

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 23, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Welcome back. Please remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

I now call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and would all members and guests please join in in the language of their choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several members of the Air Cadet League of Canada, Alberta chapter, who are here today to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the air cadet movement. I'll ask each of them to stand as I introduce them, and then we can receive them jointly with a collective applause at the end: R. Bob Bondarevich, chairman, Air Cadet League of Canada, Alberta Provincial Committee; Warrant Officer Second Class Carolyn Halladay from the 395th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron; Warrant Officer First Class Cole Rosentreter, representing the 504th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron; and Warrant Officer First Class John Veale from the 810th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron.

Mr. Speaker, they have also graciously provided each member of this Assembly with this very beautiful commemorative pin to mark the significance of this very important occasion. I'm confident that everyone here will wear this pin proudly, as will I momentarily. Our guests have all risen. I would ask that everybody in the Assembly please greet them with the traditional warm welcome that this House is so accustomed to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also wish to introduce to you and through you Mr. Krishan Joshee and Ms Noni Heine. Mr. Joshee is well known to members of the Assembly as chairman of the Wild Rose Foundation, and Ms Heine is the newly appointed executive director over the last couple of years with the Wild Rose Foundation. They are joining us today to commemorate also a very special year, that being the International Year of Volunteers. As well, they are here as special guests to celebrate the beginning of national Volunteer Week, which commenced officially yesterday and will run through to April 28.

Mr. Speaker, the Wild Rose Foundation is our focal point for ensuring the strong and lasting legacy of volunteerism of which this province is so duly proud. They work very hard on our behalf, and particularly in this year we're looking forward to even greater things. They have risen, and I would ask the House to warmly welcome our special guests from the Wild Rose Foundation. Thank you.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as I was rushing in, they were so excited, they handed me one of these special commemorative chocolates, so I'm going to ask the pages to distribute those, with your permission, to each member of the Assembly as well as one of these special commemorative pins, which are on their way.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. HUTTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer Alberta will be hosting two world-class events, and at one of these, on July 21 and 22 of this year, Edmonton will host the world at the ITU triathlon world championships to take place at Hawrelak park. Approximately 2,000 athletes, 3,000 family members, friends, and officials from 60 nations will be converging on our city. Economic Development Edmonton has estimated the economic impact to be more than \$17 million. These games are going to be here in large part due to the hard work and energy of two individuals sitting in your gallery this afternoon. Sheila O'Kelly, the executive director of this year's world championships, and Brian Hetherington, chair of public relations, are standing in your gallery. Sheila has been a force nationally as a director of Triathlon Canada, and Alberta is fortunate to have these two individuals volunteering and working in our great province. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. HORNER: Mr. Speaker, on your behalf I am pleased to introduce to the Members of the Legislative Assembly four members of the Evergreen Catholic separate regional division who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. They are superintendent Mr. Mel Malowany, deputy superintendent Mr. Larry Hlushak, chairman Mr. Gerald Bernakevitch, and trustee Mr. Alvin Yager. Again, on your behalf I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present to the Assembly today a petition from the Society of Bowness Residents signed yes by 5,459 Calgarians from all the communities throughout Calgary and also signed no by 31 and no opinion by one. The petition calls for the government of the province of Alberta "to preserve the Paskapoo Slopes from housing development."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

This petition is signed by over 20 Albertans.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by residents of Edmonton, St. Albert, and Jasper asking that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for funds to settle his defamation suit.

Thank you very much.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented signed by 45 Albertans regarding the payment of Stockwell Day's legal costs by the government now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to determine legally whether taxpayers must pay for Stockwell Day's legal bill.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the successful conclusion of House leaders' negotiations and the subsequent kind assistance of your office, I'd like to give oral notice of the following motion, but before I do, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands for their co-operation in dealing with issues relating to the procedures of the House prior to this spring sitting and to advise the House that we have as House leaders agreed to revisit questions of parliamentary reform and legislative reform with respect to the rules following this spring session.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give oral notice, then, of a motion to be dealt with later today.

Be it resolved that to give effect to the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement, the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly be amended as follows:

- 1(1) Standing Order 7 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1)
 - (i) by adding *O Canada* (first sitting day of each week) on the line preceding "Introduction of Visitors",
 - (ii) by adding "Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)" on the line following "Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes";
 - (b) in suborder (4) by striking out "three" and substituting "four";
 - (c) by adding the following after suborder (5):
 - (6) When Recognitions are called on Mondays and Wednesdays, up to seven members other than members of Executive Council may make a one-minute statement of congratulations or recognition, which is not debatable.
- (2) Standing Order 49(2)(g) is amended by striking out "nine" and substituting "eleven".
- (3) Standing Order 80 is amended by adding "directly" before "prays".
- (4) Standing Order 83.1(2) is amended by adding "in order

to be" before "read and received".

- (5) Standing Order 114(2) is amended by striking out "February 14, 1995" and substituting "April 23, 2001".

And in accordance with the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments to the Standing Orders not be effective past the dissolution of the 25th Legislature:

- 2(1) Standing Order 56(2) through (8) shall be of no force or effect.
- (2) Standing Order 57(1) through (6) shall be of no force or effect.
- (3) Standing Order 58(4) shall be of no force or effect, and the following is substituted:
 - (4) The Official Opposition House Leader may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to 4:30 p.m. on the day following the Budget Address, designate five departments' estimates to be considered by the committee.
 - (4) Standing Order 58(7) shall be of no force or effect.
- 3 The amendments to the Standing Orders in sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on Monday, April 23, 2001.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Legislative Assembly today two reports. The first one is the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report for 1999-2000, and secondly, the report on university animal facilities for the year 2000 under section 52(5) of the Universities Act. Additional copies of these reports are available through my office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file four copies of the annual statistics of the Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board for the calendar year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table with the House five copies of a letter that I've written to the chairman of our Wild Rose Foundation, Mr. Joshee, whom I introduced to you earlier. This letter is being sent to acknowledge the foundation board and their staff for their enormous effort and their hard work in relation to the commitment they share for Alberta's volunteer sector. They are a government foundation – we're very proud of that – and we thank them for their work in this regard, particularly in this special year, the International Year of Volunteers.

Thank you.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly this afternoon five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission for the year ended March 31, 2000.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first are letters from Carrie Trueman of Drayton Valley and Heather Tarkowski of Edmonton. Both are concerned about development in the Bighorn wildland area and would like the government to designate this area as a protected park.

The second tabling is a letter from Linda Lachance of Condor, Alberta. Ms Lachance would like the government to protect the Bighorn wildland area, and in her letter she included another letter

signed by Courtney Clay, Ty Clay, Brooklynn Bystrom, Brennen Bystrom, and Braden Bystrom of Condor. These children are Ms Lachance's grandchildren, and they would like the government to protect the Bighorn wilderness area and "Just keep it for play - don't let 'our land' get wrecked."

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from the Integra Co-op in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre in support of keeping John A. McDougall school open.

The second is a letter addressed to the Minister of Community Development from the Elder Advocates of Alberta with a series of suggestions on how to improve the Protection for Persons in Care Act, particularly standards of care.

Thank you.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. My first tabling is a news story from the *Edmonton Journal* dated March 31, 2001, in which the Minister of Environment is quoted as promising public hearings on the issue of coal burning at Inland Cement.

My second tabling includes letters from five principals with the Calgary board of education critical of larger class sizes.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce one of my constituents, Ms Heather Miller. She's in the gallery today. Would you please join me in giving her the warm legislative welcome she so rightly deserves.

Thank you.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 34 students from Archbishop Jordan high school who are here to observe the proceedings in the House. They are accompanied by Yolande Joly and Lucille Belzil. I would like to ask that they please rise so that we could applaud.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 27 grade 6 students and their teacher Mrs. Susan Adam from the Westbrook elementary school in the learned and vibrant constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn about our government and to attend the School at the Legislature. That program has welcomed a number of classes from Westbrook school, and this class has had the good fortune - I hope it's good fortune - to be here while the House is in session and actually see parliament at work while they're studying about it.

They're seated in the members' gallery, I believe, and I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 56 members of Albert Lacombe school in St. Albert. They are here today to spend the entire day at the Legislature and to learn about the functioning of the government and the Legislative Assembly. They are seated in the members' gallery, and they are accompanied by their two teachers, Mrs. Tracey Bowes and Mr. Binette, and by six volunteers, whom I'd like especially for us to acknowledge since it is the International Year of Volunteers as well as this specific week is honouring our volunteers. They are Mrs. Edie Pitchko, Mrs. Kathy St. Arnaud, Mrs. Michelle Palmer, Mrs. Susan Bennett, Mrs. Russell, and Mr. Latawiec. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly 12 students who are visiting today. These students are from Japan, and they are part of a reciprocal two-week exchange. There are 170 Japanese students visiting area high schools, and in July 140 Alberta students will visit Yokohama. These students are in the gallery. They are from the Yamate high school in Yokohama, and they are accompanied by a teacher from Austin O'Brien school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Colleen Stepney. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce today to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ms Pam Young, who has successfully and very efficiently and very effectively and, I must say, very graciously served the constituents of Livingstone-Macleod since 1993 in our constituency office in Fort Macleod. She is joined today by her husband, Bruce Young, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm congratulations of the Assembly.

1:50

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a young woman presently completing her first year of social work at Grant MacEwan College. She's been completing the practicum portion of her program in my Edmonton-Highlands constituency office and has been doing a superb job of helping out those constituents who call or come to my office for assistance. I would like to thank her for the work she has done and wish her the very best in the second year of her program. Her name is Mary MacKinnon, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Government Revenue Projections

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Premier. The problem with the short-term approach that the government uses in their budget planning process is that they have no idea if the projections are sustainable and are thus stable. What has the Premier done to determine if the past surpluses are sustainable rather than temporary and just resource based?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance will deliver her Budget Address tomorrow, and I hope the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition will be reasonably pleased to know that the items that will be outlined in the budget speech tomorrow are indeed expenditures on items that we deem to be sustainable.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the question was basically formed around the revenue side. Would he tell us how he's dealing with sustainability on the revenue side, stability on the revenue side?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are built-in cushions. Secondly, we have a good handle. There are still thousands of people who work in both Revenue and Finance who are charged with the responsibility of forecasting as accurately as possible and providing the Legislature and the people of this province with quarterly updates relative to our budget progress. So all of these things are brought into play. None of us are absolutely, for sure, one hundred percent accurate crystal ball gazers, but we do the best we can. Fortunately, our projections have been conservatively estimated, and as a result of that conservative – and I say it with a small “c” and a large “C” – because of that conservative budgeting practice we've been able to generate very significant surpluses as opposed to deficits.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To facilitate long-term planning, will the Premier adopt the Alberta Liberal recommendation of preparing 10-year projections for fiscal and economic trends so that we can see a degree of stability that's coming in our revenues?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any business, any government in the world that uses 10-year projections. Certainly we have a vision as to what this province wants to look like after the debt is gone. We have a vision, of course, of having the ability to invest in priority areas like health and education and solid infrastructure. It has been the policy of this government to embark on three-year business plans, to stick to those plans, and to provide Albertans with a reasonable degree of certainty relative to fiscal planning in this province.

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

DR. NICOL: Continuing on that question, Mr. Speaker, when the debt is gone, will the Premier invest the surpluses in the Alberta heritage fund to increase this endowment and give us an income stream that will stabilize the mercurial nature of resource revenues?

MR. KLEIN: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker, but I can't even begin to anticipate what we will do and what we will not do relative to the investment of dollars that would otherwise be paid to the banks and where those dollars might go. That will be the subject and the sole subject of the Future Summit to be held in September, later this year, when we will involve all Albertans, including members of the opposition, to work with us to determine where this province should go, where we should invest, where we should not invest in a debt-free province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the performance indicators are not currently true measures of the outcome of public expenditure, what is the government doing to correct this?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that statement to be true, and since the Minister of Finance is more intricately involved with these matters, I'll have her respond.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Performance measures that are in our business planning process are reviewed every year by our standing policy committees. We try to make sure that we have realistic performance measures on all of the goals that are laid out in those business plans. They're debated here in the House as part of the budget debate, and at that time I'm sure that if hon. members opposite have particular performance measures they don't think are true indicators of success in various departments, they should raise that through the budget debate. We certainly review it on a quarterly basis. We look at a variance analysis, and we publish a quarterly report, that goes out to all Albertans so that they can see how we're measuring up to the performance measures in the business plans.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. We do on a regular basis.

My final question: what analysis does the government do when they put additional dollars in the budget and the performance indicators do not change? For example, more money has been put in health care ostensibly to reduce waiting lists, and in the end the waiting lists do not shorten significantly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't believe that statement to be true. I think the allocation of more resources – as a matter of fact, I don't think; I know. The allocation of more resources to priority areas in health care, particularly to reduce waiting lists, to increase diagnostic capacity, and to create centres of excellence, these dollars have been properly identified and well used for the intended purpose.

Relative to the specific question, I would like an answer to this because I think the answer is going to be contradictory to the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's assertions. That is the question as it relates to waiting lists, and I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've made some significant investments in the area of infrastructure to deal with the issue of waiting lists. Some tens of millions of dollars have been put in MRIs. As an example, in the city of Calgary the waiting list for MRIs has gone from an average of 200 days down to 80. The number of heart surgeries that we've done has gone up dramatically and has increased at a greater rate than the growth of the number of people requiring that type of surgery. We've been very, very careful in targeting our dollars for both infrastructure and for investment in people and equipment as well as those areas that are pressure points, and we have responded appropriately.

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

Electricity Pricing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 11 in this Assembly the Premier was asked about the anticipated cost of \$475 million for electricity deferral accounts. What he said was that it was speculative to talk about deferral accounts. It would be better called planning or foresight, because EPCOR has recently released

an interim analysis with first-quarter financial statements for the year 2001, of course, which shows that it already has over a \$95 million deferral deficit. That is only one quarter for one company. My questions this afternoon are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why he would say that deficit deferral accounts are a hypothetical situation?

Thank you.

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that still holds true today. I don't know if \$475 million is an accurate figure. This is predicated on what the price of electricity is going to be in the year 2002 and beyond. All we know is that all of our projections show that the price of electricity is starting to come down and to come down quite significantly.

Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal opposition who predicted that the price of electricity at the beginning of the year 2001 would be something in the neighbourhood of I think it was 20 or 23 cents a kilowatt-hour. Well, the rolling monthly average has been more in the 9 cents range. So, you know, they may be projecting and predicting a worst case scenario. I don't believe that to be true, but perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy has a better handle on things, and I'll have him supplement.

THE SPEAKER: I appreciate all that, but we're not going to speculate too much today.

Please go on with your next question.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. When the Premier said, "I don't know if an analysis has been done with respect to deferral accounts" while EPCOR refers to a regulatory review that will determine the final amounts collectable, is the Premier suggesting that EPCOR is wrong when it includes \$95 million in its deferral accounts in its financial statements, that just have been released?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they also announced a huge profit. Again, I would suggest that like any other company they have to do budgeting on a reasonable estimate of what their analysis is going to show for the years coming. Perhaps our analysts have some different ideas. I don't know. But I will have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of deferral accounts, that has been referenced in the financial statement, is one that's based on a change in business from EPCOR. They have, in fact, purchased more customers through the competitive process. They're a bigger company. They're a different company. Seventy percent of their revenues come from outside of Edmonton now. So one could fully expect that they would do what is in the charter of acceptable practices and state what they have as an outstanding either liability or asset, depending on how you view a deferral account, and would state it accordingly. I'd suggest that the probity of their financial statements is accurate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the hon. Premier tell this House how much the final deferral amounts are expected to be which Albertans will have to pay on top of their already existing bills after the regulatory review is completed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I cannot provide a figure, and that is consistent with the last answer I gave on this particular matter a

couple of weeks ago. If the hon. Minister of Energy has any further information on this particular issue, I'll have him respond.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, deferral accounts will change by company, by customer load. What we're seeing is the competitive market process in action, where companies buy other companies, where companies buy customers on the retail side, where they exit from other sides of the business. We're seeing a competitive market unfold.

Just as one of the hon. members from the opposition predicted that prices would increase and advised that EPCOR should in fact remain in city council hands, now they're concerned about the price increase that has occurred creating a difference in revenues. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. I mean, you predict something. Something does occur. In fact, one of the outcomes of January's move was to put deferral accounts into place. They're there. They vary by the amount of customers that you have as a company and they vary by the amount of customers that you serve across Alberta.

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

Inland Cement Limited

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the government decided to fast-track environmental approval of Inland Cement's application to burn coal rather than natural gas in its cement kilns in northwest Edmonton. Last month the Minister of Environment promised public hearings on the Inland Cement proposal. It now seems that even these hearings will not take place. To the Premier: why has the government broken the promise made just last month by the Minister of Environment to hold public hearings on the Inland Cement coal conversion project?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, well, first of all, the hon. Minister of Environment has not reneged on a promise. The question here is a question of public hearings versus a formal hearing before or a joint hearing between the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, perhaps even the involvement of the federal government through the EARP process, the environmental review process of the federal government.

The extent of the hearings. The hon. minister has committed that there will be public consultations, there will be town hall meetings, and there will be a more informal process to assess and evaluate the environmental merits of this particular project. I'll have the hon. minister respond if he wishes.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we're going to try and move forward.

The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: how can the government justify not holding a full environmental assessment including public hearings on Inland Cement's proposal when converting to coal means that 403 tonnes per day of additional greenhouse gases will go up the stack and daily emissions of such toxic heavy metals as arsenic, chromium, and mercury will go up anywhere between 30 and 80 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I have the hon. Minister of Environment comment, I will say this. I will make a comment in response to the comment made by the hon. member, and that is that he does a tremendous disservice to the coal industry in this province and to a highly valuable natural resource that has the reputation certainly throughout North America and worldwide of being some

of the cleanest burning coal if not the cleanest burning coal around. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that this is a fully public process. Before a company can have its environmental approval changed, it must go through an environmental review process, and this environmental review process is fully public. There are public meetings held. They've already had open houses that my staff was at as well as staff from Inland. There's a meeting this Thursday in Edmonton, I understand, and we will be organizing a meeting on behalf of my office in the affected community sometime in the third week in May – that's the time frame we're looking at – which I will personally attend as well as officials from the Department of Environment.

If anybody is unhappy with the ultimate decision that is made, then of course they have the process of the Environmental Appeal Board. They can appeal to and make their case in front of the Environmental Appeal Board, and that is another fully and totally public process.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, to the minister this time: why does the government believe that company-sponsored open houses are an acceptable substitute for full environmental hearings, especially in light of increased air pollution that will result from burning coal rather than natural gas at Inland Cement? What's next? A wine and cheese for a strip mine?

2:10

DR. TAYLOR: Well, quite frankly, we're hearing lots of whining from the other side, so it's not necessary.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have not substituted company open houses. I quite clearly stated in my last response, that the member apparently didn't listen to, that that is only one aspect of the public process. There are public meetings. As I said and if he would listen, I will point out that in May we will be having a public meeting, that I personally will attend as well as members of my staff. As well, at the open houses we did have members of the staff of the Environment department there to answer questions. They were very successfully received and answered a lot of questions from the people that were there. As well, the public has a chance to input through letters and statements of concern. If they're still unhappy with the decision, as I pointed out, there is another completely public process, which is the Environmental Appeal Board.

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

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Today the U.S. Department of Commerce decided to investigate unfair allegations made against the Canadian softwood lumber industry. There have been suggestions that the Alberta government hasn't done enough to protect the Alberta industry from these allegations by the U.S. softwood lumber industry. What is the government doing to protect this industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We do expect that the U.S. Commerce department will formally announce that they will be

proceeding with antidumping or countervailing investigations. I'd like to assure the questioner and members of the Assembly that the Alberta government believes that what is required here is a very thorough examination of our forestry practices, because we feel that these allegations and this decision by the United States are really founded upon information that is misunderstood and that they do not fully appreciate the way that our forestry system operates.

We will certainly respond to any allegations that are made. We will be responding to the overall American position. We'll be working with the federal government and the other provinces in making our case to protect the forestry industry in Alberta and all across Canada because this is a national effort. We want, of course, to continue with constructive relations and trade in this particular commodity, but we are certainly going to defend very vigorously our position in this matter. We have been doing so for the last five years, Mr. Speaker, on this particular topic. It is not something that has just been recently brought to our concern, and to this point in time our representations have been effective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the minister of sustainable resources. Can the minister tell the House what impact the United States' trade action will have on our Alberta softwood lumber industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to stress to the Assembly the importance of the forest industry to the province and the overall economic diversification plan of our province. It does create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in revenue, so it is a very, very important industry. Therefore, the province is fighting the U.S. industry's allegations because we strongly believe that the Alberta government does not subsidize our lumber producers.

The U.S. industry's actions against us are primarily targeting our province's forest management practices. In Alberta we believe that our timber harvesting is definitely sustainable and involves environmentally sound practices. Mr. Speaker, our practice gives consideration to wildlife corridors, watersheds, and fire management practices. The timber dues and other fees we collect together with the significant responsibility we impose on industry ensures a fair return to the province and a healthy, sustainable forest for Alberta's future.

The U.S. actions make a concern for the many small independent operators that are out there providing a strong tax base, jobs for many communities across Alberta. Therefore, we will do anything to defend that industry. It is very important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. There has been some suggestion that Canada should use the ample energy resource as a bargaining chip in resolving the softwood lumber dispute. Is the Alberta government considering this tactic?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, but of course one should elaborate. The North American free trade agreement has been a very productive agreement for Alberta and for all of Canada. Overall exports from this province to the United States have

quadrupled over its life, and to use one part of the agreement which is working well to try and deal with a problem where there is a mechanism to resolve difficulties, which I've outlined as far as softwood lumber is concerned, would I think be counterproductive and totally beyond the intention of the agreement that we have.

We have a good overall trade agreement, Mr. Speaker, an excellent one, which is now being looked at on a continental basis and also with South America. We want to go through the procedures, the steps that are available to us, and to fight this battle with all the information and expertise at our fingertips to make sure that we have a positive result with respect to the overall dispute.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Education Policy

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We must preserve our schools for the sake of our children and our communities. It all goes hand in hand. This is a quote from a parent whose words are being echoed by parents in communities served by small schools across this province. To the Premier: when will policies that attack and harm small school communities be changed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that there are policies that attack and harm small schools. We have as much respect for small schools as we do for large schools. The question comes down to that of quality of learning and the ability of children to get a proper education. The hon. Minister of Learning can certainly allude to the many wonderful policies that are in place to achieve precisely that.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I will say that the small schools are very critical to the scholastic environment in Alberta. As a matter of fact, in direct response to the hon. member's question, I am in the process of setting up a curriculum advisory committee for small schools because it became very apparent in talking and visiting the small schools that there were issues there that were not being addressed on the whole. So there will be a curriculum advisory committee for small schools, which will help us address issues such as distance learning, such as areas where there is not an economy of scale. When you have four or five students taking math 30 or math 31, this is a considerably different issue than when you have 25 or 30 students. So, Mr. Speaker, I will be setting up that committee to look specifically at issues around small school curriculum.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when will the minister stop hiding behind the utilization formula and change a community-destroying policy?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been no hiding going on, as the member indicates.

I think there are some important things to look at, as well, when you start talking about the utilization of schools. For example, with the cost of keeping the lights on, the heat, and all of those other things, if you have two schools and you can amalgamate them and have them in one, there is the opportunity then to transfer money from those operations into the actual class and use it for learning. Certainly working with the Minister of Learning, this is exactly what we are trying to do to make sure that the most money is going into the classroom, therefore giving a better opportunity for the students to learn, and that's our objective.

2:20

MR. BONNER: To the Premier: with at least two ministers present at the sod turning for a new school in Edmonton, will government ministers make themselves available at school closure meetings to explain these destructive policies?

MR. KLEIN: Was it to me? Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Anytime a school is closed, it's a very traumatic situation for the community, and we will be looking at each specific issue when it comes to a school closure. As I've risen in this Assembly before and talked about, there are some schools that are very logical to close. I had, for example, a school in my constituency that had 10 students, and five of them were from Saskatchewan. So schools like that, it made ultimate sense to close them. But we do look at every school closure. We look at it very closely, and we attempt to make the best decision for all the students, based on learning opportunities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Meningitis

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A father and son from Grande Prairie were both hospitalized with meningococcal disease. These new cases have raised concerns among parents and grandparents in my constituency about the spread of this very serious disease. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what the province is doing to contain the spread of meningitis in our province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to indicate and emphasize that we do not have an emergency situation in this case, but as a preventative and proactive approach we announced last week that we are moving ahead with a spring vaccination campaign targeted to Albertans between the ages of 20 and 24 who have not already been vaccinated, and that campaign will commence beginning in May. I want to assure the hon. member that we are continuing to monitor the situation closely. I should note that these are the first cases in the Mistahia region in 2001. In previous years there have been generally two or three cases of meningitis in that area.

With respect to the specific individuals, Mr. Speaker, I am advised that both father and son have returned to their homes from hospital and are recovering well. To help contain the spread locally, the regional health authority of Mistahia has provided medication to family members and to friends who had close contact with this pair. This is the most appropriate medical intervention in this situation as a vaccination does not become effective immediately.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again for the minister: why has it taken so long to initiate the provincial vaccination program?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did announce the program in February and have since that time taken systematic steps to ensure that we vaccinate young Albertans. We have had to order half a million doses of vaccine. Canadian licensing requires that the manufacturer go through a very defined quality control procedure, and that quality assurance program requires time. I'm advised that the half million doses of vaccine which have been ordered will be arriving later this week.

Mr. Speaker, public health staff from each of the regional health authorities are scheduling staff and times and places for this vaccination to take place so that residents can be immunized. Taking the time to prepare a systematic approach will ensure that we are best able to co-ordinate delivery of this important program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how will Albertans in other regions find out when and where they can be vaccinated?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities are working with department officials from the Department of Health and Wellness, and they are putting in comprehensive plans to let local residents know about the schedules for vaccination and the places. There will be used advertisements, posters, school information, media, and also MLA constituency offices, and I would certainly encourage Albertans to watch those places for information about times and places for vaccination.

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

Children's Advocate Report

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The most recent report of the Children's Advocate is a frightening document pointing out the government's negligence with respect to children in care. We're talking about a government that is the legal and, we learn, often irresponsible parent of approximately 13,000 vulnerable children. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why are children still being inappropriately placed in homes and institutions?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge children are not being inappropriately placed in homes and institutions. Every effort is made when intake occurs to provide the most appropriate placement. We look at the child and its needs, and the best interest of the child is always the watchword.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Children's Advocate report, it addresses that period up to and before many of the children's services authorities had received their full delegation from our government. They have through 18 authorities worked diligently to provide the priorities and address the needs within their communities, and for the first time, where they are not able to provide those services, those homes, that type of environment for the child, there are ways through their interauthority protocols for addressing other placements for children, which have netted very many successes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go further and suggest that the 13,000 children who are under the services of Children's Services through community agencies are not all an increase because of inadequacy by this government. In many circumstances children with handicapped children's services are only newly receiving information because they are learning more about what services are available, and in many of the First Nations communities they are becoming even more aware of the services that they can receive.

So, Mr. Speaker, that number that is cited by the hon. member, while we always look for reductions of the numbers of children that need government care, illustrates the very good and due diligent job in many circumstances in our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To this same minister: why are youth obviously still in trouble being dumped from the system at 18 years of age?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are not dumping children. Please believe that the amount of money that we have committed this year, last fall, \$1.2 million for children in transition – we are looking at 15 to 21 year olds – on their advice, in part, to find that best way to mentor them, to provide some bridging and funding so that they can establish themselves in the proper circumstance, to assist them as they find career development and career training that will help them to establish themselves, to look at other adults in the community who may wish to take on a mentoring role or to assist them as they move forward.

Mr. Speaker, many foster parents, because of extensions we do provide, provide additional support to those youths as they are maturing and finding their way around the world.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister undertake to report to this Assembly the government actions taken on the advocate's recommendations before the end of this session?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have, as you know, been reviewing the office of the Children's Advocate to determine whether or not we are serving Albertans in the very best way through this advocacy provision, and I would be very pleased to provide a response to this House about the recommendations that are already under way, that we have taken as a result of that review. I will also be very pleased to provide a response on a number of the issues that we're working on to improve that advocacy role in our society in Alberta for all children. One of the chief criticisms of this office has been that it addresses predominantly the child in child welfare, and many other children do not require intake into child welfare in order to need an advocate from time to time.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that we're reviewing. I believe that there are a number of initiatives that the hon. member would be pleased to know are in place, and I will be pleased to provide that report subsequently.

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

Adoption Records

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Minister of Children's Services. There is a large and growing number of Albertans who would like to see adoption records opened in Alberta. Adoption records are open in Ontario, B.C., and recently in the state of Oregon. One adoptee, now 55 years old, told me that the only wish she had was to find her mother before she died. Will the government of Alberta consider opening adoption records with a veto clause for those who do not want their personal records opened?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1985 the post adoption registry agency was opened in Alberta, and at that time registry with that agency was purely voluntary. On a voluntary basis both the child and the parent could register. Amendments in '94 and '95

opened it up to a registered search agency that could assist in a find for the child or for the parent so that they could locate one another, provided that both parties agreed.

In 1999 our most recent amendments gave an opportunity for a veto to be in place, but in fact if that veto was not in place on January 1, 2000, and for all adoptions heretofore, the child's record will be available for those who wish to seek it. One of the reasons that the veto was in place was to ensure that no child, maybe a nine or 10 or 11 or 12 year old, receives the record and goes forward to meet a parent unexpectedly or in a situation where the parent is not prepared. This is to honour current contractual agreements that were in place at the time of the adoptions, and for that reason, we still hold the veto policy, although I acknowledge that there are other ways that we could look at it, as they do in other places. My colleagues tell me that what did happen previously in those other jurisdictions was often a circumstance that was unhappy for both child and parent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also for the Minister of Children's Services. I understand that at this time you can release adoption information in special circumstances. To what situations does this policy apply?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Predominantly in circumstances where medical examination has identified what may be a genetic disorder. Then with very careful screening processes the minister under special authority may sign and release certain documents, but it does not always release the identity of the person who was a parent. That, again, is subject to the parent's right for veto. So it's usually when there is a health issue and where extenuating circumstances apply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Minister of Children's Services again. How can Albertans at this time access their adoption information?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps one of the things that I should identify is that today very few people take advantage of the fact that the post adoption registry agency is free. It exists for Albertans to go forward and register that they would like to have an opportunity to talk to their parent, or in this case to their child, that there may have been a change of heart. If people, the child or the parent, wish to contact the registry for their free service to see if in fact there is an opportunity to access that name – it may already be registered – the registry can be contacted at 427-6387, and information will be provided.

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

Social Assistance Rates

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta College of Social Workers recently called on members of this Legislature to debate in this session the issue of welfare allowances. Families on

welfare, mostly women and children, are faced with escalating utility rates, increasing rents, and reduced vacancy rates. Further, although the pay for the members of this Legislature increased April 1 to reflect the 3.3 percent increase in the weekly earnings for Alberta, the Minister of Human Resources and Development has put off a review of welfare rates until later this year. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister assure this House that his department's policy, reflected in Order in Council 5/2001, of assisting welfare recipients with energy costs will continue after April 30?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, thank you very much. First, just to make a comment on the preamble part of the question, if I can. Certainly one of the responsibilities of this government is to provide assistance to those Albertans who truly need the assistance, and we do it on the basis of a philosophy of a hand up and not a handout. So any discussion that would relate around assistance to low-income Albertans will always be within the context, then, the philosophy, that you are better off in the workplace or at school than you are just solely on assistance. So we'll provide whatever programs we have to put in place so that Albertans who truly need our help of course will get it.

On the specific question, of course, we are aligning ourselves with the rebates that other Albertans are entitled to, and certainly it'll be my job as minister to see that that happens.

MS BLAKEMAN: Will the Minister of Human Resources and Employment allow a public review of welfare rates now and not wait until the session is over?

MR. DUNFORD: As a matter of fact, I think the answer to that likely would be yes, although I'm not inside her head to fully the understand her agenda. As we speak, we are putting together a review of low-income programs and services to Albertans, and certainly we want to be prepared to deal with that before the next go-round on business plans.

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Human Resources and Employment give serious consideration to the Alberta Liberal proposal to establish an independent committee, which would include welfare recipients, to automatically review welfare rates on an annual basis?

MR. DUNFORD: I think the responsibility that we have as a ministry is to look on an ongoing basis at the types of programs that we offer to Albertans. Certainly we would accept input from any Albertan. This would include not only the member individually, but also, if the Alberta Liberal Party itself wants to provide input, we'll accept that. I think, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, that we have to have someone responsible, and in this particular case the buck stops here.

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

Inner-city School Closures

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This was to be to the Premier, but I'll direct it to the Minister of Learning. During the recent election campaign the Premier talked about the need for more support for inner-city children from disadvantaged back-

grounds. He talked about the fact that smaller class sizes might benefit these children, yet the government's utilization formula is threatening to hurt these very same children by closing the schools they attend. To the minister: what steps is the government prepared to take to ensure that the world-famous Alex Taylor school in the Edmonton-Highlands riding is not closed until all avenues have been explored to keep it open, including smaller class sizes and more special-needs and community programs for its students?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The time has come to stop thinking about schools purely on a bricks-and-mortar basis. What we have to think about is learning opportunities for our children.

The Edmonton public school board has gone through a very extensive process on combining schools to increase learning opportunities for these kids. This is very important. Alex Taylor school is one of the schools that the Edmonton public school board is looking at. A decision has not been made at the moment, but I have full and utmost confidence that the Edmonton public school board will be making the decisions based on learning opportunities for their students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Minister of Learning in response to a question I put to him two weeks ago indicated that the utilization formula will be reviewed, will he now indicate to the Assembly whether or not the review will be completed in time to save Alex Taylor and Sacred Heart schools from closure?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I'll pass that question to the Minister of Infrastructure as that is presently under his mandate.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is a very hypothetical question, and I think he'll just have to stay tuned.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, it was a very specific and concrete question.

Will the Minister of Learning undertake to work with parents, communities, school boards, and municipalities to ensure the vitality of inner-city communities and their schools?

2:40

DR. OBERG: Obviously, this is a very important concern to government. It is my job as Minister of Learning to work with the school boards. It's the school boards' job to work with their communities on that. I feel that the Edmonton public school board will come up with a very viable alternative to these school closures, and I look forward to working with them in the future. Mr. Speaker, as you know, they will be looking at this issue apparently tomorrow night, and hopefully we will know more after that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Library Funding

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. Libraries are an integral part of all of our communities, and this weekend libraries, librarians, trustees, and staff will be meeting in Jasper, Alberta, to deliberate and discuss libraries and their future. Many that have

talked to me are discouraged and concerned. Before I begin, I would like to say personally that I believe reading is to the brain what walking is to the body. I support, endorse, and use regularly our libraries. Mr. Minister, when will libraries see a much-needed increase to their per capita funding, funding that was cut in 1994 from \$4.29 to \$4.03 and has not been reinstated nor increased since that time?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, that is a very good question and a very fair question. That's why I began to address it about three weeks ago when I first met with the library representatives, and I will pursue it further again when I meet with them this weekend in Jasper.

I share the member's feelings about libraries. I think they contribute enormously to our overall quality of life, and that's one reason why I've already asked that the issues surrounding public libraries be on the Future Summit agenda for this fall when we talk about specifically the balance between economic and fiscal issues, on the one hand, and issues to do with quality of life, on the other.

I think the more specific answer to the exact question, Mr. Speaker, is that I will look at this issue now, and I hope we can address it in the next round of funding deliberations.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, why are we utilizing obsolete population figures, three-year-old figures from 1997, when determining our provincial per capita grant?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, it's true that the past couple of years of funding have been based on population stats that go back to 1997. I would tell the hon. member that we now have updated population statistics and that we will be looking at employing those. In fact, the Minister of Finance will be releasing her budget on behalf of the province tomorrow, and one would hope that it will contain some good news for many different sectors of the economy.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the same minister. As all other provincial jurisdictions in Canada except Alberta and Quebec have initiated legislative policies that disallow their libraries to charge borrower fees or membership fees, will the hon. minister consider taking the necessary steps to do likewise here in Alberta?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It's another issue, Mr. Speaker, that I've discussed with some of the library representatives from across the province and another issue that I'll be addressing again more fully with them when we meet on Friday and Saturday in Jasper for a major meeting of public library representatives.

I would say that the current act that governs this issue goes back to about 1930, if memory serves. Yes, it is time to review that issue, and I will address it, but I do want to say that the act also disallows any public library from charging an entry fee. So people shouldn't go away thinking that just because there are some jurisdictions in Canada that charge for borrower fees or library card fees or membership fees, that fee in itself precludes anyone from entering a library or using the services on-site.

There are specific things that we have worked out with our partnerships at the local level to address this issue, and I will be pursuing this much more aggressively in the next few months, because I, too, am a very large supporter of our public library system, as I know all members in this House are.

Thank you.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members. The government can actually

have five recognitions today. I'm advised there are only four, so there's opportunity for one additional one.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. Joseph Shoctor

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we lost a great Edmontonian, a great Albertan, and a great Canadian. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Joseph Shoctor, Order of Canada, Queen's Counsel, who passed away last Thursday. I believe the Premier said it best when he said:

Joe's contributions to the public and cultural life of Edmonton have left a permanent mark on the city. Edmonton's incredible theatre community owes a great deal to him, as do sports fans and others who work to make Edmonton a better place to live. Great cities are built by people . . . like Joe Shoctor – people with vision, with humour, and with remarkable abilities. He will be missed, and he will be remembered.

I would also like to personally pass along my condolences to his wife, Kayla, and his children, Ian, Marshall, and Naomi.

The world is a better place because Joe was in it.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

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

Volunteerism

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize that this is national Volunteer Week and also the United Nations year of the volunteer and to celebrate the Alberta volunteers who make so many things possible. Just think of all the things that would not exist or would be greatly diminished without volunteers: community leagues offering amateur sports and other programs and always there to watch over and ensure the safety and integrity of the area; recreational and cultural groups developing programs for people's leisure time, offering instruction and enlightenment, and many times putting in the sweat equity to build or expand facilities; youth groups like cadets or Baseball Alberta or the Youth Emergency Shelter or block parents. Social service or helping agencies could not operate without the assistance of volunteers. Think of Meals on Wheels or the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers or the Sexual Assault Centre.

Volunteers give us the Alberta in which we want to live. They make things run, they make things fun, and for many, many agencies they make it possible. Thank you very much to all the volunteers in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week takes place April 22 to 29, 2001. Organ and tissue donation saves lives, restores health, and gives hope for new beginnings.

Unfortunately, the need for organs and tissues for transplantation is far greater than the available supply. Last year in Alberta 32 people died waiting for donations. Everyone should consider themselves a potential organ and tissue donor regardless of their age. It is the health of the individual and not their age which is the deciding factor.

One critical reason why waiting lists are so long is that families do not know the wishes of potential organ donors. It is crucial to become an organ donor and that the family makes the final decision regarding donations. Less than 50 percent of Canadians are not

aware of their family members' wishes regarding donations.

The green ribbons we were all given today symbolize the promise of lives that may be saved and improved through organ and tissue donation. The Canadian Association of Transplantation, the Kidney Foundation of Canada, the HOPE program, and the Comprehensive Tissue Centre have been promoting public awareness of donations through the distribution of green ribbons across Canada since 1997. We hope all Albertans wear them proudly, especially during donor awareness week, April 22 to 29, and talk to their families to show their support of the greatest gift of all, the gift of life. Remember, transplants work. Between 80 and 95 percent of recipients are doing great one year after surgery. Please make a life-giving decision for nearly 3,500 Canadians waiting for transplants.

Speaker's Ruling Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as the subject being responded to by the hon. Member for Redwater was of such importance and significance, the chair chose not to intervene. The hon. member went way beyond the one minute allocated for this particular part of the Routine. One minute. As there are only four government members today who've indicated – and the government actually can have five – the fifth one will now not be recognized.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:50

Clear Answers

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 23 is Canada Book Day, a day when we pause to celebrate the writing of Canadian authors, so it seems an appropriate day to recognize the writings of a recently elected member of this Assembly, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine* is the best-selling book the member co-authored with Gillian Steward, published by Duval House, University Press, and the Parkland Institute. The book has been shortlisted by the Alberta publishers association for their Alberta book of the year award, having been selected from an initial list of about 40 nominees.

Given that the emphasis of Canada Book Day is on giving books as gifts, members of this Assembly may want to keep *Clear Answers* in mind as they purchase books for presentation to individuals and groups in their constituencies.

I am sure all members of the Assembly will want to join me in recognizing the writing talent of an Albertan, a Canadian, and one of our own, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Thank you.

Volunteerism

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I, too, am pleased to recognize volunteers in Alberta communities during national Volunteer Week. In collaboration with Volunteer Alberta the Wild Rose Foundation encourages organizations to host volunteer appreciation activities or promotions that focus on our volunteers.

Each year the number of communities participating in national Volunteer Week increases. This year 123 Alberta communities representing more than 2 million Albertans are participating. In fact, Mr. Speaker, for the International Year of Volunteers the number of participating communities has reached an all-time high.

While Volunteer Week beckons us to honour local volunteers today, we have a responsibility to do this year-round. An estimated 74 percent of adult Albertans have volunteered within the past year, so I urge all members of this Assembly to proudly applaud them for their important role in building strong communities, for delivering

programs and services that make the Alberta way of life the highest quality of life anywhere and for helping to ensure a strong and lasting legacy of volunteerism.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Air Cadet Program

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to salute Canada's air cadet movement as it celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Canada's air cadet movement was started to train young men to fly in defence of freedom and to prepare them to become air crew members in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Approximately 1 million young Canadians have participated in air cadets, a program that maintains its military structure, although the youth remain civilians, under no obligation to serve in Canada's military. Today's movement focuses on citizenship and leadership with an orientation towards aviation, where young people between the ages of 12 and 19 learn initiative, self-reliance, discipline, teamwork, and leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta boasts 42 air cadet squadrons, and approximately 2,917 young men and women proudly wear the air cadet uniform. In partnership with the Canadian Forces and local citizens air cadets provides wonderful opportunities for Alberta youth. Last summer six provincial cadets served as goodwill ambassadors in Europe, Asia, and the U.S.A.

I extend congratulations to all air cadets, past and present, and commend and thank the Canadian Forces, the Air Cadet League of Canada and officers and instructors, parents, and sponsors for helping these young Canadians.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to move the Notice of Motion for which I gave oral notice earlier.

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Government House Leader. The process would be that first of all you're going to have to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 38(1)(a) in order to move the motion. After receiving unanimous consent, then we can go to the motion.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of the House to deal with the notice of motion for which I gave oral notice earlier.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Changes to Standing Orders

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that to give effect to the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement, the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly be amended as follows:

1(1) Standing Order 7 is amended

(a) in suborder (1)

(i) by adding *O Canada* (first sitting day of each week)" on the line preceding "Introduction of

Visitors",

(ii) by adding "Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)" on the line following "Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes";

(b) in suborder (4) by striking out "three" and substituting "four";

(c) by adding the following after suborder (5):

(6) When Recognitions are called on Mondays and Wednesdays, up to seven members other than members of Executive Council may make a one-minute statement of congratulations or recognition, which is not debatable.

(2) Standing Order 49(2)(g) is amended by striking out "nine" and substituting "eleven".

(3) Standing Order 80 is amended by adding "directly" before "prays".

(4) Standing Order 83.1(2) is amended by adding "in order to be" before "read and received".

(5) Standing Order 114(2) is amended by striking out "February 14, 1995" and substituting "April 23, 2001".

And in accordance with the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments to the Standing Orders not be effective past the dissolution of the 25th Legislature:

2(1) Standing Order 56(2) through (8) shall be of no force or effect.

(2) Standing Order 57(1) through (6) shall be of no force or effect.

(3) Standing Order 58(4) shall be of no force or effect, and the following is substituted:

(4) The Official Opposition House Leader may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to 4:30 p.m. on the day following the Budget Address, designate five departments' estimates to be considered by the committee.

(4) Standing Order 58(7) shall be of no force or effect.

3 The amendments to the Standing Orders in sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on Monday, April 23, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: It's my understanding, hon. Government House Leader – and please just nod if it's so – that all hon. members have been provided with the motion as well, so they should have it in front of them.

Now, this is a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act.

It's an enabling piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, that does allow Albertans the ability to benefit from the ownership of their resource, and that resource in this particular case is that of natural gas. Natural gas is a commodity that has been developed in Alberta over the last 50 years. It comes in a variety of states. Of course, it has had the benefit of a very sophisticated infrastructure that has created a great deal of jobs for Albertans and a great amount of benefit for Albertans.

One of the benefits that does accrue to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this commodity is traded on a continental basis. It is traded throughout Canada, east and west, and also traded north and south, and it is the benefit of the free trade agreement, of the NAFTA agreement, that has allowed Albertans to prosper from this commodity, from this heating source.

Mr. Speaker, it is in the last two or three years with the advent of additional pipeline capacity, the ability to take away gas from Alberta, that has created a tremendous surge in continental markets. In fact, if we go back to pre-election days, pre-March 12, 2001, there was a time when natural gas would continue along at an acceptable rate of around, oh gosh, \$2 to \$2.70 a cubic foot or a gigajoule, the difference being a gigajoule is the metric system of heating and the mcf being the imperial measure. But there was a constant price, a price that in Alberta was in many cases lower than what it was throughout the balance of Canada and the United States.

Then basically with the Clinton administration in the United States we saw that natural gas became the fuel of choice for the United States, for markets in air-conditioning, for markets in heating, and created an increase in demand for natural gas. This increase in demand started to put upward pressure on the prices. The producers, by initially sponsoring a pipeline called the Alliance pipeline and by the good works of TransCanada PipeLines and Foothills pipeline, being able to meet demands and take away gas, started to export more and more gas to the United States. Then of course the price of natural gas has been deregulated in Alberta since 1985, and we started to see upward pressure on gas prices.

3:00

Last September, Mr. Speaker, natural gas was about \$3.35 an mcf, and it was creeping up through the year. But then as an effect of cold weather and an effect of low storage levels in great caverns around Alberta and in some parts of the United States also at low levels, from the period of September to just past Christmas of the year 2000 gas prices went from approximately \$3.35 an mcf, or \$3.35 a gigajoule, to a high of \$12.60 a gigajoule at Christmastime. That particular spike, which was something of an anomaly or something of a phenomenon – and we don't know if it will be a continuing anomaly in future prices – created a real price spike to Albertans, who live, as we all know, in a relatively harsh climate during the winter months. That created what we call a double impact of, one, the price escalating due to increased demand and a shortage of supply and low inventories coupled with the second impact of severe winter heating conditions. So not only did Albertans' bills go up as a consequence of the cold on heating systems, but Albertans' bills also went up because of the almost quadrupling of natural gas prices.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, there was a good program put in place by the Alberta government that delivered a number of energy rebates reflecting the ownership of the resource. Of course, everybody here would be the recipient of the \$150 cheque that was issued last November, plus another \$150 cheque that should be coming the members' way as well as all Albertans' way in April of this year, this month. That was also coupled with a price per household rebate of approximately \$150. Depending on how the gas distributor billed the rebate is how it showed up on the bill. That covered the price increase for most Albertans for that period. There was also a commercial aspect to the cost protection side in that the costs were shielded from the consumption rate to the tune of 5,000 gigajoules as a maximum, and there was a rebate of \$6 per gigajoule.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, and continued strong prices in natural gas pricing, it was deemed to be prudent that the government of Alberta would put in place a program that I'll call shelf ready, a

program that would allow the government of the day to be able to react to violent price swings, also noticing a potential increase in volatility of natural gas prices, at the same time being mindful of a program that should be cognizant of market forces, a program that should not tamper with the normal market process of buying and selling natural gas, and one also that reflects the fact that natural gas belongs to all Albertans.

So Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, is one that will focus on enabling the provincial government to be able to react to spikes in prices, to be able to react to giving Albertans a period of certainty and price protection during times of high consumption, which is primarily of course, as we all are familiar with in this House, the winter months, when we all want to put our feet close to the fire and keep our doors shut and practise good conservation practices and use the least amount of gas possible to extract the maximum amount of heat.

As with any other bill, Mr. Speaker, the regulations will reflect the type of program that we will be embarking upon for the benefit of Albertans. I look forward to debate from all members on this bill as to how that program should be appropriately constructed. It is one that we want to ensure shields Albertans from violent price spikes, ensures that there is a payability, if you will, by citizens of Alberta and some certainty as to what they can expect to pay for natural gas in months where heating costs are higher than what they are in normal summer usages and summer volumes.

The legislation is primarily enabling. It does not interfere with market signals. It allows the producers to continue with the free-market buying and selling of gas. It's one that also recognizes, Mr. Speaker, that in Alberta today there exists a great deal of credits, a carryover from the program past, from January to the end of April. So it's one that we would envisage as certainly not being beyond the capability of the government of Alberta to pay, one that does not become an embedded subsidy if gas prices in fact do go down to traditional rates, and it gives us, again, the affordability of reasonable gas prices in the heating of our homes.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that will allow us to develop regulations that put in place certainty, some protection, and recognizes that the resource properly belongs to Alberta, which is the result of a hard-fought battle, an eight-year battle by former Premier Brownlee, who worked very hard in this Assembly and in Ottawa to ensure that Albertans would be able to benefit from this rich resource that lies beneath their feet, that resource being, of course, natural gas and all its constituent parts as well as crude oil and other resources.

As a matter of fact, if I can just move for a second into that, Mr. Speaker, that resource ownership puts us in an absolutely unique position to reflect upon this new continental energy plan that President Bush and Vice-President Cheney are working hard on. It's a program that we would be more than pleased to share with other provinces who are starting to develop their gas reserves now, such as Nova Scotia and Sable Island, Newfoundland and the Terra Nova field, and other areas like that, as well as being able to work with important partners in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

So it's a bill that has simplicity as its guideline, has enabling as its principle, and is one that will have regulations developed in accordance with the general procedure of bill passage and bill discussion in this House. We look forward to debate on this bill, and it's a real privilege for me to be able to move this motion – or this bill. You can tell I'm just back, Mr. Speaker, after being gone for a while, but it is a delight to be back. It's a delight to be able to move this Bill 1 in this Assembly today.

Thank you.

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

3:10

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to what the Minister of Energy had to say this afternoon initially regarding Bill 1. My first response is that this government has come dangerously close to the gas fireplace. They've gotten quite comfortable, and I believe they have fallen soundly asleep.

I see this bill and I think that we must start at the very back, Mr. Speaker, with the Natural Gas Rebates Act, which is to be repealed on proclamation of this bill. This certainly is an indication that this bill is all about public relations and has nothing to do with consumer relations or consumer protection, particularly for consumers, whether they are commercial, residential, or industrial, of natural gas or its derivatives in this province. This bill, from my view, is unnecessary legislation. I have reviewed thoroughly this past weekend the Natural Gas Rebates Act, and I cannot understand why there is a need for this piece of legislation.

Initially when I entered the Assembly four years ago, I used to hear many hon. members talk about how there was no need for the Assembly to meet because if it did meet, it would pass laws, and the laws would be accompanied, of course, by regulations, and this was not in the best interests of Albertans. Albertans wanted to be free, free from all legislation, and here we are with a piece of legislation that was initially introduced in 1974, Mr. Speaker.

I believe we have to understand our history before we continue into the future, and in this case I don't see that this government has reviewed the recent history. This is only 26 years ago, and there may even be an hon. gentleman up in the gallery this afternoon that was part of that government. My history may be a little bit lax, but there's a gentleman that I see up there who – I'm not sure – may have been part of this discussion going back to 1974, when the whole issue of natural gas and provincial rebates was discussed and, I must say, discussed very thoroughly in this Assembly.

Now, we look at the title of this bill, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. Well, to further explain how a government can become comfortable and fall asleep, I was amazed to find in my research that this bill as described, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, first came to the attention of the public in this province in a *Calgary Herald* May 4, 1974, editorial. Now, this editorial talks, Mr. Speaker, about Alberta's gas plan in 1974. This is the gas plan that was put forward – of course, it's the Natural Gas Rebates Act – by the then minister of utilities and telephones. This is just one quote:

It probably should be called the "gas price protection plan" instead of "rebate plan," but whatever the semantics Albertans received the details of a good deal yesterday.

Now, this is from an editorial many years ago in the *Calgary Herald*.

Am I to assume, after a promise by the Premier during the height of the election that there had to be gas protection for consumers, that a diligent researcher on the government side looked this editorial clipping up and thought to himself, "This is going to save a bit of work," and away they went, and here is the result of that, this bill? So I say that this bill is a reflection of a government that has certainly lost its way and is trying to get the consumers of the province to look in another direction. When you look at this Natural Gas Rebates Act, you can see that there was legislation already in place.

Now, when you look at this enabling legislation, as it's been described, it already exists. Perhaps hon. members from across the way can during the course of the debate explain to the House and explain to Albertans why this bill is not good enough. What's in this little document that's not in the current legislation? With all the rebates that have been given out, millions and millions of dollars that now total over billions of dollars in rebates, there was no mention of

this existing act. I can only assume – I believe it's interim supplementary supply No. 2 that's going to come forward – that this is where the dollars and cents will be accounted for for our massive gas price shielding or subsidies.

There's so much in this bill. When you compare it to the Natural Gas Rebates Act, I just cannot understand why it is necessary to have this. I think the existing legislation is far stronger. It is far stronger unless there's something in here now. We're certainly going to have regulations. There are lots of regulations in this new bill. The minister in his remarks talked about an embedded subsidy and the fact that this bill is not going to interfere with market signals and price protection. We have to look, Mr. Speaker, at section 2 on price protection and what exactly the minister can do, and it is quite clear that there can be market intervention.

We look at other issues, and we look at the fact that history tells us that in 1973 the Energy Resources Conservation Board was to conduct a field price hearing on the price of natural gas. This was a new move. It was a change in direction from all previous administrations. Prior to that time the Energy Resources Conservation Board had not been involved in the question of price. Now, this is interesting. We are certainly going to continue this direction with section 2 of this bill.

The government in 1974 I believe had the interests of all Albertans in mind. They were focused on diversifying the economy, but they seemed to feel that Albertans' fuel costs would be the lowest in Canada. They also thought that Albertans through their government would start to receive a fair value for natural gas taken out of this province, which is fair enough, and I'm very grateful for the fact that this was accomplished.

They also seemed to think that Alberta's economy would become more competitive with the rest of North America and that it should improve job opportunities for our citizens if the natural resources of this province were prudently managed, not only for gas producers, who were keen to ship out of this province and in most cases out of this country, but also for Albertans and Canadians. The government seemed also concerned at the time that Albertans would and should have improved prospects of finding the yet undiscovered new gas reserves in this province, and they felt that it was an asset for all people.

3:20

Now, with the development of natural resources and the policy surrounding it, the government of the time had this in mind: that sufficient resources are conserved for the future requirements of Albertans and their children. Earlier today during question period, Mr. Speaker, we were talking about a 10-year plan, and it was a novel concept to some of the hon. members across the way. Yet this government was talking in 30-year time frames and from one generation to the next generation. Long-term planning: that's what that's called, long-term planning, not getting by lurching from one election to the next, not lurching from one energy crisis to the next. We're fortunate that we have billions of dollars in royalties so that we can buy our way, but we must start by going back and looking at past governments and some of their sound, long-term policies and some of the strategies they developed.

The government also said that the resources should only be disposed of at a fair commodity value and with adequate return to the owners of the resources: the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, over this term of the Legislative Assembly hopefully we're going to have an opportunity to have a discussion on what that fair rate of return is to all Albertans, particularly with the raw natural gas streams that are being exported from this province. The Alliance pipeline is one project that comes to mind rather quickly.

Also, the past government was very keen to see the development of resources and keen to see that it was directed towards processing in Alberta to the extent practical to expand job opportunities for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, what is Bill 1 going to accomplish here? We look at the rates of rebates. We have no idea what's going to happen. This is all going to happen behind closed doors. Citizens will have no input. It is, in my view, unacceptable.

Now, we also have to look at what occurs when a government seems to feel that you can naturally have market intervention when you want. You can call it anything but price protection. You can call it rebates; you can call it shielding. But what you need, Mr. Speaker, is to have a good, close look at exactly what could happen with a rebate program that may go wild. I look at this Bill 1. This could wind up costing us billions of dollars. What criteria will determine who gets a rebate? Who is going to decide if gas used for industrial purposes, including the petrochemical industry, is to be included in Bill 1? Gas used for power generation: are the rebate payments going to be for generators of electricity? How are the coal-fired power plants going to feel about this if there's a massive subsidy to the gas-fired generators?

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that equitable?

MR. MacDONALD: I don't know. The hon. member is questioning whether that's equitable. Hopefully my concerns regarding this will be discussed during the debate on this bill.

Now, we look at natural gas used as a fuel or for hydrogen generation and other purposes in connection with the upgrading of crude bitumen, and we know with the Athabasca tar sands there's further development there. How much money could be used by those enterprises out of Bill 1? These are very critical questions, Mr. Speaker. I think they certainly deserve an answer.

Is the so-called Natural Gas Price Protection Act going to subsidize compressor fuel for gas pipelines. I would view that as a subsidy to a compressor station. Gas also used as a plant fuel and to compensate for plant shrinkage: is that going to be included in Bill 1? These are all industrial gases, and the volumes of these would be really high. Also gas used for miscible floods in oil fields: there are large volumes of gas used to sweep through formations. Is that going to be part of Bill 1? Albertans are going to pay for this. It's already cost in excess of a billion dollars, rebates that Albertans received. We have to be very, very careful here.

Now, consumers deserve shielding, and they can be adequately looked after with the existing legislation. We don't need this legislation. It's simply not needed. There is an existing statute there. I would encourage the government to come to their senses, realize that this bill is not necessary. My research indicates that the regulations in the existing Natural Gas Rebates Act lapse in March of 2000. I can only assume, as I said earlier, that interim supply is going to take care of our natural gas rebates.

You could strengthen existing legislation. Perhaps there's something in this Bill 1 that has been overlooked. Perhaps an amendment could be put forward.

Now, when we look at the objectives, we have to look at what's not in Bill 1. Is there a mechanism in there to do audits of those companies who are handing out the rebates? Is it the vendor? There's not even, I believe, a definition of a vendor in this bill. There's certainly one in the Natural Gas Rebates Act, but there's not one in the new Bill 1.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, when a government, when a tired government has to go and fish through 27-year-old newspaper clippings to come up with a new name for what is essentially

watered-down existing legislation, I have to become very, very cautious about supporting this bill. I do not think it is necessary. I think of what people told me when I entered this Assembly and how it shouldn't meet because every time it meets, there's legislation created that stops business and puts unnecessary regulations on all Albertans. When I see this bill, I just have to quietly laugh to myself because there's already consumer protection for Albertans under existing legislation. This is just a bill to promote a gas rebate process that probably is not necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, might I ask the privilege of the Assembly for an introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: When World War II ended, millions of Europeans were on the move, and in the rubble that occurred, millions left Europe and moved to various parts of the world. One of those individuals who left Europe in 1945 as a refugee made his way to the Northwest Territories in Canada and worked in the mines and ultimately made his way to Alberta and ultimately became a Member of this Legislative Assembly. He was the first immigrant to have been appointed to a cabinet in Canada in post World War II times, and he's here with us today. In the public gallery is the hon. Dr. Horst Schmid, who probably is the best-known representative of this Assembly throughout the world other than one or two individuals in our history. Dr. Schmid, please rise.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

(*continued*)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had hoped to be pleased to speak in second reading on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. I really was looking forward to what the government's plans were going to be, as revealed in this legislation, and I think I was expecting to see some policy put forward. I was expecting to see some process put forward, and I am sorely disappointed. I was looking in this bill for a plan, and I don't see a plan. What I see in fact is a blank cheque, something along the lines of: trust us and we'll do something, maybe, but we're not going to tell you what it is we're going to do.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think the idea of this bill is of great interest to Albertans. Certainly I'm sure that many of us heard this issue raised many times when we were at the doors during the election, so I anticipate a fairly keen interest in this bill. I'm sure that many Albertans would like to be involved in the discussion through their representative in this Assembly. Unfortunately, it's going to be darn hard for Albertans to figure out exactly what it is they're discussing because there is very little specific in the bill. It's essentially not legislation but a plan for legislation. I'm a very keen promoter of plans, and I would keenly urge the government to actually come up with

legislation that tells us something about under what circumstances and against whom we are in fact going to protect individuals or companies with natural gas prices.

I think that one of my major concerns when I look at this bill is the list of circumstances that cabinet may make regulations for, two-thirds of this bill. So it's all about: we'll make regulations on things. We may make regulations on things, but nothing is actually put out as to what is going to happen, even whether or not there is going to be any rebate at all. In one section it says: well, in the opinion of the minister; and, yes, we might do it; and maybe cabinet will authorize it through regulations. So we don't even know if in fact anything is going to happen. Later, sometime, maybe cabinet might do something, but we don't know what, we don't know how much, and we don't know under what criteria. Nothing is laid out in this bill. I mean, how are Albertans to give feedback? Or has this already all been decided by cabinet, and they're eventually going to let Albertans know?

When I examine a bill, I'm looking to see whether I think this is going to be for the benefit of all Albertans, and I'm looking for several things. I'm looking as to whether the proposal creates stability. Is it sustainable? Does it promote growth? Is it good management, or is it encouraging good management practices and processes? Of course I'm always going to be asking: who benefits? Is this an equitable arrangement that's being proposed? I'm struggling to find answers to any of those questions in this bill.

The crux of what we have before us is the distribution of rebates, stabilization of natural gas prices for Albertans. As I said, I certainly had a lot of constituents expressing concern, because even then there was a lot of concern expressed around the imperfect process that the government had put in place with natural gas rebates from January to April.

Interestingly, I had a number of constituents who really were suffering because the rebates were not enough. With many of the older houses and the two-by-four construction you can only get so much insulation into the walls of those houses. Even if they had the money to put forward, to put new windows in, to do the caulking, to upgrade the furnace, to have the energy efficiencies that one can put into a dwelling now, there was only so much they can do with some of those old, sort of square box stucco houses. So for them the natural gas rebates were not enough. They were looking at increases from around a hundred dollars into the \$500 range. That's a significant hit: \$400 for one household to take. So the \$150 rebate, while appreciated, wasn't helping people. They still had a lot of money to take out of their own pockets and out of other parts of their lives and other areas where they would spend money.

Interestingly, I also had constituents who were laughing because in fact they could afford an R-2000 house. That's where they were living, and they were basically putting that \$150 rebate straight into the bank because their utility bills didn't amount to very much to begin with. So they were making money on this scheme. So my question about who benefits is a very real one.

What is the underlying philosophy behind this bill? If we're starting with the assumption that all Albertans own the natural gas resources under our feet, and I believe I heard the minister say that – I'll have to check the Blues later, but I was sitting here and I'm pretty sure I heard him say it – then the revenue, the benefit from it should accrue to all Albertans, not specifically to a corporation or through usage, but all Albertans get some sort of benefit from this.

Okay, that's fine. That's one way of doing it. It's possible in fact to go through and classify it by age. Certainly the \$150 cheques that were mailed out as a program called the energy rebate program, I think – one was mailed in November, and the second one is due later this month – was based on over 16 years of age and having filed a

1999 tax return. So there were limits placed on it, but essentially it accrued to all Albertans, just not those under 16, but we presume that they're being looked after by parents or guardians.

The other way to do it is to classify by family or by household, because I had a number of people contact me and go: "Why on earth is the government giving my next door neighbour's 16 year old 150 bucks for the utility bills when I as a single person living in my home don't get that kind of assistance? It's just me and my \$150 to try and hold down these gas prices, whereas my neighbour, you know, gets a cheque and she gets a cheque and the 16 year old gets a cheque. So how is this fair?" So already there was a perception of inequality happening there, but that program was supposedly based on the fact that everybody got this. I think that was supposed to be the gasoline refund. Everybody got it, but then somewhere along the line the government changed the way they were talking about that program, and it turned into this energy rebate thing. I think that's where people started to wonder about the equality of it.

If we are going to say that these rebates are given based on usage, then we're into a different system, but this bill doesn't indicate any of that. It doesn't say every Albertan is going to benefit from this because it's under our feet and we all own it, so everybody is going to get a piece of it. Nor does it say we're going to do it based on the fact that it's for consumption, so anybody that consumes more than X amount gets such and such a rebate. People in Alberta, individuals though they are, are very perceptive about perceived inequalities and discrimination.

3:40

On a number of times, both inside and outside of the House, I've raised the discrimination that's happening with high-rise buildings and energy prices. Specific to natural gas energy, I think any MLA in here who's got a high-rise apartment building or condominium must be aware by now that those people are being discriminated against in the way these rebates are given out, because the rebates of \$150 per household off your utility bill from January to April that was happening for single-family dwellings: that's not the way it worked in these high-rise apartments and condominiums. They were classified as industrial or commercial, and they were subject to the industrial rate of \$6 a gigajoule. Well, some of the condominiums that I had got their pencils out and their calculators and figured out pretty quickly that this was a significant difference. If they had been receiving a \$150 per unit in the apartment building versus how much they were going to get on the \$6 per gigajoule rebate, for one apartment in particular it was \$14,000 difference a month. This really starts to add up. It also makes people mad when they think that they should be receiving a benefit and they're not receiving the benefit.

I was looking forward to the debate on this bill so that I can send the *Hansard* out to all of those people that have been communicating with me and say: well, here's what the government is proposing. Do you think this is a good idea? Would you like to see it? Does it work for you? Do you see it as being equitable? I can send this out to people, but none of that is nailed down in this bill; none of it. I mean, it doesn't even indicate whether or not there is going to be a rebate. Well, we can decide maybe in cabinet, behind closed doors, and then a page and a half of what might be decided by regulations.

I think the third method here is by looking at how the rebate is given out. If these payments are given based on a utility bill payment, then in essence they become a subsidy for the natural gas users. I think that should give us cause for concern. If the program was to allocate payments to gas consumers, whether they're residential or business, the program cannot be an equal payment to everyone, because it is essentially based on usage. When it's

coming directly onto the utility bill, it doesn't even pass through their hands. You get a utility bill; it's already been deducted off.

So I think what I'm going to have to look to do is to bring forward the Dickson memorial amendment, requesting that any regulations . . . [interjections]. I am serious; I stand in this House in all seriousness and in recognition of the enormous amount of work done by the previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo in attempting to bring this Assembly to account, in that regulations that are formulated or put forward or proposed by cabinet should indeed be referred to the legislative Committee on Law and Regulations, where there's an opportunity for all members of the House to discuss the regulations, where it's in *Hansard* so our good citizens in Alberta can check the web site at www.assembly.ab.ca, follow along with the discussion, and give us all input on what they would like to see us doing.

I think that's critical, given what we've seen in this bill. I mean, four pages long and no specifics in it at all. We don't know whether the plan is to give a rebate to every Albertan. We don't know whether the plan is to give it based on usage, per household, per family, per usage of a certain amount of gas. Nothing. Nothing is spelled out in here.

One of the other issues that came up around rebates and discrimination for my constituents during the election was the concern about rebates that were received by a landlord being passed on to the constituents. I notice that in fact there is a clause that relates to that here that does state quite clearly that if a rebate is made to a vendor for the benefit of the consumer, "the benefit of the rebate must be passed on to the eligible consumers." That's wonderful. That's exactly what I've been asking for in other areas, but it doesn't say how that's going to be monitored, and it doesn't say how it's going to be enforced, which was the failing in the electrical rebate program and the failing in the existing natural gas rebate program.

There's no monitoring in effect and there's no enforcement in effect and there's nothing in here that says how it's going to be monitored or how in fact it would be enforced. It's actually in the legislation but with no process with which to make it happen. Therefore, I wonder how great the intent is that in fact it should happen. I don't see how it can here.

There are a lot of people that live in apartments. I think every single member in this Assembly must have an apartment building or two in their riding now. So to dismiss this as a concern of the downtown areas or the centre of the metropolitan areas that we have in Alberta doesn't fly anymore. I'm sure members have constituents that are indeed watching them to see how they're going to deal with rebates for them and the discrimination that this government has put in place as far as people living in high-rise apartments and condominiums.

I keep seeing references in here to "as the Minister considers appropriate"; the Lieutenant Governor in Council may decide to do things. Nothing is clear from what we've got in front of us. I listened carefully to what the minister's opening remarks on the bill were – it all sounded really nice – about why they wanted to do this but nothing specific that I could glean from his comments either. So I do invite him and encourage him to continue to respond to the concerns that are being raised and to outline with specifics what the government's intending. If we have constituents that do want to go on-line and read *Hansard* or perhaps go to the library and get the *Hansard* out to understand what's being discussed here – we have in the past been able to rely on comments and remarks made by ministers as they bring forward and propose bills so that after a time you can go back and say: "Yes, but you said in your remarks here that it was intended to do thus and so, and it's not doing that. So what are you going to do to make that better?" We have nothing to run on here.

Let me take a step back. This government with some innovation did put in place key performance indicators in their budgeting process. Now, for all the concerns I have about what the key performance measurements are – and I think many of them are inappropriate – nonetheless they were there. So how do we measure this bill? What are the performance indicators for this bill? How do we look back a year?

Let's go a year into the future and look back and say, "How do we judge whether this was successful?" We can't, because there are no standards in here. There are no benchmarks in here. There's nothing that says something will happen. It says: might happen, maybe happen, if we get around to it, possibly, perhaps. But even then it doesn't specify exactly what it's supposed to be. So there's no way to determine, and I'm wondering if this is just an interesting process of the government, that in fact they can never be judged on what they're putting forward and what they're proposing on behalf of all Albertans. I don't think that's a sign of good management; I don't think it's a sign of good planning.

3:50

Let me go back to the criteria that I talked about at the very beginning. Does this bill create stability? Well, hard to tell. I don't think it does. Is it sustainable? Well, again there are no specifics in the bill to indicate what it's doing to create sustainability. Can these rebates go on ad infinitum? Do they go on forever? Do they only go on if we have a surplus? Do they only go on if we have resource revenues above X dollar amount? Nothing is in there. So it doesn't look like it's sustainable either.

Well, then is it promoting growth? I don't know how it could be promoting growth. It's not outlining any way that companies or Albertans can be moving forward based on sure knowledge of what is going to be available to them in the rebates. How about good management then? Could we find good management? If I use a criteria of good management, can I find it in this bill? No. There's no information in the bill. There are no key performance indicators in the bill. There are no measurements of any kind in the bill. It doesn't say at all what it's going to do.

I'm looking forward with great zeal to continuing my debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2 Cooperatives Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act.

In general the Cooperatives Act 2001 replaces the current Cooperative Associations Act, which has not been reviewed since 1946. The Cooperatives Act 2001 is part of a movement to harmonize cooperative legislation right across this country. Generally, this bill provides co-operatives with better access to capital financing and meets the needs of new-generation co-operatives and other types of co-operatives. It also provides flexibility while not imposing complex rules on small co-operatives. In essence this bill will allow co-operatives to compete and grow efficiently in the new millennium.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to say a few words about the Cooperatives Act. As has already been explained by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, this is modernization, and it certainly replaces co-operative legislation that was initiated here in this province in 1946, as I understand.

Now, the government in this draft - it's so different from the previous bill, Bill 1. This bill certainly, I think, is useful. The groups, the affected stakeholders that are referred to, are pleased. They're not only pleased with the diligent work of the hon. member but also the consultation process that existed that led to the drafting of this legislation.

It's quite a comprehensive bill, and I'm cautious about dismissing it casually in second reading, but we have to look at how this will affect new-generation co-operatives, Mr. Speaker. New-generation co-operatives are value-added processing, closed-membership co-operatives. Now, this particular group, members of the Official Opposition, have had no direct consultation with them that I'm aware of, nor have our research staff. They first emerged in North Dakota and Minnesota and during the last decade in neighbouring states and provinces. They were formed by producers involved in niche markets such as bison or beans or dairy, corn or soybeans, just to name a few.

They differ from other co-operatives in several ways, Mr. Speaker. There is a restriction of membership. There is a higher level of initial equity investment, transferability and opportunity for appreciation or depreciation of delivery rights, and delivery rights are tied to the level of equity invested.

Now, the shares have three distinct features. First, shares usually represent a high level of initial equity investment to which delivery rights are tied. Secondly, shares embody those delivery rights within contracts which define both rights and obligations of the producer and the co-operative. Shares are transferable or tradable and can appreciate or depreciate in value.

From a rural development perspective the new-generation co-operatives are not a silver-bullet answer to increasing rural development and to decreasing the decline of prairie communities. I think school closures, regardless of how many children are in the schools, have more of an effect on the decline of prairie communities than anything else. This is certainly an issue that's not recognized by this current government.

These new-generation co-operatives are another tool that can stimulate value-added ventures in Alberta. Investment in a new-generation co-operative is much greater than a traditional co-operative. We'll just have to see how this works, but many, many different individuals have been consulted, Mr. Speaker, as I understand.

In closing I would like to congratulate the government in this case for a legislative review that certainly is endorsed by many, many different people who are associated with co-operatives. Co-operatives have been a fundamental basis for operating businesses in Alberta for decades and as such are part of the economic and social fabric of our province. We in the Official Opposition support the efforts that will improve the operation of the co-operatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

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

Mrs. Tarchuk 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 April 11: Mr. Hancock]

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

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have lived most of my life in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I went to school there, to Youngstown elementary and Britannia junior high school, and my children go to school in the community as well. My roots run deep in Glenora.

When I was elected on March 12, I was deeply honoured. It was because of the hard work of 126 volunteers. I would like to name a few of those today. They are Sasha Angus, Judi Kendall, Heather Klimchuk, and Cliff Tetzlaff. They were with me every step of the way over the period leading up to March 12.

4:00

I was not born in Canada; I was born in Scotland. My parents chose this country, and they chose this province. They came to a place called Violet Grove - and I believe it's in the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne's riding - and ultimately moved to the town of Jasper Place, which now is in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, once it amalgamated with Edmonton.

I am enormously proud to be here as the representative for Edmonton-Glenora. I have always loved my province and my community. I've considered it to be a very positive and influential part of Edmonton, full of new growth and vibrancy with roots that extend back in time to when it was the old town of Jasper Place. The west end is diverse and prosperous. It has a diverse and prosperous business community as well as a vibrant social network of people who feel strongly about their community, as I do.

While building strong ties to the great metropolitan area of Edmonton, my constituents have kept the small-town feeling of community. The community leagues throughout the area are vital links between these diverse and dynamic people. The local business associations of Edmonton-Glenora represent and promote their local members vigorously and draw in new residents as well as new customers and clients.

To name a few of these outstanding organizations. The West Edmonton Business Association has grown to be one of the largest organizations of its kind. Likewise, the 124th Street Business Association has spearheaded new growth and attracted new development to the area. In the heart of Stony Plain Road the Jasper Place Gateway Foundation incorporates community leagues, businesses, and individuals to make positive strides in the development of west Edmonton community experience.

As set out in the Speech from the Throne, safe and reliant communities are an area of great importance. Through community organizations individuals can work together for a positive change, and with some assistance from the Alberta government our community leagues are providing a place for people to come together in sport and leisure and at the same time build ties in their communities.

Speaking of sport, I'd like to take this opportunity to mention a sporting event that will take place across the river from Edmonton-Glenora in Hawrelak park. On July 21 and 22 of this year thousands of world-class athletes will be coming to take part in a sport widely recognized as one of the most difficult sports ever, the triathlon. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the world triathlon bid committee and worked as the tourism volunteer for the first couple

of years leading up to the 2001 ITU world triathlon championships. It is one of the most prestigious sporting events that this city can host. I am certain that Edmonton is prepared to offer its best and, as is usually the case, set a new standard of excellence. The event may not be as big as the 2001 world track and field championship, but it is nevertheless a great honour to be chosen as a host. It is also an opportunity once again to raise the profile of Edmonton and Alberta on the world stage, and I am enthusiastic about witnessing Edmonton once again outdoing itself.

I'd be remiss to not mention some of my new colleagues. As a recently elected member I have the pleasure of joining five other rookies on the third floor of the Annex. I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

I would also like to take this time to respond to the Speech from the Throne by saying that I look forward to respecting the charge placed upon me and conducting myself in a manner that reflects the importance of our undertaking. We have a great deal of business to take care of over the next four years, and I am prepared to take that task with devotion and propriety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, it is with honour and respect that I rise this afternoon among seasoned legislators and newly elected colleagues to follow a great tradition and deliver my maiden speech in this Assembly.

I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, on your reinstatement. Your capabilities are well known and are considered to be ones of a true parliamentarian. We in the province of Alberta are indeed fortunate in that this government has always carried out the affairs of the province with the dignity befitting a people of proud heritage. You, sir, have been and, fortunately for us, will continue to be a mainstay in that process. It is for this reason that your guidance has earned respect and loyalty from every member of this House.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize my predecessor for the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency, the hon. Walter Paszkowski. All of you who sat in this House in the 12 years of his service would know that Walter was a man of great honour, an excellent representative of our constituency, and a very capable minister. I'm sure his presence will be missed, but his legacy will stand in all the work he accomplished in his presiding years.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, our constituency changed during Mr. Paszkowski's tenure. His term began in 1989, serving the constituency of Smoky River. The representation divisions changed during his service in '93. It is, therefore, my honour to stand before you all today to deliver not only my maiden speech but the maiden speech on behalf of the constituency now known as Grande Prairie-Smoky. It is with pleasure that I take this opportunity to formally introduce to this House the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky.

The fact that there has been a change in the electoral divisions attest to the change in growth that our region has seen over the past decade. The Grande Prairie-Smoky region is exceptionally active. More jobs are being generated, and the growth rate is accelerated but manageable. Our population has increased by close to 10,000 in 10 years, and our economy has more than quadrupled the capital investment being placed in development in the same 10 years. I urge you all to come and visit. The area is dynamic both in terms of people and economics. Though we still maintain the same rural values and charm, we have a lot more to offer people.

The Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Honour the

Lieutenant Governor on April 10 dealt with many wide-ranging issues dear to the hearts of all Albertans. There was also in my view a real commitment to uphold the vision that was directed from the preceding speech in February. This government has maintained its commitment to providing its people with a high standard of living through some difficult times and is able to celebrate its productivity in prosperous times. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent on each and every one of us to practise and promote responsible fiscal management.

The growth we have experienced in the past decade has been due to the diversity in our region. Our location gives us the unique ability to access all the major commodities which Alberta has to offer for export and national consumption. We have oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, and tourism. It is an exciting time for Grande Prairie-Smoky, one that will produce even greater benefits for Albertans if we take hold of our potential.

It is from this note that I would like to comment on the commitments of this government to Alberta and how Grande Prairie-Smoky would contribute to the growth of this province in the coming years. It is a concern of my constituents that their voice continues to be heard by the government on issues that are important to them. It pleases me and my constituents that there has been a commitment to the vision of greater economic growth for everyone. The continuation of a sound fiscal plan will maintain the economic benefits that this government has achieved in the past few years. A deficit- and debt-free Alberta is an important factor enabling Albertans to gain maximum benefit through a flexible fiscal plan. We are pleased to live in a province where a commitment to keeping taxes the lowest in Canada is a priority.

4:10

The throne speech outlines some important visions for our province to base our priorities on for the coming year. The visions include many key areas that are important to achieving development goals in Grande Prairie-Smoky, important visions for health, agriculture, energy, and education. Along with defining what is necessary to obtain greater achievement in these areas, Grande Prairie-Smoky would like to point out that the forest industry is an important and viable economic resource in our province. The people in my constituency would like to remind the government that it is imperative that we direct a vision for forestry as well and urge our government to continue to pursue a vision for renewable resources.

Albertans would benefit a great deal by aggressively supporting our forest producers in their endeavour to maintain market share. It is important to pursue this market in such a manner that unfair and unfounded economic damage is not incurred.

Grande Prairie-Smoky produces a major amount of wood fibre for domestic use and export. In the Grande Prairie region alone the forest industry generates in excess of \$400 million annually, and there are approximately 3,000 jobs provided in direct and indirect support to this industry. This does not include the thousands of students who have funded their postsecondary education through seasonal work. It is a viable industry and one that has been part of Alberta's heritage from the beginning and continues to make a big impact on a good number of our communities.

The annual forestry show held to gather all those involved in the forest industry and those who would enjoy learning more about it is coming up on May 11 in Grande Prairie. The show demonstrates the importance of the industry to our economic viability and, as well, allows those involved to share ideas, products, new information, and gives recognition to those companies who have given back to the community in many different ways, companies like Ainsworth, Canfor, and Weyerhaeuser, who have supported the community and

its young people by sponsoring the development of a new residence for Grande Prairie Regional College. They support the communities they are involved in, and often you see them giving back to the people by funding things like community recreation centres and libraries.

Alberta has an extremely high environmental regenerative standard to protect the future viability of our forests. These standards are readily enforced and expected to be upheld within the entire industry.

Fire suppression has been extremely successful in Alberta since the 1950s, and it's an important concern for the residents of Grande Prairie-Smoky that the government utilizes all new information being generated about fire suppression. With the amount of energy stored above ground in the form of mature timber, government and industry must look for ways to prevent huge fires like the disastrous one in Virginia Hills. This is a great concern to the people of my constituency especially because of the current situation where there has been very little precipitation so far this year.

Using the methods of sustainable development and responsible harvesting to ensure our future is also important to our agricultural industry, which is echoed in the words of our Lieutenant Governor. The agriculture and food sector is a critical part of Alberta's economy, and it pleases my constituents that we have promised to continue to value its importance by making agriculture a priority. A significant portion of Alberta's land base is used for agricultural purposes. This means that the agricultural industry also has an impact on a majority of Alberta's communities. It is a highly developed economic sector in our province providing a large amount of revenue. In order to maintain agriculture as a viable business in many of these communities, we must continue to focus on the small farm, especially when trade barriers are being dismantled on a global scale.

Mr. Speaker, we have said repeatedly to Albertans that we will not fail our rural communities. Grande Prairie-Smoky is committed to making a positive contribution to maintaining effective and efficient agriculture alongside our government. It pleases the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky that the government has chosen to actively pursue these goals by using recommendations from last year's Ag Summit 2000 where our farm communities would benefit through investment in value-added production. With continued support of proposed value-added investment and continued assistance in times of unforeseeable disaster, Alberta's farmers are sure to benefit from greater economic stability in the coming decade.

With some of our traditional agricultural pursuits under increasing pressure, our innovative agriculture entrepreneurs have turned to alternatives such as bison, elk, deer, boar, and game bird ranching. I would be pleased to see this government address regulatory concerns to assist these farmers in their efforts to be a viable sector of Alberta's rural community.

Water management. A comprehensive water management strategy would be another very positive step and another benefit to future Albertans. Our water is becoming increasingly important in North America, and an in-depth study leading to a strategy is not only desirable but necessary.

Energy concerns are not on the forefront these days. The energy business appears to be quite healthy. They have healthy profits, but I must say, Mr. Speaker, that these profits are being reinvested to replace reserves that are being produced. The energy sector is not a hot item on international markets. There is still a perception of instability and rapidly fluctuating prices. Recent comments with regard to North American security of energy supply should help to refocus investment and support in this extremely important sector of our economy.

Infrastructure is also an important factor in the development of our communities. Better highways and roads enable the trade process to be efficient and bring greater safety to drivers and the general motoring public who are accessing communities along these highways. A project which has received tremendous support and will bring greater efficiency and safety to the Grande Prairie-Smoky region is the twinning of highway 43, the north/south trade corridor, which is to be completed by 2007.

As the Grande Prairie region grows, each year the concern for keeping the fabric of our community strong becomes more challenging. The people of my constituency are proud of their ability to maintain the importance of community throughout our past decade of rapid growth. The outcome is quite apparent. We are committed to helping our children with the most beneficial tools we are capable of providing them. This is why Grande Prairie-Smoky highly supports the scheduled plans for the Alberta Supernet. We believe that this cutting-edge project is an excellent tool to link all of Alberta to limitless opportunities and give even the most outlying regions of the province the ability to access the world.

Further in education in the Grande Prairie-Smoky region, from Grande Prairie Regional College comes a new housing initiative, a program enhancement, and they are in the process now of looking at the funding formulas that have been laid out for secondary education. They have a concern that there are shortfalls in qualified instructors, and the availability of alternatives provided by this government such as the high-speed Internet will certainly help in this area. Northern Gateway school division also must be commended for their effort in pursuing quality education linked with responsible infrastructure utilization. The Valleyview K to 12 campus initiative linked with community-shared facilities is just such an effort.

Alberta's tourism is a large economic generator. Many smaller communities in our province have benefited from the rise in ecotourism in the past decade. Smaller businesses have realized their earning potential by accessing this market. We have been fortunate to grab the attention of visitors and tourists who wish to access the wonderful recreation prospects we are surrounded by. Grande Prairie-Smoky has a lot to offer visitors, and all the information is available to our guests in a friendly and beautiful multi-use facility, Centre 2000, built to mark the new millennium. We will also be proudly celebrating Alberta's centennial in 2005 with an incorporated museum, which is already 90 percent completed. It is an exciting time for Alberta, one which we are happy to contribute to and to share with pride in the celebration.

4:20

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I see a bright future for this province. We are fortunate to have a wealth of resources available to us for our use. We have a unique position in Alberta, where every community is different from one another. Grande Prairie-Smoky believes that this province will continue to flourish, and we will work together to ensure that the concerns of our province are continually met with a fair address and responsibility. Our strength as a province depends upon our ability to work together and to have our voice heard. Our concerns as an entire province should be met within our country.

The Alberta advantage is not just about money. It's not just about our people or just our resources. It's about this land itself. Grande Prairie-Smoky, like all of Alberta, is a place that binds its people to the land, and a deep, positive commitment ensures our future and that of other generations. Whether you are a native Albertan or come to participate from other parts of Canada or the world, Alberta pride soon envelops you, and that is our greatest advantage. The combination is the key, a key we have custody and responsibility for, a key we must hand over untarnished to the next generation.

On a lighter note, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to work with the Super Six, although I prefer to refer to the third floor of the Annex as the Three for All.

Mr. Speaker, I have a volunteer story that goes along with volunteering and goes along with the business of becoming an elected member. We had a great commitment from a large, large number of people, of course like all folks that have been through this have had. One particular story I'd like to repeat to the members here. We had a gentleman taking care of signs for us. He had a little difficulty sleeping because we didn't have signs where other folks had signs. At 4 o'clock in the morning he wakes up thinking: what's he going to do about this? Can't sleep. He gets up, goes out in his pickup truck. Driving down highway 43, not the twinned part but highway 43, he stops and discovers he's got a really good place to set up a sign. So he gets out and he's driving metal stakes in the frozen ground. Another pickup truck pulls up behind him. Two gentlemen are in the truck. They roll down the passenger-side window. A fella says, "Have you got trouble?" "No," he said. "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm just putting up some signs, election signs for my candidate." "Well, can we give you any help?" His reply was, "Is either one of you guys a psychiatrist?"

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my pride to this House in being chosen as the representative for Grande Prairie-Smoky. It is my honour to serve as the voice of such a hardworking and community-driven people. I see a bright future for my region based on the visions and the commitment of those who live there. We have a lot to offer the province of Alberta, and we are proud to be part of the whole community and look forward to giving our best to achieve the visions and goals of this province.

Thank you.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, first allow me to extend my congratulations to all the recently elected members of the 25th Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. We've all worked very hard to become Members of this Legislative Assembly, and now is our opportunity to demonstrate to Albertans that we can and will provide the leadership necessary for a positive future.

Myself, I'm following in the footsteps of a man who has a track record of approximately 30 years in serving his constituency, namely Peter Trynchy, the former MLA for Whitecourt-St. Anne. He has left some large shoes to fill, and I feel honoured to have the chance to accept this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, it's with the utmost pride that I stand today on behalf of my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. This constituency represents a large geographic area of west-central Alberta and at its widest point is approximately 80 kilometres wide by 180 kilometres long. Within the boundaries of this constituency there are some 30,000 citizens who on March 12 declared their confidence in both myself and the PC government by electing me to represent them as their Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This, of course, was the result of the tireless efforts of my campaign team. We all worked very hard, first for the nomination selection and then for the provincial election. Teamwork has put all of us into these seats, and it is at this time that this same type of teamwork will carry this government well into the 21st century.

Personally, my election as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is a pinnacle of something learned at my father's knee. My parents are both from Holland, and after surviving the horrors of World War II, they emigrated to Canada and settled in Whitecourt, Alberta, in the late '50s. They knew firsthand about having their freedoms and privileges taken away from them and so raised their three children not only to respect freedom but to cherish it.

My father became known as Mr. Red Cross for his devotion and

endless work as a volunteer with the Red Cross, whether it was coordinating blood donor clinics, providing disaster assistance, providing health aids, or fund-raising. This was his way of demonstrating his tribute to an organization that provided many forms of relief to the citizens of Holland during the Second World War. His example is undoubtedly what influenced me to become an active community volunteer, and I have done so my whole adult life. I have served as a coach of minor sports, president of the Whitecourt Chamber of Commerce, town councillor, regional board member for the Stony Plain-Lac Ste. Anne health unit, and until this election served as mayor of the town of Whitecourt for the past nine years.

Now is my opportunity to acquaint you with my constituency. Whitecourt-St. Anne is fortunate enough to have two major highways running basically east and west through the length of it: highway 16 towards Jasper national park and highway 43 to the north. Over the years these two highways have been extremely important in the development of agriculture, forestry, and the petrochemical industries. These industries and the resulting spin-off services required by them have created some communities that are totally dependent on a single industry to drive their economies. Meanwhile, these same two highways have also generated great tourism opportunities in this constituency.

Besides living in the best part of Alberta, residents of this area have long enjoyed outdoor recreation, whether one likes to fish, hunt, camp, bird-watch, snowmobile, riverboat, cross-country ski, golf, trail ride, or attend rodeos, and I can go on and on and on. In recent years Whitecourt-St. Anne has been well known for its outdoor opportunities and now is host to visitors from all around the world seeking some of our sports and challenges.

In my constituency and throughout the province each industry has its own unique challenges that continually require this government to provide leadership and assistance. Investigating and adjusting our own rules and regulations to fit not only the problems of the day but also with an eye to the future could hopefully deal with many of these challenges. For example, the softwood lumber agreement affects our forest industry, large operation or small. Our agriculture sector is faced with low commodity prices and consistently increasing input costs. The resource industry, expanding at record rates, has to deal with environmental pressures, lack of a skilled workforce, and short time lines. Tourism and industry in my constituency will both reap the benefits of highway 43 being twinned.

4:30

For many years highway 43 has been known as the busiest highway in Canada for tonnage, second only to the 401 in Ontario. Currently it's known to be the busiest two-lane highway in Alberta, carrying the largest truck traffic volumes ever experienced. At the same time, many sections of this highway are famous for high accident and death rates due to the fact that it is only two lanes and that much of this highway has little or no shoulders.

Meanwhile, the twinning is well started, but completion needs to be accomplished as soon as possible. Land acquisitions along the route have definitely slowed this process down. It's my hope to work with the Minister of Transportation to try to achieve a more streamlined but still cost-effective method to advance this process. A shorter completion date would also help to accomplish the north/south trade corridor from Alaska to Mexico. A lot of people in my constituency call this the Canamex highway.

My constituency is composed of a sprinkling of many small villages and towns, generally situated on, near, or in between highways 16 and 43. Some of the more familiar names are Evansburg, Wildwood, Niton, Peers, Whitecourt, Blue Ridge, Green Court, Mayerthorpe, Rochfort Bridge, Sangudo, Cherhill, Glenevis,

Darwell, Rich Valley, Alberta Beach, Gunn, and Onoway. Many of these communities and some that have fallen by the wayside were settled near the turn of the 20th century. At that time this area was all part of the North-West Territories and land was very cheap. This was part of a great scheme to populate and civilize the wild west. The sweat and toil of these pioneers resulted in Alberta becoming a province in 1905. Their descendants also worked diligently, and all this effort has resulted in Alberta becoming the innovative, vibrant, and prosperous province that we all enjoy today.

This constituency also enjoys a rich cultural and ethnic diversity along with unique languages and traditions. Perhaps best known is the annual Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage that sees aboriginal and Metis people come from mainly western and northern Canada every summer to participate in religious ceremonies. Lac Ste. Anne is a rather special area. During the summer months the local population spirals as many summer villages are filled with people who prefer to leave the city and live near the lake. This results in a flurry of summer activities for all to enjoy.

Whitecourt-St. Anne has a very high senior population, so proper accommodation and health care are important to all of us. Good geriatric care becomes very important, but at the same time, seniors prefer to remain in or near their hometowns. I'm very proud that our government has recognized the need for new, innovative health facilities in a town like Evansburg and appreciate the importance of the new facility that is scheduled to be built there very soon.

Mayerthorpe is home to an alfalfa plant that is one of the major employers in the community. Like many other alfalfa plants in this province, they are struggling to keep open in spite of the fact that utility costs and other input costs are outstripping revenues. The former Whitecourt-St. Anne MLA and the former agriculture minister worked together to help this industry survive. It is my hope that I can carry on this cause through the standing policy committee on agriculture, to which I have been appointed.

Onoway citizens have related to me the fact that they wish to preserve their school building, which has stood since the early 1900s. Hopefully I can achieve this with some assistance from the province.

I have municipalities in my constituency that are concerned about inadequate supplies of safe drinking water. Others are faced with aged infrastructure that needs new capital. All this puts an ever increasing pressure on the municipal tax roll. I do have to commend our government for reducing the education tax burden on the municipal tax roll by 10 percent this year. It is my hope to convince all of you that we must continue to reduce this education tax burden on local property tax rolls.

I do have concerns about inequities in the property tax roll. Under the present regulations in the School Act municipalities that wish to blend their school taxes are in contravention of the act. Mr. Speaker, I'll use the example of the town of Whitecourt, where two identical homes, side by side, one owned by a Catholic ratepayer and one owned by a public-school supporter, would pay a difference of \$200 in their school requisition. I'm pleased to hear from the Minister of Learning that he is well aware of this situation and in many municipalities across our province. It is my hope that through the Department of Learning, with the support from all of you, we can resolve this inequity soon.

More generally speaking, I am very aware that many of my constituents are very concerned about the cost of gasoline, natural gas, and electricity, and there are ongoing concerns about the costs and directions of both health care and education.

Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned just a few of the many challenges that I know our government will help to resolve to make a positive future for the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne as well as for

the province of Alberta. I'm excited about working closely with all of you over the next few years. I'm also looking forward to working alongside my colleagues on the third floor of the Annex. We Super Six rookies are all energetic and dedicated and will do our very best not only to maintain but also to enhance the performance and direction of this government.

I will end by again thanking my campaign team as well as the 7,579 voters of Whitecourt-St. Anne who all worked together to put me in this seat. I also want to thank my wife, Liz, and our two sons. They were my champion supporters. To all the constituents of Whitecourt-St. Anne and to all of you in this Assembly, I promise to work honestly, with integrity, and to the best of my abilities.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly honoured to be able to speak to this House today responding to the Speech from the Throne. It is especially an honour this afternoon because this is my maiden speech. It is the first opportunity to voice concerns on behalf of the people of my constituency, Edmonton-Norwood. On behalf of all Albertans let me say right now that I hold this elected position to be a very special privilege, and in all my actions in the upcoming months and years I will do my very best to listen, to learn, to develop, and to implement ideas that enhance the quality of life in this province.

Let me begin by congratulating all my fellow MLAs on their successful election and re-election. I have not had the chance to meet everyone yet, but from those I have met, I have come to see that we have a strong team that has been sent to Edmonton for this 25th Legislature. I look forward to working with all of you in achieving effective results over the next few years.

I'd also like to make some very important thank-you's. First, I'd like to thank all the people of Edmonton-Norwood for putting their faith in me. I'm especially grateful because I know that Edmonton-Norwood faces many unique challenges and needs a particularly strong voice in the Legislature to bring those concerns forward. I want it to be known that I regard your vote of confidence very seriously and will not fail you. I want all residents of Edmonton-Norwood, including those who may not have supported me during the election, to know that I am approachable and open to ideas. As well, I would like to thank the hon. Lieutenant Governor for her clear and eloquent presentation nearly two weeks ago and the hon. Premier for setting Alberta forth on such a positive agenda and for steering Alberta towards an agenda with tremendous vision and ability over the next few years and in years to come.

Before I address some points from the throne speech directly, I feel it is important to bring some attention to the unique aspects of Edmonton-Norwood. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of my constituency is a visible history. Edmonton-Norwood is not a new area. It's been home to some of Edmonton's most vibrant businesses, cultural centres, and schools almost as long as Edmonton has been a city. A tour of the district would enthrall all visitors with the elaborate architecture of such buildings as Edmonton-Norwood's elementary school, Spruce Avenue school. Just over 25 percent of the buildings in my district predate World War II. It's truly a beautiful district to tour both because of these man-made structures and also because of the many parks that have been put in by city planners over the decades.

A second noticeable characteristic of Edmonton-Norwood is the particular ethnic diversity. Edmonton-Norwood is home to many of Alberta's earlier immigrant populations and their descendants. By

this I refer to the significant populations of people of Ukrainian, German, and British origin that reside in the constituency, but Edmonton-Norwood is also home to a newer wave of immigrants that have arrived in past decades, including many people of Chinese and Asian descent. In addition, Edmonton-Norwood has a sizable aboriginal population. All of these diversified backgrounds make it one of Alberta's most culturally active constituencies.

4:40

A final feature of Edmonton-Norwood that members of the Legislature might find especially interesting is that Edmonton-Norwood is close by. The boundaries of this constituency being not more than 12 city blocks from this Chamber means at least two important things. First, it means that it would be rude of me not to extend an invitation to all my fellow members to join me one day and tour the district, perhaps over lunch or during a break. Second, though it stresses how much Edmonton-Norwood is at the heart of Alberta, the geographic proximity of my constituency serves as a demographic barometer. If Edmonton-Norwood, not a hop, skip, and jump from the Legislature, is facing a problem, then surely the problem is widespread throughout the province. My constituency, then, is worth keeping a close eye on.

What I have said so far, Mr. Speaker, does paint a picture of much of everyday life in my district, a district made up of hardworking people who care about one another. Yet daily life in Edmonton-Norwood is not without significant challenges as well. I'd like to address some of these challenges as they relate to the vision expressed by the throne speech.

In the speech, Mr. Speaker, much attention is given to building safe, strong communities. One of the unfortunate aspects of Edmonton-Norwood is that in many ways it is not safe. This is particularly clear in the prevalence of prostitution that continues in my district. Prostitution brings problems with not just one criminal element. It results in condoms and needles and related drug abuse being left in school grounds. This is disgusting and dangerous and is not an environment in which we should be letting any children in such a prosperous province as Alberta grow up. Prostitution and its associated crime are complex issues that demand innovative solutions.

Certainly the fact that Edmonton-Norwood has such profound difficulties with these issues is related to one superlative ranking that, quite frankly, Edmonton-Norwood would rather not have. Edmonton-Norwood has the lowest average household income in the entire province, standing at just \$31,900 per year. This is a challenge, then, that demands innovative and dramatic solutions, at least one of which I would like to mention here.

The Alberta Avenue Business Association is striving hard to revitalize 118th Avenue with support from the city of Edmonton government, small local businesses, and other stakeholders. The idea is that improving the esthetic looks of that area will attract a line of consumers with different width and depth than current clientele. By changing the demographics of the average consumer, the idea is that the entire atmosphere will change, that a cleaner look will arrive with more reputable businesses, causing amongst other things those who perpetrate the prostitute trade to move on. This is not to say, Mr. Speaker, that this will resolve the issue of prostitution. Prostitution is the world's oldest profession. Its root causes are complex, as are its solutions. Support needs to exist to offer people alternatives to getting into prostitution, and support needs to exist for those who have gotten into it.

Yet the effort on 118th is one step towards improving the community. It is clear, though, that much more is needed to be done to improve the safety of Edmonton-Norwood. Provincial funding for

crime prevention initiatives and mobile community teams responding to crisis situations, as suggested in the throne speech, needs to be given to local police services to target these areas. This must be a priority followed through on.

Another principle stated in the Speech from the Throne was education, that it continues to be a top priority for the government, and that the government will increase funding to school boards to help improve student learning, particularly at the early grade levels. Edmonton-Norwood is one constituency that could benefit enormously. By following through on this commitment, one place that funding could go would be to reinforce and expand the hot lunch programs at schools. Common sense tells us that a child who is hungry simply will not be able to concentrate, and other efforts are wasted on them if food is not provided. Unfortunately, there continues to be many students in my district whose families simply cannot afford to feed them properly. This is an ideal opportunity for the government to step in and make an effective difference.

Another place funding could go would be to reinforce or expand funding for the DARE program. This drug abuse resistance program provides children with the information and skills that they need to live drug free and violence free. It's been proven it makes a difference, but as I've been told many times by my constituents, with a little more funding it could do so much more.

The third point addressed in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, was to continue to help protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. Well, there is one group in particular in my riding that needs that support, the support to cover energy price increases in general. That group is seniors. Many are living on a fixed income that they earned by being hard working and contributing to Alberta all their lives. Now they are faced with energy bills that have the potential to inflate substantially while their incomes remain fixed. To say the least, we owe our seniors something for what they have given to this province. In the name of equality I suggest that special action be taken for the most vulnerable group.

So crime prevention programs; improve education at schools; protection, especially for seniors, from energy price spikes: these constituent priorities articulated in the throne speech need to be followed through in my constituency.

I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, a little information about myself. Perhaps my outlook on life and my vision of how Alberta might better itself in the coming years is best expressed in a little information from when I was young. I grew up on a small farm outside High Prairie. We farmed little by little. We picked roots and drove tractors and did the whole thing. The machinery we used was older stuff, and eventually we upgraded. When I was 18, I kind of had enough of that and went to work for a fella. I worked for him all summer long. I didn't take any wage. I was driving a Kenworth truck. We kind of had a plan that I was going to own this truck eventually, so slowly I started putting new tires on it, as I was driving for him, and getting this fixed and that fixed.

Fall came along, and he wanted \$25,000 for the truck. I had saved \$10,000 of my own throughout the years, and I already had \$10,000 in equity built into this truck from not drawing wages all summer. So I came home one day with this truck, and I'm peeling off the other guy's name from the door and putting mine on. My dad comes to me and says, "What are you doing?" I said "Well, I'm changing the name on this truck to mine." He said, "Well, you can't do that." I said: "Why not? I own it." "Geez," he said, "you can't just drive for a couple of months and go into business on your own like that." I was 18 years old at the time. I said, "Well, why not?" He said, "You should have come home so we could discuss these things." I said: "Dad, I don't have time. I've got to work in the morning in Red Earth. We have a lease job to pack." He said, "Well, man,

what if this? What if that?" I said: "Well, you know, I don't have a choice. I'm definitely not going to farm any longer. I like this trucking thing."

So that's how I started in it, slowly of course. You know, sometimes you can't buy a job, so I wanted to see what everybody else was doing. This guy had a hoe. Well, okay, how do you get a hoe? Of course, you get into debt and so on and so forth.

Anyway it's a lot about risk, it's a lot about management, it's a lot about planning ahead, and that's what attracted me to the government, how they plan ahead. Different hon. members have told me that the government's vision is 25 to 30 years of planning. That is so important. I mean, that's how you build a province, and you can see the fruits of it. We're coming in halfway through the profits of hardworking Albertans, the hardworking Alberta government, and it's good to see. It's a little bit easier. The momentum is there. You know, that's how we carry on as a government and as a province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest a new area that this government has not yet touched on so far as I know but is a particular interest of mine and the direction I would like to see the government go in. I'm not trying to bring legislation in, but it's my belief the government should be assisting young people with home ownership. There are many, many hardworking young families that are responsible for paying rent on time. They find it very, very difficult to own a house. It seems like when they save a few dollars, either the insurance is due or it's Christmastime. There's always something chewing away at their little \$2,000 or \$3,000 nest egg. I think we could somehow see a way in the kindness of our hearts and our purse strings to assist these young people with home ownership.

4:50

One initiative: if the payments are made on time over a period of 10 years, forgive 5 percent. It's only \$5,000 on a modest home. Forgive it, and the children can go to and from school saying: yeah, this is our house. The parents can go to and from work saying: this is our house. The benefits would be so enormous that you really couldn't put a dollar figure on it, because social life and social aspects – you really can't put money on those things. It just carries on forever and forever.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, I would just like to thank everybody. I hope that God will be with us all. We continue to seek His guidance and His direction, and with the Almighty looking upon us, we cannot make a mistake.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new member of the 25th Legislature I'd also like to rise on the floor and give my maiden speech, or my maiden address, as a response to the throne speech. I was very impressed when the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor gave the throne speech, because I also felt her sincerity, which has been remarked upon many times in here. I think the part that touched me the most was as she headed towards the end of her speech, when she said, "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you all," and then she said, "God bless Alberta." For a moment she was choked up, and that really struck a chord in me, because I thought: she loves this province. And you know what? I love this province. It touched me because I realized that the vision was built upon loving a province, and I thought: what an important thing to have in a Lieutenant Governor. How proud I was at that moment to be in this Legislature.

I'd also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and your colleagues for the wonderful job that you do. As I was considering who we should

pick for Speaker, I was reminded of the thousands of basketball games that I've attended as a mother of four teenage boys and the many times I've tried to, you know, act with decorum and not get out of control at those games. Then we had an interesting thing happen in our family. My children decided that in order to earn extra income, they would become referees themselves. So they went to referee school, and they learned to be referees. I learned what a different experience it was to sit in a gymnasium as the mother of the referee rather than as the mother of a player and how much I resented those parents who couldn't seem to control themselves at that time. I appreciate the decorum that you guys exhibit in this House and how you help and aid us in trying to get the work done in this House, so thank you very much for that.

You also mentioned in your response to the throne speech that there were two members of this House that were not the first generation to enter this House, and I'm really proud to be one of those. I am the daughter-in-law of the former hon. Member for Cardston, Jack Ady, who was in this House for 12 years. [applause] Thank you.

As you can imagine, on our family vacations the conversation was perhaps a bit different than other people's family vacations and Christmas holidays. As Jack served in this Legislature, many times he would talk about the vision of this Legislature, particularly after the first four years, and how concerned he was with the debt and the deficit that were growing in the province and how he was worried for his children and his grandchildren, whether there would be a future in this province for them and whether they would be able to turn over, you know, the kind of future for them that he was hoping for.

After four years in the Legislature he and his colleagues with vision and, I think, courage advanced an idea and a plan where this Legislature would become fiscally responsible. I think that took courage. A lot of people say today that Alberta is in the position that it's in because they've had high oil and natural gas prices, but I'm here to say that when they began that plan, it was not that way. It was during tougher times. We were just coming out of an energy recession in this province, and I remember it very distinctly, because we were just coming out of university ourselves. I was impressed that they had the courage to stand tough and to do the hard things that needed to be done in this Legislature in order to create the kind of future that Alberta has today. Jack would often say that he was worried and wanted to be able to pass on things to his children and his grandchildren. I particularly was thankful for that since he was talking about my children. I think they've done a fabulous job of that, and I commend the past Legislatures for the position that this province is in today.

Part of the Alberta advantage I think is synonymous with the Calgary-Shaw constituency, and the reason that I think it's synonymous – and I know many of you have stood and talked about how you've come from the best constituency, but I know it's because you've never visited Calgary-Shaw, so I go ahead and let you be a little ignorant in that area.

I'd like to describe to you the Calgary-Shaw constituency. I was reading the maiden speech of Jim Dinning, who was the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw back in 1986. At that time he described the Calgary-Shaw constituency as three subdivisions and a cow pasture. Well, I'm here to tell you that we've come a long way, baby. At this time the Calgary-Shaw constituency is the largest in the province.

Now, I know I have rural colleagues in here, particularly from Whitecourt-St. Anne, that will tell you that they're large. Well, physically they are large. I always say that it only takes me 15 minutes to drive across my constituency from one end to the other, but if you were to drive across that constituency, you would go past

80,000 constituents. When you think that the average size of a constituency is 30,000 people, we're pretty large down south of Fish Creek these days, and we have come a long way, baby.

There are now 15 subdivisions south of Fish Creek park, and if you looked at the city of Calgary and imagined a large provincial park that stretched from the east to the west, we're everything that is south of that park until you hit the city limits, 15 subdivisions with two new subdivisions just being brought on line at this time.

At this point in time, because of the Alberta advantage, this particular constituency has grown by 40 percent since the last election, 40 percent in four years. That's a lot of growth quite quickly. As I was going to the doors of those some 80,000 people, it was amazing to me how supportive they were of this government. In fact, in this last past election – and some say it's because I have the most people that we were the highest in the province, but we also had the highest percentage of voters that supported this government. As I went door to door, they expressed the same concerns as I've heard in this House before. They wanted there to be strong health care. They wanted a good education system. They wanted there to be a future for their children. But the main concern of the Calgary-Shaw constituency – well, there were three. They were infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure, all three.

If you were to come to the Calgary-Shaw constituency, you would see wonderful subdivisions and strong families in those subdivisions. You would see very productive people, but they lack just a few things. They lack roads. If you were to come to the Calgary-Shaw constituency, we have basically two major feeders in. One is the Deerfoot and one is, of course, highway 2, or we call it in the city of Calgary the Macleod Trail.

Now, the Deerfoot is on the east side of my constituency, but if you were to come to the west side and see what Macleod Trail can become in the morning, you would understand what gridlock looks like. Basically, we have the problem that we're trying to transport all our kids to school across that park and all the workers across the park with only one major feeder across at this point in time. It's of deep concern to us because – and I always say this – if you were to start to have your chest tighten and your arm go numb at the wrong time of day in the Calgary-Shaw constituency, you would have difficulty trying to access help.

One of the things that's happening to us at this point in time is that they're extending the Deerfoot Trail, which we thank government for, and they're also extending the LRT, which is also very helpful. But at the time they decided to extend the Deerfoot Trail, they thought, well, it would take all the trucks off highway 2 as it headed through the city. By the time that Deerfoot Trail expansion is complete, the same number of cars will now be traveling up Macleod Trail because of the growth. In those subdivisions that I'm a part of, we now have four building caps in place because there is not the infrastructure in place in order to build the homes. So while a lot of people are moving to access the Alberta advantage and the homes are there, we don't have the infrastructure, and it's a deep concern for the residents of Calgary-Shaw.

Another concern, of course, is schooling. If you were to come to Calgary-Shaw – and let's compare it to something like a city the size of Red Deer. We're about 20, 25 percent larger than the city of Red Deer. We're like a city unto ourselves south of Fish Creek park. We have basically seven public schools in that area. If you were to go to Red Deer, I think they have 18 public schools with 20 percent less people in them. So you can begin to see the problem that we're experiencing. We can't all move to Red Deer, so we have to deal with the situation down in Calgary-Shaw.

5:00

Basically, at this point in time we have almost 2,000 high school students that are now trying to get to high school. Now, some would

say that a lot of kids ride the bus to high school, and that's true. It is true, but the reality for our kids is that some of them are on those buses – actually, they take a bus, a train, and a bus to get to their high schools now – for almost an hour and a half. [interjections] It does, and some would say that, well, in rural Alberta people travel far. It is not the distance that we're traveling in miles or kilometres. It's the amount of time it takes to get through traffic that you have to consider when you look at south of Fish Creek, and it is taking these kids a long time. In fact, that's on the good days. On the days when we have a snowfall or we have, God forbid, an accident on Macleod Trail, we're finding that most kids cannot get to school in the morning. They're basically having to turn around and go home and wait till afternoon, as well as those people trying to access employment. We go to immediate gridlock in south of Fish Creek, so again infrastructure problems.

Now, I do have some good news. I do have some good news: they are about to announce an emergency ward down in south Calgary and also, hopefully within the next two months, a site for a new hospital in south Calgary. I'm reminded of a firefighter that I spoke to in Calgary-Shaw who talked about a child who was choking on a hot dog – it plugged the throat – and trying to get up to the Rockyview hospital during heavy traffic times. The child would gasp and gasp and froth at the mouth until he'd pass out, and basically then it would clear the airways enough that he could come to, to choke again as he went on trying to get to the Rockyview hospital. The firefighter said that they were driving the wrong way up 14th Street, anything and everything to try and access help.

The difficulty is not distance. It's the idea that we now are a large city, and there are a lot of people living south of Fish Creek. I again remind you: 80,000 people.

The people that live in Calgary-Shaw constituency are also marvelous people, and I just want to give you three really quick examples. I think of Wilf Mack, not the most patient man – he's 74 years old, and he's often been known to write letters to this Legislature, sometimes not even very complimentary letters – but a man that deeply cares about this province and about government. I think of him because I spent almost eight weeks door-knocking, and he would at 74 years of age door-knock with me up to seven hours a day. It didn't matter if it was 30 below. It didn't matter if there was ice on the roads. Even on those days when I'd say, "I don't know if we can do this," he'd say, "You can do it; we can do it," and he'd pull me along. I'm hoping that at 74 I can walk an hour, let alone seven hours. So Wilf Mack is a great example of the kind of people that live in Calgary-Shaw.

Next I think of the children of Janet Johnstone school, which I visited last week. Seventy-five grade 6ers. They grilled me. They had 22 questions, and if I dared step out of line on those questions, they let me know right away. As I was reading the letters that they sent me afterwards, I thought: you know what? The future of this province is in good hands. These were bright, capable children, very interested in what we're doing in here and wanting to know what lobbying looks like and those types of questions. As one boy wrote and told me: thanks for teaching me about lobbying; now I'll be lobbying my mother for more allowance. So they're very bright, quick children.

The final example of the Calgary-Shaw constituency that I'd like to point out today is the South Calgary High School Committee. It's a committee that's been working for two years trying to bring a high school to south Calgary. They've spent countless hours. I remember some 1,200 letters coming into Infrastructure last year from people in the Calgary-Shaw constituency. In particular, this high school committee has put in countless hours, many of whose children will never see the high school, but that's not why they do it.

They do it because they think it's important, and they value their community and want to see the Calgary-Shaw community thrive.

I would be remiss if I also did not mention my colleagues on the third floor of the Annex. Now, some likened us to bright lights on the third floor. I don't want to say that I'm the 100-watt lightbulb on the third floor and they're 60s or that as the only female amongst five male colleagues I am the thorn amongst the roses, but I do want to say that it is with deep pride and, I have to say, it has been a lot of fun to be able to work with them as we try to figure out our way around here. We've been able to be very supportive of each other. I call them colleagues, and I am proud to be a member of the third floor of the Annex. Thank you.

Last, I'd like to just return to something that my father-in-law said to me about two weeks ago. We were returning home from the swearing in, and I said, "You know, Jack, I've been up there for about three weeks now, and as I've been wandering the halls, I have been just so surprised at how many of my colleagues and the staff of the Legislature truly admired you." I said, "You know, you really

left a good name behind when you left the Legislature." I thought he would, you know, joke, as Jack is often wont to do, but he looked me in the eye and he said: "That's right. I left a good name. See that you do the same." I must say that at that moment I felt the mantle come down on my shoulders.

It is my hope that I will be able to leave a good name in this Legislature, and I look forward to working with you as my colleagues in trying to advance this Alberta vision. I am thankful for the opportunity to stand on this floor today, and I'd just like to echo the Lieutenant Governor when I say: "God bless you all. God bless Alberta. God bless Canada."

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:08 p.m.]