



**Legislative Assembly
Province of Alberta**

No. 1

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS*

Fifth Session

Twenty-Fourth Legislature

Monday, February 12, 2001

This being the first Day of the Fifth Session of the Twenty-Fourth Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, for the despatch of business pursuant to a Proclamation of Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, Lieutenant Governor, dated the eighteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand one;

The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly read the Proclamation as follows:

[GREAT SEAL]
CANADA
PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

LOIS E. HOLE
Lieutenant Governor.

ELIZABETH THE SECOND, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom, Canada, and Her Other Realms and Territories, QUEEN, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith

PROCLAMATION

TO OUR FAITHFUL, the MEMBERS elected to serve in the Legislative Assembly of Our Province of Alberta and to each and every one of you, GREETING...

WHEREAS it is Our will and pleasure by and with the advice and consent of Our Executive Council of Our Province of Alberta to prorogue the Fourth Session of the Twenty-fourth Legislature of Alberta:

Paul Bourque,
Deputy Minister of Justice
and Deputy Attorney General

WE DO hereby prorogue, effective February 11, 2001, the said Legislature; and

WHEREAS it is deemed expedient for certain causes and considerations to convene the Legislative Assembly of Our Province of Alberta for the Fifth Session of the Twenty-fourth Legislature, WE DO WILL that you and each of you, and all others in this behalf interested, on MONDAY, the 12th day of February, 2001, at the hour of THREE o'clock in the afternoon, at Our City of Edmonton, personally be and appear, for the despatch of business, to treat, act, do and conclude upon those things which, in the Legislature of Our Province of Alberta, by the Common Council of Our said Province, may, by the favour of God, be ordained.

HEREIN FAIL NOT

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent and the Great Seal of Our Province of Alberta to be hereunto affixed.

WITNESS: THE HONOURABLE LOIS E. HOLE, Lieutenant Governor of Our Province of Alberta, in Our City of Edmonton in Our Province of Alberta, this Eighteenth day of January in the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand One in the Forty-Ninth Year of Our Reign.

BY COMMAND:

HON. DAVID HANCOCK
Provincial Secretary.

The Speaker entered the Assembly and took the Chair. After delivering the opening day prayer he invited Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead the Members of the Assembly and guests in singing Canada's National Anthem.

While awaiting the arrival of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker spoke about various mock legislatures conducted in the past year, and the upcoming Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament.

Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor entered the Assembly and took her seat on the Throne.

Her Honour then read the following Speech from the Throne:

Speech From The Throne

Fellow Albertans, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Fifth Session of the Twenty-fourth Alberta Legislature. I am deeply honoured to again deliver the Speech From the Throne, as I am honoured to serve as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor. This role has provided me with countless opportunities to meet Albertans of all walks of life – opportunities I will forever cherish.

It is difficult to believe that we are in the year 2001. In the human imagination, "2001" has always been more than just a number or a year on the calendar. It has become a symbol of tomorrow, a symbol of the future of the human experience.

In the great Province of Alberta, people share the optimism of the future linked to the year 2001, while at the same time practicing the time-honoured values that make the province strong. Albertans have not forsaken these values. Across this province, Albertans are helping each other. Teachers are giving students a good start in life; nurses are skillfully tending to patients; farmers are raising crops and livestock to feed us; seniors are volunteering at daycare centres; businesses are creating jobs; and researchers are breaking centuries-old secrets of disease.

Growing up in the province is a new generation of Albertans – people who will carry on this work. When we plan for tomorrow, it is to today's children, tomorrow's leaders, that we dedicate ourselves — as a government and as a province.

For that reason, a class of grade six students were asked what they see as priorities for Alberta's future. These students, from Jean Vanier School in Sherwood Park, were asked to provide their thoughts on three questions. The questions were: Why do you like living in Alberta? What could be done to make Alberta a better place to live? And, in 2005, Alberta will be 100 years old. What would you like Alberta to be like in 2005?

Thanks to the participation of their teacher, Ms Vicki Whalley, these students provided answers that were, in a word, profound. I should note that many of those students are here today, along with Ms Whalley. It is my pleasure to welcome them.

The students' responses covered almost all aspects of life. They were thoughtful, articulate, and focused. They reflected an optimism for the future that will brighten the hardest of hearts. While recognizing that Alberta faces challenges, the students look forward with great anticipation to the future that will be theirs. The students wrote about their concerns about the environment, about health care, and about crime and violence. They perceive Alberta as a safe, peaceful home, and they understand the importance of family and community.

One student, Cassie Milne, captured in her response the true essence of Alberta. I quote from Cassie's response:

I like living in Alberta because I think of Alberta as a big family. Our province might not be as grand as other cities, but Alberta is my home. I think our community is hardworking, loving and generous. I may be only 12 years old, but I know Alberta is a dignified province. I think of myself as lucky mainly because I have two loving parents and a roof over my head. When I watch TV, I see the melancholy faces of young children living on the street. My heart breaks and I feel we should do something about it. I think we need more people and places these kids can turn to. In my opinion, all kids deserve to have a roof over their heads and someone to love.

In response to the question about how to mark Alberta's centennial year, Cassie wrote:

I would like to have a huge party with lots of fireworks and balloons. I hope in the year 2005, we will come together as Albertans and ring in the new year.

A Vision for the Economy

Many of the students addressed economic issues. One student wrote:

I like living in Alberta because we are the only province in Canada that doesn't pay a provincial sales tax. Alberta is a very wealthy province so our family has good-paying jobs that let us grow up in a good, healthy environment.

Like these students, the government recognizes that fundamental to Alberta's success is a strong and diverse economic base, an economic base that does not include a sales tax. The government is committed to building a strong economy for the future, and to creating an economic environment in which Albertans can succeed and achieve their dreams. This environment consists of the lowest tax regime in Canada, the elimination of the provincial debt, and an unshakeable commitment to fiscal responsibility and accountability.

This government has kept its word to Albertans. It has said that Alberta's taxes would be the lowest in Canada, and that the only way taxes will go is down. It has kept that promise.

It has said that deficits are no longer legal in this province. It has kept that promise.

It has said that it will stay focused on eliminating the provincial debt. It has kept that promise.

It has said that there would be no sales tax in Alberta. It has kept that promise.

Those promises – those commitments – remain the foundation for the economy of the next four years.

Under the government's long-term economic plan, the goal is to create approximately 295,000 new jobs by the year 2005. Alberta will have a larger role within the global marketplace, with value-added exports totalling some \$26 billion by 2005.

Alberta's low tax regime will fuel strong economic growth – this year and over the next four years. In 2001 alone, Albertans will have \$1.1 billion more in their own pockets because of the new single-rate tax plan, bringing total personal tax savings to \$1.5 billion since 1998 – an average savings of 23 percent per person.

Alberta businesses will benefit from \$1 billion in tax cuts over the next four years, savings that will flow into new jobs, businesses, and opportunities. Relief on people's education property tax bills will also be felt in 2001, in the amount of \$135 million.

Albertans continue to diversify the economy substantially, especially in the areas of high-tech investment and value-added products. This diversification helps ensure that Alberta is well-positioned to weather any storms of global economic downturns.

The government will continue to support research and the development of new ideas. It is committed to keeping Alberta on the leading edge of the new economy while building on the solid foundation of the province's resource and agriculture sectors.

The government will achieve this in the coming years through initiatives such as the Alberta Energy Research Institute and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, as well as through the first grants awarded from the \$500 million Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research.

Alberta Supernet, the cutting-edge project to link the province through the Internet, will create limitless opportunities for citizens in all corners of the province to learn, communicate, do business, and gain better access to health services. When this project is completed by 2005, Alberta will be the first jurisdiction in North America to create a province-wide high-speed Internet network.

A Vision for Agriculture

As Alberta continues to diversify its economy, it cannot forget the ongoing importance of the agricultural sector. The agriculture and food industry is a critical part of Alberta's economy and will continue to be a priority for this government.

This year, government will use the recommendations from last year's Agriculture Summit, and insights from those in the processing industry, toward achieving a goal of \$20 billion in value-added processing by the year 2010.

The government will also continue to work with farmers and farm communities to assist them in times of disaster and downturn, while at the same time building on their ideas to keep the agricultural sector vibrant and prosperous.

A Vision for Energy

Another component of Alberta's economic advantage will be its strong oil and gas industry, which is seeing record prices and reinvesting earnings in new capital expenditures across the province. The province is also receiving record royalties.

As Alberta's economy continues to grow, there is increased demand for energy resources – and an impact on consumers.

The government recognizes that Albertans are facing higher utility prices. These price pressures are not unique to Alberta. They are part of a continental rise in energy costs.

Regardless of the origins of the pressures, the government will respond to them forcefully. Already, the government is providing \$1,680 in various energy rebates to every two-adult household, plus substantial electricity and natural gas rebates to Alberta schools, hospitals, community halls, churches, non-profit groups, and businesses.

In the area of electricity, the government expects the pressures to be short-term. In fact, the market price for electricity in the first six weeks of the new year has been substantially lower than some predicted. However, there is still work to be done.

The key to reducing electricity prices is to increase the supply of power. In this regard, investor confidence is strong. Already, plans have been announced by the electricity industry to bring over 3,000 megawatts of new electricity on-stream by the year 2005. This is enough electricity to power the City of Red Deer 30 times over. This new power will increase supply and competition, which means fair prices for electricity.

In the meantime, the government will continue to monitor prices closely, respond appropriately, and work through the issues with the input of Albertans.

This work will be ably assisted by the Government Advisory Council on Electricity, recently established to advise government on policy directions as electrical deregulation unfolds. This group, comprising consumers, industry, municipal leaders, and environmentalists, will be asked to evaluate issues critically and make recommendations on how to resolve those issues.

We must not lose sight of the fact that energy revenues are part of what allows Alberta to reinvest in health care, schools, roads, justice programs, and other initiatives that Albertans support. They allow us to pay down debt. Energy revenues help keep our personal taxes the lowest in Canada and help us reduce business taxes. A vibrant energy sector is indeed a key to a strong Alberta.

A Vision for Health Care

A strong economy means little unless it translates into good jobs and a strong, safe province with a high quality of public services.

Of all public services, health care is perhaps the most important to Albertans. Like all Canadians, Albertans value the publicly-funded health system and are strongly committed to its preservation and improvement.

The Alberta Government shares that commitment. It also recognizes, as do Albertans, that the system faces challenges. Albertans are concerned about reports of long waiting lists, shortages of health professionals, and the system's sustainability.

Many Albertans have experienced, or know someone who has experienced, frustration with the health system, whether it was waiting for lab tests or being on a waiting list for surgery. No matter whether the required service is routine or serious, these waits are troubling.

The Jean Vanier students recognize these challenges. One student wrote that "Alberta would be a better place to live in if we would work on medical issues such as more doctors and supplies." Another agreed, saying that "what I would really like to see happen by 2005 is that medical attention is received quickly for those that need it."

This government will concentrate on the health issue, as it has for the past several years.

These efforts are working. Every day in Alberta, there are 55,000 family physician visits. About 1,200 surgeries are performed every day. Every day, 107 new Albertans are born. Obviously, many, many Albertans are well-served by the health system.

The government will work with Albertans to improve the health system even further. This year, it committed more than \$930 million in new funding over two years to address wait lists and access, and will continue to work to improve access even more.

There are other issues in health care. For example, to meet the unique needs of persons with mental health issues, the government will establish effective community-based services for children and adults. It will implement the Alberta Brain Injury Initiative to address the needs of adult Albertans who have experienced brain injuries.

For Albertans whose lives depend on a transplant, the government will implement the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplant Strategy.

On the human resources side, the government will create new training spaces and new career opportunities for physicians, nurses, and other health professionals. The government's commitment to add 2,400 front-line health staff to the system over three years will be fulfilled. This year alone, over 300 registered nurse and licensed practical nurse training positions have been added to the learning system, along with about 200 new spaces for physicians, MRI technicians, and other types of health providers. Next September, another 575 spaces will be added for training health professionals.

The Jean Vanier students noted that health care consists of much more than hospitals and doctors' offices. Many of the students wrote of the connection between lifestyle and good health, as well as the impact of the environment on human health.

The government shares this recognition of the importance of wellness. Initiatives aimed at reducing the use of tobacco products, especially among children and young adults, will be expanded. AADAC's province-wide system of addiction prevention and treatment programs will be enhanced. The government will implement environmental health controls that reduce and prevent exposure to contaminants.

Inherent to a good health system for the future is the fostering of new ideas and new technologies. Building on the international reputation of Alberta's hospitals, the government will fund a cardiac care centre of excellence in Edmonton and a joint surgery centre of excellence in Calgary, to be operational by 2005.

Already, news of these centres has sparked national and international interest. The centres will help attract leading physicians and researchers, and help ensure that Albertans will get the best care possible, all within the publicly-funded system.

As well, the government has made a \$10 million commitment to establish two new health research innovation centres: one at the University of Alberta, and one at the University of Calgary.

Overall, the Government of Alberta recognizes that health care is an ongoing priority for Albertans, and is committed to providing the human and fiscal resources necessary to ensure that the publicly-funded health system is protected and enhanced in the next four years and beyond. It will work with health providers and all Albertans to build a system that is responsive, contemporary, and affordable, and it will ensure that health care is there for all Albertans when they need it. The students of Jean Vanier School, and all Albertans, deserve no less.

A Vision for Learning

As with health care, a strong learning system both benefits from, and contributes to, a strong Alberta. That is why education will continue to be a government priority, just as it is a priority for the students of Jean Vanier School.

The government sees education as a lifelong process that begins well before a child attends kindergarten and continues long after that person finishes his or her formal education.

The government will ensure that adequate funding is provided for all levels of the learning system, both in terms of operational dollars and capital dollars.

In the coming year, almost \$700 million will be allocated to build new schools and modernize existing ones, part of the \$1 billion, three-year New Century Schools Plan.

Class size is on the minds of many, including the Jean Vanier student who wrote: "Children are getting low marks because the teacher is too busy with 30 other students." The government will respond to the issue by providing \$68 million a year to school boards, through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, earmarked to give boards the flexibility to reduce class sizes or take other measures to improve the classroom.

The government will also provide Alberta teachers, the best and brightest in Canada, with the resources they need to do their jobs better and help meet the needs of "the whole student." These resources include new funding to better support special-needs students in the classroom, and enhanced health and social services in schools through the Student Health Initiative.

Teachers will also be aided by on-line curriculum, made possible by the Alberta Supernet project. This service will make available, through the Internet, an array of multi-media teaching resources for all educators, which will help ease lesson-planning and bring subjects alive for students and their parents.

In the area of post-secondary education, the government recognizes the challenges of the province's post-secondary institutions in meeting rising enrollments, and the challenges of some students in accessing affordable post-secondary training.

To address these challenges, the government will enhance aid to post-secondary students through increased scholarships, loan forgiveness, and a better student finance system.

Government will increase the number of Heritage Scholarships. It will almost double the value of athletic scholarships, expand the Jason Lang Scholarship so that it is available to third- and fourth- year students, and introduce a new scholarship for graduate students valued at about \$2,000 per recipient. It will also commit \$256 million next year for expansion and renovation of post-secondary campuses.

The government's goal for Alberta's learning system is to make it the best in the world. Like all Albertans, the government understands that the greatest returns are realized from our investments in learning. It will strive to make the system responsive to the needs of students of all ages, and accessible to all regardless of where they live or how much money they have.

A Vision for Strong Communities

Good health and learning systems make Alberta's communities stronger. There are other characteristics of Alberta's diverse communities that are equally important, and which remain a vital part of the government's vision for the future.

There is no doubt that having safe and caring communities is important to Alberta's young people. Reducing crime and gang activity was a strong and urgent theme with the students of Jean Vanier School, as evidenced by the student who said that "to make Alberta a better and perfect place, you would need to take away all the bad gangs, robberies, and shootings."

No Albertan wants a province in which our children are worried about violent crime. Every shooting, every robbery reverberates across a community. That is why this government commits itself to building safe communities for all Albertans.

In the coming year, the government will complete its public review of the Police Act, and respond to the findings of that review so that police forces can be as effective and responsive as possible. Already, government has announced \$16 million in new funding to increase the number of RCMP officers in Alberta.

Under the province's organized and serious crime strategy, funding will be provided to target organized crime, and the government will continue to work with its partners to help reduce crime in the Province, so that Alberta can maintain its record of having the lowest violent crime rate in western Canada.

A key to reducing crime is ensuring that Alberta children get a good start in life. The government's vision for children is based on the premise that children have the right to be born healthy, and receive every opportunity to develop to their strongest potential.

To this end, the government will continue to respond to the results of the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk, with an emphasis on supporting children in their earliest years.

The government is also extending employment leave provisions so that parents of new babies and adopted children have more flexibility in adjusting to changes in their families.

The government will enhance programs to help children affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and reach out to children in crisis – whether they are newborns or older children being abused by predators in the world of child prostitution.

The government will also follow through on its commitment to help the province's homeless, an issue raised by many of the Jean Vanier students. The government has committed \$13 million this year to address homelessness, and will commit another \$13 million next year. These resources, combined with assistance from other levels of government and incredible support at the community and volunteer level, will provide shelter and hope for Alberta's homeless population.

Equally as important to Alberta's communities are the values and contributions of the province's seniors.

As the seniors population grows, the government is committed to ensuring the well-being of seniors, particularly those who are in need. This includes working in communities to help seniors remain independent and in their homes for as long as possible. It also includes a 15 percent increase in funding to the Special Needs Assistance for Seniors Program, and further increases to the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program, effective April 1.

Also important to Alberta's communities are the Aboriginal Peoples of the province. This year, the government will begin implementing the new Aboriginal Policy Framework, with the goal of increasing the well-being and self-reliance of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and other Aboriginal Peoples of the province.

On another front, Alberta's Emergency Public Warning System will be expanded over the next three years to make use of new and advanced technologies. This will help ensure that Albertans are alerted as quickly as possible to public emergencies and given information on how to protect themselves.

A safe and modern physical infrastructure is important to all Alberta communities. As one Jean Vanier student put it, "In the year 2005, I hope that Alberta's roads and sidewalks will be fixed, with no more big cracks down the middle."

The government will work with its municipal and federal partners to improve Alberta's infrastructure. It has also committed over \$2.5 billion in additional dollars over three years to improve roads, highways, and public transit, and \$260 million over three years to improve water systems and other municipal infrastructure.

Government will follow through on its \$918 million commitment to modernize health infrastructure, a commitment that includes a new, state-of-the-art Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary, and the full modernization of Edmonton's Royal Alexandra Hospital.

A Vision for a Strong Alberta Within a Strong Canada

Like Albertans, the government is fully committed to a strong Alberta within a strong Canada. It rejects the destructive vision of separation, and embraces the concept of a united, diverse nation in which each province has an important role.

Alberta will do its part toward maintaining a united Canada. The government will continue to support the concept of equalization, recognizing Alberta's role as a "have" province.

At the same time, the government asks that Ottawa not intrude into the areas of provincial responsibility set out in the Constitution. It seeks a genuine effort from Ottawa to deal with the concerns of Albertans to make sure their voices are heard, and their priorities addressed fairly.

Albertans don't want or need "tough love." They want a fair deal. They need proper funding for core services, not specialized programs that duplicate provincial programs. This government will be a strong and persistent voice for that kind of respect from Ottawa, and will not rest until it is achieved.

The Government implores Ottawa to understand the needs of the province's agriculture industry. Alberta farmers want marketing choice outside of the Canada Wheat Board. We will continue to press Ottawa for that choice, and for equitable treatment of Alberta farmers in times of disaster.

As well, at a time of high energy prices across the nation, the Government of Alberta calls on the Federal Government to stop charging GST on electricity and natural gas bills. These energy services are essential, and in the view of this government, it is unfair to increase the burden on energy consumers by charging this unnecessary tax on a necessary commodity.

An Overall Vision, Based on Albertans' Priorities

Fellow Albertans, this province has been built by strong, caring people, people who value family and community, and who approach the challenges of life with optimism and hard work.

We know from our young people, including the students of Jean Vanier School, that these characteristics will continue into Alberta's future – into the year 2005 and beyond.

The Government of Alberta will work hard to make sure it does not let these young Albertans down as we head to 2005.

Soon, Alberta will be debt-free. For eight years, Albertans and their government have worked hard to ensure that young Albertans do not inherit a burden of debt or a legacy of overspending. Thanks to that hard work, the accumulated debt has been reduced from \$23 billion in 1994 to \$7 billion this year. The goal is to make sure the debt is gone by the year 2005, and very possibly earlier than that.

Eliminating the provincial debt will free up \$700 million a year in interest payments. That's in addition to the \$1 billion a year in savings from debt reduction achieved thus far.

Albertans said that their priority for these savings is tax relief, especially further cuts to personal income taxes, as long as quality health care, education, and other services are maintained. The government will act on what Albertans have said, and it will now begin planning what a debt-free Alberta will look like.

To achieve that goal, the government will convene a provincial “Future Summit,” to be held later this year. The Future Summit will bring together people from across Alberta to discuss, debate, and determine a plan for Alberta’s debt-free future. The Future Summit will bring together Albertans from all walks of life to sit as partners in the detailed planning of the province’s future.

The words and hopes of all of the grade six students from Jean Vanier will be woven into the texture of those details.

Their sense of optimism will be part of that texture, the optimism that is evident in one student’s view that in Alberta, “the opportunities are overwhelming for young and old. The educational program is somewhat awesome.

Their sense of compassion will be part of that texture, the compassion that is evident in the young writer who said: “Things that could be done to make Alberta a better place include building more shelters for the homeless people.”

Their sense of confidence in Alberta’s future will be part of that texture, the confidence that is evident in the words of one student who wrote that “I think that unless you can invent flying cars, Alberta is perfect the way it is,” or the student who said that “I think in 2005, I would like Alberta to be basically the same as it is now because we live in such a wonderful place right now I wouldn’t want it to change or be any different.”

Above all, the government’s plan reflects the love of the province that every Jean Vanier student captured in his or her essay.

This love was articulated with uncommon wisdom by a student named Daniala, who wrote:

I love how it seems that the towering mountains watch over us, and guide us along the twists and turns of life. It’s wonderful how you never need to go far in Alberta for your imagination’s content; you can always find an adventure in the next bend in the road. Just the feeling of looking at the Alberta wild rose fills me with pride that I can only find here in Alberta. I’m proud to be an Albertan; I’d never dream of finding more opportunity or adventure in any other province.

What powerful words! To Daniala, to all of the wonderful students from Jean Vanier, to their teachers and their families, and to all Albertans, the government pledges to do all it can to keep your love of Alberta alive and your sense of optimism strong.

It promises to build an Alberta based on its vision of a strong and diverse economy, of opportunity for all its citizens, of a responsive health system, of an effective education system, and of communities that are safe and caring.

And it promises, as Cassie Milne requested, a party with lots of fireworks and balloons when this great province comes together to celebrate its 100th birthday in four short years.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you all.

God bless Alberta. God bless Canada. God save the Queen.

Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor then retired from the Assembly.

Dissolution

Hon. Mr. Klein, Premier, advised the Assembly that he had just called upon Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, and informed the Members that Her Honour had consented to signing the necessary documentation now effectively dissolving the 24th Legislature.

The Speaker left the Chair at 4:05 p.m.

*The traditional Motion allowing for the printing of Votes and Proceedings was not moved prior to the dissolution of the 24th Legislature.

Title: Monday, February 12, 2001