

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, February 28, 2002**

Date: 02/02/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

1:30 p.m.

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members a guest in your gallery from Grande Prairie. Mr. Wayne Jacques served in this House for two terms. He represented the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. He represented that constituency with enthusiasm and, I've heard, at times with outrage. Mr. Jacques continues to serve the people in my part of Alberta as a board member of the Mistahia regional health authority, and I'm delighted to introduce him and have him join us here today.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. HUTTON: Thank you. It is an honour for me today to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three outstanding members of the business community. They are Brian Ironside, Bruce Gordon, and Jim Taylor. Mr. Ironside is Manulife Financial vice-president of regional operations, and his territory covers the Yukon to Thunder Bay. Accompanying Mr. Ironside is Mr. Bruce Gordon, the executive vice-president of Canadian operations for Manulife Financial, a Canadian company worth \$150 billion in assets, the number one insurance company in Canada. I've just left the Minister of Economic Development, and we were discussing the Alberta advantage with Mr. Ironside and Mr. Gordon. Accompanying these two gentlemen is Mr. Jim Taylor, former councillor of ward 4 and now the newly appointed executive director of the Downtown Businessmen Association. I would ask the three gentlemen to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with pride today to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly my eldest brother. John MacDonald is visiting the city this afternoon on his way through to Kelowna to the Canadian Horticultural Council's annual meeting, which is going to occur in that city next week. John is a former president of that organization, and he's also a blueberry farmer in P.E.I. He is a father and a husband, and he's also a Montreal Canadiens fan, one of few in Prince Edward Island. I would ask him now to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Education Spending

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said that spending on education has gone up by 40 percent in the past five years and that this figure takes into account increases in enrollment and inflation. Using the government's own numbers, it's clear that this statement is not accurate given the fact that real spending on education has gone up only 12 percent since 1995 and only 2 percent since 1992. My questions are to the Premier. When Alberta Learning's own numbers say that spending has gone down since this Premier's government took over, why does he continue telling Albertans that spending has gone up?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the proof is in the budget, and if you will examine the budgets over the past five or six years, you will see that spending for education has gone up 40 percent. I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe it is quite obvious, and I will go one step further and suggest to the hon. member that he look at the consulting report that Price Waterhouse did, which verified all of these figures. It does show, for example, that in 1995-96 the spending on basic education was \$2.6 billion. It is now up to \$3.7 billion, which obviously is in the 40 percent increase.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the Premier say yesterday that the 40 percent increase in the expenditures included enrollment growth and inflation when it's only a monetary value?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that at all. The hon. Minister of Learning said that. What he did say – and I'll have him elaborate once again. He did point out the increase relative to the student enrollment and relative, I believe, to the population increase in the province, and I'll have him reiterate those figures.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I said yesterday is that the enrollment increase was roughly 6 percent and the teachers' salary increase was roughly 17 percent over that time frame. I will reiterate once again that those are numbers that have been confirmed by an independent third party, so they are absolutely accurate. So it's gone up 41 percent in real spending. The enrollment has gone up roughly 6 percent, and the teachers' salaries have gone up roughly 17 percent over that time frame.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why does the government insist on using 1995 spending figures as a reference point when everybody knows that in that year education wasn't properly funded and so you're starting from a base that is not sustainable?

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, that comment is entirely subjective. We don't believe it was underfunded then; we don't believe it's underfunded today. As the minister pointed out, there has been a 41 percent increase in spending over the past five or six years.

THE SPEAKER: The minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just add a couple of things. One of the things we really have to remember is that that was a time when we made some major changes in education, and one of the ones that we always talked about is the number of school boards that were running at that time that actually had no schools. We had something like 160 school boards. We're now down to 64 school boards, so we decreased the amount of administrative dollars that were going out. We also put in administrative caps so that there were not as many administration dollars going out. More dollars were going into the classroom.

The other very important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that everyone tends to think that there was a 20 percent reduction in things like education. Well, education was 4.8 percent reduced.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the Premier tell us how much education spending has gone up as a percentage of all government spending since 1995?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that education spending accounts for about 25 or 26 percent of overall government expenditures. I would suggest that the increase in education spending is really commensurate with the growth patterns and the needs that have been identified within the school system, but I'll have the hon. minister elaborate.

1:40

DR. OBERG: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that right at my fingertips. However, I certainly will undertake to get that for him. As everyone here knows, the percentage spending on education has gone up dramatically. We've seen a lot of other departments that have had their budgets decrease, whereas education and health care have continued to increase. So we're very fortunate that that has occurred. I will, however, undertake to get those numbers to the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is your government demonstrating goodwill to teachers by presenting monetary figures instead of real value figures when you talk about the cost of education?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the question is: are we demonstrating goodwill to teachers? Well, yes, we are demonstrating goodwill to teachers. I believe it was a gesture of tremendous goodwill in last year's budget to put in as an unprecedented step a 6 percent guaranteed line item relative to salaries, unprecedented in this government, a lot better than zero, which is what the Liberals for some reason seem to think would have been appropriate. Nothing as opposed to 6 percent.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will remind the hon. member that from November of 2000 to November of 2001 the inflation rate in Alberta was actually a negative number. It was under zero. There was a deflationary period. So I think that that has to be taken into consideration. This is over the same time frame when, as the Premier has indicated, we guaranteed a 6 percent increase to our teachers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: was it showing goodwill to teachers when they were not informed that the money for the pension offer would actually come out of classroom funding?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true. All I know is that something equivalent to 3 percent – well, actually, more than that because it's after-tax dollars – was put on the table relative to the unfunded portion of the teachers' pension fund, and that is now, unfortunately, off the table, the result of job action that has been taken by the union.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'll reiterate the process that was involved there. Back in October of this year the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association and I met on the unfunded pension liability. At that time I said that we were open to discussions on anything to do with the unfunded pension liability. I did not hear anything back from the president of the ATA until around January, when I asked for a meeting with him. I subsequently formally put it on the table at that time. I felt – and maybe this was my mistake – that as a union leader it was his obligation to tell his clients, to tell his people about the offer. Obviously, the leader of the ATA chose not to. I believe it was to the true detriment of all the junior teachers, to every teacher in the system. I believe it was to their detriment. It is extremely unfortunate, but that is what happened.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Teachers' Labour Dispute

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a confidential document I've received from Alberta Human Resources and Employment titled A Semi-annual Preview of Key Alberta Labour Negotiations, October 2001 to March 2002, in the education sector outlook there is this statement: "The government does not directly participate in education bargaining." My first question is to the Premier. Does the Premier agree with that statement?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, outside of the 6 percent line item in last year's budget relative to teachers' salaries, unprecedented, as I mentioned before, we do not become directly involved in bargaining with the teachers' union. That is left entirely up to the individual school jurisdictions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, my second question to the Premier: how can the Premier say that there's no direct involvement with teachers' negotiations when the Deputy Minister of Learning in a recent e-mail instructs or tells school boards how to spend this money?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true or not, and I don't have the benefit of the document that obviously came to the hon. member in a brown envelope. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Learning knows more about it, but I sure don't. They don't leak a lot of information to me.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe that if the hon.

member would actually read the memo, what it states from my deputy minister is to be careful about using operating surpluses to pay teachers because the operating surpluses are onetime dollars – they're only there one time – and the teachers' salaries are a continuing expense.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Learning. Is running full-page newspaper ads interfering with local bargaining?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess you'll have to ask the ATA and the Canadian Teachers' Federation that because that's where the full-page ads were. We did run an ad. We ran a very factual ad, because at that particular moment in time there was a lot of misinformation that was being put out in the media.

DR. MASSEY: Interfering with bargaining.

DR. OBERG: I'm sorry, but it is not. Putting out the facts is not interfering in bargaining, Mr. Speaker. What we had done was we had confirmed all of the data that we were putting out, and it was confirmed by Price Waterhouse, which is, obviously, a very reputable firm. That was then made public, as our job as government is to make information public, real, factual information public to the citizens of Alberta, unlike the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: The chair would like to apologize to the House. Obviously, there has been some movement of tongues in the last 30 or 40 seconds caused by the chair's decision not to rule out the third question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, which sought to seek an opinion, which is against the rules. Now, the chair should have ruled the question out of order, and that would not have permitted the comments that did come unsolicited. We'll have to be a little more vigilant, then, perhaps in the future.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Teachers' Labour Dispute (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning has stated publicly that should the government lose its case on the back-to-work order tomorrow, he will introduce legislation to order teachers back. Moreover, the minister also seems to have a plan to unilaterally impose a contract settlement on teachers through legislation. The message the Minister of Learning is sending to teachers and all Albertans is pretty obvious; that is, if the court rules against the government tomorrow, the minister will just change the rules. My questions are to the Premier. Why doesn't the Premier tell this Minister of Learning to put a sock in it so he stops making inflammatory statements designed to provoke teachers thereby providing the government with the pretext to unilaterally impose a contract settlement through legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly a sock isn't required, because the minister is doing absolutely what he is required to do, and that is to speak to the welfare of the students – the students – the most important people in this particular dispute. It's the attitude of this government that students come first. The minister is saying that we will take every action necessary, legislative or otherwise, to make

sure that the students' needs are met. That's what it's all about: the students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: as a way of rebuilding some trust with this province's teachers, would the Premier today in this Assembly make a firm commitment that the government will not unilaterally impose a contract settlement through legislation and instead abide by the arbitration process that is set out in the Labour Relations Code?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll make absolutely no commitment one way or the other relative to legislation that may or may not be introduced in this Legislature. It could be – I'm not saying that it will be, but it could be – a matter for debate in the Legislature. Let's just wait and see what kind of legislation, if any, is tabled in this Legislature, and the hon. leader of the third party will have an opportunity along with every other member in this Legislative Assembly to debate the issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the Premier: when the Premier made a flat denial yesterday that the government is planning any punitive legislative action against teachers, was he not aware that the Minister of Learning is in fact working on a plan to unilaterally impose a contract settlement?

MR. KLEIN: You're absolutely right. The questioner is absolutely right, Mr. Speaker, in that no legislation, no regulations, no policy initiatives will be taken to bring about punitive action – punitive action – against the teachers. Understanding that, albeit inconvenient, teachers do have the right to strike in this province for the time being at least and perhaps forever. I don't know, because I don't know what kind of legislation, if any, is going to be tabled in this Legislature or whether that legislation, if it is indeed tabled, is going to be passed by this Legislature. But I will reiterate: nothing that this government contemplates in the future at any time is punitive relative to teachers. It's not the nature of this government to punish. We just don't do that.

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

AES Calgary ULC Project

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an electricity generation plant proposal by a company, AES, is outside my constituency but is within the distance of concern of some of my constituents living in the community of Erin Woods, my question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister help explain to my constituents the approval process for such a project?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Power plant approvals are a provincial interest and therefore must first go to the EUB for the process. I would like to say that the company would apply to the board, which would consider input from the municipality and other interested parties. After considering the input, the board may issue an approval, and in this case they did, and they may ask municipali-

ties to amend their plans and bylaws if necessary. What I would like to state is simply this though: under the Municipal Government Act it stipulates that the decision of the EUB prevails over any local approval or a decision of the Municipal Government Board.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, if I could just take two seconds to supplement the minister's answer. That particular hearing for AES was a series of public hearings, public hearings at which all and sundry people from the member's area were invited to attend and did attend. People from the area of Chestermere were invited and did attend, and at the end, in fact, the people that were assembled there that evening gave the EUB a round of applause for the good job that they had done in holding those hearings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that the Rocky View municipal council has voted rejecting the rezoning of the land for the power plant, what is the process available for the project owner and the citizens concerned?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, certainly the EUB decision will prevail over a local municipality ruling, but I would like to also indicate that if an agreement can't be reached, an appeal can be lodged with the Municipal Government Board. However, the Municipal Government Act does require the municipality and the actual affected party to try to mediate the situation, which of course is another option in terms of mediation. So having said that, again it's a quasi-judicial board. Clearly, in terms of approval the Minister of Environment also has played a key role, and he may want to supplement my answer as well on the importance of the environment.

Standing Policy Committees

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, standing policy committee members are paid significant fees with tax dollars over and above their usual salaries. That means that these committees should be open, transparent, and accountable to all Albertans, as it is in other jurisdictions, yet it is the policy of this government to restrict access to these meetings, limiting membership to Conservative MLAs, and often prohibiting access to taxpayers, media, and to opposition MLAs. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier justify a policy topping up committee members' salaries with taxpayer dollars when they use these committees as just another internal caucus review committee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, SPCs are relatively new, since 1993 anyway, and they are government committees. They are standing policy committees that make recommendations to cabinet and therefore are government committees. The chairs of those committees, sitting on the front benches and in the seats across, can decide whether an item will be an open item on the agenda or will be an in-camera session. Ultimately, the decisions are made by the committee members, all of whom are government members, and those recommendations are carried via the committee chairmen or chairpersons to the cabinet table. So, clearly, it is the business of government, and I would remind the hon. member that she is not government. She is the opposition.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask my question to the Premier one more time. How can the Premier justify a policy topping up committee members' salaries to the tune of more than \$20,000 for the chairs with taxpayer dollars when they use these committees as just another internal caucus review committee, as he just stated?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would say that the chairs of the committees are paid extra because they work very, very hard and work long, long hours not only to convene and to run the meetings but to do all the research that is required on the various subjects that come before them. I would advise the hon. member that the vice-chair of each committee is a member of the cabinet, and there's absolutely no extra pay for that. All the members of the committee are members of this caucus, both cabinet members and private members, and receive no extra pay whatsoever for serving on those committees.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, once again I'll ask the question because the Premier refuses to answer it. How can the Premier justify topping up committee salaries with taxpayer dollars when they could take it out of their own caucus budget rather than as an additional burden on the taxpayers of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not or refuses to understand the structure. This is not a caucus committee. These are policy committees. These are committees of cabinet, and the chairs of those committees report directly to cabinet.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Grasshopper Infestation

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring forward an agricultural issue, and I am an unpaid member that sits on the SPC on agriculture and municipal affairs. Last year farmers in my constituency had to deal with an infestation of grasshoppers due to severe drought conditions. With the dry winter and the expected drought farmers will be facing this year, grasshoppers are again posing a threat to our provincial crops. Tomorrow I'll be meeting with the Whitecourt-St. Anne agriculture advisory board, and I know this topic will be on the agenda. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can you tell me what the potential is for another grasshopper outbreak?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that this was a huge concern in the agricultural community last year, and we had a widespread monitoring program working with municipalities, working with agricultural field men, agricultural service boards, and our own specialists. Unfortunately, the indications are that unless conditions change dramatically in the next short weeks, we will probably be faced with the worst outbreak we've had in 30 years. We came close to that last year. The area is expanding, and we would really like to see a very cold, wet spring to at least delay one of the hatches. Unfortunately, the ground was perfect for the laying of eggs and for them surviving over the winter, and the indications aren't very good for this spring.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: has your department identified areas of this province that will be hardest hit?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we do have an indication of what the areas are, and with your permission I'll quickly go over them. The areas are west and southwest of Edmonton. It is not common to have large outbreaks in this area: the county of Yellowhead, the county of Parkland, Lac Ste. Anne, the county of Athabasca, Wetaskiwin. That's in addition to the areas that have had problems: Barrhead, Westlock, Smoky Lake, Bonnyville, and then, of course, down the eastern border of Saskatchewan across the whole south of Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, you can see by those projections that this is widespread. Obviously, these are hungry, voracious little insects, and they will move where the food supply is, so we're monitoring it very closely this winter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Affordable Housing Agreement

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Four provinces and territories have already negotiated affordable housing agreements with the federal government. Close to half the pot is gone while the government is only expecting to complete negotiations sometime this year. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. Why has this government dragged its heels to the negotiation table and given other provinces the opportunity to scoop the funds?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, if ever there was an effort at misinformation, you've just heard it. I'd like to point out that as of last August, through the lead of Alberta in the meeting of the housing ministers in London, Ontario, the federal government went back to the drawing board and actually drew up in consultation with the provinces a plan that was made to fit each province, not a one size that doesn't fit anybody.

That process was finalized at the end of November. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the meeting. Out of that, four provinces, one of which had a previous agreement, signed on. The commitment is there for the Alberta government to receive some 67 million dollars over the next five years. The process of negotiation involved is quite lengthy in that we want to ensure that the money we receive is targeted to the areas that are most in need, whether it be geographic or social.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister confirm, please, that the \$67 million figure that he's referring to would be the province's share of that federal money, or is the province responsible for putting in half of that \$67 million?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The \$67 million is the amount of federal money that would be directed to Alberta over the next five years.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much for that information.

My last question is back to the same minister. Given that there is a retroactive clause in the new agreement, will the minister confirm if the funding for affordable housing is new money or if it's funding that he's already announced for other previous programs?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go into the details of the agreement that we are currently negotiating. All I'm going to say is that the agreement will be the best one that we can possibly get to ensure that we continually improve the housing situation of all Albertans, social housing, the homeless, and I would say that we've done an excellent job there, since we are being used as a plan for the rest of the country. Our community plans are being used as a basis for the homeless funding. When the time comes, when the agreement is finalized, it will be made public so that all Albertans can know what's contained therein.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

G-8 Summit

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2002 G-8 summit is approaching fast. Ever since Albertans first learned that the summit would be held in Kananaskis, there have been many concerns raised by Albertans about potential violence and destruction by demonstrators. My question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What preparations and precautions will be in place to ensure the safety of the environment and those attending the summit?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it's important to emphasize that the summit is a federal government responsibility. However, this is a very important event for this province, for its residents, and for people that will be visiting as heads of state and also in various other capacities. A number of Alberta government ministries are very much involved in the planning process to make sure our priorities as a province are going to be met.

I'm not, as I think can be appreciated, in a position to discuss specific security matters, but I can tell you that very strong linkages are established between various groups involved in the security of the summit, including the G-8 summit management office, the RCMP, the Calgary Police Service, and other security officials.

It's also, I think, very important to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that there is very extensive contact being arranged with the local governments in the area and the citizens in the area that is impacted by this particular major event. Every effort is being made to put the planning in place in an effective way so that the summit participants are safe, so that there is as little disruption as possible in the ordinary business and activity of Albertans in the area, and also very important of course are the environmental considerations that have to be given to this event and its possible impact. Everything is being done to mitigate any damage there.

Also very important and, I think, showing the balance that is being worked on here: there is work being done to make sure that peaceful protest is provided for in a constructive way. We know that this is a major international event. We want it to be successful, I think, on behalf of the people of the province and the participants, and we're doing everything we can to work towards that result.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you. My second question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given the dryness and forest fire dangers that Kananaskis experienced last year, what steps will be taken to protect the area from forest fires during the summit?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question at this time because of the drought and low water levels out there and general dryness in the past five years in Alberta. But Alberta does have a very, very, excellent fire prevention program that we already, in fact, will be implementing tomorrow. On March 1 we will implement the fire prevention program. In fact, any individual that wants to start a fire will have to have a permit, and we've also encouraged the municipalities to try and consider permitting their applications for burning.

In relation to the G-8 summit itself, Mr. Speaker, we will be handling the fire suppression, fire prevention program the same as we did in the past. We will have the appropriate manpower available. We will have the appropriate equipment available. In fact, you know, when you look at last year's budget, it was over \$170 million. In the last five years, because of the dryness, we spent an average of \$150 million per year. We will continue doing that.

In relation to the specific question, we will continue monitoring the situation closely and take the necessary action that's required to make sure that the people are safe that are there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is for the Minister of Community Development. How long will Kananaskis be closed to campers, kayakers, hikers, and ordinary Albertans during the summit?

2:10

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, the area in Kananaskis Country where the summit is occurring is actually the Evan-Thomas recreation area, and certainly that will be closed to the general public. That will include the golf course, three hotels, the RV site, and, I suspect, the ski hill area as well. But they will only be closed for about a week leading into the summit, and as soon as possible after the summit is over and concluded, then they will immediately be reopened.

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

PDD Boards

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last September this government came to an agreement with employees working in the PDD system that placed government employees at up to a 49 percent higher salary than community staff in the same jobs. In the past when this government settled with PDD workers, it provided PDD boards with the funds to cover the settlement. However, this year no additional funds were received, and the boards have had to struggle with these increases themselves. My questions are to the hon. minister responsible for PDD boards. Why has your government put PDD boards in an impossible bind by settling with workers and then not providing the dollars to support those settlements? Why are you downloading responsibility onto your boards?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not downloading anything unreasonable here. What I would say to the hon. member is that we have asked for some co-operation during some very difficult times that were precipitated largely by the tragic events of September 11 last year, over which we had no control.

What I would like to remind the hon. questioner about is this. In the current budget we provided an increase of 9 percent to the PDD system, which is one of the largest increases to any government

department. We worked very hard to try and affix some of those dollars toward the wage disparity between the community agency workers and the government workers working in some of our institutional care centres and so on. So with the 1 percent reduction there still remains an 8 percent increase overall.

Now, specific to the issue of the wage disparity, that is an issue that I'm abundantly aware of because I did make that recommendation in the Building Better Bridges report, which most members here will remember. We did provide about \$23.4 million or thereabouts in additional moneys specifically for narrowing that gap. Those moneys went out to the community agencies, and to the best of my knowledge they were passed on to the workers. There will be a need to readdress this issue, and I will do that later.

DR. TAFT: Given that you've conceded there's a need to address the issue, then let's go back and ask: why have you reneged on your commitment initially in Building Better Bridges to "undertake the necessary steps to narrow the gap that exists . . . between agency/service-provider staff wages and government-employee staff wages"?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was no reneging at all. When I first authored the report and that particular recommendation, there was up to a 40 percent difference between what community agency workers were receiving and what government-employed workers were receiving. Through the increases that I just explained, which I believe started in the fall of 2000, we narrowed that gap from 40 percent down to 25 percent. So it was a recognition of the good and hard efforts that our community agency PDD workers provide, as do the government workers. However, given the recent settlements of 5 and 4 through the AUPE channel, that gap has grown a bit, and I will be looking at how to best address that, as I've already indicated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then is the minister committing to providing adequate funding to the PDD boards to not only cover increases in government employee wages but also to narrow the gap between government employees and service-provider staff? Is that a commitment?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government-employed individuals in the PDD system will be receiving obligatorily the 5 percent and the 4 percent. The other piece, which is the community agency workers, is what we're working on right now. There will be a new budget tabled, and the hon. member will have to just be patient, as will all members, to see what that budget contains.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Health Care Premiums

MR. MASON: Thank you very much. Yesterday the Premier tied himself in knots trying to justify health care premium increases while posing as a tax cutter. A duck is a duck is a duck, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: if an increase in health care premiums is not a tax increase, can he assure Alberta's taxpayers that they won't have to pay such an increase?

MR. KLEIN: No. I can't give that assurance at all, but I can give the assurance that a health care premium is a health care premium is a health care premium. So if it looks like a premium and it acts like

a premium and does what a premium is supposed to do, it must be a premium.

MR. MASON: Does the Premier agree that tax increases and health care premium increases both come out of the same pocket of the taxpayer?

MR. KLEIN: Of course it all comes out of the same pocket. I mean, it reminds me of a former member of this Legislature, long since deceased, who said: there's only one taxpayer, you and me. Mr. Speaker, certainly it all comes out of the same pocket. But the simple fact is that there is a difference between a tax and a premium. First of all, with premiums you can be selective as to whom the premiums apply, as we have been selective in this government by shielding those who cannot afford to pay premiums from paying premiums, by shielding seniors and other people in unfortunate circumstances.

Another factor relative to premiums, Mr. Speaker. Unlike a payroll tax, unlike a tax, it clearly points out that there is a cost associated with health care, and one of the fundamental problems as it relates to the sustainability of health care is the perception by some that health care is somehow free . . .

MR. MAR: It's 18 million bucks a day.

MR. KLEIN: . . . when in fact it costs, as the minister points out, \$18 million a day. I would point out that premiums only cover 11 percent of insured services, but at least it demonstrates that there is a cost associated with the delivery and the maintenance of health care.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier in response seems to be having difficulty telling the difference between a tax and a premium. Once again to the Premier: why is he having so much trouble explaining the difference between a tax and a premium?

MR. KLEIN: I am not having any difficulty whatsoever explaining the difference between a tax and a premium. The problem we have in this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member, who has a very serious problem in understanding what I'm saying.

Speaker's Ruling Exhibits

THE SPEAKER: Exhibits are not normally the case for decorum in the Assembly. I would invite the hon. member to attend the Speaker's suite this afternoon. There is a beautiful bathtub there. He can take his two rubber duckies and play as he wants to.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Bighorn Wildlife Recreation Area

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been getting an abundance of letters on the Bighorn country. I've also attended a few public meetings held on access to the Bighorn area. What I'm hearing from the majority is that they are concerned that the use of mechanized vehicles, as in off-road vehicles, quads, snowmobiles, et cetera, would be banned in the area. So the question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Are there any plans to ban off-highway vehicles or snowmobiles from the Bighorn recreation area?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:20

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A similar question came up in the House yesterday, but I'll try and expand on my answer to try and clear up the issue for the member and Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Bighorn backcountry is about a 4,000 square kilometre area in southwest-central Alberta. Eighty percent of the area is presently zoned as a prime protection and critical wildlife zone. In fact, there is so much interest in the area that it was recommended to be designated under the special places program. The committee that reviewed it, in fact, at the time – this is very, very important – recommended that it should not be designated in the special places program, that a committee would be set up, and the committee then would develop some form of an access plan for all the interested users in the area. Since then we've set up a committee of 15 members, also involving six different departments, to ensure that as we move forward with this plan, it deals with all interested users including the recreation users you mentioned, the environmentalists, wildlife interests, et cetera.

MR. OUELLETTE: My second question to you. I'm not fully understanding what direction your department is going, and I really just have a simple question: are they in or out?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the recommendation – and I've said this all along. There is enough land in that area. There is enough interest by various interest groups to utilize the area. What I've suggested is that the end result will be a balance between environmental management and other users, including industrial development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: That's fine. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Revenue. Yesterday you appeared at odds with the Minister of Finance over whether or not the heritage fund should be liquidated to pay off the remaining debt. Is it the position of the minister to use the heritage fund to pay off the debt early even though it has been noted that it would be costly to do so?

MR. MELCHIN: We continue to look at the mandate of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund as to how we maximize its value and its potential for savings for Albertans in the future. When we talked about that review, it was not a discussion about how to spend it or how to chop it up or how to get rid of it. It was always about how you ensure that it's there for the intended purposes for which it ought to be there for the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Is it the position of the minister to liquidate the heritage fund to pay off the remaining debt by the centennial in 2005?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've laid out a fiscal plan for

this House. We've debated it here. Those kinds of debates have to take place in this Legislature in the longer term, and they haven't come to the floor of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can this minister assure Albertans that their prized nest egg and the legacy of Peter Lougheed will not be blown on a burn-the-mortgage party in 2005 as a legacy of the current Premier?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the nonsense that comes out of this hon. member is unbelievable. It's been demonstrated all day again.

Quite frankly, the heritage trust fund has been extremely beneficial to the financial stability of this province. It has not only been the financial backing of the province during the good times but in the very difficult times that we experienced from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s. It has also been a vehicle that has provided a stream of revenue to the general revenue fund that has helped us ward off some of the costs as we were rapidly paying off our debt to get us into a better fiscal position. So to thwart or be loose about the future of the heritage trust fund I think is irresponsible and unfitting because that fund is reviewed by an all-party select committee of this legislature that makes recommendations as to the future of the fund. I used to be a member of it myself, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure most members in this Legislature have at one point or another. The long-term plans of the fund are to be reviewed on an ongoing basis, as is the case with any of the funds that come before this Legislature, but there is an all-party committee that does just that and brings recommendations forward on an annual basis.

The Minister of Revenue is also responsible to make sure that the fund performs well, and quite frankly it has done extremely well. I am very pleased with the performance of this fund, particularly in a year when we have seen some very difficult economic market conditions. This fund has performed very well for Albertans.

So the hon. member in my view, Mr. Speaker, is out of line, he's frivolous, and he's out of tune.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Three hon. members today will participate in Members' Statements, but prior to arriving at that very important juncture in the Routine, let me just advise all hon. members that today is the 43rd anniversary of the birth of the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Viking Cup

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. History is full of examples of where sport and cultural exchanges have nurtured understanding and goodwill between people of different national backgrounds and political persuasions. This has been demonstrated over the last few weeks as the world has been focused on the pinnacle of sport and intercultural activity, the Olympics. Here in Alberta in my constituency a youth sporting and cultural event, the Viking Cup, has been taking place biennially for the past 22 years with long-lasting benefits.

This tournament began as an idea generated on a wobbly train carrying the Augustana University College Viking team from Leningrad to Helsinki as part of a hockey tour in 1979. This led to the first Viking Cup international tournament with teams from Finland, Sweden, and Canada in Camrose in 1980. The event is

sponsored by Augustana University College in partnership with the Camrose and Wetaskiwin communities and involves over 400 dedicated volunteer workers and approximately 100 billeting families.

The 10-team tournament is known worldwide for its quality; 233 Viking Cup players have been drafted by the National Hockey League with approximately 50 players currently playing in the National Hockey League. Twenty-four players of the Viking Cup played in the Salt Lake Olympics.

The Viking Cup has been won by national junior teams from Finland twice, Czechoslovakia with Dominic Hasek in 1982, Russia, U.S.A., as well as Canadian teams from NAIT twice, University of Alberta, McGill University, University of New Brunswick, Saskatchewan junior all-stars, and finally in January at Viking Cup 2002 the Augustana Vikings became the Viking Cup champions for the very first time. The Viking Cup has produced many winners and champions, but more important it has generated a spirit of friendship, understanding, and goodwill amongst its numerous participants.

Thank you.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We live in the most prosperous province in Canada, but this government continues to mismanage our financial resources at an alarming rate. Only two years ago we had an over \$5 billion surplus, but a large percentage of it was blown on pre-election spending. While a few benefited by the government's wild spree, a whole segment of society was ignored and still suffers from the government's neglect today.

Alberta's programs and benefits for things like assured income for the severely handicapped and supports for independence are paid lip service by the government but little else. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment appointed a low-income review, but where is it? Every week calls come into my office and to my colleagues', but still there is nothing to be heard on this review. The government knows what it really needed to do is allocate more resources, yet they won't give this review priority over something like horse racing or gambling. So with inflation and the cost of living and as utility rates go up, benefits for the most vulnerable in our society stay the same, and with that, they fall further behind in the most prosperous province in Canada.

What are our priorities? Where is all the money going? Why can't those who need it the most to afford to live in our ever increasingly expensive cities get some needed help from the government?

2:30

In fact, the money is going the other way. As the third-quarter update shows, \$34 million allocated for programs like SFI was not spent and therefore goes back to the government to help balance its budget and increase its surplus. The year before, about \$13 million went unexpended in programs. How much could the benefits offered in these programs have been increased with that money, Mr. Speaker?

Only a decade ago we were hearing the same rhetoric we hear now about tightening our belts, making cuts, and raising taxes. One thing that has not changed in the last 10 years is this government's inability to budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Jennifer Heil and Don Bartlett

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and give praise to two extraordinary world-class athletes from Spruce Grove who showed their stuff at the Olympics and came out on top.

Jennifer Heil is a vivacious young downhill skier who caught the world's eye over the past year, blowing through the competition in several World Cup events, and is currently ranked ninth in World Cup moguls. She represented Canada beautifully in the freestyle skiing in Salt Lake over the past few weeks where she narrowly – and I mean narrowly – missed a bronze medal by a fraction of a point. All of Alberta was watching in awe as we saw our amazing athlete post jumps with higher degrees of difficulty than any other skier in the competition. We're all very proud of Jennifer and can't wait for the snow to fly in the years to come to watch this young lady take skiing to new heights.

I would also like to say congratulations to the lead of Kevin Martin's curling team, Don Bartlett, who, as I have been told, bound the team together as only one of the best leads in the country can do. Don and Kevin Martin work like a fluid machine out on the ice. We all thoroughly enjoyed watching some intense games. Don has worked with Kevin since 1989, and their ability to curl so well together certainly shows. We're excited about the silver medal Don and the curling team was able to play a key part in obtaining for Canada in men's curling.

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert extends a huge congratulations to both Olympians as they made us so proud that they were representing us and Canada in Salt Lake.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Notices of Motions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that immediately after the daily Routine I will move as follows: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 24 to March 2, 2002, as Freedom to Read Week."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I believe the hon. member would want to do that under a Standing Order 40 provision. Is this correct?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Normally at this time I'd be moving a motion that written questions and motions for returns stand and retain their places, but there are none on the Order Paper. I thought I'd better make that mention in any event so that the House was aware of the need for that.

head: Introduction of Bills**Bill 202****Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Clean-up Instructions) Amendment Act, 2002**

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Clean-up Instructions) Amendment Act, 2002.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

**Bill 203
Gas Flaring Elimination Act**

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Gas Flaring Elimination Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE CLERK: Pursuant to Standing Order 37.1(2) I wish to advise the House that the following document was tabled with the Office of the Clerk: Alberta heritage savings trust fund third-quarter update, 2001-2002 quarterly report.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, for the interest of particularly the rural members of the House but I know all, I would like to table some very good maps that show the grasshopper infestation forecast for the prairie regions.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two articles in response to a question yesterday from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, who was surprised to hear of Enron's involvement with the U.S. government. The first article is entitled Enron for Dummies, and the second is an in-depth research article on exactly that topic.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with two tablings today. First of all, I'd like to table a set of letters expressing concerns over education funding and classroom size written, one, by Greg Balanko-Dickson, another by Dianne Gazdewich, another by R. Moore and the Moore family, and the fourth by Jeff Goth.

I would also like to table an extraordinary document called Making Medicare Better, a discussion paper by the Alberta Liberal caucus on how to improve Alberta's health care system.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tablings today with the appropriate number of copies are letters from Albertans, five who are in support of teachers in the current negotiations. They are David Sloan . . . [interjection] Don't worry. I've got hundreds more coming. We'll just bring in a few a day.

They are David Sloan, Pat Eeckel, Norman Blais, Corinne Whelan. Lorie Welk and Lyle Weis, a businessman from Medicine Hat, are both concerned about how the government has handled the teachers' strike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have a number of tablings today. The first one is a bookmark put out by the Alberta Teachers' Association: "Public education benefits everyone . . . By accepting students from all backgrounds, public education prepares children to participate in a democratic society."

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a handout I got when the Edmonton Catholic teachers picketed my office to support Edmonton public teachers, and it listed the conditions as to why there was job action taken by teachers.

The third tabling is titled *Why Not Become a Teacher?* It goes on to state that “there is a critical shortage of Chemistry, Physics & Mathematics teachers in North America and around the world.”

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a notice about a public forum to discuss the teachers’ strike which was held on Friday, February 15, at the University of Alberta. It lists representatives from the ATA, parent groups, the Public School Boards’ Association, a Liberal MLA, an ND MLA. Unfortunately, no members of the Tory caucus would show up for this.

Thank you.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table on behalf of the Minister of Community Development, responsible for provincial libraries, five copies of an excerpt from the Library Association of Alberta’s February 2002 magazine which elaborates on activities and purposes related to Freedom to Read Week, which is being celebrated this week throughout our province.

Also on behalf of the Minister of Community Development I’m pleased to table his congratulatory letter to the Library Association of Alberta acknowledging their good efforts in this regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I would like to table five copies of the financial addendum to the report of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2000 provincial confirmation process, and the Monday, March 12, 2001, provincial general election of the 25th Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter dated February 13, 2002, from myself to the Minister of Energy, and it is in regards to questions about the composition of the 11-member EUB Advisory Committee.

My second tabling this afternoon is a letter that I received at the constituency office from the King Edward Child Care Society. The King Edward Child Care Society is very concerned about the elimination of the \$15.6 million day care operation allowance by this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the government now share the projected government business for next week with us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, there’s some tentativeness to the agenda for next week given that we’re in the first week of the session, but Monday afternoon, of course, under the revised Standing Orders would be private members’ business for the most part. At 9 p.m., depending on the pleasure of the Legislature this afternoon, we will possibly be dealing in Committee of Supply with supplementary estimates and then may request unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Bills to introduce Bill 8,

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2002; failing that, as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, March 5, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading bills 1, 4, 2, 3, 5, 8, and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday, March 5, at 8 in the evening under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and second readings on Bill 8 and Bill 1 and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 6, in the afternoon second reading of bills 7, 9, 10, 11, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, Committee of the Whole on bills 8 and 1, and second readings as per the Order Paper.

Thursday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders third reading of Bill 8, second reading of any that remain on the Order Paper, and address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a Standing Order 40 application.

Freedom to Read Week

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the importance of open access to reading material by recognizing February 24 to March 2, 2002, as Freedom to Read Week.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had given the notice of motion earlier and had read the motion into the record.

Now, this is the 18th annual Freedom to Read Week. The members of the Book & Periodical Council Freedom of Expression Committee reaffirmed their support for intellectual freedom guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and acknowledged the ongoing commitment of Canadian writers, publishers, librarians, educators, and booksellers to support intellectual freedom and to be vigilant.

Mr. Speaker, books and magazines are banned regularly at the border.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please, just explain the urgency of it. We’ll decide whether or not we go on to the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for your wise counsel.

There are three points that I’d like to make on pressing or urgent necessity. The first is that this is the week that has been designated in Canada as Freedom to Read Week. We were not able to bring up this Standing Order 40 motion prior to today with the throne speech and other business that’s been scheduled. This has been the first opportunity to do it, and if we don’t do it today, the week passes from us.

Secondly, usually the Ministry of Community Development would have given some sort of information bulletin on the importance of this particular week. I have checked the government web sites, and there has been no information bulletin that has come out. Therefore, there’s been no information disseminated by this government either on the content or the importance of Freedom to Read Week.

Thirdly, we still have problems about access to reading material here in Alberta. In one e-mail that I had, they were talking about an incident where a vandal mutilated books from a gay and lesbian section at a Chapters bookstore and then moved them to another section of the bookstore so that people couldn’t get at them and read them. Chapters thankfully reacted by putting them on display, but

we still have issues every day, often quietly, where books are removed from libraries and bookshelves in Alberta, and the importance of that issue needs to be addressed.

So I think these are compelling reasons, Mr. Speaker, and with respect I think we need to show our leadership, as we are all elected leaders in this Assembly and it's not a matter of one member giving a private member's statement. I think it's important that we join together and that each of us in this Assembly signals our support and affirmation for Freedom to Read Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 application the proposer of the motion is afforded the opportunity to put arguments forward with respect to urgency. The decision to proceed is a decision of the Assembly, and it requires unanimous consent of all members of the Assembly to proceed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, a point of order?

Point of Order

Standing Order 40 Motions

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under the Standing Order which provides that in the absence of a rule you have the right to make a ruling, I would like to raise a point of order on the last Standing Order 40. Bringing up a Standing Order 40 does not allow for a discussion of reasons as to why one might give unanimous consent or not give unanimous consent, and therefore the only opportunity that I have to deal with it is under this particular section.

I would not at any time suggest that a member does not have the right to bring up a Standing Order 40 under the rules. However, the bringing in of Recognitions into our Standing Orders started, as you might recall, through a House leaders' agreement which was an effort to make sure that private members in the House had an opportunity to recognize events and people that were important to our community. The clear understanding at the time was that we were bringing in Recognitions as a way of avoiding the need for the House to deal with these sorts of recognitions, which are very, very important to all Albertans but to do it without the need of an emergency debate and without detracting from Standing Order 40 and Standing Order 30, which allow for debates of issues of an emergency or an urgent matter. Therefore, it should not be taken by a negative vote in this House on a Standing Order 40 that anyone is denying the importance of the issue which has been raised but, rather, that Recognitions themselves were brought into the House under a House leaders' agreement, and they're now embedded in our Standing Orders for precisely this purpose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: Absolutely. There is no point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader was simply looking for an avenue to bring forward his argument in terms of why this Standing Order 40 shouldn't have gone forward. In fact, my colleague from Edmonton-Centre made a very good argument on the pressing nature of this particular issue. This government had all week to bring forward this issue, and they have not. We have not seen it come forward in any other venue. Therefore, this is the last opportunity of the sitting of this week to bring forward what is, in fact, an urgent and pressing matter for all of us and is a matter that has not ever

been given unanimous consent in this Legislature, certainly in the time that I have been here, which is now nine years.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I would observe that an apology is not a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, there's some validity to the argument put forward by the hon. Government House Leader about the historical development of Recognitions and Members' Statements, but that does not preclude an hon. member from coming forward with a suggestion that he or she may have with respect to a Standing Order 40.

The chair would like to point out again, though, that the following is also true, and this is the 28th day of February. February is and was Black History Month. February is and was Heart Month. February is and was Potato Month. On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly the chair will provide recognition for those three very important events in the month of February.

The chair would also like to point out that the year 2002 is the International Year of Mountains and the year 2002 is also the International Year of Ecotourism.

When we arrive in March, the chair will provide members with an update of what March is all about.

2:50

head: **Orders of the Day**

Transmittal of Estimates

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have transmitted to you the messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor and also filed five copies of the supplementary estimates with the Legislature.

head: **Government Motions**

4. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2001-02 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2001-02 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

7. Mr. Hancock moved:

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

[Government Motion 7 carried]

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.

[Adjourned debate February 27: Ms DeLong]

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to reply to the Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor. The Speech from the Throne, like no other event, sets the tone for the goals and the obligations of this Legislature and the government of Alberta. I am very proud to know that we are continuing to face the future bravely and that we are constantly moving forward. Some of the themes that Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor addressed are of extreme importance to my constituents and also bring a sense of the great challenges and opportunities that the next year will bring to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the mandate of this government remains the same: stay the course of fiscal responsibility while maintaining excellence in programs and services that are most important to Albertans. It can sometimes be a tall order, and there will always be naysayers, but this government has consistently delivered a focused, reasoned, and progressive approach to achieving the directives of the people. We will continue to do this with the vigour and innovation that has become the hallmark of this government and all Albertans.

As noted in the Speech from the Throne, what Albertans can be very proud of is a booming economy in spite of tumbling financial markets across the globe. While other economies are speaking of job cuts and recession, Alberta has posted a growth rate of 4 and a half percent through 2001 with no fewer than 45,000 new jobs created over the year. Albertans are confident in their economy because they have confidence in this government that facilitates economic growth through the lowest tax levels in the country for individuals and businesses. We have won the trust of Albertans as the stewards of their tax dollars towards the goal of sound fiscal management, and it is seen in consumer confidence that only serves to drive the economy even further.

Although estimates for 2002 are more conservative in terms of job creation and economic growth, I have no doubt that Alberta will once again surpass expectations. Just a few weeks ago several Alberta cities were cited in a KPMG study for having the lowest cost of doing business in the world. This combined with some of the best trained and most highly motivated, ambitious workers adds up to an Alberta advantage that will continue to attract greater and more diversified investment into the Alberta economy.

Because Alberta has been a world leader in the sound management of its finances over the past decade, we are in a far better position at this time of economic downturn. Some economists have said that Alberta was lucky to have paid down its debt during times

of steady revenues and low interest rates. This had, of course, absolutely nothing to do with luck. It had much more to do with the willingness of Albertans to sacrifice over the short term for the sake of their children and their children's children, a sacrifice that is showing real benefits to Albertans already.

Now at a time of extraordinary market uncertainty in the shadow of the tech bubble bursting, the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the corruption scandal of Enron, Alberta's prospects are bright. My constituents recognize the importance of strong fiscal leadership and the preservation of the good things we have built here in Alberta. Investors across the globe are scrambling to find safe, secure investments, and at the top of the list with a triple A credit rating is Alberta.

Although being fiscally prudent in the good times helped us to prosper, that prosperity has extended itself into current bear markets and has positioned Alberta to lead Canada's economic recovery. We are more than ever in a position to realize a standard of living for all Albertans that will only serve to perpetuate our excellence.

I know as do all Albertans that the adjustments to tumbling oil and gas prices are a necessary consequence of the new global economic realities. It brings me great pride and satisfaction to know that although Alberta is fiscally strong, we only strive to reinforce this sound footing by attracting new investment and innovating in the delivery of the best and most cost-effective programs.

Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor also discussed a very important aspect of living in Alberta: that we maintain safe and strong communities. It's one of the most important functions of government, to protect the security and well-being of our citizens, and again we're addressing new challenges in law enforcement with innovative, straightforward, and practical solutions that involve all Albertans.

Our efforts are increasingly effective, and our crime rates are now at the lowest level since 1985. Our overall crime rate is the lowest in western Canada, but again we're not willing to rest on our laurels. Through new and innovative models of service delivery, such as the provincial organized and serious crime strategy, youth justice committees and alternative measures programs, and youth attendance centres, we are fulfilling our mandate to keep Albertans safe while not breaking the bank. Even through our most turbulent hour we are continuing to tend to our responsibility to all Albertans. As Her Honour mentioned, anyone can steer a ship through calm seas, but it takes strong leadership to steer through rough waters.

3:00

In response to a very real need for greater service levels we are quickly responding to our obligations to our children and seniors with increased funding and greater focus on these key priority areas. Through the youth in transition policy framework Alberta will continue to be an excellent place for all children to come of age and become strong contributors to the society that has cared for them. Mr. Speaker, the youth in transition policy framework will guide cross-ministry program development of youth progressing to adulthood. Through the framework Alberta's youth will be one of the priorities of government ministries, and youth will be involved in determining the future direction of goals and business plans. The framework seeks to ensure that youth acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives that contribute positively to society, that youth are safe, supported, and connected to caring peers and adults, and that youth are involved in and have access to a wide range of flexible services that meet their diverse and unique needs.

Of equal importance to my constituents is that we continue to respect our obligations to Alberta's seniors. I was heartened to hear

that we will continue to provide base supports for our seniors to live out their lives in comfort and dignity. As we develop a plan for the future, our heritage must continue to play a key role in the social and cultural development of the province. It is of the utmost importance that our seniors be regarded as a backbone of who we are as a people and that there be safeguards for their wellness, including affordable housing, accessible health care, and a strong base level of financial support. Our commitment to Alberta seniors to ensure that they share in the Alberta advantage serves to bolster the feelings of respect all Albertans have for seniors and each other.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of what we have accomplished as a government over the past year. I know that my colleagues share the pride that I have to be part of a strong team with the extraordinary leadership of our hon. Premier. I look eagerly forward to the Second Session and fully expect that we will continue to realize the goals of this government: to meet the core needs of Albertans while managing the province's finances responsibly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before I, then, call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I stand on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre to introduce a group from Norquest College. They are accompanied by a couple of leaders, Mr. Cap Tiege and Miss Catherine Schmitz. There are in total I think 24 people in the group. I welcome them through you to the Assembly, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all MLAs assembled.

Thank you.

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

(continued)

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

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to sit down so that the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar can do his speech.

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

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All right. Thank you for the opportunity to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to begin today by congratulating Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for her grace and dedication to this province. It is always a pleasure when she attends this Chamber but even more so when she delivers the Speech from the Throne.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Her Majesty the Queen on over 50 years of duty and service to our province, our nation, and our Commonwealth. Her honoured commitment to service and duty has served this province well, and I know I join all members of the Assembly in wishing her many more years of continued success and happiness.

As Her Honour outlined on Tuesday, Alberta's future remains strong and vibrant in spite of new threats and challenges to our

prosperity and way of life. Literally thousands of Albertans participated in our recent Future Summit through regional forums, on-line surveys, and mail-in workbooks. We confidently plan for a bright future in Alberta looking five, 10, even 20 years down the road. I'm proud to say that many residents of Drayton Valley-Calmar contributed some great ideas that will undoubtedly shape policy and planning in the coming years.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the future is coming. As the men and women of our proud armed forces are deployed around the world to protect and maintain our way of life, I wish to join the chorus of Canadians giving thanks to these brave soldiers and their families for their bravery and sacrifice. I am confident that those military men and women trained here in Alberta will serve us well. The threats that we face can never overcome the potential and ability that we Albertans have always had to meet adversity with fortitude and new risks with optimism.

A perfect example of this spirit can be found in our agricultural sector, a sector that is vital to Alberta's health but one that faces both new challenges and opportunities. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the second largest agricultural producer in Canada, with 23 percent of Canada's farm cash receipts despite having only 10 percent of the country's population.

Alberta is also the largest beef-producing province in Canada, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, with 41 percent of the national herd. This province is renowned for its food safety and quality products. Who hasn't heard of Alberta beef? Who hasn't tried it and loved it? The farmers and ranchers of Drayton Valley-Calmar produce some of the finest cattle in the province. Preliminary figures for farm cash receipts for the 2001 calendar year show a new record of just over \$8.2 billion, consisting of \$5.1 billion in livestock and livestock product sales, \$2.3 billion in crop sales, and \$862 million in direct program payments.

As we become even more innovative in areas such as the proposed cervid harvest preserves and other brand-new value-added sectors, this number will soar even higher, Mr. Speaker. Alberta boasts an estimated 500 food and beverage firms, forming the single largest manufacturing sector in the province. In 2000 the value of shipments of manufactured food and beverage products reached a record \$9.2 billion. Preliminary figures point to \$10 billion in shipments for 2001. That's 9 percent growth in this sector for the year.

Food sales from grocery stores topped \$7 billion in 2001, while restaurant, caterer, and tavern receipts totaled just over \$4.5 billion. The average Alberta household spends \$6,500 a year on food. Now, that's more than 10 percent of the average household budget. I know, Mr. Speaker, that it looks like some of us spend more than others, but as outlined in Her Honour's speech, Alberta Health and Wellness will address this issue also.

As well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's exports reached an estimated \$5.8 billion in primary and processed agrifood products in 2001 sold to 110 countries around the world: again, a new record, an almost 10 percent growth from the previous year. Just over 54 percent of exports went to our friends in the United States.

These are incredible statistics from a vibrant and dynamic industry, but our agriculture industry also faces challenges, challenges that we can't necessarily control, Mr. Speaker. Weather experts from across the province are predicting another dry season. This could result in extended drought conditions, and I'm very pleased that the government will implement the agriculture drought risk management plan. This plan will help producers access timely and cost-effective response measures if needed. The plan will also allow for the province to better assess the impact of any drought on the farm economy in our rural communities.

I'm also proud, Mr. Speaker, that this government has committed

to facing the challenges in providing health care to Albertans in the 21st century. The report of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health has provided a solid and balanced framework on which to build reform. In accepting the recommendations, this government is taking sound and prudent action to build a health care system that will meet the needs of our children and our grandchildren: sustainability. As her honour said, it is to the betterment of people's health and the province's health that the government of Alberta dedicates itself in 2002.

3:10

In building a positive health care infrastructure and network, reform must be approached from many different directions. We must look at the way we use the system and how health boards provide services. We must examine the role of health care professionals as well as the role of individuals using the system. We must not shy away from looking at how we pay for health care and how we spend our health care dollars. The people of my constituency believe in dollar stretching and prudent spending in all areas of government, Mr. Speaker, even health and education. We are in a time of constraint, and efficiencies must be found.

Now, we also face challenges in the economy as a whole, but again, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is not only positioned to meet these challenges; we will come through them stronger and better than before. A stagnant global economy has affected us all, yet Alberta remains in the best fiscal position of any province. Our economy continues to grow, and that growth will allow this province to continue to address Albertans' key priorities. These priorities include sound fiscal principles, principles that demand balanced budgets, payment of the debt, and lower taxes for both individuals and corporations. Small business tax cuts are of paramount importance, as these will allow more jobs to be created at higher salaries.

These prudent fiscal policies do not mean that we should not or cannot invest in the basic responsibilities of government. Rather, our fiscal principles will enable us to build the roads, the highways, and the infrastructure that will fuel our continued economic success. Our roads are our wealth creators, Mr. Speaker, and our fiscal principles will allow us to invest in the growth, the health, and the security of our citizens so that they can pursue their own individual agendas and pursuits. Our fiscal principles will allow us to ensure that our people will be educated and ready to meet whatever new opportunities or challenges await them that we cannot yet see. We will continue to turn out the top-ranked students in the world from our basic and advanced education systems.

Despite all the gloom and doom talk of opponents, naysayers, and special interest lobbyists, this province, Mr. Speaker, stands at the forefront of fiscal prudence and responsibility. We are ready to eliminate our debt completely within years, not decades. No other province can yet plan for that time when they overcome their debt, but I am proud to say that we can. This is a remarkable achievement, and we should never lose sight of how far we have come.

We can also be proud of the climate that we have helped to foster. When other Canadians think of Alberta, they see an attractive and vibrant place to live. Our tax policies, both personal and corporate, have compelled people to move to our jurisdiction. No sales tax, flat rate income tax, and high tax exemption thresholds have drawn people and industry from around the globe to Alberta. And when they get here, Mr. Speaker, they find a province with a quality of life like no other. They find a province whose beauty never ceases and a province that has room for all individuals who want a better life to pursue their dreams and aspirations. It's easy to get caught up in the negativism of our times and the narrow focus of a minor few. Opposition forces will come, but we will continue to do the right thing regardless.

Mr. Speaker, thousands of children go to school every day and receive a world-class education, an education that will provide the foundation on which to build a more specialized knowledge and a continued need to expand their own individual and collective horizons. Every day thousands of Albertans who get sick or find themselves in need of medical care receive that care in a responsible and professional manner. They encounter a health care system that produces results and that pushes the standards of excellence for not only other Canadians to follow but the rest of the world as well. Our health care system allows our seniors to enjoy the golden years, as they so deserve. Every day millions of Albertans and the thousands of others that follow them live and prosper in a jurisdiction that lets them keep more and more of their own hard-earned dollars so that they can decide how best to address their own needs and priorities.

This is a great time to be an Albertan, Mr. Speaker, an exciting time to be an MLA. I'm proud to represent the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar in this honoured Assembly. The Lieutenant Governor was correct when she indicated that our province has always had a unique destiny, one that is guided by great leadership, by character, and by the values of its people. I look forward to working with all Albertans in continuing that destiny and in building a positive future for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, did you wish to participate? First of all, we're going to go to questions if there are some.

DR. TAFT: I have no questions.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Well, I enjoyed some of your comments. To the member: could you expand a bit on the comments on the fiscal principles of this government and specifically how it relates to your constituents?

REV. ABBOTT: Sure. Thank you for the question. Actually, my constituents were very happy to see one thing in particular in this Speech from the Throne, and that is where it says: "Government will not spend more than it takes in. It will not leave a legacy of deficits for tomorrow's Albertans to pay."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Would there be additional questions from hon. members? That being the case, the chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me, as it is for all MLAs, to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I will keep my comments quite brief and pointed today in light of the fine speech given by the Leader of the Official Opposition last night and the comments from my other colleagues. They've covered much of the ground I would have covered if they hadn't, so I will be able to keep my comments brief.

I will just go through certain points made in the speech here that I think are worth some comment. On page 4 of the speech it reads:

Factors contributing to a healthy Alberta are the same as those that contribute to a healthy Albertan. They are economic growth, fiscal stability, good schools, safe children receiving parenting in a caring and nurturing manner, strong communities, secure seniors, clean air and water, and confidence that the future is bright.

Of course, it's more or less impossible to dispute any of those. I would, however, like to add one in particular, a factor that is well substantiated by research nationally and internationally, a factor that contributes to the health of people throughout a society, and that is the factor known as equality. In fact, there is strong research from various countries in the world indicating that the greater the inequality in a society, the lower the level of health. You can in fact have very poor countries, such as certain countries in Africa, that have unusually high degrees of population health, and that is often attributed in the research to high degrees of equality. So I would like to have seen in the throne speech a notion of equality, and I would encourage this government to consider equality as one of its values. I would, for example, muse on the effects of the flat tax on equality among Albertans. I'm concerned that in fact the flat tax and any number of other policies of this government have exacerbated inequality.

I'd also like to make comments on a sentence farther down on page 4 that reads: "Ensuring the continued stability of the province's health care system is without a doubt at the top of the government's agenda in 2002." For a moment I thought there was actually a typographical error. I thought that perhaps they meant to say: ensuring the continued instability of the province's health care system. The simple fact of the matter is that over the last eight years the health care system in Alberta has been profoundly unstable. We can look at that in various ways. We can look at the wild swings in funding: down, down, down; up, up, up; and apparently down, down, down again. We can look at the thousands of layoffs and then the scramble to rehire staff with the ensuing staff shortages. We can look at the leadership or the management of the Department of Health and Wellness, in which there have been seven deputy ministers in nine years. The status quo for Alberta's health care system the last nine years has been turmoil. I would love it and I would thoroughly encourage the government if they ensured stability of the province's health care system, but when they speak in terms of ensuring continued stability, I'm afraid they're misleading themselves.

3:20

There are various comments in the Speech from the Throne on the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, the report there and the recommendations. Certainly some of those recommendations are well worth implementing, and I'm sure we'll see some of them implemented. We will work with the government to support those recommendations including, for example, an increase in tobacco taxes. We will, I hope, be able to support the Minister of Health and Wellness in efforts that he may pursue to ensure that the revenue from the increase in tobacco taxes goes to a dedicated promotion of health and wellness fund. It's an excellent idea, and I think that the minister, if he pursues that, can look forward to our support.

Of course, there are concerns that have been already raised at length in this Assembly in the last couple of days about health care premiums. An increase in health care premiums is something we will be actively opposing.

While I continue to focus on Health and Wellness, I'll also mention the suggestions farther down on page 5 that there may well be reductions in services that are covered under our public health care insurance system. Those are potentially very worrisome trends. Any move toward delisting is potentially a serious mistake, and we will be challenging the government if it moves in those directions.

As I move through the speech and move into the section of the speech on education and learning, I am again concerned that the government may not have a firm grip on reality when it says that "the government believes there is a great deal of goodwill on all

sides" when it addresses the education system. I think that any claim that there's a great deal of goodwill on all sides in the education debate is delusory. I'm expressing my strong conviction, in fact, that there is very little goodwill in the education debate and that we are looking to this government for leadership in establishing and expanding goodwill and reducing the animosity that is existing in the education area.

Moving further through the speech, I'll just skip ahead to the section on healthy communities. I note that there will be new child welfare legislation drafted this year. We'd all agree in light of events in the last weeks and months that any additional attention paid to the child welfare system will be welcomed. I would ask all members here to carefully read the speech given by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford last night, a passionate plea on behalf of children. I'd encourage – let's see – the one, two, three, four, five cabinet ministers who are here at this moment to take that text to the next cabinet meeting and argue based upon the strong points . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to Absence of Members

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it behooves me to rise on a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: A point of order?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Right now? Okay.

MR. HANCOCK: I know it's unusual during the reply to the Speech from the Throne, but it is normal not to refer to the absence of a member, and by referring to members by means of referring to their position in cabinet, it does indirectly what you can't do directly. The hon. member indicated that there were only five members of cabinet here, and that was an inappropriate reference.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I tend to agree with that, but it was being done in such a nice way about conveying information someplace else.

So please continue.

Debate Continued

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In any case, I would encourage all cabinet members, whether they're here or not, to review carefully the speech given by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford last night, which was a plea for very, very careful and compassionate attention to children. It was a commendable speech, and I think that he should be proud to have had the courage to stand up and make that speech, largely aimed at his own government, I would expect.

However, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and carry on.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. We have provisions under Standing Order 29, so the hon. Government House Leader, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, and then followed by the hon. member for Grande Prairie.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. I'm wondering if the hon. member would give any recognition to the fact that the single rate of tax, which he

referred to as a flat tax, also afforded an opportunity to raise the personal and spousal exemption rate in this province so that many, many thousands of Albertans who have a single income and a family income of under \$27,000 no longer pay any tax at all. I'd also wonder who in his comments he accuses of not having goodwill. We know that the government has goodwill; we know that there's goodwill with boards and teachers.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a very long history of debate in our parliamentary tradition. This kind of debate is widely available to all MLAs, and I welcome it. It was fully available to government members and backbenchers under the previous Standing Orders, and they seldom used it. It's still available to them, and I will engage them if they use it at that time. At the same time, in my view there was no need to change the Standing Orders to create this platform. So while I'm delighted to engage in the traditional debates in the Legislature, I have no plans to respond to questions.

MR. SNELGROVE: It would not be a debate if the hon. member would please inform me what year the total funding to health care actually went down.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: In view of the member's criticisms of our health care system, it's my understanding that his Liberal cousins have sponsored a committee chaired by ex-Premier Romanow, an NDP, which may be very reflective of what the Mazankowski report has indicated. Any comments on that?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. None?

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Redundant.

THE SPEAKER: Redundant?

Additional questions under Standing Order 29 to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview? There being none, the chair will then recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise on behalf of the constituents of Red Deer-North and reply to the Speech from the Throne. First I would like to thank Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor for her touching address. I truly enjoy the official ceremony and protocol that surrounds the Speech from the Throne. It is an excellent way to begin the Second Session of the 25th Legislature. It reminds me of the history of this province and this building, and I feel very fortunate to be a part of it. It's exciting to be part of a province that has worked hard to make it to where it is today in just 97 short years. Alberta has such a bright future and boundless potential.

Everyone can recognize that the recent world events have altered our way of life. The events of September 11 have brought changes that we deal with every day and others that we have not yet begun to grasp. Despite the turmoil and the uncertainty that we have all faced, the people of this province have persevered, and that makes me very proud. As Her Honour stated yesterday, there is no prouder person than an Albertan. I certainly agree with this sentiment, even though I'm originally from Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to add my thanks to the men and women of our armed forces who are stationed around the globe to stand on guard for the Canadian way of life. I would also like to thank the families of our soldiers for their sacrifice. As a former member of an armed forces family I join with them in their hopes and prayers for the safe return of their children and spouses. I think that we can all draw strength from the bravery that the men and women in our armed forces display. I would urge everyone to never forget that they are some of our very own out there on the front lines making sacrifices, taking risks, and working hard to protect us. We must also remember the very brave members of our Canadian armed forces bomb squad who risk their lives every moment when they are attempting to locate and diffuse the horrific and inhumane land mines located in war zones like Bosnia, Herzegovina, Sudan, and Afghanistan. I thank them all.

Alberta, as I have said, is a proud province and a province that is proud of the achievements of its sons and daughters around the globe. Alberta has produced many exceptional people who have achieved incredible success. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the members of the women's and men's national hockey teams for their recent success at the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City. Do you realize that Canada received more gold medals than any other country? We have 25 medals for the men's hockey team, 25 for the women's hockey team, four for the relay team, two for the pairs skating, one for cross-country, and that makes 57 gold medals, more than any other country.

3:30

As Her Honour alluded to, Alberta has built a rich history in a short time and has a lot to look forward to this year and in the years to come. Given the circumstances of the global economy, I think that we are fortunate to live in such a strong province. While the financial picture that is forecast is not as splendid when compared to last year's results, I must say that it is very promising when compared to the rest of the country and the continent.

The Alberta economy has evolved significantly over the last two decades and is now fundamentally strong and geared to withstand exterior pressures. People say that if any province can weather the current economic slowdown, it's Alberta. They're right, and that's thanks to the fiscal policies of this government. Even though the economy will grow less than it did last year, it will still grow a significant amount. Alberta is forecast to exceed Canada in economic growth for 2002 and remain competitive for the lead in economic growth among provinces across the country.

Activity in the energy sector is expected to slow down due to lower prices. However, investment in the oil sands is expected to remain strong throughout the year. Even though the number of wells drilled this year will be lower than last, the number will still be higher than it has been historically. This is good news for all oil and gas service companies in Alberta and especially for those in Red Deer.

The reduction in demand for oil and gas has brought along with it a reduction in prices for these commodities. Lower energy prices will result in lower government revenues, and as Her Honour stated firmly yesterday, this government will balance our priorities with accountability, and we will not spend more than we take in. This is the same principle that my husband keeps telling me: we will not spend more than we take in.

The government continued to display its dedication to fiscal prudence just last fall when we implemented a 1 percent spending reduction across all government departments. Difficult decisions were made, but like a strong and wise parent our government chose what was necessary. To further emphasize our dedication to fiscal

prudence and commitment to accounting excellence, I am pleased to see that we plan to resurrect the financial management commission. As Her Honour noted, this commission is charged with assessing the fiscal policies and accounting practices of this government.

Health care is an area that affects all Albertans from a baby in the womb to the oldest resident. Albertans need to find a sustainable and affordable solution so that health care will always be accessible.

Alberta education achieves high goals, and we are proud of our results. The education in Alberta would not be as good as it is without our teachers. Teachers in Alberta do a good job, and many teachers do an outstanding job. I personally appreciate and value all teachers for I believe that they would not be doing the job they do unless they were truly dedicated to the children they serve. As chairperson of the Youth Secretariat I work with our youth advisory panel. This is a diverse group of 16- to 22-year-old Albertans who work together to help find the answers that will help our youth acquire the skills and attitudes they need to live those happy, healthy, and productive lives.

Our environment must be cherished and protected. In Alberta, as Her Honour noted in the throne speech, our "environmental standards and regulations are and will continue to be among the most stringent in North America." In my private member's Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Clean-up Instructions) Amendment Act, I aim to make sure that when a spill occurs, a timely plan is put into place that states how and when a cleanup will happen and how long it will take. Whoever is responsible for the cleanup will then be forced to abide by the terms of the plan that is set in motion according to the terms of this amendment.

Children's services is a priority area and accounts for the most difficult decisions made in government. A review of the Child Welfare Act is being conducted at this time, and we are accepting comments from all Albertans. One area under review is the adoption section. The adoption task force of Alberta, which finds its chairperson in Red Deer-North, is asking for open adoption records with a noncontact declaration or a veto clause. With the help of our gracious Minister of Children's Services and committee members, an acceptable solution will be found and recommended.

I would like to once again echo the sentiments of Her Honour: staying the course is not something the government can do alone. It will require co-operation and input from the people of this province. We have a proven record of consultation and interaction with Albertans on important issues, the latest being the Future Summit that Red Deer was very proud to host.

In conclusion, I would like to quote from the daily bulletin of February 27, 2002: Alberta has been ranked third in the country for UFO sightings, with 40 sightings this year. Obviously, the Alberta advantage is well known even in interplanetary circles.

The throne speech eloquently illustrated the advantages of living in Alberta. We have work to do and promises to keep. Long live the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have now arrived where Standing Order 29(2) kicks in, and I just want to repeat it again. It says under Standing Order 29(2) that members are allowed "to ask questions and comment briefly" as well.

Then we will proceed to the next speaker. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to have the opportunity to respond to Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. I'm proud to be a rural Albertan, and I'm very proud to represent the hardworking

people living in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency.

I'd like to thank the Lieutenant Governor for talking about several rural concerns that were acknowledged in Her Honour's throne speech. I agree with Her Honour that agriculture is an important part of the economic health and a vital component of our rural landscape. Alberta is Canada's second-largest agriculture producer, and despite higher farm operating costs and expenses and the worst drought in 130 years in 2001, our province saw farm cash receipt levels reach a record of approximately \$8.3 billion. Agriculture is very important, and it's part of Alberta's economic health, contributing over \$16 billion in economic activity in value-added food and beverage processing and primary production. An often overlooked fact is that agriculture is Alberta's single largest manufacturing sector.

I also agree with Her Honour that the merger of Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company will provide additional support to the industry by creating a one-window approach to commercial financing for the agriculture industry and for small businesses. Alberta's agriculture industry is well positioned for continued growth and is working toward achieving \$10 billion in primary production and \$20 billion in value-added processing by 2010. The Alberta government is committed to helping the industry meet these goals by continuing to stimulate economic development in the agriculture communities.

There are some big challenges ahead, including another drought forecasted for 2002. I'm relieved that this government is prepared for another dry summer and its effects on the agriculture and forest industries. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will officially launch the fire season March 1, 2002. Under normal weather conditions operations usually begin April 1. Dry conditions and warm weather have resulted in fire officials preparing for another potentially busy fire season. A significant lack of snow in parts of the province this winter means that the forest fire hazard conditions could be high or extremely high this spring. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development summed it up best when he said that we cannot control nature, but we can take every precaution to protect the public and Alberta's natural resources.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Alberta producers who have felt the effects of drought on pasture and forage crops have new insurance options for 2002. Some areas of the province have experienced the driest conditions in over 100 years. Forage is critical to the health of the cattle industry. To help producers deal with the extremely dry conditions, the government has introduced a new pasture insurance option and has enhanced two of its existing forage insurance programs. Forage insurance compensates for production losses due to damage caused by natural perils. The lack-of-moisture insurance pilot program is new in this province, a wide insurance option that helps producers protect their pasture acres against the lack of moisture, based on readings from the weather stations selected for the insurance. I feel that in light of our dramatically altered fiscal picture from a year ago, these new insurance programs will offer a suitable safety net to protect people in the agriculture industry.

3:40

This season I will introduce two motions that will deal with two issues in rural Alberta that should get some more attention. In the first motion I urge the government to investigate a system of pooling all proceeds from charity casinos throughout Alberta. The proceeds would then be redistributed in quarterly intervals to all the charities – and I mean all the charities – across this great province. This will help charities, especially in our rural areas, to improve services to the community.

My second motion urges the government to re-examine the

expropriation rules and regulations to ensure a streamlined system that encourages efficient and more economical resolve to land issues. Right now the government pays for associated legal fees for landowners during the expropriation process. No slight to lawyers, but they love this law, and there's no incentive for our constituents to settle land compensation issues in a timely manner. This expands the legal fees billed to the Alberta government. I believe that this government should also place a time limit from the time expropriation proceedings begin in the court system to the time that a fair settlement can be reached, and I express "fair." As the process currently stands, there is no time limit, and the legal bills, court time, and assessment stretch longer and higher.

I would again like to thank the people living in the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency for choosing me as their MLA last spring. It has been an honour representing their concerns and a pleasure to work with the members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: As per our Standing Order we now have five minutes for questions and comments.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Maybe I didn't hear it well, but I would like you to comment on the safely produced food in your agriculture comment.

MR. VANDERBURG: Sorry. Did you say "safely"?

MR. CAO: Yes. Safely produced food.

MR. VANDERBURG: Well, thank you. It is a pleasure to accept a question on food safety, especially since it didn't take nine years for me to get a question, and I would like to refer it to the minister responsible. But I can comment that Alberta remains in the best position of any province to take the lead in responding to today's stagnant global economy. Alberta's economy is healthy and continues to grow. The economic growth is forecasted at about 2 percent this year.

MR. SNELGROVE: The hon. member mentioned in his speech that this was the driest summer in 130 years, and we've heard recently from the opposition and the media that it's global warming that has caused this drought. I'm just curious if he could tell me what caused the one 130 years ago.

MR. VANDERBURG: I'd like to refer that to the Minister of Environment, but of course I can't. He's right, you know. It's too bad that we didn't have the statistics for 150 years; otherwise, I could have extended it to 150 years.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands for a question.

MR. MASON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to phrase the same question in a very similar fashion. How does the hon. member square the continuing drought conditions, the increase in forest fires and so on with the climate change that is occurring and the government's position on the Kyoto accord?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne to respond.

MR. VANDERBURG: Yes. Thank you very much for that question. There are some very good points you've brought up, and I think that we should expand on that. You know, I will continue and I think our government should continue to put in the fiscal policies that encourage investment, job creation, and consumer confidence. It will also limit spending in areas without reducing the quality of priority projects. If I didn't hear it quite right, you know, that's okay too.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It appears that nobody else is rising for questions.

The chair will now recognize the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise today and address this Assembly to provide a reply to the Speech from the Throne from the perspective of the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. We are pleased to be able to join with other Albertans to recognize Her Majesty Elizabeth II ascending to the throne 50 years ago, and we applaud this long service to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The Premier's citizenship awards are a very fitting way for us to remember this historic anniversary.

On a personal note, I was saddened at the passing of HRH the Princess Margaret. Through a longtime hobby I was privileged to be the caretaker of a motorcar constructed for the princess in 1975. This exceptional conveyance afforded us many pleasant hours touring Alberta's first-class highways and bi-ways, enjoying our natural beauty and friendly, pleasant citizens.

I am looking forward to the Second Session of the 25th Legislature with optimism. Her Honour has set the tone for the session: focusing on working to build a healthy Alberta. I believe we are all aware that we have much to do to fulfill the agenda we have before us. This agenda addresses what Albertans have been telling us over the past months: we need to work together for a better Alberta. The Future Summit's regional summit in Grande Prairie brought this theme forward from all working groups.

We need to make the necessary changes to ensure prosperous and healthy futures for all Albertans. Change is often not well accepted, but Albertans are faced with a number of challenges that will not accept the status quo. I am confident that Alberta is a strong and capable province, and the people who live here are hardworking and committed to making and embracing positive change.

The government of Alberta's dedication to improving people's health and the province's health in the year 2002 will be strongly supported by the constituents of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Sustainable health care is arguably our greatest challenge. It becomes increasingly apparent that a greater level of private involvement will be necessary to maintain Alberta's leading health care services.

It is interesting to note that in a recent national broadcast the former federal Minister of Health, Monique Begin, stated that it is time to open the Canada Health Act and allow private providers to deliver some services that will enhance health care in Canada. It will be remembered that this minister introduced the Canada Health Act under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. In light of this refreshing news from a prominent federal health care champion, we are assured that recommendations from the Premier's Advisory Council on Health are indeed leading Alberta to a new shared health care system where personal responsibility, families, communities, all levels of government, and private providers will contribute to long-term affordability and accessibility in our first-class system.

As Albertans we share many advantages. Primary among them is a learning system that is one of the world's best. Our ranking in international tests is proof of this, and it is clearly demonstrated here

that Alberta has exceptional teachers, who remain dedicated to their profession. It is not by chance that executives from around the world come to Alberta to source educators. These test results are noticed, and with that comes recognition that Alberta's postsecondary institutions and universities continue to turn out top-ranked teachers.

The other point to be made with respect to these tests is that they show the government's commitment to our children's education and, as importantly, show our students' commitment to their own futures by making the effort to do well in their studies and excel in a competitive environment.

3:50

To ensure that Alberta's students continue to achieve, we as a government must investigate and promote a range of alternative investment initiatives that can provide the infrastructure that houses classrooms and equipment that students require to learn. Recent school audits conducted across the province have identified a number of structures that require repair and/or replacement, and addressing these pressure points is necessary to avoid increasing our infrastructure deficit.

Mr. Speaker, Grande Prairie-Smoky constituents are pleased to see this government's commitment to stick to its fiscal principles, and under this framework we will encourage the government to invest in our infrastructure in a timely, responsible manner. In keeping with this encouragement, we in Grande Prairie-Smoky will continue to insist that the trade corridor remain a high priority of this government. Trade is certainly the lifeblood of this province, and our ability in northwest Alberta to reach markets for our products is the key to our progress and prosperity.

Our products, Mr. Speaker, include some that are under extreme pressure in current trade action. I am very supportive of our government's co-operative effort with other provinces and the federal government to improve trade rules and open access for softwood lumber exports to the United States. We in Grande Prairie-Smoky support free, as well as fair, international trade.

Agriculture, as Her Honour pointed out, is a very important part of our province and of the Grande Prairie-Smoky region. Grande Prairie-Smoky is certainly no exception in this. We have many of the province's most productive and progressive producers. As agriculture expansion moves north in our province, we in Grande Prairie-Smoky welcome the opportunity to work with our government in support of producers and processors, who are strengthening our agriculture sector and ensuring that this sector continues to thrive. The goal of \$30 billion in primary and value-added agricultural business by 2010 is realistic, and Grande Prairie-Smoky entrepreneurs will play a major role in accomplishing this goal.

A safety net system continues to be an important part of this sector, and we encourage and support this government's positive initiatives in this regard. This Assembly recognizes its responsibility to Alberta's children, seniors, and disadvantaged persons. Nowhere, Mr. Speaker, is this responsibility taken more seriously than in the riding of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Volunteers and professionals work tirelessly, side by side, to improve the quality of life for these sectors of our society.

A case in point, Mr. Speaker, is a group of individuals who have formed a society to provide low-income housing for disabled and other members of the Grande Prairie community. This group is currently beginning the development of a 47-unit complex suited to this purpose. It is this Alberta spirit that makes our province the best place to live and work.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour has reported that aboriginal peoples are key members of this province's communities. This again is very true in Grande Prairie-Smoky. The commitment to continue with

implementation of the aboriginal policy framework with the goal of increasing the well-being and self-reliance of First Nations and Metis is a commendable policy. However, some current policy and practices need to be reviewed to ensure that women and children in these communities benefit fully from any programs or policies.

Exploration for and production of energy resources has been ongoing in Grande Prairie-Smoky for more than 50 years. This major economic driver continued to grow through the ensuing years and today plays a major role in the success of many communities in my riding. There admittedly were some problematic practices in the drilling and production areas years ago. A responsible government has worked with industry to design environmental standards that will protect our natural heritage, maintaining healthy forests, clean air, and clean water for future generations.

Ongoing studies, science-based studies, will determine what action is appropriate with respect to flaring and venting. The stewardship of these resources – forests, air, water, and hydrocarbon reserves – has been successful and responsible and will provide benefits for all Albertans and Canadians for generations to come.

Arctic gas from Canada's north or Alaska will soon be playing a major role in the North American security of supply. It is very probable that this resource will be brought into Alberta, and Grande Prairie specifically, for possible upgrading and inclusion in the Alberta gas hub. This tremendous resource, the hub, allows resource owners to produce, process, store, and then market natural gas to six major markets in North America.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. KNIGHT: Six. This investment in energy-related infrastructure is an Alberta advantage, but, Mr. Speaker, more important are the thousands of Albertans educated and trained to build, operate, and maintain these systems.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta advantage working on a daily basis in our communities. This industry and, indeed, the economy of our province would be negatively impacted by a hasty ratification of the Kyoto accord. The Alberta government commitment to science-based reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is much more in line with the actions of our trading partners in North America. Grande Prairie-Smoky constituents support the government's efforts to convince the federal government that ratification will unnecessarily penalize our business and citizens while it does very little to actually reduce global greenhouse gas emissions or global warming.

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive policy, a provincial water strategy is not only timely but absolutely necessary for Grande Prairie-Smoky and, indeed, all of our province. Safe, secure drinking water and healthy rivers and lakes should be viewed as a birthright of Albertans. We are most certainly in a four-year plus time period of moderate to severe shortfalls in annual precipitation level. Groundwater and aquifers supplying some of our communities are showing an alarming decrease in volumes available. A comprehensive study will be a first step in allowing us to understand and design solutions to this most crucial concern.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, Grande Prairie-Smoky constituents will see in this throne speech that many of our most pressing concerns will be addressed by a government that has pledged to maintain its focus on the present in all aspects. I look forward to participating in these endeavours on behalf of the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members now have five minutes to ask brief questions and receive brief responses.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After listening to the hon. Member for Grande-Prairie-Smoky, it now is confirmed to me that the constituents made the right choice on March 12, 2001.

I do have one question of the hon. member. He mentioned in his remarks about expanding the trade corridor, and I would like him to elaborate a little bit on that, please.

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

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that I actually said that I would want it expanded. We just want it continued.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair is not seeing anyone rise to ask questions. If that's the case, the chair will now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Not at this moment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to reply to Her Honour's Speech from the Throne. If the speech is any indication, the coming year promises to be one of the most important for Albertans in a long time. As a province we are embarking down several new roads that will challenge this government and the citizens we represent in this Assembly. Her Honour's words provided the people of our province with a clear vision of change, innovation, and renewal and outlined the big picture very nicely.

However, Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do today is shift gears and concentrate on the local picture that the constituents of the riding I represent, Dunvegan, see every day. I'd like to talk about Dunvegan's history, some of the problems the region currently faces, and how focusing on some key ideas could help to reinvigorate and diversify our economy.

Dunvegan, as I'm sure most members are aware, shares the northwest corner of Alberta with the riding of Peace River. It is among the largest ridings in the province and, as far as I'm concerned, one of the best. The people of Dunvegan are hardworking, diverse, and proud Albertans. We have one of the strongest Francophone contingents in the province and an unparalleled history.

4:00

The fort of Dunvegan was founded by the North West Company in 1793 and served as a fur trading post in Alberta's north. Later Catholic missionaries came to the fort bringing with them cultural vestiges of Europe and eastern Canada. They, along with occupants of other trading posts scattered across Alberta's north, provided a new heritage that even today deeply influences the people of Dunvegan.

Just as the trappers of the 18th and 19th centuries relied upon Alberta's natural resources to make a living in the north, the people of the 21st century rely heavily on Dunvegan's natural resources as well. Our major industries include agriculture, forestry, and oil and gas, and our major commodities include forage production, oil seeds, honey, and cereals. The region produces over 10 million pounds of honey per year. The town of Falher is known as the honey capital

of Alberta and is home to the world's largest bee and the Falher Honey Festival, which takes place every July. The constituency is also the closest in Alberta to the Pacific Rim countries through the port of Prince Rupert.

So, Mr. Speaker, just as we are proud of our history in Dunvegan, we are also optimistic about the future opportunities that our resource base provides our young people. The town of Fairview, for example, is home to Fairview College, an institution through which we hope to educate our young people, to teach them new skills and keep them in the area.

However, Mr. Speaker, just as there is optimism in Dunvegan, there is also some cause for concern. Dunvegan is, in fact, like many rural areas, a net exporter of young people. The families in our 36 municipalities raise their families, and those children more and more are being forced to leave because while we have opportunity, we often don't have enough opportunity. This is potentially disastrous. Any community is created by the fabric of history. Any time that a large number of people of a specific generation leave that community, it means that the historical fabric is ripped and is not as strong as it once was. The people that we need to run our farms, businesses, hospitals, community and volunteer organizations, and municipal governments of the region won't be there to do that.

There's no reason why this should happen. With solid economic development policies that would encourage manufacturing and product refining in Dunvegan, we could diversify our economy and create opportunities that would keep our promising youngsters in the constituency. We could tap into the vast potential that this region has to offer. For example, while the region boasts massive numbers in honey production, most of it is refined and packaged elsewhere. Right there we see a prime example of a project that with just the right motivation and policy-making could get off the ground and create jobs in our region, which would encourage our young people to stay around.

The municipalities of Dunvegan have expressed the desire to take a more active role in developing the region. The will of the people is there. It must be matched by the political will of our government to effect change in the area. It is often hard to remind my fellow MLAs to the south – and believe me, Mr. Speaker, from the perspective of Dunvegan, Edmonton is south – of the natural benefits of Dunvegan as a constituency in which all facets of a resource- and service-based economy can be developed. There are no major centres in the constituency that most Albertans would associate with a picture of diverse economic development, but that does not mean that we are short on innovation and know-how. That economic diversity is there, and so are the seeds for greater development of Alberta's north. It benefits nobody in our province to see it depopulated by a lack of opportunity.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Dunvegan would really benefit if economic development and learning policies would bring the tools of integration and the knowledge economy to our constituency. I must applaud the Department of Innovation and Science for forging ahead with the Supernet program, which will connect all schools and libraries within the province to the information super-highway. Supernet will help us to educate students and will help us to close the rural/urban divide that is apparent in information technology usage.

But that's just a start. The founding principle of the knowledge economy is that the ideas inside a person's mind are just as valuable, if not more so, than the resources this province has to offer. It is based upon the idea that human beings are the best capital and the best resource we have. The knowledge economy is about ideas, and this has major implications for our education system. Knowing the three Rs is one thing. Being able to appropriately apply them is

another. Being inventive thinkers and being taught to think outside the mold is altogether different.

In the end we need an education system that prepares our students to be flexible and innovative so that they as the future leaders of Alberta's communities can develop every one of our urban and rural centres into the economic centres they all have the potential to be. In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the more we teach our youngsters how to think creatively, the more they will be able to benefit each and every constituency in Alberta. Especially for constituencies like mine, which is comprised of much smaller communities without the natural economic attractions that cities like Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge hold, ideas are most important. In a sense we are always playing catch-up. If we can hold some aces up our sleeve, then it can only help us to develop new solutions in our own backyard.

Within our government and in the activities of Albertans we are already starting to see how the knowledge economy is being applied to our rural areas. In the agricultural sector crop diversification has allowed farmers, including many in my area, to experience some economic benefits. As Her Honour noted in the throne speech, the province is geared up to make over \$30 billion in agricultural primary and value-added production by 2010. This is good news for all Albertans but especially those in our smaller communities.

We are pleased with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's efforts to support a profitable agricultural services and processing business sector. Dunvegan welcomes these innovations and is always ready to help the department of agriculture lead Alberta into the 21st century. I encourage the department to work with municipalities in all the rural ridings and to take these innovations to the people who have done farming for generations and who are the guardians of a proud way of life.

In this vein, I'm also enthusiastic about the merger of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation and the Alberta Opportunity Company. Creating opportunities for farmers and agriculture and food-related small businesses is the first step to strengthening the industry. By diversifying their economy and allowing them to oversee the next step in agricultural innovation, we can blend Alberta's past with its future and give a greater sense of economic hope to our rural citizens.

So in reality, Mr. Speaker, with the right fine-tuning there is much to be optimistic about. The people of Dunvegan are true Albertans and will say that with pride every time. They are ready and willing to be participants in our growing economy to ensure the prosperity of their families, neighbours, children, and the rest of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I have given you and the members of this Assembly a small insight into the constituency I represent. I also hope that there are others in this Assembly who have the same concerns and also share the same aspirations for their constituencies as I do for mine. It is my hope that we can all work together to effect change for our rural communities and for the continued prosperity of all of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We have another five minutes for questions or comments if any member wishes to ask.

Seeing nobody rising to ask questions, we'll proceed with the next speaker. Any other member want to respond? The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct honour and privilege for me today to stand in the House and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I wish, first of all, to pay tribute to the Lieutenant Governor for her eloquent reading of the Speech from the

Throne. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank her for her tireless dedication to this province. I really feel that she is a superb representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Honourable Lois Hole brings class and dignity and a wonderful sense of humour to her duties as Lieutenant Governor. Her Honour's unwavering commitment to Alberta is widely respected, and she brings renewed credibility to Alberta's traditions of monarchy and state, which is so very important, as it shows our youth the prestige of our traditions.

4:10

I would like to extend heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty and members of the royal family on behalf of my constituency of Calgary-West on the passing of Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowden. Condolences are also passed on behalf of Calgary-West to the family of the Hon. H.A. "Bud" Olson. He was a great Albertan and will be surely missed.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to represent the people of Calgary-West in this Assembly today. I know that they share a vision for the future. I have discussed with them actually many of the initiatives and ideas that were brought forth in the Speech from the Throne. Their feelings are very clear that we as a government must continue down, first of all, the path of fiscal responsibility as we address Alberta's concerns both in the present and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, along with my constituents I am extremely proud of this province. Alberta is the province to live in. I think it is important for us to realize, though, why we are proud and that much of our pride has come from our history and also the good fortune that we have all been privileged to experience largely through the revenues of our energy sector.

But, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are concerned about our future. They are pleased that the government has realized the need to be proactive and to undertake widespread public consultations through the regional Future Summits and also the Red Deer Future Summit. I attended the Future Summit in Red Deer, as well as co-chairing the Calgary regional forum and hosting a Future forum in Calgary-West. The commitment of Albertans at all these summit meetings was evident. They told us through their values, which were carefully crafted, their vision for Alberta five, 10, and 20 years into the future. It is a real daunting challenge to realistically think that far ahead, yet it was one that I feel they met very well. At all levels of consultation I was always very impressed with the depth of knowledge and caring of the participants.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that many Albertans think about the challenges of the future, and now, though, they look to this government. That means to me that every individual MLA is challenged to make responsible decisions on policies and programs that will move Alberta toward the future that they have envisioned. The future they envision is one outlined in the throne speech, and that includes a sustainable health care system, one which has a strong world-class education system, one which confronts the impacts of an aging population and workforce head-on, and one which meets these challenges with fiscally responsible decisions. Albertans do not want to be in debt, and they never again want to be in a deficit situation.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-West constituents want this government's leadership also in committing to the challenges of health care reform. They understand the pressures that are currently on the system and that actions must be taken to save it. Our health care system and the Canadian health care system truly are at a crossroads. My constituents, I believe, realize that this government has to make many tough decisions. Many of my constituents also realize that to save our health care system, we cannot simply throw money at the

current problems. As in the past that action leads us toward even higher expectations and a deficit situation. I believe they are waiting for outcomes as the government develops new ways to solve our health care problems and as we work through the recommendations in the report by the Premier's Advisory Council on Health.

Mr. Speaker, I realize, as do most Albertans, that health care reform is a very tremendous challenge. Just as we met our lofty goal in balancing our budget in the mid-90s and led the provinces to aim for fiscal responsibility, I believe we will meet this challenge and lead Canada into a new era of health care.

As I said earlier, my constituents would like to see government continue to consult with Albertans on the direction of health care. They want a sustainable – and that includes affordable – health care system. I believe the task before us is to make the best decisions possible and at the same time work to gain public consensus. We're going to have to exercise responsible leadership, making informed, tough decisions, and some of these decisions will be met with protests. However, they will be from a small, loud minority, and I feel, as do many of my constituents, that we must not be swayed by the noise but stand by overall public consensus on our decisions.

For instance, many of my constituents support the reason for raising tobacco taxes. They realize the detriment smoking has on our health and on our health care system and that this is one way to recoup some of the costs. I'm confident in this government's commitment to prevent and reduce smoking, especially among our youth.

Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated the Lieutenant Governor's reference to the importance of a healthy lifestyle and contributing factors such as socioeconomic status; education; a sense of inner security and external security; the feeling of being part of a larger community; access to jobs; safe and healthy foods; and cultural experiences. As leaders we must try to ensure that the lifestyles that informed Albertans are choosing are ones that will lead to healthier living so we can progress at a fantastic rate. We need to remember that Alberta is acknowledged as a leader in Canada, perhaps begrudgingly by some. I've told myself, certainly lately: Karen, remember your commitment to consult with the grass roots on pending tough choices so that you will be informed, as you are part of making tough decisions.

Mr. Speaker, not only is our health system feeling the pressure of our growing and aging population; our workforce is aging, and the labour market will be under extreme pressure in 10 years or less. This government, I have to say, formally identified this problem of an aging population five years ago and more and now has in hand two major reports as a result: the long-term care review and the aging population study. Since the submission of the extensive long-term care report of which I was vice-chair, there have been many changes in the continuum of care which are supported by Albertans and key health care stakeholders. These changes give me confidence that our aging population and our future will not be taken for granted. I hasten, though, to add that our work is far from done, but we are leaders in Canada in these two major dimensions.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are proud of the achievements of their students in our school system, and I would say that most of them are their children and grandchildren, but many are also concerned about the present labour situation in our education system. They are disheartened and they are very frustrated by the actions that many teachers have been convinced to take, and they feel that this was the wrong approach. I do not believe that confrontation is the best way to solve any problem. I have been a teacher and counselor for a long time in the public school system, and more recently, since being an MLA, I have spoken to many teachers from both the private and public school systems, and I have to admit that

I've learned a great deal by engaging with the grass roots of these school systems.

There is no doubt that most teachers care deeply about our children and the importance of their work and that the system may not be perfect, but do they realize that we, too, are faced with challenges? I believe we must be able to communicate directly with those who are on the front lines and not through those who claim to represent them. I do not believe that teachers in our public school system are fairly represented. This is a clear challenge that MLAs, government, and teachers must face together to solve.

Based on the variety of comments to my office during the past three weeks, I am re-energizing in stating that a strike is not the best solution for anything. The government should take a long hard look at our education system with regard to making, perhaps, some needed changes that will benefit, most important of all in our learning system, the children. Our children and our grandchildren – and I have nine, so I have a real investment in the future of young people – are certainly the most important part of this province and a priority of this government, Mr. Speaker. We should frequently ask ourselves: how will this decision benefit their future? We should leave them with a province that they will want to inherit.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, it is important that this government has reconfirmed with Albertans that we will stick to our fiscal principles. I am hugely supportive, as are most of my constituents, of the government's pledge to balance priorities with accountability. I am extremely pleased this government has reconfirmed it will not spend more than it takes in. We will leave a province for future generations to inherit.

Even though we are in a period of less revenues, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased this government has pledged to work to sustain our strong economy. I am very pleased the Lieutenant Governor also shared with Albertans that this government will be reviewing and assessing our current fiscal and accounting policies to ensure we remain a leader in fiscal planning. My constituents will be encouraged knowing that we will not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of deficits and overspending.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited about the year 2002 and beyond, and I am very proud to reconfirm my commitment to my constituents and Albertans that Alberta will continue to be a leader in Canada for many years to come.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, you now have five minutes to ask brief questions, to make comments, and to receive response.

Seeing nobody rising to ask questions or make comments, the chair will now recognize the Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to make a few comments on the Speech from the Throne. First, I too, as many of my colleagues have in the Legislature, would like to acknowledge the very gracious delivery of the speech by Her Honour. Our province is indeed fortunate to have Her Honour, the Hon. Lois Hole, as Her Majesty's representative. She has, as some have indicated, a wonderful sense of humour, but she has a warmth, a feeling, and a commitment to this province that few could exceed.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is always an exciting time for those of us in the Legislature, I think on all sides of the House. It's our first day back in session. It's an opportunity to debate the legislation or the fiscal policies of government, but this year I think it was a very special day. Certainly the commemoration of Her Majesty's 50th year of reign as our monarch and the special

music that was performed so beautifully added to that day, and I think a very fitting tribute to Her Majesty's reign and to her work and commitment through her reign were the scholarships, and I know that students in our province who receive those scholarships in the future will be very, very proud. Certainly they exemplify what Her Majesty has emulated through her reign.

The other thing that I think was perhaps more poignant to us this year was the fact that so many of our troops are fighting in Afghanistan. It's a reminder of the very horrific events of September 11, of the pain that families and businesses and friends for more than just the United States or the city of New York felt from those events and certainly is an acknowledgment of the importance of those folks who protect our peace, our security, and our safety. Every moment I think was important, and it's also important to recognize the commitment of the families of those men and women who leave their homes and go to protect what we hold so dear. So those things I think made this throne speech maybe even more important to me, and I have heard a few in the Legislature.

The other thing, though, is that this throne speech covers a number of areas that Albertans have told us are critically important to them, and having the throne speech follow so closely after the Alberta Future Summit, where men and women of our province came together to talk about the vision for this province that we all love so dearly and are so proud of, a vision for five years, 10 years, maybe 20 years down the road – so to have an opportunity after that summit to lay out some of the government's vision, plans, and priorities to follow through on that summit is particularly important. Certainly for all of us who either attended the summit or were able to read of the proceedings or to talk with people who did attend the summit – I think what really came home to all of us is the immense pride that Albertans feel in this province, the tremendous commitment they have to the positive future of this province, and the absolute desire to do anything they have to do to ensure that future is bright for this province.

I'm asked as I travel outside of the province why Alberta is so successful. We are 10 percent of the population, we are not a hundred years old, yet we are the second largest economy and the second largest exporter, and we continue to excel. I have always said that it's the people of this province. People of this province, when they're faced with a problem, don't say: we can't do that. They say: how can we? I think that exemplifies the Albertans that were at the Future Summit.

The throne speech also lays out the importance of our health system and the importance of the deliberations that we will all have over the next weeks, months, and perhaps years in ensuring the sustainability of this system. It is going to require a lot of work from all, and it's going to take a lot of dialogue, and I hope that from all members in this House it will be constructive and with the best interests of the health system as the final route, if there is one. I recall saying, when I had the privilege of being the Minister of Health in this province, that health should not be discussed in a political way. It is too important to all people. I believe the throne speech lays out some very important directions for the sustainability and improvement and increasing excellence of our health system.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I also read and listened with interest in the area of children's services. I, like some others in this House, have grandchildren, four beautiful grandchildren, and it hurts me and pains me when I understand that there are children in this province that don't have all of the necessities, maybe the love and caring and nurturing that all children have every right to have. I support what we can do to work

with our communities – our communities, Mr. Speaker – to ensure that all children in this province have an opportunity to succeed, to learn, to enjoy good health, and to realize their dreams. I think that's an important contribution.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about learning in this Legislature over the last days, and certainly it was discussed in the throne speech. Alberta has been proud for some time to have the most highly skilled workforce in Canada. That has not come about by accident. It has come about by the dedication of the men and women who teach, whether it's in the kindergarten to grade 12 level or in our postsecondary institutions, that commitment but also the commitment and the desire of the students in this province, whether they be children or adult students, to learn and to excel. We have to continue to ensure that we are on the leading edge in our educational opportunities. I believe that the plan that the Minister of Learning has set forward will allow us to do that. There are many components of learning. Some say that children learn more from the ages of one to five than they do at any other period in their lives. That speaks to the importance of children having that basis and background, but from that point on we also have to ensure that they have those opportunities.

4:30

It is no secret that I am a strong proponent of research. I am proud of the research facilities that we have in this province, whether they be in an institutional setting or, in the case of agriculture, in a setting that is less traditional, in fields and greenhouses and buildings. Our agricultural industry has benefited greatly over the years from research. Without good research we would not have the agricultural industry that we have here today that allows it to be the largest single manufacturer in this province. It is the largest single manufacturer in this province; 24 percent of the manufacturing is in agriculture. It has an opportunity to grow. It is a sustainable, renewable resource, and with good research we can continue to grow that industry, to have good jobs, to contribute to the economy, but maybe more importantly to ensure that the people of this province, of Canada, and the hundreds of countries that we export to have a safe, reliable supplier of a quality food product, and we will continue to work towards that end.

We talk about healthy communities, and many of the things I've talked about today contribute to healthy communities. I do want to make special mention of the volunteers in our communities. We are blessed in this province with having the largest volunteer community or commitment of individuals of any province in Canada. Canada is the leader in the world; Alberta is the leader in Canada. Those people, who are often not noticed and certainly not recognized often enough, maybe taken for granted, are people who contribute to the success and the strength of our communities and who are, I believe, the best decision-makers in the communities. Frankly, in most of our communities if you are an elected representative, a municipal representative, your pay is not very high, Mr. Speaker. It is a volunteer commitment, and we should always take time to acknowledge those folks.

The last thing that I'd really like to touch on is something that I think is perhaps most important to this province and beyond our province, to Canada and, I believe, to North America, and that is the issue of water. The Minister of Environment has put in place an opportunity to review and to come forward with directions on a water strategy. Mr. Speaker, we often think of water as turning on the tap and having a good water supply to drink and to operate our homes. We take it for granted. We do take it for granted. We have an abundance. We sit on the largest amount of fresh water in North America in this province, but it is a resource that we have to

maintain and make sure that we protect the supply and the quality.

We think of water often, too, as irrigation. Well, in southern Alberta you think beyond that, because almost every community depends on an irrigation system for their domestic water supply. Recreation: to the best of my knowledge there is not a natural lake in southern Alberta. They are all fed by irrigation. So recreation is a part of it, but more important is that we have a responsibility as a province to ensure that we protect the quality and the use of that resource. Too often, except in times of drought or water shortages, we let the taps run. We don't think too much about it, and we should think about it all of the time.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is, to me, an exciting start to a session. Yes, we have some fiscal challenges, but as our Minister of Finance has clearly stated, we are fortunate. Because of good, good decisions that have been made in the past, this province is probably in the best position in Canada to withstand those fiscal challenges. Albertans have clearly told us how to manage our fiscal affairs. We will do that, and because of that our economy will continue to grow, maybe a little less than it has been, but we will come through this time.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2) kicks in at this point in time if there are questions, comments to the hon. Deputy Premier. Then, there being no indication of such, I will now call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour, as always, to be able to rise in this Assembly and address the Speech from the Throne, which, as has been pointed out by the Deputy Premier, was so graciously done by our Lieutenant Governor. We're very fortunate to have a woman like that, of such high honour and integrity, to represent us in this important position.

As a child growing up in Alberta, I had probably not a rare opportunity, probably a fairly common opportunity to have had grandparents from other parts of the world. Three of my four grandparents came from the British Isles, and my grandmother on my maternal side came from London and was a huge fan of the royal family. So as a child it was into the scrapbooks every time a picture of the Queen or her sister or children or, you know, just anything to do with royalty appeared in any magazine anywhere. I had to cut it out and put it in a scrapbook. I have an incredible collection of pictures, of course, going back more than 39 years now, because I'm a little older than 39, but going back to then.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Say it's not true.

MS HALEY: It is true.

But it's wonderful to be able to go back and look at that and to understand, you know, the meaning of all of that, the history that we're attached to by having a tie to the monarchy. I know that there are some people who are against the monarchy, but I think it's just a wonderful connection to a country and a culture and particularly that we here in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, that we're all members of, also have links back into that system of government as well. So I, too, have deep sorrow for the royal family on the loss of Princess Margaret and for the Olson family here with the Hon. Bud Olson's death this past month as well.

To have an opportunity to address a few of the other issues that the Lieutenant Governor raised, particularly our soldiers going to Afghanistan – there is nobody in this room or probably anywhere in the world that didn't see the horrifying pictures from September 11 of the World Trade Center and what started this war against terrorism that we are part of as Albertans. Our troops are over there.

I pray for their safety and for their safe return and also for the strength that their families have in having a loved one go overseas to try and defend what we believe in here, which is democracy, which is what in fact we're here representing today. So whether, you know, a person is on the government side or on the opposition side, it doesn't matter. Democracy is what it's all about. It allows us to have an opportunity to get up and brag about our ridings or fight about issues or fight about financial issues. It's about priorities and trying to do our very best to represent the people that live in our ridings.

4:40

I particularly had to enjoy the one comment from the Lieutenant Governor about being proud Albertans. I have a number of friends and acquaintances in the United States, and when I meet with them and when I talk about Alberta, they tell me that I sound very much like a Texan. Texans in the United States are known to be number one in the patriotism game, but I think they would be hard pressed to beat out Alberta. Perhaps it's because we have links to Texas that go back years. When I grew up in the oil patch, a lot of the engineers and geologists and owners of a lot of the companies that were here investing in Alberta back at that time were of course from Houston and Dallas. I grew up with these guys coming out to the rig. My dad was a tool push on the rigs. Our Minister of Energy pointed out to me one day that he finally understood me after I told him that I had in fact grown up in the oil patch. Well, understanding me might be a little more difficult than that. But I learned a lot of interesting things in the oil patch, and one of them was to be very proud of who we are. We would go to other provinces for holidays, and when we would get back to Alberta, my dad would stop the car, get out, and kiss the ground. I always thought, well, this is a little weird, but when I saw the Pope do it, then I understood. This was my dad's Mecca. There was no place like Alberta, and he passed that, the love of this province, on to my brother and me and my mom, who – and we won't hold this against her – came from Saskatchewan. But she is as Albertan as they get, except when the Roughriders are in town.

Our Future Summit I think was a great thing. I think it changed; it evolved as time went on. When we originally came up with the concept of a Future Summit, the idea was: what would Alberta be like without a debt? Where would you allocate resources? Of course, the economy started to spiral down just a little bit. Oil and gas resources dropped dramatically and impacted our ability to maybe have a surplus this year and pay down more on our debt. That's unfortunate, but we will get back to where we need to be in due time. But the Future Summit, as it evolved, became something more meaningful, I think, than where it had originally started. It became something where people could talk about what they truly believed this province should be, how we should do things.

I was delighted that the Finance minister is going to look at how we do our books and if there are any other ways and things that we should be doing. We shouldn't be afraid to look at things like the heritage savings trust fund or any of the other issues. Everything should and could be on the table, and I for one think it's awesome that she's willing to do that.

Hopefully we'll be able to take out some of the peaks and valleys that we run into here when it comes to things like infrastructure and transportation, because without those two – you know, we talk about how the most important things in Alberta are health care and education and our seniors and our children. Everybody knows that. That's a given. The areas that are so easy to step past are the things that drive our economy, and transportation is one of the key economic drivers of this province. If you can't build an off-ramp,

then maybe you can't build those businesses. That's a problem in my area. We need another overpass in Airdrie. Everybody knows that. Maybe 10 years from now we'll get it, but on a short-term basis we can't even do an on- and off-ramp on the highway, which means that two very large warehouses, that would have been factory outlet malls for Calgary, are not being built in Airdrie at this time. Hopefully we'll find a way to address those issues because if for the sake of a million and a half dollars you lose a hundred million dollars, you probably haven't accomplished very much in the big picture. So along with this review that the minister is doing I hope that there will be consideration given to things like that, how we can smooth out some of those issues so that our economic drivers can still be maintained.

Even though oil and gas are down, our dependency on oil and gas is decreasing. We in fact have a much more diversified economy than we did in the mid-80s, when oil and gas went down a bit – a lot – then too. Those are issues that we can work out. We've got a great group of people, and I know that there are a lot of great ideas that will come forward. The minister will bring back those great ideas, and we'll deal with them in this Assembly, because that's what this place is for.

With regard to our health care system, you know, we always talk about what we maybe don't have. We never talk about the things that we do have. You have a system that's using up over \$6 billion worth of resources in a year now. Funding has increased dramatically in the last few years on this, yet you never hear about the thousands of people every day that go into the health care system and get exactly what they need. They get the diagnosis; they get the tests; they get the surgery if that's what they need. We have examples of that in some of our colleagues right here, in our Minister of Seniors, who just recently, you know, underwent very traumatic surgery and came out of it. He's doing so well; he's back at work.

Our seniors are, of course, right up there with children as being one of most important resources and probably an underutilized resource as well. Unrecognized perhaps is a better word. They are the ones that do so many things. I can tell you just on a personal level. My mom and stepfather are constantly volunteering their time to try and raise money for the Elks or for the Royal Purple or for a variety of organizations like that, that then turn around and contribute back into their communities. That in fact is, you know, one of the things that makes Alberta so strong.

We do have a great economy in this province. There isn't anybody that can compete with us anywhere. It's not just a Canada issue; it's a North America-wide issue. When the Fraser forum does their reports on North America, there's only one other part of North America that's ever as strong as we are, and that's Texas. That's oil and agriculture again that come back. So when things are bad there, they're bad here, but overall our two economies are the strongest on this entire continent. We have a lot to be proud of.

Agriculture. Being my favourite thing in the world, I just echo the minister of agriculture's comments from earlier. We have an unprecedented opportunity in this province for value added. It is my hope that by the year 2010 we are at that \$20 billion value-added stage, because our resources are our resources. There's never, ever been a reason to ship raw resources out of this province when we have the ability to do the manufacturing and the value adding here. Move up the food chain, give our people the higher paying jobs, and take advantage of that wonderful resource that's renewable and ongoing.

Our Minister of Environment today released his Water for Life report. I'm sure it will be very controversial, but it will also be a fascinating discussion for Albertans to participate in. You know, I think that all of us as MLAs should be encouraging our constituents

to get involved. They can do the workbook right on-line. They can pick it up from us if they want to, but everybody – everybody – in this province has an opinion on water, and I'm sure that we're going to hear from them.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I just want to say again what an honour it is to be here to represent the citizens of Airdrie-Rocky View, and I appreciate very much the opportunity to have been able to stand and speak in the Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2) kicks in. 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 Airdrie-Rocky View, and it would be this. The hon. member was discussing the value-added industry and the importance of it to the Alberta economy, and I could not agree with her more. But can the hon. member explain, please, why we are allowing so much of our natural gas liquids to be exported, specifically ethane, in the Alliance pipeline and why it is not upgraded in this province?

Thank you.

MS HALEY: I would be delighted to take a shot at that. I believe that it was the National Energy Board of Canada, federal, that determined that this gas would go out in this form, and we've been trying to work with the industry, in fact, to have more work be done here in Alberta, but it's fairly difficult. Maybe the Minister of Energy could help me out here, but my understanding was that the National Energy Board of Canada approved that in that form, and the only way to undo it is to become very uncompetitive in this marketplace.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: There being no additional questions or comments, then the chair will recognize the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I as well am honoured to have the opportunity this afternoon to make comments in address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. I would as well like to start by acknowledging and thanking Her Honour the Hon. Lois E. Hole, our Lieutenant Governor, for the job that she does and for the inspiration that she is to Albertans and particularly to Albertan children. Since the appointment of Her Honour and her taking on the role of Lieutenant Governor, she has made it a passion to attend schools in our province and to inspire schoolchildren in our province to succeed. I would like to thank her for doing the job that she's doing. She has really revitalized the role of Lieutenant Governor and therefore revitalized our understanding of the monarchy and the way that our monarchy plays a role in our democratic process. I for one very much appreciate that.

4:50

I'd like to comment just briefly on some of the aspects of the Speech from the Throne. The Speech from Throne in itself this year, in my view, was inspirational. I've been a student of government for a long time. I actually read speeches from the throne before I was elected, which I know not many people do. I have copies of speeches from the throne that have been signed by Peter Lougheed and by earlier Premiers and earlier Lieutenant Governors. I have a collection of them. I collect things like this.

Historically speeches from the throne tended to be a fairly dry litany of what was going to happen over the course of the year.

"We're going to amend the Railway Act. We're going to do this act. We're going to do that act." Really the role of government is to provide a policy direction for the province, a policy oversight for the province, to provide a vision, to provide hope, to paint a picture of hope for the province, where we want to go and how we want to get there, and then the role of government is to look to see what the best delivery model is.

For many of us the private sector does a very good job of delivering most things. The government is a necessary delivery vehicle for some other things, and not-for-profit or nongovernment organizations deliver very well in other areas. But it's not the primary role of government to be a program deliverer. It's the primary role of government to set the policy standard and then to make sure that there's a delivery vehicle and then to audit to make sure that we're achieving that standard. So the Speech from the Throne this year, in my view, really spoke to that.

A healthy Alberta, working together to build a healthy Alberta. What could be a better set of directions for our government in this year than that very topic?

To start the Speech from the Throne, they're talking about recognizing Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee with commemoration through the Premier's citizenship awards, through the Queen's Golden Jubilee citizenship medal, and through the Queen's Golden Jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts, again setting a very, very good tone at the very front end of the document for something which I believe to be extremely important.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm here in this House today is because my parents taught me that we have an obligation. We have an obligation to give back to our community. We have an obligation to take care of our families and then to contribute to our community. So in this 50th year of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, what more fitting way could we recognize that Golden Jubilee than to recognize citizenship and encourage citizenship, particularly in youth?

The citizenship award to one student from every high school in the province to recognize the values which make up citizenship and to recognize mentorship, leadership in those schools, and leadership in our community among our youth is to me one of the most important and most significant things that we could do, so I was absolutely delighted that we could recognize the jubilee in that manner and then in order to highlight it have a jubilee medal, which I hope will be presented right here at the Legislature and that we will bring the five winners of the jubilee medal each year to this Legislature to be presented that medal. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, that medal could be presented at a luncheon where the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier and the Speaker could be in attendance, or perhaps we could even have them in the Speaker's gallery and have the presentation there.

The opportunities are marvelous to highlight the fact that the Legislature is about citizenship. It's about what we can each do in our communities to make our communities a better place. While we have the opportunity to be here and to debate public policy in this forum, what's really important is citizenship back in our communities and how we each play a role in building our communities. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely delighted that the front piece of the Speech from the Throne was celebrating citizenship, particularly celebrating citizenship and mentoring of citizenship among our youth.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne goes on to talk about "the unique character and record of accomplishment that the people of Alberta have shaped through hard work, concern for each other, and the sharing of common goals." And again I'm inspired by those comments and by what they mean, what they say to Albertans,

because what they say to Albertans is that we know and understand that Albertans are pioneers. They're young, well-educated people who are ready to take on new challenges.

I'm reminded of the time when as minister of intergovernmental affairs I had the opportunity to attend in Redmond, Washington, with the Premier of our province. We met at Microsoft, and we met with their vice-president of research. Now, Microsoft spends \$3 billion on research every year, and we were able to let them know that nowhere in this world is there a better place to do research and development of product than in Alberta, because we have a young, well-educated population who are entrepreneurial and pioneering. There's no place where people have taken up computers faster. We've more computers per capita than anywhere else as far as I'm aware. Anytime some new product comes out in the way of a telephone, an electronic telephone, a VCR, the take-up in Alberta is faster than in most places in the world, and it's because we're pioneers. It's because we're prepared to step out, to try something new, to be entrepreneurial, to be different, to be daring, and to be good at it. So that's what the Speech from the Throne says to me, and it says that this government recognizes that and will build on that, Mr. Speaker.

It goes on to talk about the Future Summit. The Future Summit is important. I was chagrined the other day when someone asked whether the Premier would direct the co-chairs of the Future Summit that they should not bring forward something that was said by Albertans at the Future Summit. The Future Summit is typical, a hallmark of this government, where we listen to Albertans, but we listen to Albertans not so that we can do everything minutely that we're told by Albertans, because of course that's not possible. There are 3 million and some Albertans, and there are many, many different views as to what should be done.

We listen to Albertans in the context of the Future Summit, Mr. Speaker, so that we can shape a vision for this province not based on the 83 people in this House and solely their views, not based just on us going out to our constituents, which is a very, very important part of the democratic process and shouldn't be overlooked, but also on the types of summits and forums that the Future Summit provided so that there could be reasoned and educated thought and opportunities for discussion so that we can continue to reshape and rethink and relook at where we're going and how we're going to get there. So the Future Summit was a very, very important way to help Albertans have an opportunity to provide and guide us in setting a vision for this province.

We then get onto the real context of this speech, the theme of the speech, which was working to build a healthy Alberta and the betterment of people's health and the province's health that the government dedicates itself to in 2002. I want to comment just briefly. In the Speech from the Throne there was a comment that said that that is exhibited in many, many ways, not just by prescriptions of pills or providing surgical services but in so many ways that we make ourselves healthier. One of those ways was the teacher who took a student aside to say, "Good work." I might have expanded that particular part of the speech to also say the student or former student who says to a teacher: you made a difference in my life; I would not be where I am today without what you've done for me in the classroom and what you did for me as a role model. We have so many teachers in this province who can tell us stories of being in a store or a restaurant or being on the street or in the parking lot at a movie theatre and having somebody come up to them and say: you were my teacher; you made a difference in my life. I've witnessed that happen, Mr. Speaker, and it's about what makes this province healthy. It's teachers who work every day with our students to make sure that our students have the opportunity to be

the best that they can be, and they do make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, a “sustainable health care system,” because, yes, although we’re talking about health in the broad context, there’s also the health care system itself. We had the benefit in January of what’s called the Mazankowski report, the Premier’s Advisory Council on Health, and that was a very broad-reaching report, 44 recommendations.

5:00

I’m not going to dwell on all the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, but there were some in there that we don’t dwell on enough perhaps because we often think of health care on the acute care side. The first recommendation, Mr. Speaker, was one of wellness, and I again really would like to emphasize that. I often talk about in the Ministry of Justice, that I’m responsible for, the wellness side of the justice system. How do we make sure that we don’t spend so much on acute care in the justice system? We do it by making sure that our children have a good start, that they’re healthy, that they get a good education. If there’s any way to keep people out of jail, it’s to make sure that the barriers to their success are removed and that they have an opportunity to succeed. So when we talk about the health care system, wellness is very important.

One of the members of our caucus takes every opportunity to talk about the fact that we should be putting some of our resources into community programs for children so that they can be active and healthy in sports. That’s very right. We do need to encourage that active, healthy activity, and that’s done in so many ways in our communities by organizations, for example, like the YMCA, who provide healthy leadership opportunities for our children and for some of us as adults if we’d ever go. So on the wellness side of the agenda we could do better for Alberta if we would devote some attention to making sure that we are well.

There are so many things to say, and I’m going to run out of time, but I do want to say that we often refer to the Premier’s council as the Mazankowski report, but we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that there were 11 people who served on that committee and many more who supported them and provided ideas. I want to just reference one who’s a constituent in Edmonton-Whitemud, Dr. Lillian Douglass, who I’ve had the honour and privilege of talking to about health issues since well before I was elected, when I was at a roundtable on health care as a representative of the University hospital and talking about some of the things that are so important and that have come through in this report, like taking measures so that Alberta’s health care professionals are able to practise to the full extent of their training and education. So many people in addition to Mr. Mazankowski made a huge contribution to that report, and I just wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge that and to acknowledge the good work of Dr. Lillian Douglass, who’s a former president of the AARN, and the others on that committee who made such a contribution.

The other aspect of the recommendations that I wanted to touch on briefly was the question of the contribution of health care to our

economy, and we mustn’t overlook that side. It’s not to say that the other ones aren’t important, but health research, particularly in the Capital region, is very, very important. If we look to the next 20 years and the impact that biotech research and development is going to have on our economy and therefore our well-being and our wellness, we can’t diminish that in any way, shape, or form. So, yes, we spend some \$6 billion on health care, but let’s recognize what impact that has on our community in terms of the economic driver and the economic engine that it provides for us and the good work that’s done in our postsecondary facilities and our research facilities both in the public and the private sectors as spurred on by the emphasis that we put on health care, but it also contributes back to our community because of health care.

A Healthier Alberta through Learning: Mr. Speaker, it couldn’t be a more important topic. It’s essential that we deal with education in a meaningful way, that we constantly revisit, re-evaluate, and that we recognize the important contributors to education, those contributors again being our teachers. Our goal should be that our children always have the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

I’d like to just reference a comment that was made in a speech to the students in the Ismaili community during their Ishtar awards last year recognizing the success of those students. An ophthalmologist from Ottawa who was the president of the Ismaili community in Ottawa at the time was the guest speaker. He made the point that we have an obligation to maximize our potential, to be the best we can be so that we can contribute, so that we can give back, so that we can make our community a better place.

That would appear to be my time, Mr. Speaker, and I would just end where I started. We all have that obligation to build our community, to make our community a better place, and this document, the Speech from the Throne, is such a good framework for that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2) option for hon. members. There being none, then I would now like to call on the hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Because it is our first week in the House and we’re all excited about the opening session and being here again, I’d like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 4.

[Motion carried; at 5:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

