to clean up the environment, and to further improve our great education system?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: The first thing that we need to do to clean up our environment is to have rigorous enforcement of all laws and regulations. Now, with our health care system we have to have stability and continuity, and with our energy system we have to have clear policies. There has to be a vote of confidence in the system. Surely this hon. member should know that there's not a vote of confidence in our electricity system, because if there was, there would be people coming forward to invest in new transmission lines.

Thank you.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talk about privately delivered being much more costly and, of course, some of the other comments about how it raises the cost. I'm just curious if he's proposing that we purchase all of the private doctors' offices in the province and run them publicly?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to respond.

MR. MacDONALD: No, certainly not, Mr. Speaker, but I would advise and encourage the hon. member to compare our health care costs as a percentage of GDP with the Americans, who already have the system that the member opposite is proposing.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. member. Regarding your speech, you talk really about the money side, of costs increasing and all of that. So my question to you, sir, is: from whom do you want to get the money, and given the limited amount of money you have, from whom do you want to take away to give to the others?

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort's question, there is an appropriate amount of money in this province. It's just that it's been mismanaged by this government.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just ask a simple question of the hon. gentleman that gave the speech. He mentioned a problem with compliance. I would like you to explain to me: what is the level of compliance with Alberta Environment's orders with respect to the energy business?

MR. MacDONALD: That, indeed, is a simple question. I would just refer the hon. member to the events that led up to the explosion at Hub Oil in the vicinity of Calgary-Fort and Calgary-East. That is his answer. There was no compliance of occupational health and safety or environmental laws.

MR. McCLELLAND: On questions and comments, I wonder if the member opposite would give us his thoughts on the notion of settling public-sector disputes through the final offer arbitration process?

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, there are processes that are in place in this jurisdiction, in this province, as the Minister of Human Resources and Employment is only too well aware, that will resolve each and every dispute, and I would remind the hon. member that we already have the second lowest if not the lowest days lost to strike action of any jurisdiction in Canada.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you. You talk about the high energy, utility prices, and so on. So my question to you is: given that there's a rising wage demand for people who work in that industry, what's your proposal to keep the price low or the same?

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I had difficulty understanding that

question. Could I ask the hon. member to repeat it, please?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, we are starting to run out of time, and at this stage I think it's only appropriate that the Assembly stand adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

