

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, February 20, 2003

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2003/02/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, life and health are precious. We ask Your blessings upon our Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Lois Hole, as she begins a journey of medical treatment. Let us pray that Her Honour will be back on her feet quickly, meeting and greeting Albertans. Let us reach out with compassion, understanding, and prayer to Her Honour and her family. May God bless them all. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

Mr. Jonson: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Mr. Ki-ho Chang, ambassador of South Korea to Canada. He is accompanied today by his wife, Mrs. Lee, and several Korean consular officials from Vancouver and Ottawa.

Korea is Alberta's fourth largest trading partner, with annual two-way trade averaging nearly \$1 billion over the past five years. Alberta has a productive sister province relationship with the Korean province of Kangwon. This was Alberta's first twinning relationship and will reach the 30-year milestone next year.

We appreciate the ambassador coming to Alberta, and we anticipate a productive and mutually beneficial relationship with him over the coming months and years. I would like to ask our honoured guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four young students who attend Tempo school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're Logan McColl, Hunter McColl, Aidan McColl, and Kathryn Wood. Tempo school has reading week this week, and these students have taken this opportunity to come and watch question period and learn about our form of government and our Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to be able to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly some of Alberta's and Canada's finest firefighters representing seven of nine firefighters' associations in Alberta. I'll ask them to stand as I call their names. They are Gord Colwell, president, Alberta Fire Fighters Association, from Calgary; Ken Block, president, Edmonton Firefighters Service Association; Scott Wilcox, president, Calgary Firefighters Association; Brian Makey, president, Fort McMurray Firefighters Association; Bart Rowland, president, Red Deer Firefighters Association; Kim Smyth, president, St. Albert Fire Fighters Union; Brent Shelton, vice-president, Alberta Fire Fighters Association; Tim Stewart, vice-

president, St. Albert; Ron Polutnik, recording secretary, Red Deer; Mark Faires, recording secretary, Calgary; and Mike O'Reilly, treasurer. In addition to that, a gentleman named Paul Wyndham, also a fireman, is here, and he is the first firefighter in Alberta to receive WCB benefits for cancer.

I would ask that all members of this Legislature give these firemen, no pun intended, a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a recent graduate of Grant MacEwan College's journalism program, Mr. Rob Harris. Rob is here as an intern in my department's communication division, and I would ask him now to rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Maskell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature a person who has made a great deal of difference in my life over the past two years. The person I speak of is Jo-Ann Briscoe, a former nurse who chose to be a stay-at-home mother, but she was far more than a stay-at-home mother. She was a very active person in her community and was president of the Elmwood Community League for many years. Jo-Ann is the person who manages my constituency office and does a wonderful job in helping me serve the needs of constituents in Edmonton-Meadowlark. Accompanying Jo-Ann today is her son Behn and daughter Bekky. They're not truant from school; they're also students at Tempo who are enjoying this reading week. Jo-Ann, Behn, and Bekky, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 38 students from Red Deer Christian school. I understand that these students are among the smartest and the brightest in Red Deer. With them today are their student teacher, Miss Amy Zesko; their teachers Mr. Jim Driedger and Miss Carolyn Stickland; and parent helpers Mrs. Aletta Cartwright, Mrs. Alleta Loney, Mrs. Joanne Jacobsen, and Mrs. Kim Schreiner. I would ask the students and their teachers and helpers to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Her Honour Lois E. Hole

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I take this opportunity today on behalf of every Member of the Legislative Assembly to extend our sincere best wishes to Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole. It's so good to see so many young people in the galleries today, because Lois Hole lives for young people. She lives for children.

Earlier today in a public statement Her Honour advised Albertans that she is currently preparing to undergo cancer treatment. I know that all Albertans join us in extending our thoughts and prayers to her at such a difficult time. As well, our thoughts are with the members of the Hole family, who, I understand, are close by her side.

As all Albertans know, Her Honour is a woman of remarkable strength and energy, and we saw that during the delivery of the

throne speech just a few days ago. I am confident that in short order we will have the true pleasure of seeing her back in her office greeting staff and visitors to the Legislature with her warm smile and, of course, her traditional hug.

I know that every Albertan would join with me in sending heartfelt thoughts to this remarkable and beloved lady. In the meantime, let me break from protocol and simply say: "God be with you, Lois. Our prayers are with you."

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, this morning we were very shocked to hear of the medical condition facing our Lieutenant Governor. We in the Official Opposition join everyone in this Legislature and all Albertans in letting her know that our thoughts are with her. Her hugs have brought all Albertans into the reach of the Lieutenant Governor, her office, and the Queen she represents. It's now our turn to reach out and give our Lieutenant Governor a symbolic hug, a hug that wishes her a speedy recovery, a hug that expresses our support for her and her family, and a hug that will carry her through until she returns to her duties as our Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might I ask if the Assembly would give unanimous consent to permit the leader of the third party to participate?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

1:40

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to join with the hon. Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and indeed all members of this House in expressing concern over the news that we heard this morning about the Lieutenant Governor's illness. I along with millions of Albertans am very proud of the fact that we have a model citizen in the person of Lois Hole as the Lieutenant Governor of this province. She represents all that is noble and good and strong about Alberta, and I want to extend my best wishes, along with millions of Albertans who are doing the same, I'm sure, as they hear this news, for a speedy recovery and a return to full work and the provincial duties that she is doing as Lieutenant Governor with such outstanding performance. I also wish her family our sympathies and our hope that Madam Hole will be back to her work and will regain her health in full.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Electricity Deregulation

Dr. Nicol: Electricity deregulation has failed in Alberta. This government promised lower prices and more competition, but just the opposite occurred. Instead of putting an end to this failed experiment on high electricity prices, this government plans to move even further ahead with deregulation. To the Premier: how come this government is planning to entrench high prices in electricity in Alberta?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we're planning on doing anything but. What the whole idea of deregulation is is to provide competition, and to enlighten the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition further, I'll ask the hon. minister to respond.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I have seen the Liberal plan at www.altliberals.ab.ca, and in fact if anybody here wants to buy into

a plan that spends \$3 billion to save \$1 billion, I guess you would be a Liberal. That's the foundation of their plan.

The Dominion Bond Rating Service has come out and said that deregulation is working in Alberta, and it's working because the power price is lower than what it was when deregulation started. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have seen electricity prices drop on January 1, 2003, and this bill that is now before the House – so I'm reluctant to talk about the details – will bring even further deductions. But let's not forget for a moment that if you lived in Quebec, you would be part of a guaranteed structure that guaranteed \$36 billion worth of electricity debt. We are not going to mortgage the future earnings of children to subsidize electricity prices today.

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, we talked about a plan that, in effect, costs less than \$2 billion to return Albertans a billion dollars a year. That's what he forgets to tell Albertans.

To the Premier: given that retail competition has failed to provide lower electricity prices for Albertans, why is the government continuing to pursue this deregulation just for competition's sake?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's not just for the sake of competition, although that's one of the primary elements. It's also being done to encourage more electricity generation. As a matter of fact, since deregulation – and the Liberals failed to put this on their web site purposely because it's good news – there have been many hundreds of megawatts, perhaps thousands of megawatts of new power developed.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister expand.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the electricity prices that the Leader of the Opposition refers to are those electricity prices that remain as the regulated rate option, and in fact those rates are part of the commitment that this government gave to Albertans to the period 2005. Now, those particular regulated rates were set prior to the introduction of the Electric Utilities Act by the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton behind closed doors in some such manner with which I'm not familiar. Now with this bill those two utilities will be, in fact, setting those rates transparently in front of the public and in hearings that the hon. member can attend himself.

Dr. Nicol: Again to the Premier: are you telling us that you don't want municipality-owned utilities to act in the best interest of their own consumers of electricity in their jurisdiction? Is that what you're telling us?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we do, in fact, want the municipalities to act in the best interests of their constituents whether or not they own utility companies. The simple fact is – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands knows this full well – that these power companies owned by municipalities have expanded far beyond the borders of the municipalities. They are now businesses and big businesses. Enmax is competing in Edmonton. EPCOR is competing in Calgary and throughout the province. They are no longer little municipally owned power companies. They are big companies competing in a very competitive world. If they want to play with the big boys, then they have to be subject to the same regulations and the same regulatory applications as the big boys.

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

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the preregulation price that Albertans paid for electricity was about 4.5 cents a

kilowatt-hour, why did the Premier say yesterday that the 6.4 cents that we're currently paying is about half of what it was when deregulation began?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, according to the information that I have, as of January 1, 2001, electricity was selling on average at about 13.1 cents a kilowatt-hour. Today it's selling on average for about 6.4 cents a kilowatt-hour.

Perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy can bring us up to date as to what the rate is today and perhaps what it was on January 2.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, electricity prices are fluctuating in Alberta because they are tied to natural gas. Sixty-five percent of our base load generation is with coal; the balance is with natural gas. As we've seen natural gas come up in price, so has electricity. The price that the Premier has quoted is absolutely correct. The last price I saw was 4.7 cents at the noon hour. There is entirely an abundance of evidence that shows that we are on the track to lower prices. The prices are lower today than they were last year. They will be lower next year than they are this year. Deferral accounts will be paid off. I would direct the member to the ATCO service network, which has the same price as it did prior to deregulation.

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: is the 13.1 cents that you quoted not the price that was on January 1, 2001? That was caused by the uncertainty that was associated with the impending deregulation. It had nothing to do with the status of the current presentation of electricity at that time.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have to refresh my memory, but I do recall quite vividly the debate that took place in this Legislature, the questions that were being asked at that particular time as we headed into deregulation. I can tell the hon. member that, yes, deregulation created a certain degree of uncertainty, but that was not the only – the only – cause for electricity prices to increase at that particular time. If I recall correctly, a number of power plants were shut down, at the same time putting a tremendous demand on the requirement for electricity. Gas prices had spiked to an all-time high. The province was in the midst of one of the most extreme albeit positive growth periods of all time, putting a tremendous amount of pressure on electricity. So there were a number of factors that I alluded to at that particular time that contributed to the cost of electricity at that particular time.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, will you remind your minister that no matter who holds the mortgage, in the end the utility users of this province have to pay for it. We can borrow money at a less costly rate as a public than you can through the private sector, so the cost of that mortgage is actually less when it's held by the public than it is when it's held by the private sector.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I knew I was going to hear it. It was inevitable that I was going to hear it from the Liberal opposition because the philosophy of the Liberals is to spend, spend, borrow, spend, spend, spend, borrow more, spend. So what they would like to do is to develop a situation that exists in Ontario, for instance, where every man, woman, and child in that province owes \$2,875 in an electricity debt.

An Hon. Member: So what?

Mr. Klein: So what? Every family of four is indebted to the tune of over \$11,000 to the electric company under a regulated system, Mr. Speaker. Their solution: borrow, borrow, spend, spend, borrow, borrow, and borrow more.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the member brings up an extremely important point on why the private sector that can borrow more expensively must pay income tax. You know, surely they must be more expensive, and that must explain a bit why EPCOR in Edmonton has a 5.825 cent per kilowatt-hour charge and ATCO in the rural area has a 4.78 kilowatt-hour charge.

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

Education Funding

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a new funding wrinkle the Minister of Learning claimed: there's plenty of money for boards to pay teachers; they simply must take the money out of the instructional grants. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. The instructional grant rate increase for two years was \$180 million. Why is the minister recommending that \$142 million of this be taken directly out of the classroom?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'll reiterate what I said yesterday, and that is that the school boards were supplied with 4 percent and 2 percent for teachers' salaries, for a total of \$118 million, and 3.5 percent and 3 percent, for a total of \$180 million. When you add those two together, it comes to \$298 million.

Mr. Speaker, last budget year was the first time that we had actually put a salary enhancement in for teachers, because quite frankly we thought that they deserved it. Where the negotiations have occurred when it comes to teachers' salaries, it has always been out of the basic grant. For the last hundred years it has always been out of the basic grant. The basic grant increases this year were \$180 million. Those are what were expected to be negotiated between the school boards and the teachers. We guaranteed a minimum. We said that the \$118 million must go to teachers, but it was up to the school boards and the teachers to negotiate where that other \$180 million went.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. My second question to the same minister: does the minister agree with his colleague from St. Albert when that colleague says that there isn't any wiggle room with things the way they are, referring to boards?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 14.09 percent was certainly a very large salary settlement. It amounted to around \$260 million. That's an awful lot of money that has been put into teachers' salaries. When it comes to the amount that they received, it was \$298 million, so you have about \$38 million worth of wiggle room. That is throughout the whole province. The 14.09 percent was something that the arbitrator put down. It was something that he felt could be afforded, and we are living within that. But I'll leave it up to the Assembly as to whether \$38 million is a large amount of wiggle room or a small amount.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why does the minister insist that funding is adequate when documents from his own department indicate that when you accommodate inflation and enrollment, there has been no increase since '93-94?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, all it takes is for the Member of the Legislative Assembly to take a look at what my budget figures have been since 1995. From 1995 on, the amount of dollars put into the basic K to 12 education has increased by 46 percent. Enrollment growth has increased by 6 percent.

I'll again draw attention to the figures that I showed yesterday, which are from Stats Canada. Mr. Speaker, these are not affiliated with our government. They're not affiliated with the federal government. They're supposed to be arm's length from the federal government. It shows that we spend more on education per capita than any other province. As a matter of fact, the next closest to us is New Brunswick, which is 14 percent less. As I said yesterday, for example, we spend about 85 percent more on education than they do in Ontario. We spend more money on education than any other jurisdiction in the country. [interjections] They're saying that they don't believe it, but I guess that what they should do is talk to their leaders in Ottawa who look after Stats Canada and find out what's going on. These are Stats Canada data.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Electricity Deregulation (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Five years ago the government released what it hoped would be a blockbuster: deregulation of power. They promised lower power prices to Albertans, but the movie was a bomb because power prices have subsequently doubled in this province. Now the government is planning a sequel. [interjections] It's not the background noise. I just need to put on my glasses; that's all. Since power bills for most Albertans have doubled because of deregulation part 1, why should Albertans believe that power rates will fall now that deregulation part 2 is in the theatres?

Mr. Klein: Who's it to?

Mr. Mason: It's to the minister.

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the belief part is solidly grounded in fact, and the fact is that 2,300 new megawatts of generation have come on at no additional cost to the consumer for paying for that generation. Back in the regulated days, Genesee, the last coal-fired plant to be built, took 14 years from permit to first piece of power. If we had waited the 14 years or tried to find a regulated solution, we'd have had blackouts, we'd have had rolling blackouts, and we'd have had spikes much higher than what they are today.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that there were deferral accounts levied on both the regulated rate and on the purchaser price for 2000 and 2001. These deferral accounts will fall off at the end of 2003, representing a 20 to 25 percent decline in the price of power alone as well as an open, transparent hearing process, more generation coming on. The Calpine 300-megawatt plant is coming on in Calgary. We're going to be the largest windmill producer of power in Canada by this time next year. I mean, the deregulation story has allowed the private sector to solve a government problem.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister is predicting a 25 percent reduction in power rates in this province in the next year or two and given that power prices have doubled already, it doesn't take very much – even the minister of education could do the math and find out that we're still going to pay 75 percent more for power than before deregulation. What does the minister have to say to Albertans?

Mr. Smith: Well, I can say, Mr. Speaker, to Albertans that this is a very good province to invest in, that this is a very good province to live in, that this is a very good province to vote for this government in, as the people proved in 2001. Deregulation is a long-term process, but it's a process that has delivered appropriate generation when it was needed. Yes, there have been some bumps in the road. That's never been denied, but we know – and we know by the refinement of the Electric Utilities Act – that everything we do continues to put downward pressure on prices.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, I will just refer the hon. member because I think he was probably part of this rate setting – EPCOR Edmonton has 5.825 cents per kilowatt-hour. EPCOR/Aquila has 6.129 cents and Enmax 5.985 cents. These companies do not pay taxes. These companies also invest, can borrow money at a lower rate.

Now, for the poor beleaguered private operator that is in Alberta by the name of ATCO, it must pay corporate tax at the rate of 50 percent as a publicly traded company, and in fact it also has to borrow money at market rates. Their rate is 4.78 cents per kilowatt-hour, some 25 percent cheaper than the city-owned rates.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister is continuing to try and pass off the high prices of Alberta as if they were a temporary measure, will he guarantee under this new deregulation scheme that the government has come up with that prices will go down to where they were before deregulation, and if not, will he resign his seat in this Assembly?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the last government that guaranteed electrical prices in western Canada was the New Democratic Party in British Columbia. Today that hydro corporation is \$7.1 billion in taxpayer-guaranteed debt.

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

Farm Income Support Programs

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Hog producers in our province have gone through another difficult year, and the drought has affected them as it has the rest of the agricultural industry, but hog producers have also been faced with low commodity prices as well as skyrocketing production costs. Many of my producers have told me that the risk-management tools that are in place, including the farm income disaster program, are not meeting their needs. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Will this government adapt existing programs so they better address the financial crisis that the hog industry is currently facing?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that the hog industry has faced highs and lows in pricing for some time. By nature it's cyclical, and generally the period of time between high and low is long enough that they're able to maintain their operations. However, in the last four or five years they've had some highs and lows that came pretty close together. We responded first in 1998, I

believe it was, to the crisis then in depressed prices by introducing a disaster loan program. Fortunately, we had made a decision as a government about a year ago now to reinstitute or continue that loan program, so we have that available on the short term.

The hog producers are not incorrect when they make the statement to us that the farm income disaster program doesn't meet their needs on a short-term basis. However, I expect they will have a different opinion very shortly because the farm income disaster program is based on your tax year, and of course most producers who are on a calendar year are doing their taxes now. I can assure you that we are expecting and are planning for a fairly high draw on that program because of the big swing in prices.

So we have the loan program in place. It's been very successful. I can tell you that the repayment schedule has been excellent on it, Mr. Speaker, and we have FIDP, that will kick in for producers soon.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: could the minister explain how the current agricultural policy framework negotiations will benefit the hog industry?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we were one of the provinces who signed the agricultural policy framework umbrella document in June of this year. We did it because we felt that it was important to move ahead, especially in the areas of safety nets for our producers, and to be part of that discussion, we felt that we should be signatories. Well, in fact, in order to be part of the discussions and negotiations, we had to be signatories.

We've been negotiating on our producers' behalf, and very recently, about two weeks ago, you saw introduced changes to the crop insurance program, which I think have been very well received by our grain and oilseed producers. Those would not have been possible without a lot of hard work from, I can tell you, members around our caucus and the fact that we signed that. Now the discussion is on NISA.

In the interests of time, Mr. Speaker, I can't go into all of the complexities of the discussions around NISA, but Alberta has not been a part of NISA for some time because of the inadequacies of the program. If – if – we can negotiate a disaster component under the NISA program, if we can respond to the concerns of the beginning and developing farmer, that may very well be the answer for our meat industry on these issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the recent increased energy costs have been a contributing factor to the greatly increased costs of production, could the minister please tell me what he is prepared to do, if anything, to offset these high costs to the hog sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we recognize the importance of the pork producers in diversifying an important sector of our economy, that being the agricultural economy of Alberta. There are no specific energy rebate programs in place for pork producers, but of course all Albertans have benefited from the electricity return of \$40 per month as well as the 3.6 cents per kilowatt-hour on commercial use paid in the year 2001. I know that natural gas is used as a heating source in pork barns, and again in the year 2001, when gas reached \$10.28 per gigajoule, there was both a \$150 per month rebate and a commercial rebate of \$6 per gigajoule.

Electricity Deregulation

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, as utility bills go up, both natural gas and electricity, the credibility of the Premier and this government goes down. Power deregulation in Alberta is the granddaddy of all Progressive Conservative billion dollar boondoggles. Albertans are reminded of this costly policy mistake every month through higher bills, and when they visit the web site altaliberals.ab.ca, they see just how much of a rip-off electricity deregulation has become. My first question is for the Premier. Is the generation of electricity in this province guided by competitive market forces?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that question was already asked and answered. That's part of the answer, competitive forces, yes. Competition normally results in lower prices, but deregulation was also brought in to encourage more power generation, and that has happened.

You know, I hate to answer the last questioner's question, but there are some unique things going on relative to hog farmers, and one needs to go down to the Oyen area and look at the Highland farms, where they use the manure and the methane off the manure to cogenerate electricity. This can occur under deregulation. You don't have to buy from an established power company. There are all kinds of examples that deregulation has opened up.

I talked to a young fellow just recently, and he said: you know, with deregulation there's going to be a tremendous market for me to joint venture with an Italian company to bring small, six-kilowatt wind generators to individual farm families, you know, small windmills. It would power a house and a barn.

This is what deregulation has brought about: the ability for people to go out and do imaginative things, Mr. Speaker, and also for those people who depend on the major lines and the major electricity companies, for those electricity companies, including a city-owned utility that was represented at one time by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, to go out and generate more power.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: in regard to city-owned utilities why attack Edmontonians again by picking on municipally owned utilities when this government has different roles for TransAlta Utilities, one of the big boys, which was allowed to operate and continues to operate certain hydro projects developed with the assistance of taxpayers on both the Bow and North Saskatchewan river systems?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that TransAlta is also joint venturing with EPCOR to develop coal-powered electricity generation. We are not picking on municipalities. We're saying that if municipalities want to play outside their borders, if they want to be players on the provincial or, as a matter of fact, on the national scene – because I understand EPCOR now is competing in Ontario – if they want to be national and provincial players as opposed to municipal players, then let them be subject to the same rules and regulations as the other private-sector players.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, that development between EPCOR and TransAlta is created because of the uncertainties around electricity deregulation, and you know it.

If competition and choice are so important, why not give other companies the choice to compete for the lucrative operation that

TransAlta currently has along the Bow and North Saskatchewan rivers? Why not open that up for competition?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I can't recall any new dams being built lately, I'm telling you, to harness water for the generation of power. If it did, then the environmental community missed me altogether, and I'm sure it would not happen.

I suspect that the hon. member is talking about dams that were built many, many, many years ago with private dollars – many years ago, 30 or 40 – and it's not only on the North Saskatchewan River. I don't know if he mentioned the Oldman. There's the Bow River. There's Seebe. There's Bears paw. There's Ghost dam. There's Dickson dam. That was the last dam. I don't even know if that's a power generator; is it? I think that's a water control dam. But, anyway, as far as power generation goes, those dams were built eons ago, even before the hon. member was born.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Disposal of Used Oil

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Environmental protection is vital to Alberta, and the government's priorities on that subject are very high. Recently I received a call from a constituent who operates an automotive shop in Calgary. He called to express a concern about a new service fee he's required to pay to have the used oil from his shop picked up and properly disposed of, and he's concerned also that if the fee becomes so high, then proper disposal would be jeopardized. As the province oversees the regulations related to management of used oil in the province, my question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain what these new fees are for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you. The member is quite correct. The disposal of used oil is overseen by the Alberta Used Oil Management Association, effectively known as AUOMA, and that group is certainly recognized around the world as leaders. Saskatchewan has started a program like ours; B.C. has started a program like ours. Certainly Ontario is looking at it, and even the OECD has invited AUOMA to present our program.

In response to the member's specific question, there are no new fees. What he may be referring to is a fee that is charged by a company that picks up the oil from the garage, and that is a result of a company charging a fee. These are not AUOMA fees. They are not government fees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. So what are the alternatives for Alberta companies in terms of how they can dispose of their used oil?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are about a hundred companies in Alberta that are doing this, so I don't know the specific instance that the individual member is referring to, but certainly AUOMA would be prepared to provide his constituent with a list of companies that are doing this. Some are charging fees, some are not charging fees, and the information that I have indicates that some are even paying the garage owner to pick up the oil, because they then turn and resell it and reprocess it. So, as I say, there are a hundred

companies doing this. On a standard four-litre oil change there is an environmental charge of 90 cents. Eighty-six cents of this goes back into the system, back to the people that pick up the oil, the collectors of the oil. Only 4 cents of this, around 4 percent, is used for administration of AUOMA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. If Alberta consumers are already paying the fee for the oil recycling and the cost does not cover the cost of disposing of the used oil, then where does all that money go?

Dr. Taylor: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, there are only 4 cents of 90 cents that go to AUOMA. One of the ways they can do this is because as we use our vehicles, certainly they burn oil, and when you do your oil change, you pay, as I said, on the four-litre oil change about 90 cents. Not all of the four litres goes back into the system, because some of our cars burn a little less; some burn a little more. So they actually have a bit of a surplus based on this, and once again they are using that to invest back into the system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Education Funding

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the throne speech this government stated that its highest priority must be children. However, Alberta schools are dealt a \$142 million shortfall while the horse racing industry gets \$33 million more and there's \$105 million to upgrade VLTs. Yesterday the Premier said that this government tries to split the pie evenly. My questions are to the Premier. Is the Premier saying that the government views gambling as equal in priority to education?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, what I did point out is that gambling in this province contributes a lot to education. During my time in this Assembly all we've heard from the Liberals is how bad the education system is. You know, they need to get out from under the dome. They need to travel the province. They need to talk a little bit about the stories . . . [interjection] No. I'll tell you a story though. You know, maybe you should read a little book. It's easy reading. Even you can understand it; that is, the members of the Liberal Party. It's called *Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails*, stories of a one-room school and the marvelous education system we had, the marvelous education system we have today, because I'm going to tell you a story that took place only a year ago.

A standing ovation greeted Sheila Pratt at the New Brigden school on June 27. Principal Deena Meekins announced that Sheila was the provincial winner in the grade 8 Canadian scholastic challenge. Sheila's score of 79 was only four behind the national champion and within the top 10 in the country. This exceptional score was the highest of the 3,000 in the province of Alberta. In fact, two New Brigden students did exceptionally well. Darcy Blair, second place, received a medal for his mark of 68, well above the national average. Indeed, this score is higher than those scored by the provincial champions of Manitoba and British Columbia. You know, a mark of 50 percent – 50 percent – was considered very good. This year the national average . . .

The Speaker: And I thank you and will look forward to having the document tabled in the Assembly, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: The Premier is a good storyteller, but I'm looking for the answer or the truth.

Perhaps he could explain why Alberta schools are on a 17- to 18-year or longer rotation for repainting but VLTs get replaced in less than 10 years for chipped paint and a few minor dings.

2:20

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again the Liberals seem to be obsessed with seeking out the negatives. All I'm trying to do is say that there are so many positive things, and I plan to give a story a day about the wonderful things that are happening in our schools. A story a day. You know, there won't be enough time in this legislative session nor the next 10 legislative sessions to tell a story a day about the wonderful, good things that are happening in the education system. I'm going to go on.

This year the national average was 44 questions correct. The grade 8 class at New Brigden school achieved an average of 54 correct, 10 percent above the national average. By the way, the top score in the country was 83, and this was earned by a young man who attends the University of Toronto school for the gifted. This is a story of a small school in rural Alberta, a good story.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I'll try again. Again to the Premier: why are Alberta schools on a 17- to 18-year or longer rotation for repainting when VLTs get replaced in less than 10 years for a few paint chips and some minor dings? Why does it take so long? Where's the priority?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again, our priority, of course, is education, and I just recited a story of what a small rural school can do with dedicated teachers, inspired students to achieve outstanding, remarkable academic results.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Irrigation Farmers' Utilities Billings

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The irrigation sector in Alberta's agriculture industry pumps water from May to September, and they're billed twice a year. Many of these irrigators finally saw their final meter reads, which were taken in November by Aquila, billed to them through EPCOR in January 2003. Some of these were totally inaccurate and grossly wrong, and EPCOR blames Aquila for this frustrating delay in a billing that prevented the irrigation business sector from properly expensing multithousands of dollars on their 2002 income tax return. In January I was made aware of many of these irrigation problems. My question to the Minister of Energy is: can he direct Aquila to correct the inappropriate, inaccurate billings that were sent to the irrigation farmers so that they can be properly compensated for a legitimate business expense, which wasn't properly billed to them in time for the 2002 tax year?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, Aquila commercial operation has publicly stated that it has made errors in delivering meter reading data and billing data to EPCOR. Further, EPCOR made a business decision to delay billing until accurate billing information was made available for irrigation customers. Clearly, a commercial EPCOR/Aquila problem. They have taken steps to resolve the billing problem, and the irrigators are encouraged to contact EPCOR, from whom the bill originates, with their billing concerns.

The irrigators are also free to contact the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board for further corrective action.

With respect to the tax situation, I do not know what specific information either Aquila or EPCOR will give to those irrigators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Again to the minister: what, if any, action can be taken to ensure that Aquila will properly credit overcharges on transmission and distribution charges which resulted from the overestimates and incorrect meter reads taken by Aquila back in November?

Mr. Smith: The most appropriate direction for that, Mr. Speaker, is through the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, which is now working with people who have inappropriate meter reads, where they have billing problems, and we can expect the EUB to direct Aquila because Aquila remains under the regulated part of the transmission structure in Alberta. They are regulated. They have service performance, code of conduct performance standards that must be maintained, and they're subject to the full scrutiny of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. So the direction of redress lies with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a \$75 potential credit to an account and that further action through the Energy and Utilities Board may not happen until 2004, could the EUB be directed to manually handle each and every one of the irrigation accounts to ensure total accuracy before these fictitious, horrible bills are mailed out?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member brings up a suggestion that may be entirely appropriately handled by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. I will certainly forward that information to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Of course, they already are aware of the billing irregularities with respect to irrigation.

Now, with respect to the \$75 that the member refers to, this is put in place to ensure that both EPCOR and Aquila were going to undertake making the appropriate corrections to failed and erroneous meter readings that had occurred in their area of service. I can report to the House that as of February 18 the EUB has forwarded 1,287 calls to EPCOR for review. EPCOR, therefore, must examine these bills, determine if they qualify for a credit, and return them to the EUB with a recommendation that is then reviewed by the EUB. So far, to this day, 395 bills have been returned to the EUB from EPCOR for review. Of those 395, Mr. Speaker, 256, or just about 70 percent, will receive a \$75 credit. Out of the 350,000-customer service base, that means a total of 1,287 calls or files represents three-tenths of 1 percent of the total response. It shows clearly that the EUB mechanism that regulates what Aquila does is working and is working well. Plus, it demonstrates that there is an area which the member who has difficulties can direct that to that particular body.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Government-appointed Committees

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier announced he is spending \$6 million to devise a consultation process to examine the dispute between First Nations and oil-field contractors. Sounds like yet another expensive government committee.

Hollywood had the \$6 million man; this government has a \$6 million committee. To the Premier: I'm sure Albertans would like to know who is going to be paid this \$6 million.

Mr. Klein: Well, you know, the Liberals hang around like hungry wanna-be journalists down in the newsroom, and they pick up on every word. That's why they're holding their scrums prior now to it: so they can listen to the reaction. You talk about media 101 and the need for media advisors: they need it. Having said that, he would make a very, very poor reporter – a very poor reporter – even poorer than the poorest reporter, because his facts are all wrong as reported.

As I said, this is part and parcel of the implementation of the monetary requirements for the aboriginal framework agreement. Now, I also said that as I understand it, the hon. minister had asked for \$25 million to fully undertake the consultation process and all that's involved in putting in the aboriginal framework agreement. She didn't get that.

But relative to what she's going to do and how she plans to proceed with respect to the framework agreement and how the money will be spent, I'll have her respond.

2:30

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Premier. First of all, I think it's important to recognize that we have to be able to do an adequate consultation process, and that process has to be able to include all the stakeholders, and those are the stakeholders that we'd be working with relative to any kind of consultation we deal with. Most specifically, Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the First Nations' issues are addressed as well as industry's concerns so that we can ensure that people can get access to land where the people have permits to be able to do the work that they need to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Six million dollars. Again we'll try the Premier. What's the time frame for this \$6 million, and where's the business plan?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, maybe I ought not to have answered the question put to me by one of the reporters and picked up erroneously by the Liberal Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but this is a budget item. It will be coming forward to the Legislature for debate in conjunction with the business plan. All the details will be spelled out at that particular time.

All I said was that the minister had asked for \$25 million. The best she can hope to expect – well, this, of course, is contingent on how the vote goes and how the debate goes – is \$6 million at this particular time. The business plan will be released along with the budget, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. We'll broaden the question. Does the Premier have any idea of the total amount being spent by his government on all the committees it's created?

Mr. Klein: Do I have any idea? No, but I can get the amounts, I'm sure, including all the money that's being spent on committees that include opposition members and perhaps all the money that's being spent on the opposition as well.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I can say this: the administration of government is a big business. In anticipation, well, the Liberals sat down today at their caucus, came up with I don't know how many

different questions covering a wide range of areas. We need to be on top of all of these issues because as the government – as the government – we have the responsibility for the administration of all of those departments. So, yes, there are ministerial committees; there are MLA committees; there are legislative committees. I imagine there are numerous committees within the administration of government. There are deputy ministers' committees. There are ADM committees. There are committees relative to division heads. There are committees in the bowels of all the departments because decisions are made on the basis of consensus, and when you need to achieve consensus, you need to bring people together, and that could be construed as a committee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to the next item in the Routine, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced some firefighters to the members of this Assembly, and there have been a few more that have come in the room, and I would like to include them in the record for the members. I'll ask them to stand as I call their names out. Their names are: Lorne Corbitt from Edmonton; Larry Walsh from Edmonton; Dale McLean, the secretary of the Edmonton Firefighters Union; and Greg Holubowich, vice-president of the Edmonton Firefighters Union. I'd ask that all members give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we have a very special guest in your gallery, a person that many Albertans have recognized for her enormous commitment and leadership and dedication to the health of Alberta's young people. This is a woman of vision who has dedicated herself to the service of others and by doing so has contributed enormously to one of the most enduring values that we as Albertans hold dear and precious: to enjoy a life that is healthy and free of disease. This is someone that I have no doubt members of this Assembly have heard of. I'm speaking of Barb Tarbox. She's here today with her good friend Tracy Mueller. In a few moments the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose will welcome Barb on behalf of the Assembly and all Albertans and speak to her accomplishments. I ask that all members please give this person the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Barb Tarbox

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of thanking a very special person and friend, a woman whose courage is an inspiration to all. Since being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer last September, Barb Tarbox has dedicated the remaining months of her life to talking to as many children and teenagers as she can about the dangers of smoking. Barb is a mother, a wife, and a former model. She started smoking when she was just 11 years old and is now dying because of her tobacco addiction.

With no previous experience in public speaking, Barb started talking to small groups of students in Edmonton classrooms. Her campaign has since truly become a national antismoking crusade. Her original goal was to touch 1,000 students with her message. Soon it became 5,000, then 10,000, and now 50,000 before smoking takes her life. Through the hard work of her teammate and manager, Tracy Mueller, she has now spoken to over 40,000 students and tens of thousands through the means of TV.

As chair of AADAC I would like to thank Barb for her support of the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy and its goal of preventing young Albertans from starting to use tobacco. AADAC has worked with Barb on a series of television and newspaper ads and several speaking engagements.

Barb and her family's willingness to share their painful journey in such an honest way is working and will be her legacy to all of us. She has received thousands of e-mails, letters, and phone calls from children and adults who have been inspired to quit smoking, make a commitment to never start, or encourage a loved one to quit. Local and national media have documented her cross-country campaign, and the National Film Board is working on a documentary and educational video.

Today I am pleased to announce that AADAC will establish an annual award of excellence and scholarship in her name for work in tobacco reduction focusing on children and youth. But most important today, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say: thank you. Thank you, Barb, for your courage, your sacrifices, for your service to the youth of this province and, indeed, to all Albertans.

Thank you. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Women's Cross-country Snowmobile Relay

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Snowmobilers have been in the news recently and not for the best reasons, so today I'd like to recognize a special group of snowmobilers and a snowmobile manufacturer for starting a trek which promotes responsible snowmobiling and raises money for a good cause.

Polaris Industries, in searching for a way to celebrate their 50th anniversary in 2004, wanted to encourage more women to become involved in this recreational activity. The idea of a cross-country relay for women was the result, with funds being raised for breast cancer research. The ride started in St. John's, Newfoundland, on January 11 and arrived in Alberta yesterday, coming from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, to Bonnyville.

In each province three VIP riders were chosen to represent their province. The VIP riders in Alberta are Darlene la Trace from Sherwood Park, Lisa-Marie Pelky from Red Deer, and Louise Sherren from Erskine. Other riders can join in on any leg of the relay, and anyone can help out by pledging to sponsor participants for each mile they ride. According to the Polaris web site, over \$70,000 in pledges has been raised so far.

2:40

I especially want to cheer on the women riding from my old club, the Sherwood Park Snowmobile Club. These women and their support team have taken responsibility for the Swan Hills to Whitecourt segment. They are Mineko Blakeman, Karen Dowhan, Heather Armstrong, Priscilla Heaton, and I think that my old riding buddy Sandy Alton is joining them.

I also want to thank all of the men who are participating in the ride. Thanks, guys.

The riders are helped out by volunteers and guides from the

Bonnyville Snowdusters, Smoky Lake Trail Twisters, Athabasca River Runners, Swan Hills Snow Goers, Whitecourt Trailblazers, Northland Sno-Goers, and the Valleyview and Swan City snowmobile clubs.

Thanks to Polaris for promoting women and snowmobiling and raising money for an important cause, and a special tip of the helmet to all the women and their support teams who ride segments across Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Alberta's Firefighters

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to Alberta's firefighters, the toughest, most physically fit group of workers to call this province home. They risk their lives to save our lives every day.

The first thing a firefighter is told when he or she takes the job is that it is inherently unsafe. Firefighters can put on helmets, masks, and protective gear, but they know that every time they walk into a building, they might not walk out, and in a fire their bodies under the best equipment will suffer from smoke and soot exposure. Structures can collapse, things can explode at any moment, and always, in every fire, there are carcinogenics and chemicals burning that have a high likelihood of causing cancer. Firefighters all know that they are more likely to get cancer just by virtue of doing their job.

There are six cancers, Mr. Speaker, which are known as the firefighters' cancers. They are: brain cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, and colon cancer. Take just two of these cancers: colon cancer and leukemia. Studies show that a firefighter is 68 percent more likely to get colon cancer than anybody else if they have been on the job for 20 years or more. The risk of getting leukemia is doubled after only five years on the job. These figures are staggering, and it brings home the sobering truth that firefighters put their safety on the line to ensure ours, but if they get these cancers, they've got to go through a process with Workers' Compensation, and they are not guaranteed at this date to receive WCB benefits. Can you imagine getting cancer, being worried about your own life and the well-being of those around you, and having to prove to the WCB that, yes, fighting fires for 20 years most probably is the reason you have cancer? It isn't fair, and it's time to do something about it.

In this session I will bring forward a private member's bill that if passed would grant presumptive status to any firefighter who contracts one of the firefighters' cancers. While there will be a years-of-service restriction on this presumptive status, the message will be clear. If a firefighter puts his life on the line protecting Albertans and contracts cancer from doing his job, this government has the obligation to ensure that the firefighters and their families are given proper recognition and compensation for the valuable service that they have undertaken and the suffering it has caused them. It is the right time to do this and the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Benefits

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One raise in nine years. Many honourable members of this House would quit in protest if they received only one raise in almost a decade. We certainly wouldn't see them for dust if that solitary increase was equivalent to less than half a percent a year. Yet that's what this

government expects people with disabilities that prevent them from holding gainful employment to survive on.

The inflation rate in Alberta for the last decade has eroded the purchasing power of AISH clients. In 1999 assured income for the severely handicapped payments were certainly increased, but it was only by \$40 a month. By comparison, Alberta MLAs have been receiving annual increases in salary recently. Alberta's Human Resources and Employment minister said last May that he would be looking into the AISH program when the MLA low-income review committee advised him that low-income support rates in this province need to be increased. The minister said that he would look at the AISH program separately from the supports for independence program, a plan that is supposedly under way. Where are his suggestions? Where is the proof for AISH clients of this province that this government is at all interested in their well-being?

Rhetoric won't put food in the mouths of AISH recipients when natural gas bills are so high that they must use their food budget to supplement the high cost of natural gas. Mere words won't keep the lights on when there's no money to pay for increasing electricity bills either. Only a much-needed increase in AISH benefits will bring some measure of comfort to AISH recipients. For shame's sake this government must do something to help these vulnerable members of our province, and now.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday my colleague will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday my colleague will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 6
Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003.

This bill proposes amendments to four pieces of justice legislation. Under this bill the Judicature Act will be amended to streamline the selection processes for provincially appointed judges. The provincial Young Offenders Act will be amended to coincide with the changes under the new federal Youth Criminal Justice Act, which comes into force on April 1, and changes to both the Petty Trespass Act and the Trespass to Premises Act will strengthen the provincial trespassing laws by allowing peace officers to lay charges and raising the maximum fines for committing these offences.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 7
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, being the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2003.

The Real Estate Council of Alberta is responsible for administration of the Real Estate Act. The council has consulted with their stakeholders on these proposed amendments and are fully supportive.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 8
Health Foundations Act Repeal Act

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 8, being the Health Foundations Act Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Bill 9
Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 2003.

This act will amend existing legislation to reflect the way that seismic geophysical exploration is currently done by updating terminology and practices.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:50
Bill 13
Government Organization Amendment Act, 2003

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, being the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2003.

This bill authorizes continued production of voluntary ID cards. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 13 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Bill 201
Emblems of Alberta (Grass Emblem)
Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce

Bill 201, being the Emblems of Alberta (Grass Emblem) Amendment Act, 2003.

Bill 201 will amend the Emblems of Alberta Act by designating a native grass species, rough fescue, as Alberta's provincial grass. As a provincial emblem rough fescue will be an official symbol representing Alberta's prairie heritage past, present, and future.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Bill 202
Workers' Compensation (Firefighters)
Amendment Act, 2003**

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being Bill 202, the Workers' Compensation (Firefighters) Amendment Act, 2003.

Studies consistently show that firefighters face an increased risk of contracting one of six firefighters' cancers. This bill will bring fairness to firefighters who contract the cancers.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 37.1(2) I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Occupational Therapy Profession Act, section 5(4), Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists annual report 2001-02; pursuant to the Dental Disciplines Act, section 8(4), Alberta Dental Association and College 2001-02 annual report; pursuant to the Health Facilities Review Committee Act, section 16(2), Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee annual report 2001-02; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act, section 14(3), Health Authority 5 annual report 2001-2002; on behalf of Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board annual report 2002.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file copies of two documents today: the Agrivantage final report and recommendations, Building Tomorrow Together, and Alberta's Agriculture Research and Innovation Strategic Framework. Both of these documents as they are implemented will contribute to the advancement of the agriculture and agri-food industry in Alberta and ensure that the industry remains competitive and respected.

Mr. Speaker, I would just make members aware that copies of both reports are available from my office upon request.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the Elder Advocates of Alberta directed towards the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness in which they are asking the government to make mandatory five tenets: to reduce abuse of seniors including not prescribing psychotropic medication and no permanent relegation of residents to bed and allowing nurse's notes and medical files to be available to the resident and maintaining a written protocol.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the appropriate number of copies of a letter to table urging the Alberta government to keep its promise to protect the Bighorn wildland recreation area. The letter is written by Mr. Paul Otto.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a document from Alberta Learning indicating that funding has changed very little for public education when one factors in inflation and enrolment, and this document includes the fiscal year '93-94 right up until the current time.

The second document that I would like to table for the benefit of not only members of this Assembly but all Albertans is a Did You Know document prepared on behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus, the Official Opposition, comparing what some of the expenditures of this government are – for VLTs, for horse racing, for extra staff, for expansion of the cabinet – and what that money could be used for in public education.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make two tablings today. Both are letters, and I'll be tabling them in an appropriate number of copies.

The first letter is from Mrs. Doreen Smith of Edmonton. It's dated February 14, just a few days ago, addressed to the Minister of Seniors. Mrs. Smith is expressing great concern about the sea of hardship that the high gas and power bills are causing to her and thousands of other seniors, many of whom also live in my constituency. That's the first letter.

The second letter, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Mrs. Jean Polasek of Clairmont dated February 17, addressed to her MLA. Mrs. Polasek is a board member of district 1, the Alberta Council on Aging and has written this letter on behalf of many seniors and single mothers in the area who are finding it impossible to pay their gas bills and desperately need an immediate break in the form of rebates if they are to be able to stay warm in this cold weather.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is a letter from the Marlowe family in Edmonton dated February 7, 2003, addressed to the Premier. They had a shock of disbelief upon opening their utility bill and are seeking help.

The second tabling is a letter from a greenhouse operation in Coronation dated January 25, 2003, also addressed to the Premier. This greenhouse has been in operation for the past 19 years and is now canceling spring orders and laying off staff due to horrendous increases in utility bills.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Acting Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I could ask the government to please enlighten us on the projected government business for next week.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Projected government business for the week of February 24 to 27, 2003. At 9 p.m. on Monday the 24th under Government Bills and Orders, address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; second reading or Committee of the Whole for Bill 1, Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act, Bill 5, the Line Fence Amendment Act, 2003, and as per the Order Paper.

For Tuesday, February 25, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 4, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2003; Bill 5, Line Fence Amendment Act; Bill 11, Auditor General Amendment Act, 2003; and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders under second reading or Committee of the Whole Bill 4, Bill 5, and Bill 11, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, February 26, under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate the supplementary supply messages to be presented under Government Motions with respect to supplementary supply motions being moved and then second reading of bills 3 and 2 and as per the Order Paper. In the evening under second reading Bill 6, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2003; Bill 7, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2003; Bill 8, Health Foundations Act Repeal Act; Bill 9, the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act, 2003; and Bill 3, the Electric Utilities Act; and in Committee of the Whole Bill 3, Electric Utilities Act; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, February 27, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 1 of 1, and we would anticipate requesting unanimous consent of the House to revert to Introduction of Bills to permit the introduction of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act and as per the Order Paper.

3:00head: Orders of the Day

head: **Consideration of Her Honour**

head: **the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Jacobs 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, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate February 19: Mr. Hancock]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise today to add my voice to the response to the Speech from the Throne, my thoughts return to the Lieutenant Governor. I know that my colleagues in the House and myself all feel the same level of appreciation to her for her greatness.

As I think back to just a week ago when I had the opportunity to have dinner with her, I asked her at that time how her husband was doing, and she said to me: you know, he's got to do all the really important things in life. He's had a family, he's been able to see

them raised, and he's been able to see them become productive citizens, actually run the business better than we did, she said. She said: he's been able to have grandchildren and see them grow up; all the truly important things he's got to see happen in our family. She said to me that that was the most important thing to her and her husband.

As I reflect now on the Speech from the Throne and I think of how earlier this week she stood in this House knowing of her condition and gave that speech, I am doubly impressed with the nature and the spirit of the woman that is the Lieutenant Governor of this province.

I looked at the title of the speech, and I thought what she must have been thinking as she read A Promise to Our Children as she reflected on her own family and her own family condition, and before I even knew that news, that title really jumped out for me. I've heard some opposition members say: "A Promise to Our Children is too vague. It's not solid enough. There's not enough detail. What does it really show?"

I'd like to kind of look at the cup half full today instead of half empty. When I see the words A Promise to Our Children, those mean a lot to me. I'm the mother of four children, and I know that when I think about my children and I think about the future of this province, it makes me doubly – doubly – determined to make sure that we provide the kind of future that we want for our own children. I want for my children a province that is strong and economically able to manage their families. I want for my children safe communities. I want for my children a lot of the things that are covered in the Speech from the Throne that was given earlier this week, so I was delighted as I read that speech.

I'm not only a mother, but I'm a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and I represent the constituency of Calgary-Shaw. I've always said that it's the greatest constituency. Some of my colleagues have a problem with that, but I stand on that and want to say that since I've been in office, just over two years, I find that this is a good time to reflect and look back over the last two years to see what kinds of promises we have fulfilled and the kinds of promises that we want to fulfill in the future.

Now, I've always said that I come from a large constituency. That constituency is now over 90,000 people, and I'm sure that if I stand next year, I might be saying that it's over a hundred thousand people. It is the largest constituency in the province of Alberta, and it's a very rich constituency, and I know that if they read this speech, they would be very encouraged as they see the action that government is preparing to take. So in my response today I wanted to in particular keep my constituents in mind and express to you some of their hopes and desires and the things that they will be encouraged about as they read this speech.

I quote from the speech on the first page when it talks about the prosperity of Alberta and the course that government has charted for their new future. It said, "That course has brought the province to an era of unmatched growth and prosperity." That is true. That is true. You don't have to live in Calgary-Shaw to know that this province is growing.

I often hear my rural colleagues talk about how long it takes them to drive across their constituencies and how difficult that is for them sometimes. You can drive across my constituency of 90,000 people in under 15 minutes, but I must tell you of my surprise when I drive to communities within my neighbourhood and see whole new subdivisions that have sprung up since the last time I visited them. It is growing rapidly.

As I knock on the doors of those people and visit and talk with them, they tell me where they've come from and why they're here. They've come from Saskatchewan. They've come from British Columbia. They've come from Ontario. They've come from further

east. I'm told that Ontario is not the east, that there are more eastern provinces. I always ask them: "Why are you here? Why did you come to the province of Alberta?" They always say to me: I came here because there was a job; there was a job so that I could have a salary to raise and support my family. That's why they come. They're young. They're dynamic. They're bright. Now, I'm not saying that I have the brightest constituents in the whole province, but I think close. [interjection] Others think they do. But I'm always impressed with the nature of the new constituency that is growing around me, and I think: why do they come?

I remember back in the early '80s when my own family was living in a little community down in Riverton, Wyoming, and the oil and gas industry plummeted, and for the very first time in our family we didn't have a job. It's the first time that we'd not had a salary. I quickly learned a lesson: all the other things that we seek in life are really nice, but when you don't have a job, it is very, very difficult on families. I've never forgotten that lesson, and I've always been grateful for my husband being able to be employed and being able to support our family.

Now, as an MLA for the last two years many, many times I've heard the expression: how can a rich province not? In fact, I thought that if I had a nickel for every time I've heard that expression, I probably could solve all the problems in the province of Alberta. I thought back about that, and I thought: you know why the people tell me that they come to Alberta? Not because it's a rich province, but because they can support their families. I think sometimes we lose sight of that in this province, and I think this throne speech points that out. It says that we have a prosperous province. We do. People have jobs. They have a way to support their families. So when I look to A Promise to Our Children, I can think of no greater promise than that.

I like the saying "steady as we grow" because there's no question that we've been able to establish – and I think not just because of oil and gas but because the government was prepared to make tough decisions and to bring this province into a fiscal responsibility mode that allowed it to get where it is today. When we see "steady as we grow" in this speech, I think that that's a reality. Now our task and our job as government is to make sure that we don't, you know, have to go backward, that we can continue to go forward and that the promise can be bright in the future for our children.

I particularly wanted to spend just a moment on A Bright Future for Children, as it was entitled in the speech, and it says that Alberta's most precious resource is its children, that our job is to protect and enable them "to develop to their fullest potential." I don't think of us as not having tried to do this in the past. I think we've gone to great efforts to do this, but what this speech tells me is that we are focusing an even greater attention to this difficulty.

We start with the Child Welfare Act. I'm the chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Part of my responsibility with my committee is to go and visit those children that are not in ideal circumstances. They live in foster care homes. They live in circumstances other than with their families. It is difficult for me to watch those children. I see people providing, and I see foster care parents who are trying very hard, and I always honour the work that they do. Yet these children are not with their families, and they are not in homes. A religious leader once said that it is not enough simply for parents to provide food, shelter for children and their physical well-being, that there's an equal responsibility for us to provide nourishment, direction to the spirit and the mind and the heart.

When I look at these children and I think of my own four children, who have had all the benefits of parents – now, I'm not saying that I'm the best mother always, but practically always, but my children

have always had the benefit of a mother and a father who love them and grandparents who love them. They've had the benefit of living in communities that also care for them. I think of all the coaches that have coached them in basketball over the years. I think of the Scout leaders that have hiked up the hill with them in the middle of the winter and, you know, brought them back home to me even though sometimes they really annoy me and I wonder if they should come back, but they do. I think of those people that have cared and loved my children. I think of the teachers in schools that have invested in my children, worked hard with them to ensure that they got a good education and that their promise was bright.

3:10

I realize that it takes many people in order for this to happen, so when I look at this reform of the Child Welfare Act, I think it's appropriate. I think it's the right thing to do. I do not think government should do this alone. In the speech it says:

This approach recognizes that creating an environment where children succeed is an endeavour that stretches beyond the ability of any one family or any government. Education and health systems, the corporate and voluntary sectors, parents, extended families, and caregivers are all part of a vital community network of supports that must be in place for children to thrive.

And I say, "Hear, hear" to that.

The other piece that was covered by the Speech from the Throne that I wanted to respond to was the initiative for the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research into fetal alcohol syndrome. Myself and the hon. Minister of Children's Services were able last year to go with the hon. Minister of Children's Services to a conference on fetal alcohol syndrome. I must be frank with you. Before I came into office, I wasn't really aware of fetal alcohol syndrome. I've now seen children that have fetal alcohol syndrome. I've been able to talk to foster care parents and parents who adopted fetal alcohol syndrome children. I've been able to visit with mothers that have had fetal alcohol children. I'm not certain why I wasn't exposed to it. I suppose I feel fairly protected in that way, but as I looked and spent time with these children, I realized that it was a problem that needed to be dealt with, and I've been so impressed with the colleagues that are surrounding me that also feel strongly about this. As I see this in the Speech from the Throne, I feel encouraged because it talks about research on the prevention of fetal alcohol syndrome. Much time and attention has already been spent on identifying fetal alcohol and what it is and defining it, but let's prevent it, and I'm encouraged to see this in the Speech from the Throne.

If you look at the Calgary-Shaw constituency, one of the richest resources that it has, although there are some, I guess, sour gas wells in the vicinity, is children. I have over 25,000 children in my constituency. In fact, I have more children in my constituency probably than some members have constituents, which tells me I have roughly, if you do the math, 50,000 parents of those 25,000 constituents that are children, so it's no surprise to me when issues about education or that primarily affect children come along that I hear and that my phones ring and that my e-mail is filled with the concerns of parents and of children. So when Alberta's Commission on Learning was struck, I was very encouraged. I felt like it was an opportunity for us to take a good long look at what we were doing in education. Could we improve on it? Could we make it better? Where were the challenges? I will be bringing forward a motion later that will talk about the complexity of the classroom this year. I think it's something that we do need to address and something whose day has come. So I'm very encouraged when I see in the Speech from the Throne comment on Alberta's Commission on Learning, and I very much await their results and hope that we will

be able to improve an already excellent education system and make it even better.

I was also encouraged to see the \$20 million to help Alberta school boards purchase additional classroom resources and textbooks. Often some have said: well, that only buys half a textbook per child. But I would like to point out that there is budget already out there for textbooks, and this will add and enhance that and create more opportunity for textbooks, and I think it's a good-news story. I was very encouraged when I saw that in the Speech from the Throne.

In the few short minutes that I have left I just want to touch briefly on infrastructure. Many of you have heard me talk about infrastructure, and at the beginning of it it talks about a solid infrastructure. "As Alberta has grown, so has its need for health facilities, schools, and roads." Now, what I say to my constituents is: many of you have come to the province because you have jobs, but unfortunately you were not able to drag with you your schools, your roads, and your hospitals. So as I see my constituency continue to grow, we have needs in my constituency for these things. It says in the speech that the "economic growth has surpassed its investment in capital projects, and Albertans aren't willing to wait until tomorrow for the infrastructure they need today." I think that reflects the Calgary-Shaw constituency. They recognize that there's difficulty in this area, and that's why, first of all, they sent me to Edmonton, and that's what they look to us for as government: to not tell them why they can't have it but to come up with the kinds of solutions that will ensure and enable them to have it in the future. So I'm very much encouraged as I look at this government trying to become more flexible in how they look at infrastructure.

Now, perhaps all ideas out there are not the best ideas, and perhaps things have been tried other places that were not effective. That doesn't mean that we can't capitalize on the successes. I think of the Bethany care facility within my constituency, which is a P3 arrangement and working very well. [some applause] Thank you. I also think of Hampton school, which I've seen in the news. All over the news they talk about Hampton school, but I've had opportunity to tour that school and talk to parents and students and teachers, and I can tell you that there are some pretty happy parents and teachers and students in Hampton school today, very grateful that there was a P3 arrangement. Now, could that be improved upon? Absolutely. Are there ways that we as government can help control some of those factors that were negative? Absolutely.

So, again, I'd like to just close today by saying that steady as we grow is the way to go. I think this is a speech of promise and hope, and I think the Calgary-Shaw constituency will enjoy reading this. I thank you again.

The Deputy Speaker: Comments? Questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to speak.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there are no questions for the hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, that's what I had asked, and that's why I was asking you. Go ahead.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise in this Assembly to speak to the Speech from the Throne. I concur completely with the comments of the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw in expressing her feelings and, I'm sure, the feelings of all of us about the condition of the Lieutenant Governor and the courageous job she did in delivering this speech just a few short days ago, an inspiration for all of us.

There has been much discussion already on the nature of the Speech from the Throne, and the phrase I've heard from any number of us is that it's a matter sometimes of looking at whether the glass is half full or the glass is half empty. I think we may want to say that sometimes some people's glasses are full and some people's glasses are empty, and we need to keep all of that in perspective. It's not a simple issue of: is one single glass half full or half empty? The fact of the matter is that for many of us, probably for all of us who are members of this Assembly in most regards our glasses, our lives are very full and very wealthy and very prosperous. But there are many people in this province whose glasses are by any measure less than half full, and we want to try to remember those people as we go through our daily business in this Assembly.

The Speech from the Throne, of course, is focused on children, A Promise to Our Children, and that's a noble focus for this speech and for this government and for this Assembly. I think we would all concur that looking after children and providing all the resources and supports we can for children from conception right through to the early years of school is crucial and is probably the single most important way to secure the future of this province. So, for example, when amendments to the Child Welfare Act are raised – and I'm told that they will "emphasize the importance of early intervention and the preservation of the family" – I commend that, and I hope that that prevents, for example, the kinds of issues that we were debating a year ago in this Assembly from arising, where we saw reductions to early intervention programs.

I also agree completely with the emphasis on fetal alcohol syndrome. It's a frightening problem for this society. There have been some dramatic crimes, some murders committed in this province by people who suffer from this condition, and they really have no conception of what they're doing. That's just a small and dramatic example of the severity of this disease. I know that it's extremely widespread. The thing is that we already know how to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome. We know what causes it, and we know how to prevent it. So I hope that rather than just pouring research money into this question, we actually take action, as the Minister of Children's Services has, but we need to take more action on preventing fetal alcohol syndrome.

3:20

Another tremendous program that as recently as last night I was hearing very discouraging words about the future of is the Alberta initiative for school improvement, AISI, as it's known as in schools. They have had some dramatic results through this program in many schools in Edmonton, including some schools in the most impoverished neighbourhoods.

What's the issue? Well, the issue is that the funding is running out for those programs this year. This is it, and there's a very decided risk that young children, preschoolers in neighbourhoods like Norwood and indeed neighbourhoods across Edmonton and across Alberta will suddenly not have the supports that have made huge differences to their early childhood development. So I hope that that program gets extended as a result of this speech.

The \$20 million investment in schools and school resources, frankly, is too small, but it's better than nothing. There are schools in this province, for example, where the maps still show the Soviet Union, and that sort of geography is so far out of date that we're not doing anybody an advantage by that. If schools can use some of this money to improve their resources, great, but we shouldn't have allowed them to get so far behind as it is.

Moving to the section of the speech on a strong economy, the two great emphases in the speech are on agriculture and energy, which we all agree are absolutely fundamental to the prosperity of this

province. The agriculture sector is in a very rough spot. I know that we voted in the fall for a substantial increase to support that sector because of the drought and ironically also because of some flooding in southern Alberta, but I'm afraid that the future of this sector is in for long-term problems and that we need long-term solutions. I know that our leader has some very clearly thought-through ideas on that, and I hope the government listens to those.

I am concerned about the commitment of this government to continue to oppose the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. A tremendous number of farmers in this province and across western Canada support the Canadian Wheat Board, and they show that every time members to the board of the Canadian Wheat Board are elected, and they continuously elect members who want the Wheat Board to continue. I'm concerned that this government is actually listening to a very narrow voice on that particular issue.

The energy industry also gets a substantial amount of attention, and let's be honest: it's the energy industry that separates Alberta's economy from the economies of the other provinces in this country. So well they deserve particular attention, but they don't deserve the kind of attention the electricity industry has received in this province in the last few years. We all know that electricity deregulation has brought many problems, and I am concerned when I read that the government is planning to make further changes and hopes that these changes will "increase competition and value for consumers." Frankly, I'm a big fan of competition, but anyone who knows economics knows that there are limits to markets and that competition doesn't always work and that in fact it was because of a breakdown in competition early in the 20th century that we got into regulated electricity in the first place. I am not optimistic that the moves of this government are going to benefit consumers of electricity in Alberta at all.

The economy needs to diversify in this province, and although we trumpet the efforts of diversification, if you take a hard look at their success, proportionately Alberta's economy is still overly dependent on energy and agriculture and especially on energy. Tory governments have been trying for 25 years or more to diversify the economy with very mixed success and some spectacular failures. I'm not sure what new thoughts this government has to put into place as it's suggested here, but we'll be watching them carefully.

P3s have had a fair bit of debate, and they're going to get a fair bit more, I'm sure. They are specifically referred to in the Speech from the Throne. It's curious. The Speech from the Throne says that "Albertans aren't willing to wait until tomorrow for the infrastructure they need today. That's why the government will develop a new capital plan to address infrastructure needs." Well, I'm sure there has been a capital plan in place for many years. I'm not sure why we particularly need a new one. The old one would probably have worked perfectly well if the government had just followed it. Instead, it was on and off and on and off. So some stability, which we've argued for in this party for many years, will be welcomed in the sector. However, turning to P3s is a risky business, and I would encourage – encourage – the Minister of Infrastructure and all members of this government to very, very carefully examine the evidence on P3s. There is, in fact, an extensive body of analysis on P3s, and by and large their usefulness is extremely limited. So let's approach this issue with great caution.

The new fiscal framework that's referred to in the Speech from the Throne is hard to disagree with in any substance because, after all, it is essentially a borrowing of our own party's position. So my congratulations to the government for doing that.

Seniors. While the Member for Calgary-Shaw has a huge number of children in her constituency, I have a huge number of seniors, and if there's something I would have liked to have seen more emphasis

on in this speech, it is the plight of seniors, over half of whom are living on incomes of under \$15,000 a year. Seniors have borne the brunt of a great number of the government's cuts in the last decade, and it doesn't look from this speech like they're going to get much of that returned. So I would like to see much more careful attention paid to seniors.

And now to health care. Health care will continue to be the top priority of Albertans and of Canadians as it has been for many, many years now. This government from the beginning has wrestled with health care and has in my view and the view of many, many other people not done a particularly good job of it. In fact, health care is one of the areas that this government consistently scores low on in terms of public confidence, and there are many reasons for that.

But at least they're right that still more money is not the only answer for improving health care. I think that we would all agree with that. One way of improving health care is better management, and I am very concerned that we have a health department in which in 10 years there have been eight changes of deputy minister, the revolving door at the top of that department, and as a result there's continuous chaos. So it would have been nice to see a commitment to steady management there.

I would also like to have seen some explicit addressing of conflict of interest issues in the health care system because the system as it is now tolerates conflicts of interest that, for example, would never be tolerated in the legal system. They would never be tolerated in any major corporation, and indeed they wouldn't be tolerated elsewhere in the public sector. It's an issue that needs to be sorted out.

There are also questions of the credibility of the promises of the Speech from the Throne. I mean, after all, I'm reading from the Speech from the Throne of 2001, that says: "The government will provide Albertans with a stronger voice in health system management. This fall Albertans will elect two-thirds of the board members of the 17 regional health authorities." Unfortunately, a mere two Speeches from the Throne later we've seen those elected positions abolished. So it does make me wonder: how much can we rely on the promises that we're seeing in the Speech from the Throne? How much does it mean when we read fine words under the section on the health system here when those promises are so easily and so soon broken? But we can always hope, and we can always work, as we will, to hold the government accountable.

3:30

The speech also has drawn some controversy over its comments about Alberta's position in Canada, and I would like to note the curious paradox in which this government very, very tightly ties its funding to school boards. So, for example, the \$20 million being provided can't be spent on anything except exactly what this government says. They're very quick to tie funds to school boards, but oh, my goodness, if the federal government ties funds forwarded to the province, the noise, the complaining, the objections are nothing short of remarkable. It's this kind of double standard that rubs many Albertans the wrong way and, frankly, undermines the province's own position. Wouldn't it have been better just to have said: "We'll give the \$20 million to the school boards. You guys spend it how you want." That's how we want the federal government to treat us. That's a position that could be respected.

Finally – I see I'm running out of time here – this province wants to do everything to protect Alberta's economy. We agree with that, but I for one have differing views on what actions need to be taken there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions? Comments?

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to respond to this year's throne speech. This province is truly blessed with the gift of our Lieutenant Governor, and I wish her a speedy recovery as we all keep her in our thoughts and prayers and send her our hugs.

Like Her Honour I share a vision for our children and our youth, a vision where we in the Legislature make a promise to them, a promise of protection, encouragement, and, most of all, prosperity. Themistocles of ancient Athens demonstrated the importance of children to government when he said, "The Athenians govern the Greeks; I govern the Athenians; you, my wife, govern me; your son governs you."

Mr. Speaker, every parent understands exactly what Themistocles meant and, therefore, why the Alberta Promise is so important. This promise is shared by the people of Alberta and by the people of Red Deer. Did you know that there are some people in Red Deer that actually think that Red Deer is the centre of the universe? And then there are some people in Red Deer that know that Red Deer is the centre of the universe.

In response to Her Honour's remarks, I'd like to talk about three very important issues that are at the heart of Alberta's Promise. The first is mentoring and the important difference that having a strong mentor makes in a young life. The second is doing everything we can to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome in Alberta and to do this without any hesitation. The third is ensuring that we take all necessary steps to protect Alberta's prosperity, especially in light of the federal government's ratifying of the potentially dangerous Kyoto protocol.

On my first point, one of the promises Her Honour highlighted is to ensure that "every child receives ongoing support, care, and guidance from at least one caring adult in his or her life." For most Albertan children this support comes from within the family, but we know that many children come from troubled homes or from single-parent homes where that parent works hard to pay the bills and to set a good example for his or her children. In cases where a parent needs a little help from their friends and neighbours, when they need someone else to be there for their child, every Albertan who is ready, willing, and able should take the time to be there as a mentor, as an in-school mentor or as a Big Sister or Big Brother. We already have dedicated and committed mentors in the form of coaches for hockey, soccer, ringette, lacrosse, and every other kind of coach, in the form of leaders for Brownies, Cubs, Guides, Scouts, Pathfinders, and Venturers, and in the form of youth group leaders as well as teachers and tutors. These mentors do a great job, but we need more.

Mr. Speaker, in my role as head of the Youth Secretariat I've seen firsthand the value of mentoring. When I go into schools where Big Sisters and Big Brothers have in-school mentoring programs, I not only see kids who are happier, healthier, and learning more enthusiastically, but I also see mentors who are happy as well. If you talk to anyone who's taken on the role of a mentor, including the in-school mentors, you'll hear stories about the good things that the child is doing and the successes of that child. You'll also hear them talking about how much fun it can be and how rewarding it is to play a significant role in the life of a young person.

If you knew beyond any doubt that by spending an hour a week with a child or a youth, you could make a huge difference in their lives, if you knew that just by being there, you could prevent them from turning to drugs or alcohol or that you could keep them in school and guide them to a successful future, that just by being there, you could prevent them from attempting suicide, would you do it? Would you take the time to be a mentor? My husband has always said that if you take a kid fishing, you'll never have to fish for him or her, or if you take a kid hunting, you'll never have to hunt for him

or her. Mr. Speaker, maybe it's time to take a kid fishing or hunting.

The theme of Her Honour's speech is Alberta's Promise. I'd also like to call it Alberta's challenge. I challenge each and every Albertan to call Big Sisters and Big Brothers or the boys and girls clubs and get involved. It will be one of the most rewarding decisions you will ever make.

Mr. Speaker, John F. Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Well, you don't have to be a soldier or an astronaut, a brain surgeon or an Olympic athlete to make a difference for your country. You can make a huge difference by being a mentor, somebody's own personal hero.

On my second point, Mr. Speaker, I commend Her Honour's comments with regard to Alberta's efforts to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome. Fetal alcohol syndrome is a brutal affliction, even more sad because of the fact that children are born with it and it is not curable. It is a syndrome that inhibits their development and in such a way that some do not even know they have this problem. Yet the negative social effects of FAS are well known. We know that babies born with FAS don't recover, and often those with FAS become adults who are not financially or socially self-sufficient, and they are more likely to require special education and drop out of school. Some will likely end up in our jails because they do not know how to cope with this affliction. Many children with FAS grow up to be alcohol or substance abusers themselves.

The opportunity for children born with FAS to live a healthy, normal, and successful life is drastically reduced, and for some sufferers that opportunity does not exist at all. It is up to us to make sure that we take steps to rid Alberta of this terrible form of brain damage. I know that many of my colleagues are already fighting the good fight and that all my colleagues will join me in encouraging our government to keep fighting FAS. Red Deer and central Alberta are fortunate to have many caring and well-trained volunteers and outreach workers that are helping families and children to cope with this life sentence.

Finally, to my third point, Mr. Speaker. It will come as no surprise to anybody in this Assembly that my constituents are particularly concerned with the federal government's ratification of the Kyoto protocol. After all, when you're talking about Red Deer, you're talking about the centre of the oil and gas service industry. Not only has the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and the city council of Red Deer informed the provincial and federal governments of their objections to the Kyoto protocol, but so have numerous businessmen and corporations. Our provincial government has reiterated its intention to fight the Kyoto protocol should it prove to be as onerous as first expected. That's only one part of the equation. The other is the commitment to future generations of Albertans that we will not let any action by the federal government risk the opportunity of these Albertans for success.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't make me very happy to have to stand here with skepticism about our federal government, but I am nonetheless disheartened by its performance of late. Believe me; coming from Red Deer my constituents have long memories. Folks from Red Deer remember the national energy program, and they remember how it decimated the economy of the province. They remember the daily bankruptcies of businesses that failed because of flawed federal programming. And Red Deer was not the only city that suffered. To this very day I still see tough, mighty oil workers and educated, well-trained professionals shudder at the very sound of that which cannot be named.

3:40

So when we see another solution brought in from Ottawa or in this

case from a city in Japan that many Albertans had never heard of before, we rightly get suspicious, and when the federal Minister of the Environment tells me that their calculations only show an increase of 20 cents on a barrel of oil, I pray that those calculations weren't made by the same people who calculated the cost of the gun registry. When we see this made-in-Ottawa solution coupled with this wasteful gun registry, the monopolistic Canadian Wheat Board, the too little, too late farm programs, and the new round of federal intrusions into social programs, I start to shudder. This is not how this country is supposed to work.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will be introducing Motion 502 that asks the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to investigate and take steps to strengthen Alberta's position within Confederation. What might have worked 100 years ago does not work today. We need to negotiate a new deal in Confederation for all Albertans. After all, that is part of our promise: to protect our prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a good Canadian, and I will always remain so. This is also most definitely true of my constituents in Red Deer-North and many other Albertans. It does not seem to me that just because hardworking Albertans have found success, it is the federal government's job to waltz through and squash it. In fact, it should be the other way around; they should be encouraging our success because success for Alberta means success for Canada. In the case that the federal government will not share our success, this government will be there. We'll work so our young people know that this is still the best province in Canada and the best place in the world to live, work, and raise a family. And when the federal government comes calling with a new, punitive program that nobody asked for, we'll work hard to make them take it right back to Ottawa. This is another promise that we can make to our children.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to add that a new fiscal framework to bring predictability, sustainability, and more discipline to fiscal management will be welcomed by the constituents of Red Deer. By eliminating the need for stop-and-go infrastructure spending, all Albertans will benefit.

On the environmental side I am very pleased that this government will provide funding for a clean coal demonstration project to develop techniques for the use of coal in electricity generation. We all know that sustainable economic growth requires clean air, water, and land and that Albertans will accept no less. This is why I am also very pleased about a made-in-Alberta plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked about three of the issues underlying Her Honour's promise to Alberta's children and youth. These are three of many. This government is right to put the concerns of our children and youth first and to promote and take action to ensure a prosperous life for them and indeed all Albertans. I, like most Albertans, have confidence in our government to fulfill these promises. I also have confidence in our wonderful citizens to follow our lead.

Mr. Speaker, when I was six years old, I made a promise. I promised to do my best, to do my duty to God, the Queen, and my country, and to help other people every day, especially those at home. Now, my mother might tell you something different, but I've always tried to keep that promise. I also intend to keep Alberta's Promise to ensure that Alberta's most precious resource, its children, are protected and enabled to develop to their fullest potential.

May God bless Alberta, and God bless Canada. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Ms Kryczka: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been more than six years since I was first elected MLA for the constituency of Calgary-

West and six years since I first responded to the 1997 Speech from the Throne. I clearly remember describing proudly the distinctive community and geographic areas of Calgary-West and the wide range of ages of my constituents and especially the high standards and expectations they have for themselves and for their political representatives, especially their aldermen, school trustees, and MLA.

Now, six years later, I am of course much wiser, but I know I'm older. Much has happened in Calgary-West. Explosive development in the western half resulted in 70 percent of K to 12 students living in that sector having to leave the area to attend one of the many underutilized schools in the east sector of the constituency. There are traffic challenges also. Movement of constituents to and from work is an increasing frustration these days.

There are, however, many more housing choices for the increasing number of seniors who are choosing to age in place, who have said good-bye to their residential homes with the high-maintenance yards which they have lived in for many, many years. In Calgary-West there are, fortunately, increasing housing choices for all income levels of seniors. I am increasingly concerned, even alarmed, though, that with the years just how much more seniors become frail and thus dependent on others to maintain an acceptable way of life.

Turning to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, which the Lieutenant Governor delivered so beautifully in her very special style on Tuesday, February 18. She should know that we all embrace her too. I wrote this before I read my memo about her recent health status, but especially now I wanted to say briefly that I extend to her our sincerest prayers for a full recovery.

I was very pleased with the key messages in the theme A Promise to Our Children with a focus on Albertans' common values, their pride in meeting challenges and trying new things, in working hard, in being independent but with a strong sense of responsibility to family and community. I agree with the steady-as-we-go challenge to manage growth pressures today and remain strong into the future.

Mr. Speaker, who can disagree with these goals, unless you have no family or children? Being a mother of two adult children and another two by my second marriage and now a grandmother of nine, I have a huge personal interest in the importance of planning for the next 10, 20, and 30 years. Whether it be access to quality health services, an excellent learning system, a strong economy, stabilizing of the energy sector long term, accelerating research, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, providing solid infrastructure, developing a more sustainable fiscal framework, and responding to the needs of people, especially the most vulnerable, the priorities in the throne speech covered very well all of the areas important to providing young Albertans with a better quality of life today and in the future.

However – and there's always a however, and that's where I'm at right now – economists and planners nationally and worldwide have red flagged demographics and an aging population for many years now. My counterparts in other provinces readily acknowledge that Alberta has the youngest population in Canada, and therefore we have the benefit of more time to prepare for its true impact in 10, 20, 30 years. Seniors are only 10 percent of our population now, so why worry today? The time of 20 to 25 percent seniors is years down the road. But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I have an increasing concern that is reinforced with very credible sources that as a government we are not acutely aware of the increasing numbers and health needs of vulnerable Albertans. By vulnerable I mean those who are too frail physically or mentally to advocate for themselves to government and health authorities and therefore depend on family and caregivers to do so.

The vulnerable include people of all ages, but the majority are older seniors. Think about this. Since 1997, for example, we have all become six years older, with time bringing about physical

changes and chronic conditions that we have to live with daily and for the rest of our lives. I'm probably speaking now to the older colleagues who are here in the House. For me I have now got progressive arthritis in my hands, and without medication most days it is very painful. My 90-year-old mother, Mary Sterling, has a walker now, provided by a wonderful provincewide community support program, Alberta Aids to Daily Living. It enables her to stay mobile more safely in her congregate living housing setting, but my mother has increasing osteoporosis in her spine and legs. I see a noticeable increase in her frailty monthly, but her great attitude never waivers. I'm sure most of you today can easily think of someone very close to you with similar progressive health problems. It's not hard to do.

Since 1997 I have visited seniors in many housing settings, and each time I revisit, I see significant changes: many walkers now where there were none and more than just a few wheelchairs. Many seniors no longer live there. They have moved to a long-term care setting, an Alzheimer's care centre, or have passed away. Since the development of the long-term care review report, very few frail seniors are now admitted to acute care hospitals. Bed blockers is pretty much a label of the past.

3:50

So I ask, Mr. Speaker: where do these seniors go? We know that seniors are living longer thanks to modern technology, but not all of them are able to spend their last years or months at home in a supportive community setting. One fact in Alberta is that there is an increasing number of older seniors and those with disabilities in the long-term care system who have complex and chronic care needs or, put another way, multiple severe health problems. They are a distinct subgroup of the population. Call it seniors' C3. By seniors' C3 I mean the seniors' chronic, complex care group, and I don't say that in jest, but they are definitely a very important group in our society.

This situation also exists in Ontario and, as in Alberta, the work for hardworking professional staff is heavier and more stressful in care centres now than in an acute care hospital. In Alberta many long-term care facilities are replacing the role of the chronic hospital, providing respirators and tube feeding to residents, for example.

A second reality of this health situation is insufficient funding to the long-term care operators to provide better quality care. The present funding formula, the CMI, or case mix index, is outdated. It's 15 years old, and more dollars are required for medical technology changes, pressures on the system, and increasing costs. Assessments for funding are done in the fall with funding released the following July, which is then out of step with residents' present needs. This government needs to commit to develop a more appropriate funding formula, one which will enable regional health authorities to more adequately fund an enhanced level of long-term care.

A third reality, Mr. Speaker, is the aging population, as I've already noted. A large very well managed long-term care centre administrator in Calgary has quoted to me that there was 80 percent walkers and 20 percent wheelchairs in their centre, and now it's reversed, 20 percent walkers and 80 percent wheelchairs. It is really important to understand that our population is not only aging or growing older. That age group is expanding in size from, as I said earlier, 1 in 10 to 1 in four.

A fourth reality that this government must address is Alberta's current long-term care accommodation rates, which are the lowest in Canada. Alberta's is \$32.60 per day, while the national average is \$58 per day. The accommodation rates paid by the resident are expected to cover the resident's cost for room and board and not

costs associated with direct care, nursing, rehabilitation, and support services, which are covered by the region or the government. In January 2002 this government increased the accommodation rates by 14 percent, or approximately \$4 a day, the first increase since 1994. A second anticipated increase by government has been deferred to date. This situation is a disincentive for owners to upgrade facilities or for private providers to enter the market.

The Alberta Long Term Care Association is unique in Canada in that it speaks with a united voice for private, voluntary, and public-sector facilities across Alberta. Its 30 member organizations employ over 15,000 Albertans, and they care for more than 10,000 elderly clients. They have urged government through the Health and Community Living Standing Policy Committee to address these funding problems.

Mr. Speaker, I've also heard many similar messages of urgency from the Alberta Gerontological Nurses' Association both in Calgary and in Edmonton, and in Edmonton it was at a recent presentation to the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. I've also heard from key administrators in the Calgary health region, from a number of individual owners and operators of long-term care centres, and from many very concerned parent members. The messages are the same and are cause for government attention.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, our health system reform must include addressing the complex and chronic health needs of the subgroup that I have described. If we do not address the funding needs in this area, we will defeat, for example, our goal of retention of gerontology health professionals in the long-term care system. Our target of staying healthy may help prevent a degree of chronic diseases for many of us in the future, but we have a responsibility as a society and as a government to adequately care for those Albertans who are most vulnerable.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions? Comments?

Our next speaker, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like all of my colleagues here I, too, would like to pass on my best wishes to our Lieutenant Governor in the hopes that she has a speedy recovery. Sadly, it also reminds me of so many of us who over the last few years have all dealt with members of our own families. Our Lieutenant Governor is like part of our family, but on a more personal level I, too, have members of my family that have been dealing with cancer this past year, and it is really a devastating disease.

I would like to say, though, that our health care system, you know, fraught with problems as it is – and there's never enough money or never enough resources to do everything that everybody wants it to – has been there for the people in my life that have had to deal with it, particularly this last year, and I'm very grateful to the dedicated doctors and nurses in both Ponoka and Red Deer that have been dealing with my family. I know how hard they work and how seriously they take their jobs, and I'm very grateful that they're there.

Back to the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about a bright future for our children, there are few things more important than our children, if you can think of anything more important than them. I'm lucky. My sons are now, you know, past the K to 12 stage. One of them has a degree from the University of Calgary. The other is working on a certified program. I can tell you that education throughout the whole time that I've been an MLA has been an ongoing issue. It think it was probably an issue when I was going to school. It'll probably be an issue when my sons' children

are going to school. I'm not sure how you ever satisfy the growing expectations or the needs or the wants of everybody, but every government globally has to deal with their economics the best way they can.

We have tried to increase funding for education. Is it enough? Probably not. Will it ever be enough? Probably not. Are there things that we can do? Yes, I think there are. Perhaps the \$20 million is a step in the right direction. Maybe we need to be looking at a little bit more on the classroom side as we go toward the budget, and with any luck we can sort some of those issues out as well.

I'm one of the MLAs that's received hundreds of letters, and it really is hundreds. There were over 350 of them in the last four months from the Catholic school system in my area. They've got some serious issues, and they want some serious answers. I try really hard to listen to their concerns and deal with them to the best of my ability. It would be real easy if I could just come up with another \$400 million or \$500 million for education tomorrow, but probably next year I would find myself in exactly the same position, where once again it's not going to be enough for longer than a day.

As a taxpayer I can tell you that I'm not real keen on paying a lot more in income tax. We are spending as Canadians – forget the Alberta part – \$37.6 billion this year on interest on a federal debt, and it does matter, Mr. Speaker. When you put that number out there, \$37.6 billion, what does that really mean? Well, I'll put it to you this way. If you took 10 percent of that money, it would be \$3.76 billion, which would pay 50 percent of health care in Alberta. So when we sit as Albertans, as Canadians and we yowl and rant and rave about things in Alberta not being quite what they should be – but the deafening silence by our media, in particular, on critical thinking issues on a federal government level absolutely astounds me. Where are they?

We had one of my colleagues over here today talking about MLAs giving themselves a raise every year. Well, let's put that into some kind of perspective when we talk about the fiscal realities of this province. As a committee we decided that it would be easier to address a very tense issue. It's something nobody wants to deal with ever, but we have to deal with it realistically. You can't come along every four or five years and give yourself a 20 or 30 percent raise. There are members of that caucus and that little caucus that are on Members' Services that have agreed to these issues, so if we're doing it wrong, then I guess we need to deal with it in another way. That can be done as well.

When we fund education and you come up with several hundred million dollars to try and help an education budget and the vast majority of it goes to wages, that's normal. That's the biggest expense in a school, but it does make it difficult to try and do the other things that we want to do, which is to try and improve classroom conditions.

4:00

I have great, great hopes pinned on that Commission on Learning when they come back with their recommendations. I hope that after 30 years the study that they're doing will encompass all kinds of new and innovative ideas and not just be something that says: well, now you've got to go spend another \$4 billion, and oh, by the way, the results won't really change because you're already number one in Canada, you're probably number one in the world on most things, and your teachers are the highest paid in Canada.

So what do we need to fix after that? We need to fix some of the conditions inside the classroom. One of the more difficult issues that people really don't want to deal with or talk about is the full integration side. We know that there are some parents who believe that their children truly benefit from this, but we also know that there

are parents who feel that it has created a certain amount of chaos inside classrooms. It's not fair to teachers, and it's not fair to the other children. What's the right balance? I'm not sure, not being an expert on such matters, but I do know that we must not be afraid to deal with it, and I hope that the Commission on Learning is looking at it as well and will come back with some recommendations that we can work with to try and alleviate some of those problems.

On the new fiscal framework side of things, well, setting up a sustainability fund I believe has some merit. Also, for me personally it creates some concerns. When you're looking at it on a global basis, there are a few places where that kind of fiscal sustainability fund has actually worked quite well, and there are other places where it has been an unmitigated disaster. So we need to make sure, when we build this, that we build it in such a way that it creates a positive environment for this province and not just something else that creates more of a problem.

On the economy side, I think probably the highlight for me when the Lieutenant Governor was doing the Speech from the Throne was on the value-added side. I'm a firm believer in value added. As a child growing up in Alberta in the oil patch and later in agriculture – we're a great province for producing wonderful resources and shipping them out. I don't know if there are very many people in here that have actually spent time on a farm, but when you get, you know, 75 cents or 95 cents a pound for a thousand-pound steer or heifer and you go to buy some beef in the grocery store and it's, like, \$18 a pound, you think: "Okay. What part did I miss? How did it go from there to there? Somebody cut that thing, and now it's worth 20 times more than it was when I sold it." I probably lost money selling it, because we did that about seven years out of nine when we were raising cattle. The value-added side is where we can make agriculture into a \$20 billion industry. When I leave here, if we can achieve something like that, nothing would make me more proud than to have watched an industry such as oil and gas, such as agriculture or the wonderful natural resources we have turn around and make it into good-paying jobs for Albertans, keeping some of the value inside our province and helping to develop and diversify our economy.

You were right: on some of our economic changes we've been a little bit hit and miss. Realistically, 15 years ago in Alberta 40 percent of government revenue came from oil and gas, and now it's about 21 percent. So diversification does work. It is important, and we must continue down that road. What does that mean? Maybe in the future we'll have to look at some of our tax policies because when we look at venture capital, research and development issues we are not competitive with other provinces. As a result of that R and D technological advances are not being done here. They're being done in other provinces, and that's just an enormous loss for us. We do all of the work on the research, we help set up funds to do university research, and then we watch the technology leave the province so that somebody else gets the good-paying jobs. We need to address that.

The last thing I wanted to mention briefly was being a full partner in Canada. As one of the original people on the triple E Senate for Canada I can tell you that I don't believe that Canada can continue the way it is, not just because I'm a proud Albertan and a strong Albertan but because as a Canadian I don't think it's right or acceptable that one part of the country can totally and completely dictate to another part of the country. We want to be an equal partner in Confederation. I don't think that's asking too much. If one way of trying to achieve that is to have a tripe E Senate so that it can be a Senate where you have 10 Senators from each province or two Senators from each province – I don't really care what the number is. It has to be equal, elected, and effective. I think it would

be something that a federal government, looking around this country and wondering why one of the major players in this country is unhappy - then they need to start looking at what has made us unhappy. It's because we're not being treated equally or with respect, and it's time for both.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat and thank you once again for the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, could I move to adjourn debate on this?

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: Second Reading

Bill 1

Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act on behalf of our Premier and on behalf of our Minister of Children's Services, who has championed Alberta's Promise for some time now and, I think, will be delighted to see this particular initiative come into force in Alberta.

Alberta's Promise is a nonprofit entity designed to encourage and recognize co-operation among Albertans to increase resources for programs benefiting our children and youth. The goal of Alberta's Promise is to mobilize the corporate sector and communities to form partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and governments to secure a brighter future for children and youth in Alberta. No money will flow through the Alberta's Promise organization. Partners will simply make a pledge as to how they will increase their contributions toward the well-being of children and then follow through on their promises. Corporations or communities are recognized as Alberta's Promise partners if they increase their investment in supporting children and youth by over 5 percent above current levels.

The five promises that make up Alberta's Promise are: committing to give Alberta's children "a healthy start and a promising future," working with neighbours to provide "safe and healthy communities for our children's growth, education, and development," leading by example and encouraging others to do the same, setting an example that the rewards of volunteering are immeasurable, and "seeking out the best tools, [best] models, and [best] examples of other individuals and communities so that Alberta's children may learn, benefit, and succeed."

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

The intent of the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act is to establish the initiative, form a council to oversee its operation, and provide for the membership of the council. Providing a legislative base for Alberta's Promise will assist in raising the profile of this community collaboration both provincially and nationally.

The concept itself has been implemented in the United States as America's Promise and in Ontario as Ontario's Promise. Alberta, however, will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to enshrine the initiative in legislation. Establishing the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise will enhance the initiative, and it is expected to assist in attracting high-profile community and corporate leaders to the council.

The Premier will chair the council. Its members and vice-chair will be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council for a

maximum term of three years. Council members will have the following duties:

- (a) act in an advisory capacity [to implement] Alberta's Promise,
- (b) promote Alberta's Promise,
- (c) provide leadership in promoting the development of community strategies [that enhance] the well-being of children, [youth, and families],
- (d) raise awareness of the shared responsibility of . . . [all sectors of society for enhancing] the well-being of children, [youth, and families],
- (e) encourage financial and other support for initiatives and research that [enhance] the well-being of children, [youth, and families].

The Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise will outline that the council members will not be paid, but they may be reimbursed for travel and subsistence expenses. The Ministry of Children's Services will provide the administrative funding to assist the council in carrying out its duties. This bill, Mr. Speaker, will also require that the council prepare an annual report outlining its activities and the status of Alberta's Promise.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Promise, as I've said, is not a new initiative, but it's an initiative which has worked in other areas, as America's Promise and Ontario's Promise, and it's bringing into Alberta yet one more initiative which can encourage members of the community, which can encourage the corporate sector, the business sector, and communities to work together to enhance and improve quality of life for our children. We've heard over the last several days speakers replying to the Speech from the Throne, and the Speech from the Throne itself focused considerably on a bright future for our children. In fact, ensuring that our children have the abilities to succeed, to be the best that they can be, to maximize their potential surely is one of our most important goals.

4:10

Bill 1, while in some ways symbolic, as Bill 1 always is, also takes the opportunity not only to state this government's concern, focus, and direction on making sure that children have that opportunity and that promise, but engages all Alberta in the same task as we look forward to make sure that not only do we have an Alberta where our children can live and work and play and grow up in safe communities, can maximize their potential, but that all of our communities, all individuals in the province, and all corporate entities in the province have the opportunity to understand the focus, to participate in the initiative, and to work with us towards that vision, which this province is all about.

So in order to improve the lives of children and youth in Alberta above and beyond those things that government can do by itself, I would ask for all members to support the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act, to join in partnership with businesses and individuals and communities right around this province to help improve the lives of our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Blakeman: Do we get questions?

The Acting Speaker: No.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to address some of the substance of Bill 1, the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act. I have to say at the outset, first of all, that I'm going to support the bill. I think that any effort that the government undertakes to improve the lot and the potential of children is worthy of our support. It doesn't mean that I don't have

some questions about the bill that appears before us, and I'd like to spend a minute or two looking at some of those questions.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bills in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, usually reflect public policy or public policy attempts to address a problem. As I read Bill 1, I'm trying to determine exactly what the government thinks the problem is and what Bill 1 does in terms of a solution. Let me give some other examples. For instance, we have Bill 5, the fence disputes. It's intended, I think it's pretty clear, to resolve those issues when they arise between people with property that adjoins each other. Bill 11 is designed to look at how the Auditor General acts in particular situations and to take the office of the Auditor General and to improve, in ways, its operation. Bill 7 talks about the real estate industry and how agents and people working in that industry are to conduct themselves. Those are bills where it's fairly clear what the problem is and how the government through legislation is attempting to come up with a solution.

But in this case of Bill 1 it's not quite so clear. If you look at the preamble, I guess you can ask some questions: does the government feel that children are not our greatest resource? Do they feel that they somehow or other are not being valued? Did children not have the opportunities to reach their potential? Is there not a commitment to children on behalf of all Albertans? So it's rather a curious preamble when you look at it from the perspective of a bill designed to help solve a problem that exists.

I listened to the Government House Leader's comments. I haven't read the *Hansard*, but it seems that there's a notion that agencies and volunteer groups that are working on behalf of youngsters need to raise their contribution, and I thought I heard the figure, by 5 percent. I guess I'm curious as to where that kind of a number would come from and on what basis the government would decide that 5 percent is the number that's appropriate.

The appointment of the council members. I hope they're going to be drawn as being representative of all Albertans and not just government supporters. I worry about the independence of the council members, and I think with good reason. I look back to the Commission on Learning that was established by the government and how that differs so greatly from the previous commission on education, the Worth commission that reported in '71-72. The Worth commission was made up of people who were not known for their political affiliations. They represented the judiciary. They represented college presidents. There was a real attempt in putting together that commission to draw on members of the public who were at least perceived as being independent of the government. When you contrast that to how the current Commission on Learning is constituted, there is a dramatic difference. We even have a sitting MLA on that commission, and the notion that it somehow is arm's length to the government and will make decisions that the government may not favour is really I think drawn into question when you look at the membership. Even the chair of the committee ran as a candidate for MLA in southwest Edmonton. So I worry about the council members and how they will be drawn.

The Government House Leader indicated that the model is drawn from America's Promise and Ontario's Promise. The America's Promise model, if you go to the web site, is a very independent group of leaders who encompass the entire political spectrum. I think, as I indicated in my reply to the Speech from the Throne yesterday, that it was put together by former President Ford, Nancy Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton. So there was an attempt to make sure that America's Promise could be seen as nonpartisan and would be open to working with groups of all political stripes in their efforts to improve the lot of children.

We don't have that with the bill as it is in front of us today. Instead, it's called the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act. I can understand why, in some ways. The Premier has the prestige and the resources and the power to promote and to draw leaders from across the province into an enterprise such as this, but again the mere fact that it is a Premier who is associated with a political party I think is going to at least raise questions in the minds of some individuals and I think would also affect the decisions some individuals might make in terms of serving on the council. So unfortunate that it's not set up in a more independent fashion than it is as it appears to us now.

[The Speaker in the chair]

4:20

The question, again, of what the council is supposed to do I suspect is going to be worked out. I think working on the fetal alcohol problem is admirable. It's one that we all recognize has a great impact on Alberta and across the country, but there are some other huge issues for children, and I hope that the council isn't going to be confined to a narrow perspective. I look, for instance, at the problem of children living in poverty in this province and the huge amount of effort and how complex it is to try to get help to those youngsters and their families. So I hope that the council is going to address broader concerns and not confine itself to very, very important but necessarily narrow projects. I think that the bill – and I said at the beginning that I'm going to support it – has the potential, and it'll be interesting to see how it actually works when the council is in place and starts to do its work.

I'm reminded that at one point in this province's history we had an independent research council that worked on issues such as this and that that council, in fact, did the research that was used by the Worth commission when it last reviewed education in the province. So we have in our past history had a government-sponsored research council – it was fairly independent – that was designed to look into social issues and to do research much as what we've heard from the government with respect to Bill 1 and Alberta's Promise.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing from other members of the government's side of the house in terms of what they envision the council and its work to be, and again I go back to my basic question: what are the problems that Bill 1 is supposed to solve?

I guess I have to conclude with one concern, and that is that somehow or other the government may use the council to withdraw from its responsibility to children, particularly with respect to the Department of Learning and the Department of Children's Services. I think that if that were the case, if the intent is to use the council to render those two departments less responsible to children, it would be a retrograde step and one that I would hope that this government will guard carefully against happening. It would be unfortunate, indeed, if this were seen as a move to have the volunteer and the private sectors take over more responsibility than they already do. There aren't many in this Assembly, I think, that get through a supper hour every week without someone already calling for help or for money for a volunteer endeavour of some kind. I think this is a bill that could add to that kind of burden on those organizations, and I hope, as I said, that doesn't happen and that wasn't the intent when the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise was designed.

Thank you very much.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm happy to rise to speak at second reading of Bill 1, the Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise Act. This bill doesn't make particular sense to me. There are some bills that the

government introduces that I agree with and some bills that the government introduces that I don't agree with, but this bill I just don't get. It doesn't seem to be doing or saying anything.

I listened with great interest when the Attorney General/House leader was presenting the bill because he outlined some pretty specific expectations or motivations for the bill. I looked carefully. I actually was flipping very quickly through the entire four pages of this bill looking for where those very concrete suggestions might be actually found in the bill which would give us something to check the performance against or would be a definitive direction, where people could look on the web site and read the bill and know exactly what was supposed to happen from this bill, but none of those things that the Justice minister actually outlined is, in fact, in the bill. Now, he did at one point read through the activities of the council, but all of the earlier sort of descriptive "this is what we mean to do with this" is, in fact, not in the bill. So it's not enforceable. There's nothing to monitor. There's nothing to judge the performance of the council against.

I don't understand what this bill is about. I mean, it seems to be a nice sort of slogan, a nice way to start out the sitting this year, say some sort of fluffy, cotton candy kind of things where everybody will go, "Oh, isn't that nice," and then nothing more will ever come of it. So I don't understand why they did this, or maybe that's the point. Maybe the point of bringing this bill in was so that we can have yet another avoidance of the real issues on behalf of this government as it regards children, because I'm not seeing where the government is stepping up to the plate on its own commitment and responsibility to education or children in care or perhaps funding for handicapped children or maybe foster children or perhaps prevention programs. Oh, that's right. I forgot. Those are the ones that got cut. Oops. All I keep hearing is: everything's great; the Liberals don't say enough positive things, because everything's just great. And now we've got this lovely slogan promise bill which doesn't actually do anything. It doesn't actually charge members of the council to do anything.

You know, that's interesting, because there's been a lot of talk in this Assembly recently about how blessed Alberta is and how fortunate we are, and you're right. We are. We are very blessed in Alberta. But we're blessed in Alberta by an accident of location in that under our feet flows oil, and that has given us most of our prosperity and our ability to get that oil out of the ground. But, you know, the Premier didn't put that oil there. He really didn't. I know that members opposite like to think that, but he didn't. I'm sorry, but the government's not responsible for having created that. I think we have to look back to another set of dinosaurs that, in fact, created that.

So let's look specifically at this act. Now, we have some interesting things that are in the preamble: recognizing "that children are our greatest resource," that the Legislative Assembly "is committed to building a province where children are valued, nurtured and given the opportunity to reach their full potential" – just remember the words "Legislative Assembly"; I'll come back to that – again, the Legislative Assembly recognizing "that achieving these goals for children requires a commitment and effort on the part of all Albertans." So we get three sort of nice little things that are being said about valuing and nurturing, sort of unsubstantive stuff, no action connected with that, just, you know, aren't they nice, and that's in the preamble, which, as we know, is not considered a part of the substantive legislation and therefore is not enforceable. Well, gee, so that blows sort of the first 25 percent of the bill, the preamble, which is unenforceable.

4:30

So I'm assuming that this promise is meant to be a program that is subsequent to government action. How do I know that since it

isn't really in the bill? Well, you know, gosh, darn, this wasn't an original idea. In fact, it was borrowed heavily – some might use another word – from America's Promise, the Alliance for Youth. Now, that's a totally different approach to it; isn't it? It's talking about an alliance for youth. It has five promises. It starts out:

To mobilize people from every sector of American life to build the character and competence of our nation's youth by fulfilling Five Promises:

1. Caring Adults
2. Safe Places
3. Healthy Start
4. Marketable Skills
5. Opportunities to Serve

Well, where would that be in this bill? Oh, it doesn't seem to be here. Well, I guess we're supposed to just know this, but we don't know it. It's not anything that anyone can ever download from this bill off the web or go and get from Queen's Printer and understand that it's supposed to be in here. It's not. So this is some sort of blank cheque bill, this: well, we'll put a bunch of people together, and they'll do something.

It's interesting because great care is taken in saying that the volunteer members of the council, those appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which, of course, we know is cabinet, won't be paid, but there's also a sector that talks very clearly about employees. I'm wondering if I can get a response from the government as to what the anticipated budget is for this council and how much they expect to be paying their chief officer. I think that could be quite interesting. That certainly indicates whether the government is sort of serious about supporting something or not supporting it. They can sort of strangle it with not very much money, but I'm interested in how much money they're going to pour into something that doesn't have a mandate. So I'm wondering how much a nonmandate is worth. I hope to have a response to that.

When we look at the model from which this was taken, which is this America's Promise, the Alliance for Youth, a couple of things immediately spring out as being quite different. This came from the 1997 Presidents' Summit for America's Future to provide a national call for action. I suspect – I could be wrong here – that this is, in fact, the Bob Stollery memorial bill as the government's attempt to respond to some of the very well-publicized accusations and disappointments that Mr. Stollery made during the Laurel awards luncheon a couple of years ago, which got an awful lot of press and sort of made the government sit up and pay attention. So perhaps this is the Bob Stollery memorial bill.

Now, as I look through the five guarantees or five promises that are available in the American program, it talks about an "ongoing relationship with a caring adult," and they're quite specific. They're talking about a "face-to-face meeting with [a] young person at least once a week" and "structured one-on-one interaction scheduled bi-weekly or weekly." So it's really coming down to very specific instructions on how this is to be followed. Do I find this in our Bill 1? No. I'm disappointed I don't.

Then we talk about "safe places and structures activities." No, I don't find anything mentioning safety or safe places in our bill.

It talks about a healthy start; that's the third promise. Interestingly, they're talking about access. They spell it out: access to "Success by Six" and "Head Start" or other early health interventions. I know that the government felt that they had to cut their early childhood prevention programs, so I'm wondering how they reconcile that. Are they planning to put it back in anticipation of this bill being passed? Maybe their support for Success by Six and Head Start in fact has been enhanced and they're hiding their light under a bushel, but I don't think so. They talk very clearly about health insurance coverage, in particular including eye and dental coverage

“served by a primary care physician.” Well, that would mean that they have to have access to primary care physicians, which a number of people in Alberta are kind of struggling with right now. So there’s something else that the government could step up to the plate on. Access to “two square meals a day.” Boy, we’re sure talking poverty when we’re talking about two square meals a day, not even three.

The fourth promise from America’s Promise is “marketable skills through effective education” with “special emphasis on achieving and maintaining grade level in reading and mathematics,” including young people of working age spending one hour per week with after-school jobs or an organized skill program: internship, apprenticeship, and summer jobs.

Finally, the “opportunity to serve,” which is another part of their basic promise kit. As my much gentler and nicer colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods pointed out . . .

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you know, I tell the truth. I’m honest about it.

This America’s Promise was in fact put together by Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan, George H. Bush, and Bill Clinton. What’s interesting about that is that it’s not nonpartisan; it’s all-party. That’s a major difference with what is happening with this bill. It’s very clearly a partisan endeavour. I mean, it’s headed up by the Premier. The Lieutenant Governor in Council is going to make all of the appointments. Now, I hear whispers that there’ll be some good Liberals on there so that we can’t dare get up and criticize them. Well, then, you’re just smart to take advantage of the good Liberals that are out there, but it’s not going to stop me from saying that there’s nothing in this bill.

I think what this bill should be about is leadership. I once had a corporate leader from Calgary who talked to me about funding for the arts say: you know, Laurie, corporations really look to the government for leadership to sort of set the direction. We were talking specifically about funding for the arts. He said: if the government is not going to show that they approve of what’s happening and support and lead and fund, the corporations aren’t going to follow suit here. I think I can use that same argument here. If we don’t have the government out-front already, showing how they are putting in place funding and support and programs and really committing, then why would any of the corporations or the communities follow suit?

I guess part of what really bothered me when I looked at this – and it was actually exacerbated by what I heard the Justice minister saying – was this concept that somehow the organizations, corporations, and individuals should be taking on more of the load. Given what those sectors have taken on in the last 10 years through off-loading of programs and services, I’d say that they’ve taken and shouldered quite a bit of the load. Now I hear the Justice minister saying that there’s an expectation that they’d better up that by 5 percent. Did I hear that incorrectly, that there was to be an increase in commitment from the corporate and community organizations and individuals by 5 percent? I’m not getting a reaction. I’ll have to check the Blues. Perhaps I’m mistaken, but I thought that’s what I heard. I say: well, if that’s matched by government, fine and dandy.

Thanks.

4:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) now kicks in, so we do have a five-minute question and comment period that is available. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney-General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m wondering if the hon. member would be interested in advising if she thinks it’s a terrible idea that members of our community, whether they be corporate, individual, or municipal or however they are found in our community, the churches, nonprofit organizations, and each of us as individuals could be encouraged to increase their commitment to our children by 5 percent over what they’re doing. Is that a bad thing? Not required, not forced, but encouraged to participate in a greater way in our community to build a better community for our children.

Ms Blakeman: If the government will show the leadership by increasing their participation and support in every way by 5 percent or better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to clarify and ask a question on America’s Promise, a promise that was made and championed by Colin Powell. In the last state of the union address President Bush committed \$450 million from the federal government to sponsor mentoring. That’s how important it is. Ontario made the same promise, and Alberta has made the same promise. That’s why you see the similarities. Then my question is: don’t you think it’s a good thing that if everybody in North America could recognize the promise to all our children, it would be a better place for all of us?

Ms Blakeman: I’m sorry; I haven’t heard of any money being promised by the government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair is open to additional speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to continue the debate.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. I’ll proceed on the debate on Bill 1, the Premier’s Council on Alberta’s Promise Act. None of us are going to disagree with the intent of this act, I don’t think.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I do.

Dr. Taft: Well, not many of us will disagree with the intent of this act or the sentiments of the act, perhaps I should say. However, there are a number of questions that arise from it and questions I’d like to raise and, in fact, suggestions I will make to the government and I think we may consider as an opposition caucus proposing as amendments down the road here.

The first thing I thought would be useful to do is to look up the dictionary meaning of a promise. A promise is an assurance that one will do something or that something will happen, an indication that something is likely to occur, potential excellence or making a promise, give good grounds for expecting, or firmly intends. Those are all what we would hope underlie some of our commitments to children. But one of the puzzles for me and I think for others with this act is that it’s not at all clear what is being promised, at least not in the act. If you were just to read this act, I think you would be left wondering: what is it really about?

So I think, as at least one if not both of my colleagues have pointed out, it would be a wonderful thing if we were to amend the act by actually putting the promise right in legislation so that people reading the act knew what the council was actually up to, and the council itself would know clearly in legislation what its mandate

was. Merely having the promise spelled out in a speech seems to me a halfhearted commitment. Let's take it that step further. Let's actually put the promise in the bill.

Before I get to some of my specific suggestions, constructive as they will be on how to improve the bill, there are questions that we have. Perhaps, judging from some comments made a few moments ago by government members, they have information that we don't have. We have no sense of the funding level for this council that's created in the act. What is the budget going to be? If the United States committed \$450 million to their promise, that would mean that proportionately Alberta might be committing \$4.5 million. Is that what we're looking at here? I don't know, and of course those kinds of commitments are important in us determining how seriously the government will take this bill. So it would be great if we had a more complete set of background information for this debate. What's the budget? Who is the staff going to be? How many staff will there be?

One of the things I wonder: what's going to be the relation between this council, in practical terms, and the Children's Advocate? We do actually have a well-established office in the Children's Advocate, and it seems to me that in many ways the fundamental idea of the Children's Advocate could overlap with Alberta's Promise. So what's the relationship going to be between this council and the Children's Advocate? Will this council report directly to this Assembly? What will be the partisan influences on the council, formal and informal? What's the independence of the council? Those are some of the questions that simply are unaddressed and left unanswered in the legislation as it stands, and we'd love to have more information on that.

Then, of course, there's always the question of results. I'm not familiar, and we've only had this bill how long? One day?

Ms Blakeman: Twenty-four hours.

Dr. Taft: Twenty-four hours, so I don't know what the results have been, for example, from America's Promise. Have they actually spent the \$450 million? Has it been well spent? Has it had an effect? In Ontario what have they done? What have they achieved? What did they set out to achieve? Did they reach their goals? Exceed them? How cost-effective were they? All those kinds of questions come up, and none of them are even set up to be considered in this bill, much less answered. We don't know what the objectives are. We wouldn't know how to measure the success of this bill if it was a success because it's not in here.

So that sets up some of the thoughts I've had about how to improve this bill. There are precedents for putting real detail, real, measurable standards into legislation. One that this government is very proud of is the Financial Administration Act, which actually puts out a number that forces the government into a particular commitment whether the government wants that commitment or not. Admittedly, it's sometimes an awkward commitment, but if we can do it for our budget, we can do it for our children.

So how can we improve this bill? Here are a few suggestions from me. Let's put the promise in the legislation. Let's walk the walk and not just talk the talk, and I think perhaps we'll make that amendment. Second of all, let's put some real measures of performance in this bill. If we're making a promise to children, what's the promise? Well, I'd suggest, for example, that we make a commitment to improving the high school graduation rate of children entering kindergarten. I learned last night that in the Edmonton public school system fewer than 70 percent of children who enter kindergarten finish grade 12. In other words, more than 30 percent of children in the Edmonton public school system never finish grade 12. That's

terrible. Let's put a measure in here. Let's promise that from here on in 80 percent or 90 percent of children who enter kindergarten will finish grade 12. Then we could really commit to something. That would be a promise.

4:50

How about addressing children living in poverty? Why don't we put an actual commitment to reducing the number of children living in poverty into legislation in the same way that way we put a commitment in legislation about balancing the budget and managing the surplus and paying down the debt? It's a different kind of debt; isn't it? It's a debt to children. So why don't we put a measure in this bill that says that we will reduce the percentage of children living in poverty? We could establish a certain line, the low-income cutoff that Statistics Canada has or some other generally accepted line, and say that we will reduce that number to 10 percent of children. My understanding, in Edmonton at least, is that about 20 percent of kids live in households that would be by any reasonable measure considered very poor. That would be a promise. Where's the promise, folks?

How about a promise like this: every child in Alberta will get at least one nutritious meal a day. We can measure that. We could figure that out. We know how to deliver it. That would be a promise. There are thousands of children who go to school every day in Edmonton, and undoubtedly in Calgary and undoubtedly in many rural communities, who never have a hot lunch, never have a nutritious meal. So there's a promise. Why don't we make that promise? Why don't we promise that every child in Alberta who needs a nutritious meal will get at least one every day? If we have to pay for that as taxpayers, why not pay for it? Isn't that as good as paying down the debt?

How about this? How about full-day kindergarten? The evidence on full-day kindergarten is enormous. We're seeing this played out yet again through the government's commendable program, the AISI program, Alberta initiative for school improvement. The assessment information on that is spectacular. The results have been spectacular. Where's that program headed? It's headed for history because the funding is going to be cut off. [interjection] The Minister of Justice is suggesting that maybe funding will be extended for that program. We look forward to that. But how about a promise for full-day kindergarten? We know the results from the AISI program and we know from all kinds of other research that full-day kindergarten is a huge benefit to children. It's easy to deliver. It's easy to measure. Why don't we make that promise? Why don't we put that in this legislation?

How about early literacy and numeracy programs for every child in this province? Of course, that could be delivered through full-day kindergarten. That would give our kids a huge start. Again, the evidence on that is tremendous. There's no question that there's fruitfulness to that promise. Let's make it. Let's deliver the goods here.

Day care. Adequate day care. Why not make that promise? Is there a reason not to promise that every child will have some adequate day care or every family will have access to adequate day care in this province? There's a promise we could make for children.

Full prenatal care. There was earlier discussion today, and there has been since the Speech from the Throne, about concerns over fetal alcohol syndrome. Well, the only way to prevent that is to get to mothers from the moment of conception and ensure that they are minimizing or, indeed, completely avoiding alcohol consumption. In some cases that means quite an aggressive prenatal care program. Now, that would be a wonderful promise not just to children but to ourselves, to all of society. So how about a good, aggressive, full prenatal care program in this children's promise?

How about a promise to protect children from abuse? How about a promise to provide shelter to children who need shelter? There are all kinds of things that can be promised here, and do you know what? They don't need to break the bank. They certainly don't need to be anything that's beyond the resources of this province, and indeed in the long run I think we'd find that they'd pay off. We'd be a wealthier society not just in terms of dollars and cents but also in terms of the quality of life and the quality of citizens we have here.

So I'm all in favour of making a promise to our children. This bill is a beginning, but this bill could be dramatically, dramatically improved. Let's put some real teeth in this bill. Let's take our children as seriously as we've taken paying down the financial debt.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I'll take my seat and look forward to hearing how the government members respond. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in.

Mr. Marz: I have a question for the hon. member. He raised a number of suggestions of what promises could be made specifically, full-day kindergarten, early numeracy. I would wonder, with all these wonderful suggestions he has, if there would be a price tag that he's worked out as to what it would cost Albertans to fulfill all those promises successfully.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to discuss that question. Personally, I find that in debating bills, the time for that sort of back and forth is during the committee, and I'll make a point of being here during committee when that member is here to carry that discussion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional hon. members?

Then recognition goes to the hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 1, Premier's Council on Alberta's Promise. I listened very carefully to previous speakers and appreciate, I believe, their support for the intent of the bill. I appreciated the little lesson through the dictionary of what a promise is, and I like what it says, too: an indication that something is likely to occur. I liked one other one better: firmly intend. That is really the gist of the government desire in this bill.

While I listened to other members from the opposition speak on this, I guess I've kind of realized that maybe in these instances our really philosophical differences become quite apparent. I see legislation as a framework. I see the detail being in the regulation, which is really how the activity occurs, and I see the business plan of the ministries that provide the services that would be provided in this by government maybe being where some of the benchmarking is done.

I'll repeat the five promises that Alberta's Promise is made up of. Committing to give Alberta's children "a healthy start and a promising future," and obviously there are a number of areas that are involved in that. Working with neighbours to provide "safe and healthy communities for our children's growth, education, and development." Again, some room for government involvement through our Solicitor General but certainly maybe even more through our community groups. Leading by example and encouraging others to do the same: I think an important role for government there. Setting an example that the rewards of volunteering are immeasurable: I do want to speak to that further. Maybe the most important part of this is "seeking out the best tools, [the best]

models, and [the best] examples of other individuals and communities so that Alberta's children may learn, benefit, and succeed."

Much was talked about by other members about America's Promise. I think that using that as a model but changing it to fit our country, our values, and the way we do things is very appropriate. This isn't the first initiative that we've worked together on with the United States of America. I would talk about the volunteer movement, where we have shared conferences, where we have shared ideas, where they recognized fully that Canada led the world in volunteerism. Certainly Alberta is the leader in Canada, and they were most anxious to learn from us and have us involved and invited us to be very full participants when they were developing some areas in their country. So we can always learn from others. I don't think it's wrong to use a good idea. It doesn't have to be our identification.

5:00

But I am concerned that we think we can codify children and their needs and write it all down on a piece of paper, because I can tell you that the needs of the children in my community are different than they probably are in the inner city of Edmonton, and the way that we would approach resolving those needs is very, very different. I think it's important that we recognize that there are differences. Our province is large and vast and is made up of so many communities, whether they are communities of interest, whether it's by nature of — we often talk about the mosaic of the people here. We have people from many countries. I can assure you that people who come here from other countries have quite a different idea of how to raise children and who should be involved in that than I might have. So I don't really think it's for me to say that, but it is for us, all of us in this Legislature, to understand the needs and the differences. And I'm sorry: in my experience you can't just write down a list and expect that all our children will fall in that list. Obviously, their needs will not fall in there. I think the fact that the framework is more an umbrella and general is a very positive thing.

I don't have a disagreement with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's desire for every child to have one nutritious meal a day, but I can tell you that in my community, in my school, that's handled in a different way than it might be here. Again, that's appropriate, but it is the families and the community. Frankly, if I had a disappointment in the opposition's comments on this, it was that the family was left out to a greater extent than I would leave them out. The first thing that we can offer our children is a safe home and environment, and they can be different. There is no question. But the family has to be, in my mind, first, and if families have difficulties in meeting needs, then we look at ways that we ensure that. In many families having a nutritious meal a day is not an issue, in fact in the majority.

Full-day kindergarten. Many communities have that. I can tell you that in my community — and it's easier to speak about your own — it's a private kindergarten run by the parents. I might say that those two outstanding children that were referred to earlier today and yesterday came through that system. It's totally different. Those parents raise money willingly and provide a kindergarten of their choice in their community for their children. They could send them on a bus to a full-day kindergarten, which would have no cost to them except, of course, the bus ride and the kids being out of their lives, but no; their commitment is to have that kindergarten.

So it's different there. The needs of inner-city Edmonton or Calgary or Drayton Valley are probably different again, but that's, I believe, what this bill recognizes, that there are differences. I don't doubt anybody's commitment in this Legislature to children. I may disagree with the approach or the measures that they might suggest

to deal with it, but I don't doubt that everyone believes that Bill 1 is a very important bill and should proceed.

I would remind members that this government was maybe the first in Canada that made a determination that it was important that we provide a benefit so that if moms wanted – wanted – to stay home with their children, it was not an economic hardship for them to do it. That came from consultations with mothers, and I was proud to be a part of the early discussions, much earlier in my career, and listened to moms that said that they needed to work a small amount to make it work. But if there was a tax break or a benefit to them, they could stay home and do all of those things for their children that they wanted to do for the difference in the dollars. They were not advocating that no mother should work, nor am I. I think that's a choice. What we want to make sure is that the moms and the dads can make the choice, and those are the things that I think we look at in this.

I believe, as I know many of you do, that the saying that it takes a village to raise a child is a very true saying, and the more we involve our community groups, those who know what the needs of their particular community are and what the best methodology is to address the issues there – it may be a literacy tutorial. It may be that in that community we have several teachers who are not working who have time who would like that interaction with children and would offer that. In others it may be an extra teacher in a classroom, and we have done that. I don't think that with children one size fits all. I've only two children of my own. They're certainly different. They are male and female, so I accept there would be some obvious differences there. But I've got four little grandkids, and I can tell you that they're as individual as they can be, and one size doesn't fit any part of all of them. I mean, they were raised in the same family by the same parents and in the same surroundings, and you'd think you'd get something that was similar, but they're all individuals and so are their needs.

I think the difference that I hear here is more philosophical in that the opposition members would like to see more codified legislation, have more structure in the legislation, whereas I believe that the legislation should be more of a framework document, that the detail be in the regulation so that if with children and our changing society we need to change things, it's much easier to amend, obviously, and change. The important thing for all of us, I think, in this Legislature is that this is Bill 1, that this is putting our children first, and I think we will all support that, whether we support exactly the way we have planned to do it. I want to certainly make a promise as a legislator that I'll support making this province better for our children and that I will do everything I can.

Mr. Speaker, I've been a foster mom of a child in another country for I don't know how many years, and it's always just simply amazed me what advantages those children can gain in a developing or a Third World country for a very, very few dollars a month. It just blows my mind. I don't remember exactly what it is, but it's under \$50 a month; I know that. I think it's my third child, because they reach a certain age and they move out of the program. I've never had the opportunity yet to meet one of my children, but I do hope that I will meet the present one I have. It has always humbled me, I think, when I receive a letter, a card from this youngster. I get a sense of what this has meant to him and his family and think of how much we have here, and it renews my belief in the fact that we're pretty fortunate to live here. But we can always do better. Any community that believes in their children and supports them will be successful in the end.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I want to end my part in this stage of the bill.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the member. The member is the Deputy Premier and is a very influential member of the government. [interjections] Well, she is. I heard her say quite clearly that she was disappointed in the opposition not talking more about family. She must have been involved in the drafting of this legislation or as it passed through the various committees that government has for legislative review. I'm curious, therefore, why the word "family" does not appear anywhere in the act. It talks about corporations, it talks about community organizations, and it talks about individuals, but it does not talk about families. I'm interested as to why the government made the choice not to have the word "families" appear in this act if it's so important to her.

Mrs. McClellan: I think that we come back to the comment that I made earlier. I don't know whether it's an ideological or a philosophical difference that we may have in how we approach things. I see documents more as a framework for carrying out things, and it seems to me from the comments I heard that there was more of a desire to codify or identify or list in the legislation absolute actions rather than more general. So when I look at this, I see organizations, corporations, individuals, enhanced resources. I see all. What I was commenting on – I was surprised, and I may have missed it – was that I didn't hear that as part of the ideas of how to carry this forward, which is really what I was referring to when I mentioned that.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had some interesting comments today about the nature and intent of Bill 1 and some comments from the opposition about the need for detail. I think the hon. Deputy Premier has indicated what I think is very true in this House from time to time, that on our side of the House we tend to want to put together framework legislation which encourages, allows, and creates the opportunity for things to happen, and if there needs to be regulation or structure around it, that can be built in regulations.

In this case the legislation that we're talking about today is very much promise legislation. It's very much being brought forward to encourage and to raise a topic for public discussion, to raise the profile of something which is incredibly important to our communities, to our families. It's not so much a piece of legislation that needs to have detail set out as to how and what and how much but is to encourage all of our communities to get involved in something which is very, very intrinsic to the future of our province. I'd encourage all members to support the legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; at 5:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]