

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 30, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/05/30

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature.

We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve.

Amen.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition today signed by people in St. Albert and the surrounding areas. They're concerned about the Sturgeon general hospital being included in the Edmonton region.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to present a petition from residents of St. Albert and surrounding area asking that the Sturgeon general hospital be taken out of the Edmonton region.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, just in case the Minister of Health has not heard it, I too have a petition from the Sturgeon Valley and surrounding area asking that the Sturgeon general hospital be put where it belongs.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 72 signatures on it with respect to the Alberta Children's hospital, asking that it be maintained on its current site as a full-service pediatric health care facility. The majority of the signatures are from the town of Brooks.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 16 with regard to keeping the Grey Nuns hospital open as an active care hospital now be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the south-east end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

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

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 15 regarding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to apply Section 33 of the Constitution Act, 1982 (the Notwithstanding Clause) to uphold the Individual's Rights Protection Act and thereby fully respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I presented on behalf of residents of Edmonton-Avonmore and surrounding areas urging the government to maintain the Grey Nuns hospital as an active treatment, full-care unit now be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the south-east end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

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

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that my petition of May 18 regarding the exclusion of the Sturgeon general hospital from Edmonton be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to reconsider the inclusion of the Sturgeon General Hospital within the Edmonton Region and to allow the Sturgeon General Hospital to serve its customers from the City of St. Albert, the MD of Sturgeon, the Town of Morinville, the Village of Legal, the Alexander Reserve, the Counties of Athabasca, Barrhead, Lac Ste. Anne, Parkland and Westlock.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I tabled on May 18 regarding the Alberta Children's hospital be now read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislature of Alberta to urge the Government to reconsider the recommendation of the Hyndman Report in regards to the relocation of the Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented on May 26 regarding the Plamondon cutoff road be now read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to designate the Plamondon cutoff as a Secondary Highway, and to rebuild this road to acceptable standards, including paving.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on May 26 asking the government to stop the development of Horseshoe Canyon now be read and received.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to not allow the excavation and development of Horseshoe Canyon into a golf course and to designate Horseshoe Canyon as a provincial park, for the viewing of all Albertans and for the viewing of future generations.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to give oral notice of the following government motion:

Be it resolved that the debate on third reading of Bill 35, the Seniors Benefit Act, shall not be further adjourned.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After question period I will propose a motion under Standing Order 40.

Be it resolved that this Assembly give recognition to Child Poverty Awareness Week, which is being held Monday, May 30, to Friday, June 3, 1994.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 40**

**Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a Bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1994.

[Leave granted; Bill 40 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of the 1992-93 annual report and fact book of Athabasca University, also four copies of the University of Lethbridge Foundation financial statements for the year ended March 31, 1993, and four copies of the Evaluation of Effectiveness and Efficiency report provided by the Alberta Vocational College, Calgary, March 1994.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling with the Assembly today the third quarter report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Community Development.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today the annual report of the Alberta Human Rights Commission for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1993.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table my response to Motion for a Return 198. In doing so, I'd like to express my sincere appreciation for all those individuals who have worked and continue to work on the 1-800 lines.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me today to introduce a number of Calgary-Lougheed constituents who are visiting the Legislature, some for the very first time, some who know the place all too well. They are part of the Calgary-Lougheed PC youth group. They are led today by a fellow by the name of Brent Harding, who served as the executive assistant to the Provincial Treasurer many, many moons ago. They've come to Edmonton to see democracy in action, and that's why their next stop is West Edmonton Mall. They are Kyle Mack, Ilarion Borody, Brent Harding, Jason Hubler, Nadine Carter, and Matt Gurdely. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Heather Nicholson. Heather is a student who is working for the summer in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency office, and she has already proved her worth. Heather is in the public gallery, and I'd ask her to stand and receive the welcome of the House.

**1:40**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly today some 50 very bright young students from Pipestone school in the Drayton Valley-Calmor constituency. They are accompanied today by Mr. Steven Van Diest, the principal, and Mr. Don Meller-Liepert and by parents and helpers Mr. Hugh Mufford, Mrs. Roberta Priddle, and Mrs. Susan Merilainen. I apologize for not pronouncing your name properly. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful group of students from Bertha Kennedy community school in St. Albert, a school I even taught at once upon a time, a great school, and their teacher Mrs. Joanne Tarabula and her assistant Miss Vanessa Vanderkooi. I ask the members to please give them the warm welcome that they deserve.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you two very dedicated community volunteers who serve endlessly at the church and throughout other functions in the communities of Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Avonmore. They are also very distinguished members of the Knights of Columbus, a group which I'm sure Mr. Speaker is familiar with. I would just ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. They are seated in our gallery, and they are Guy Ouellette from Edmonton-Avonmore and René Paquin from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and a privilege for me to introduce to you and to the Assembly two residents of the city of Medicine Hat, constituents of mine. Although they are residents of Medicine Hat, they seem to have a more than normal interest in Cypress-Medicine Hat in that their son is the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly Jim and Agnes Taylor from Medicine Hat. Would they please rise.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House expects that the member opposite would perhaps behave himself today for the first time. It may even be wonderful for his parents. I'm sure he shall.

Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature 26 very hardworking students hailing from some 18 different countries. They're here with us from the Alberta Vocational College, a school that is supported by the minister and by his department very well. These students arrived here to be introduced to you along with their two teachers: Siegi Solty and Marg Armstrong. They're in the members' gallery, sir. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature a person who ran against me twice and against the Member for Calgary-Lougheed once unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate: Mr. Brendan Dunphy. If you wouldn't mind rising and receiving the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

### **Ministerial Statements**

#### **Global Business Plan**

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to file in the Legislature today the 1994-95 Alberta Global Business Plan. The Alberta Global Business Plan is the result of the co-operative work of several government departments in partnership with the private sector. In addition to Economic Development and Tourism and the Alberta Research Council, these departments include Energy; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Community Development; Advanced Education and Career Development; and Education.

Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that its main role is to encourage a positive business and investment climate in the province. Such a climate results from a competitive tax and regulatory regime, investment in human resources, supportive infrastructure, support for industry-led economic development, and strategic partnerships with businesses and communities.

This plan supports the government's goal of working with the private sector to create a dynamic, internationally competitive economy. The plan includes strategies to help achieve the goals set in Seizing Opportunity, including increasing the value of Alberta's international exports from \$19 billion to \$24 billion by 1996, increasing the number of provincial exporters from 2,000 to 3,000 by 1996, increasing annual tourism revenues from \$2.95 billion in 1992 to more than \$4.4 billion by the year 2000.

The Alberta Global Business Plan is a practical, strategically focused document designed to help Alberta businesses reach their economic potential in the global marketplace. It sets out the province's overall plan for tourism, trade, investment, industry,

and technology developments. The plan is organized into separate strategies for 21 industry sectors, each complete with a brief overview, objectives, target markets, strategic directions, and a list of activities of potential interest to Alberta companies.

Today these companies are faced with many challenges in expanding their exports and in attracting investment. Around the world competition is in, and trade barriers continue to fall. However, the province faces such pressures with many strengths. Alberta has a high level of technological development, a well-educated work force, and abundant natural resources. If we work together, Mr. Speaker, we will succeed.

The 1994-95 Alberta Global Business Plan is a foundation for consultation. It is designed to help Alberta's industry sectors to streamline, to become more efficient and more competitive, and to seize opportunities in the global marketplace.

I'm pleased to report that the 1994-95 edition of the Global Business Plan is available to Albertans in two ways. First, there is the comprehensive document that I'm filing in the Legislature today. Second, this information will be available on the international business information service, IBIS, an electronic bulletin board that offers current information on trade and investment opportunities throughout the world.

I encourage business and community leaders to use the plan and to continue to work in partnership with our government to create a more prosperous future for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal caucus, the Liberal opposition accepts the Alberta Global Business Plan as at least a step in the right direction. It is a broad plan which sets out broad directions. We suggest that there are some corrections that could be made to make this broad plan with these broad directions even better.

First of all, we believe, Mr. Speaker, that there should be mechanisms put into place, put into this plan that would measure outcome; that is, we would see and we would know whether a specific area was successful or whether there was failure in that area in terms of the plan.

Secondly, we don't think that the government can have it both ways. It is true that Alberta has had a well-educated work force, but we will not have a well-educated work force when a serious lessening of strength in that area has taken place by a reduction of learning in kindergartens all the way up to the top, including postsecondary education where more than 20,000 Albertans can't get access to postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, finally we note with interest that the government has abandoned the specifics of job creation that they set out in their document entitled Seizing Opportunity. We saw specific jobs being created in the manufacturing sector and this sector and so on. The government has forgotten that, abandoned that, so the Liberals are going to take up that challenge during the month of June.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

### **Oral Question Period**

#### **Party Leadership Campaign**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have learned that telephone calls were being made out of the Deputy Premier's office to help the Premier become leader of the Conservative Party and that confidential lottery lists were being used. The Deputy Premier's response was to viciously attack the Albertan

who said that wrongdoing was taking place. Now a former minister and a former executive to a minister have confirmed that telephone calls were being made. My first question to the Deputy Premier: how could you have thoroughly investigated this whole issue and found that nothing had happened out of your office when it is now corroborated by others?

1:50

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday last I made a statement in the House, and I can repeat it. I quoted that I'd been assured by my senior staff that they "did not use my offices to conduct any business of a political nature or otherwise." The hon. gentleman did not say the truth in his statement at the opening of his question when he said that the offices of the Deputy Premier were used. That's not correct. The second point of his statement is also incorrect when he says further that he has now learned and that something has been corroborated. I'm unaware – unaware – of any corroboration with respect to my office from anyone.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, surely the Deputy Premier isn't going to play games and say that he wasn't the Deputy Premier then. The fact is that the calls were coming out of the minister's office, that minister's office.

Will you, Mr. Deputy Premier, table the report of your investigation giving this Assembly the specifics on the people that you interviewed and in which ministerial offices those people were located?

MR. KOWALSKI: The results of my investigation are in the *Hansard* of the province of Alberta. They were read into *Hansard* on May 26, 1994. As Mr. Speaker will recall, there were even opportunities when I wanted to make something in greater enhancement during the question period, and by the rules of the House I had to wait until a point of order was raised at the end. It's very, very clear to me what I said. All submissions as a result of my investigation were filed in this Assembly as early as I possibly could, and that was last Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's time for the hon. member – proof. Stand up and be counted. I'm fed up with these silly allegations. I've had allegations against me as an MLA in the Paddle River dam and Opron Construction. The hon. member has been found guilty of a point of privilege in this Assembly.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Factual Accuracy**

MR. SPEAKER: Order. For the record, the Committee on Privileges and Elections, if, as, and when it acts as the result of a motion passed by this Assembly, will decide whether there's any issue of guilt or innocence on that matter.

#### **Party Leadership Campaign (continued)**

MR. DECORE: I think all the raw nerves are showing today, Mr. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Deputy Premier, how can you deny the facts set out in an affidavit that have been tabled in this Assembly, how can you deny the statements made by a previous minister of the Crown, and how can you deny the statements made by a previous executive assistant to a minister, all of which say that your office was involved in telephone calls during that critical week? How can you deny it?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, my office is involved in telephone calls virtually every day of the week. First of all, no former minister has ever made such a statement. A former employee of this Assembly has said that he observed women in my office on the telephones in the evening. Well, come tonight to this Assembly and you'll observe people in my office on the phones. Unlike Liberal offices, the people who work in my office work till the conclusion of this Assembly and well into 9, 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night virtually every night of the week other than Saturday night. That is a fact. If anybody in Alberta wants to talk to any custodial person in this Assembly, any janitor, about presence in my office, they can do so. They can talk to any employee of this building, and they will see it. For someone to suggest because someone walked down the hall and observed very competent women in my office working in the evening that they were operating on behalf of a political campaign is taking one heck of a lot of liberty with the truth.

MR. SPEAKER: Second main question, Leader of the Opposition. [interjections] Order. [interjections] Please, hon. members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the Deputy Premier's denial that telephone calls were being made out of his offices and that confidential lists were being used, there is general knowledge and I think overwhelming knowledge with affidavits and statements from previous ministers and from a previous executive assistant that in fact that was happening. The Association of Alberta Taxpayers now wants a full investigation, and the Auditor General is prepared to do an investigation. If this thing is so squeaky clean, as the Deputy Premier is suggesting, let's get him and let's get the government to direct the Auditor General to do an investigation to see whether those calls were made and to see whether confidential lists were used. Mr. Deputy Premier, will you agree to use the rights and privileges that you have through your government to call upon the Auditor General to do that full investigation on telephone calls and lists out of your offices and other offices?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I am not guilty of anything, and I will most definitely not be made guilty by innuendo from the Leader of the Opposition. If there's a requirement for a full investigation, let us investigate everything. Let us investigate every telephone list, period. I don't care what day we want to go back to. The leader's telephone list, my telephone list, the Member for Redwater's telephone list, the Member for Edmonton-McClung's telephone list anytime since they've been involved in an election. Let's find out how the Leader of the Opposition flew to Calgary last Thursday to go to the fund-raising dinner with the Prime Minister. Did he drive his own car? Was there a claim against the dollars allocated under the Legislative Assembly for his caucus? Did he fly on a public airline using a travel chit? Let's investigate it.

MR. DECORE: The issue here is telephone calls from confidential lottery lists using your name, and you were the minister of lotteries at the time. That's the problem, Mr. Minister.

Will you agree – this is a very simple question – to use your authority on the government side to direct the Auditor General to do that investigation on telephone calls using confidential lists relating to lottery applications? Yes or no?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there were no confidential lists that were used by anybody for the formulation of any telephone call. I'm not in a position to direct the Auditor General, and I most certainly would not have him waste taxpayers' money going after a phantom fantasy that does not exist. There were no confidential lists used by anyone to my knowledge soliciting support for Ralph Klein in the leadership campaign, nor were there to my knowledge any such confidential lists used by any other candidate or any other people on behalf of any of the other eight candidates.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, this same caucus asked that the government direct that the Auditor General do an investigation on Gainers three years ago, and they refused. Moneys could have been saved, and people would have known the facts.

Will you, Mr. Minister, when you say that you're squeaky clean, prove it by allowing the Auditor General to do the investigation to ensure that confidential lists weren't used? Will you do it?

2:00

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, this gentleman and the Member for Fort McMurray stood up in this Assembly a couple of weeks ago and said that they had researched completely that I was guilty of using a postage meter in my constituency office. They went to the media outside and said: oh yeah, we've done our research; we've got him. Eight hours later they stood up in this Assembly and they apologized. If I am innocent, why do I have to prove my innocence? Does anybody have to prove their innocence? Let him prove my guilt.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

#### Tourism Promotion

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to hear the Deputy Premier talk about the issue of truth. It seems the Alberta advantage lost some of its lustre recently when the minister at a conference in Medicine Hat in a speech advocated with respect to promoting the tourism attractions of the province of Alberta, quote, lie if you have to, exaggerate, close quote. It seems kind of a contradiction of what we recently heard. My question to the minister responsible for tourism: how long has it been the policy of the government to embellish upon the truth when promoting our tourism attractions?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, there is a tremendous difference between taking something said in enthusiasm – would the hon. gentleman file a copy of my speech in this Assembly where I said exactly what he said? Would he file the speech?

MR. DECORE: It says right in the news report.

MR. KOWALSKI: Oh, it says that in the newspaper, Mr. Speaker. My point's made. My point's made.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. BRUSEKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Curiously, the speech doesn't have it. This is one of his meanderings, I guess. I learned of it in speaking with people who attended the meeting.

My supplementary question is: is it the standard operating procedure of this minister of the Crown to lie if you have to?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question, of course, is no. It's a silly question. Let me get this straight. The hon. gentleman says that what he claims I've said wasn't in the speech. I heard him say that right here. Yet he asked a question, and he said that his source was a local newspaper. Is that correct?

MR. DAY: No. He just heard it from someone.

MR. KOWALSKI: No. He just heard it from someone, Mr. Speaker. Please. Please.

MR. BRUSEKER: Well, skating once again.

I guess my final supplementary question: why would the minister advocate embellishing the truth in a province like ours, that has so much natural beauty? Why would he take that position?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, when a person gives a speech that is from 35 to 40 minutes long and is based on enthusiasm and love for this province and everything else, it takes a pretty warped mind to extrapolate a couple of words out of context and then show up in this Assembly and say that's what was said. I would be happy to file my speech with this Assembly. In fact, we'll try and do it before the end of the question period. People in my office observe question period. I don't have to phone them. They're watching this right now. They will have for me appropriate copies of my speech to file. It went over very, very well with the southeastern Alberta tourism association. I thought they were rather impressed.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

#### Children's Hospital

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Health. The Hyndman report recommends a single pediatric inpatient program at one site adjacent to adult inpatient services. In a nutshell they are suggesting closing the Children's hospital. Many people are unaware that they have the model of care that is described as the future of health care delivery in Canada setting the benchmark for pediatrics in Alberta for lowest length of stay, lowest admission rate, and lowest ratio of beds per thousand children. The principles in assessing facilities are quality care, governance, cost-effectiveness, and geography. Why, then, following the direction of government, would the Hyndman report consider closing such a well-run hospital when it leads to less costly health care?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of reasons cited in the Hyndman report for a recommendation of relocation of the Children's hospital. In reading the report, I believe it was felt that this would be in the best interests of children's health. However, it was not a discussion of closure of the Children's hospital in Calgary but of relocation.

As I have indicated in this Assembly before, this is a report to the Calgary acute planning group. They are doing some further studies in this regard, and I would expect that they will pass on their recommendations from that work to this minister.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What cost savings would be made when one of the major objectives of the

Alberta Children's hospital ambulatory program is to keep children in the home when they already have a lower average of stay than any other centre?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it's always difficult to discuss admission rates, length of stay, because it depends of course on the reasons for it, the patient's history. However, I think we are finding that all of our admission rates and our lengths of stay are lowering, and that's due to new information, new technology. I think we should commend the Children's hospital and other institutions in this province who have made great strides in keeping people in their homes and out of institutions for treatment.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can money be saved when the emergency department of the Alberta Children's hospital is 50 percent less likely to admit than it seems to be at other Calgary hospitals, because the physicians are trained when true admissions are needed?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would gather that the hon. member was suggesting that the physicians in that institution have specialized training in certain areas. Certainly I would expect that that is very true. However, that is the case in all of our facilities. I think we should applaud the children's health services that we have in this province both at the Children's hospital in Calgary and in Edmonton, which are delivered in a different way. I think we have a fine, fine group of physicians working in children's health services.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

#### Principal Group Collapse

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The collapse of the Principal Group cost Alberta taxpayers nearly \$150 million and put the lives of almost 30,000 Albertans in turmoil. The provincial government has now announced that no charges will be laid as a consequence of the seven-year RCMP investigation. This morning Paul Palango, an award-winning reporter and author of *Above the Law*, stated on an open-line program that the Principal affair is a good example of political interference in the process. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Will the Minister of Justice tell us the exact recommendation made to his department by the RCMP, as Mr. Palango has claimed that there was sufficient evidence to lay charges but political interference prevented this from happening?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I was asked a similar kind of question coming into the House, and my answer to the reporter then was: preposterous.

DR. PERCY: Pretty short. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell us, then, exactly what steps were taken by his department to ensure that the decision not to prosecute was free of political interference in light of the alleged extensive negotiations that occurred between the special prosecutions branch and the RCMP over the issue of laying charges?

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, it's inappropriate to use the word "negotiation." Our department does not do investigations; the

RCMP do the investigation. I understand there were over 15,000 hours of investigation done on this particular file, and throughout that process information was brought because it's together that the special prosecutions branch, which are prosecutors that specialize in this type of offence, work with the police to look at the evidence. Sure there are little threads here and little threads there, as it was very obvious from the Code inquiry, but there is not sufficient evidence such that a prosecution can be commenced with any expectation that you're going to have charges. That is not a negotiable matter; it's a matter purely on the facts by both the RCMP and the Justice department officials.

2:10

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's your department, sir, that makes the decision.

My final question to the hon. minister is: will the minister commit to forwarding the evidence in this case to the Attorney General of Saskatchewan for an independent review since this government doesn't like to take action on its own when there are bureaucrats or ministers involved? Just ship it to someone else.

MR. ROSTAD: Mr. Speaker, I think the answer to the first question is appropriate for the third question: preposterous.

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

#### School Act Amendments

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 19, which was given Royal Assent last week, has provided long-overdue fiscal equity for the students in the province of Alberta. Currently the public boards are investigating the option of legal action on the premise that separate school boards will have different opportunities to allocate locally collected funds. To the Minister of Education: does the opt-out clause of Bill 19 give special spending privileges to separate school boards?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker, the funding provisions of Bill 19 do not give special allocation or spending privileges. The grant structure, the fiscal framework that we developed for provincial funding will provide guidelines, provisions regarding grants that will be applicable across the province for every student in the province, be they in a separate school jurisdiction or a public school jurisdiction.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What provisions or priorities are given to funds which are collected locally?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the overall funding of education there are guidelines and provisions which apply to all funds that are expended by school boards on education. With respect to money that is allocated from the Alberta school foundation fund or by an opted-out school board, this would be calculated on a per pupil basis or a per pupil equivalent, and that is money that is used for the purpose of education by both types of school boards.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question: given the consideration of a lawsuit in that there seems to be an inequity in the allocation of these dollars, could the minister please identify what potential usage of this money school boards may be developing such that the public boards feel they have lost an advantage in funding for their students?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is one particular and important aspect to the overall thrust of Bill 19 with respect to funding; that is, that the moneys raised for the purpose of education are to be spent on education. They are to be spent on an equitable basis across this province for all students. I think that is the answer to the hon. member's question. I think it needs to be emphasized that our overall goal is one of providing a good funding system for the students of this province. It is not designed to give any particular school board any particular privilege over any other.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

### Arts Funding

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Community Development threatened censorship to arts projects on the basis of some unspecified definition of community standards. Now we understand that he and his office are also telling arts foundation board members what they should be saying about this issue, if anything at all. To the Minister of Community Development: why is he interfering with the freedom of speech of his supposedly arm's-length arts board members?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising that members of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts would be interested in finding out what exactly it is that I said. They've asked those questions, and I've provided those answers for them.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Perhaps the hon. member should check the article that appeared in the St. Albert *Gazette*, just for some information, just for his own personal emolument.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister clearly state that he will not place any further controls over the arts foundation by placing a government MLA on that board? This would be contrary to what he's just done to the Sport Council and the rec, parks and wildlife board.

MR. MAR: There are no plans to do that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Hard to get a straight answer here.

Let's see. Let's try this one. I wonder if the minister could at least provide this answer, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] I think the minister's going to be exercising some freedom of speech curtailments over there if you're not careful. So hang on. When will the minister tell Albertans the definition of community standards by which arts in Alberta will now be governed?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is not possible to come up with a single definition for what community standards are throughout the province of Alberta. The fact is that what may be the community standard in the town of Cardston may be very different from what it is in Edmonton. That definition will change from time to time and from place to place.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

### Nurses' Salary Rollback

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Labour. The Premier in discussing the deficit elimination has talked about: if various sectors within the province would take a 5 percent rollback, we'd be well on the way to getting the deficit eliminated. Now, nurses in my constituency feel like they've been asked to carry more than their share of the pain that it takes to get the deficit eliminated. My question to the Minister of Labour: has the minister been able to determine if the nursing bargaining agreements have been settling at a 5 percent rollback, or are there additional demands placed upon them?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, actually UNA is involved in negotiations right now, in the first couple of days of this week, regarding members in regional and rural hospitals. In the latter part of the week they'll be involved with their members who work at the teaching hospitals. So it would be inappropriate for me at this stage of the negotiations to comment on either side of those negotiations that are going on right now.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then perhaps to the Minister of Health: what impact in terms of wages and benefits are nurses expected to absorb in order to meet the budget estimates?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the 5 percent reduction was requested of all workers in the health care sector effective January 1. Certainly on January 1 all health care groups that were receiving grant dollars from this government for operating – human resource budgets were reduced by 5 percent. There are reductions in health spending in this year's budget. We expect our hospitals and our health units to live within the budgets that we give them, and we have asked them, certainly, to ensure that it is not the direct service delivery of patient care that is affected if at all possible. However, there are a number of reasons why reductions are occurring in hospitals. Some have been mentioned today: shorter stays in hospitals and in fact admissions have dropped considerably because of at-home care. So there are a number of reasons. It's impossible to exactly answer the member's question.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, then perhaps back to the Minister of Labour. While I recognize that the United Nurses Association might not be a friend of this government, has UNA approached the government for relief from excessive demands made by hospital boards?

MR. DAY: While I appreciate the Member for Lethbridge-West speaking for constituents that he's concerned about, I would beg to differ in terms of whether United Nurses are friends of the government or not. I know that certainly nurses are in communication on a regular basis with us as individual MLAs and also through the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Health in other areas. I have found most of those discussions to be very friendly indeed, to be proactive. Certainly in areas of discussion like work force adjustment strategy, the regionalization that's going on, there's a lot of new, unchartered territory there, and the UNA has been very significantly right out there, involved in the suggestion process. We anticipate that that's going to continue,

and we look for continued good suggestions from them as we see the province work through this whole area of regionalization.

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

### 2:20 UN Charter of Children's Rights

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Child Poverty Awareness Week: a rather serious indictment of failure, that we've abandoned children in this province, one more reason why we wanted or needed Alberta to endorse the UN convention on the rights of children. It seems that the former government was willing to give support to the convention provided Ottawa could address some of their concerns, and I'd like to file documents of correspondence between the former Premier of this province, the present Premier, and the former Prime Minister of Canada. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Is it the minister's intention to bring in a Bill to endorse the convention?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, of course when dealing with children in Alberta, it's always a high priority of this minister and this government. I've indicated to the Assembly before that our budget alone in the department, over \$200 million, goes towards services to children in various capacities. We are at the final stages of the review by the Commissioner of Services for Children, and a report will be made available in the near future. Part of that report of course will form what future direction this government should take in relation to services to children.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about children's lives here. To the minister. The very review that you're speaking of and your working committee in that review have urged you to adopt this convention. Are you going to ignore them?

MR. CARDINAL: Of course, Mr. Speaker, when you're doing a sensitive approach of that nature, we don't ignore any group or individual. In fact, for over a year now I've asked the opposition Liberals to come up with some support in what direction we need to go in relation to services to the children of Alberta, and I haven't seen that report yet. But I have to also give credit where it's needed. A couple of the members from that side met with the Commissioner of Services for Children and did provide some input. I hope they continue doing that. It's a very, very complicated issue, a very sensitive issue, and it has to be dealt with properly.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the member who's the chairman of the council for Alberta children and families. This member has made some very positive public statements regarding the convention on the rights of children, and I'd like to ask the member if he as chairman will now bring in his own Bill since he can't support the Liberal opposition's Bill?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, as you well know, is an arm's-length council from the government. In our deliberations one of the concerns that we had on the United Nations rights of the children was that a lot of the words in it were open to discussion and interpretation by the courts of this land. We felt that the United Nations charter is an extremely positive document as it applies to Third World countries and a lot of other countries. We

feel that anything to benefit children in this society is certainly a plus, and we are currently reviewing it.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### Transferability of Postsecondary Credits

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] It's nice for the members opposite to show that they like me so much while my parents are here.

MR. DECORE: The only time.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, hon. leader.

A recent document called Freedom, published by the University of Alberta, has a number of valuable suggestions regarding higher education in Alberta. One of the suggestions relates to the first year of university. It recommends a common first year across the province to deal with transfer problems. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Will the minister commit to moving towards a common first year across the province to eliminate the transfer problems between colleges and universities?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does have the ability to ask very pointed questions as it pertains to my portfolio. The document that the hon. member is referring to is the strategic plan for the University of Alberta, and it's entitled Degrees of Freedom. That report does deal with the issue that the hon. member brings forward. In fact, to quote briefly, just two lines:

The University will actively seek to minimize duplication and maximize transferability among postsecondary institutions and will be a full partner in Province-wide institutional planning.

One recommendation flowed from that; that is, it would develop plans for encouraging and increasing the percentage of Alberta undergraduate students to begin their studies at a transfer college.

Mr. Speaker, we support these goals and any other proposals that improve transferability and transfer in our province. May I also say that the report that's brought forward, Degrees of Freedom, by the University of Alberta is a very good proposal and program, and I commend them for that.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. As the study does recommend, as you quoted, that the colleges offer first year, not necessarily the universities, will you commit to moving more towards college education for first-year students?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member might be just a little bit ahead of what's really taking place, unless he's got some information that hasn't come to me yet. The specific proposal that the member is referring to is one that has been discussed by a multi-institutional group of vice-presidents and senior academic officers from the college and university sectors. Although I haven't actually received the official recommendations from the group, I understand that this committee will be discussing this option at one of their fall meetings and examining the various pros and cons of such an idea as he has brought forward in the Assembly today.



MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you. Will the minister consider restructuring first-year programs at universities so the professors will be more student and teaching oriented?

MR. ADY: Well, as the hon. member knows, our department is currently involved in the most important restructuring process ever to occur in postsecondary education in this province. There are numerous proposals on the table to make our system more accountable, more accessible, and more affordable. I should also add that our institutions have responded very well to the challenges that we face to do more with less, and I want to compliment them for that. One would find that first-year courses throughout the system are extremely student oriented, with the focus on teaching and assisting the needs of the student. I think that our institutions have done a great job in responding to that.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

2:30

### Rural School Boards

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Bill 31, the Municipal Government Act, it implies the continuation of the county system and goes as far as allowing the election of the reeve. Also within Bill 19, the School Amendment Act, reference is made regarding the county system, leaving the impression that the county system as we know it may indeed continue. However, the county of Strathcona council has decided not to meet regularly as a corporate body with the school trustees elected at large. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the county system continue to exist in its present form?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that's a fair question, because many have asked that throughout the province. The answer simply is that we have put in enabling legislation that will allow that choice, the choice of the counties as they exist today when they go into regionalized school districts to, for the purposes of administration, opt out of the county system. Indeed, the county system is separate from the municipal districts. The main difference is that school board members, having been elected in a county system as councillors, also serve on the school board. You can see that if a county and an MD in another region amalgamate, then the county system becomes redundant for school purposes. Therefore, the option is there, and some counties have already indicated to this department and to the Department of Education that they wish, for school purposes, no longer to be a county. We will allow them to maintain their letterheads, the name of the county, but administratively they'll be an MD.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: based on the Minister of Municipal Affairs' answer, if the municipality continues as a county, can you explain to Albertans how Bill 19 will impact on that delivery system of education?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that the delivery of education will be able to proceed just fine.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm left with the distinct impression that they don't know.

To the Minister of Education. Could you explain to Albertans: will there be a separate administration for education, separate from the municipal if indeed the municipality stays a county?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, to answer the question, I would have to take one of a number of possible examples. Let us say that a school division and a county regionalize according to the provisions of, originally, Bill 8 and now Bill 8 amendments and the amendments in Bill 19. There would be, as was requested by the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, still the ability of the county council to appoint their representatives to the new regional school board, but there would be one school administration for that larger jurisdiction, which would take in the division and the county, and there would be the municipal administration, as there are in counties, and there would be a municipal administration in the municipal district that was part of the school division's territory. That is the way the regionalization structure is laid out in the legislation.

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

### Mental Health Services

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community is fearful that the mental health plan will lead to hundreds of patients being released into neighbourhoods without adequate support. This is a plan that's long overdue, but it could be yet another example of this government cutting costs instead of entering into meaningful restructuring. The sad truth is that nearly 60 percent of our current jail population are individuals with mental health problems, and those released from hospital often end up in conflict with the law. To the Minister of Health: specifically, how much money will be allocated to community-based mental health services, and when will this funding be available?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is in the budget documents – and I'm sure the hon. member would be familiar with those because I think we spent four hours together in committee as well as in this House debating the budget. So I think the hon. member is quite aware of the budget for mental health services in Alberta today. What we have said in the mental health plan, which, I might say, I believe has been endorsed very wholeheartedly by mental health associations in this province, is that those dollars that are today allocated to mental health services would be placed in a single funding envelope for a provincial mental health board to allocate. The only exception to that would be for psychiatric units in hospitals, but we would still rely on the provincial board to recommend those dollars. So obviously all dollars are subject to budget, but they would be responsible for their allocation.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. I understand that, Madam Minister, but as Minister of Health why wouldn't you ensure that the community network is in place first before you close down those psychiatric hospital beds?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how this all comes into it, because I don't think there's been a discussion in the preamble or the first question of closing down psychiatric hospital beds. What we have said is that there will be in the

future less need for institutionalized care as there is more community care available, and that is a process that has been building in this province. We have a number of community agencies that deliver those services. We have our provincial mental health clinics. What indeed we have not had is the cohesiveness of all of those services to ensure that through the acute system and the community there is a close working relationship and collaboration. The provincial mental health board will be in place to ensure that indeed that occurs. I would also remind the hon. member that we have reallocated dollars from the acute system to the community system, and certainly some of those dollars would be available for mental health as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Well, okay. What will the minister do to ensure that Alberta won't run into the same problems that have happened in other jurisdictions that haven't done this transition properly? What will you do to make sure that jail populations, for example, don't grow as a result of closing down psychiatric beds?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I do recall seeing a quote from, I think, a person who is very, very knowledgeable in mental health services in Canada as well as in Alberta saying that this could be a model for other parts of Canada and indeed North America. The very reason that we have provided for a provincial mental health board is to ensure that mental health services are available in this province for those who need it, and that board will be charged with that very specific responsibility. I have every confidence that they will take that responsibility and that our mental health services will be delivered in a very co-ordinated manner that will serve the needs of our citizens wherever they are.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

### Senior Citizens' Housing

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Seniors Benefit is starting to hit home, literally. Seniors' ability to remain in their homes is at stake as municipalities begin to adjust their property taxes due to downloading. Seniors' taxes are going up while benefits are going down. Current taxes are due June 30. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will there be any help available in this transitional period to seniors who don't have enough money to pay their property taxes?

DR. WEST: Well, I appreciate the question that came forward, but that question almost exemplifies your misunderstanding of what's going on. You see, we had last year about 116,000 seniors who got \$650 that had no relevance to their income or what have you. We also had 54,000 seniors that got \$1,200 on renter assistance. When we pour the average of \$650 – that was the average that went out for homeowners – into the package, the average again will be, when it comes out, about \$650 to \$750. What will happen in the first part of the year: \$325 will be sent out automatically up until July 1 to all seniors. Of course, they will then be exposed to the formula that says who will pay taxes and who doesn't and who gets benefits. Some seniors will get more: 89,000 seniors will likely get more benefits through this type of program than what was there before. During the last part of the year most seniors could get up to \$650, if they're eligible within that group of 89,000, or parts thereof of their taxes. We

will put the carrying charges on any taxes that they don't pay up till December 31, because they won't be required to pay it if they don't want to. We're giving the counties \$11 on each unit in order to carry the interest charges on that. We're giving the municipalities that. So to say that seniors are going to be out of their homes this year is a total misrepresentation of what's going on.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker. We just filled out two forms for some friends of ours on the weekend.

2:40

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Perhaps the supplemental portions will . . .

The hon. member, a supplemental.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is not what I said.

Why are seniors' taxes, then, going up when this government has stated emphatically that there will be no new taxes?

DR. WEST: Some property taxes are going up because of the fact that assessments haven't been done on those properties for years. When you bring in the new assessments and apply them against the property, when we go to a fair market value on properties, it does bring the taxes up. That is traditional for anybody, whether you're a senior or whether you're an average citizen. Just because at age 63 you can accept your taxes going up because of a new assessment which you don't accept at 65, I think that is a total misrepresentation again.

Seniors' taxes on average, if their assessments are current, will not be going up. Some do go up. But seniors with high incomes in this province have had the benefits of a universal program. What we're doing in order to address budgetary needs – we have to put dollars into health care; we have to put dollars into education – is we income tested seniors, and those of high incomes, yes, will be paying more tax. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. So they should. Just because you're a citizen of some wealth and you're 64 years old paying tax, the minute you hit 65 doesn't mean you totally go forward into a universal all-paid system. I don't think that proud people who worked all their lives in this province, who were consumers, who have their own self-determination and self-reliance, want to be shamed by having their taxes paid in full by the state.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: does not all this fly in the face of government policy to keep seniors in their homes for as long as possible?

DR. WEST: Again on the same theme that I was on when I left. You would think that seniors, when they hit the age of 65, forgot all the tools that they'd ever learned. The seniors I know have budgeted all their lives. They know the facts of cutting your coat according to your cloth, and they will budget accordingly for their taxes. When they hit 65 or 66, they don't throw out all those tools. In fact, they could teach a lot of our younger generation the tools of budgeting and utilizing your dollars towards where it should be. To put it this way: in our system today 75 percent of the seniors own their own homes, not very many rent, and they'll continue to own their homes because the pride of ownership, property rights, and self-determination is something that's bred into our citizenry, and our seniors led the way.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The time for question period has expired, but the hon. minister responsible for lotteries indicates that he wishes to augment the answer he provided earlier.

### **Tourism Promotion**

*(continued)*

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to file with the Assembly the speech that was alluded to earlier in question period today. It's called Tipping the Hat to Tourism in Southeast Alberta. It was given in Medicine Hat, Alberta, May 25, 1994, at the 28th annual meeting of the South East Alberta Travel & Convention Association. I look forward to any questions from any hon. member with respect to the marvelous text of the speech tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair has received notice that the point of order that was indicated is not to proceed.

Orders of the Day. [interjections] Oh, is there a supplemental arising?

MR. BRUSEKER: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the speech that the hon. minister gave last week, and my supplementary question is simply this: does he deny making the comments? Are those comments that I referred to earlier inaccurate?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the hon. member to read the speech, read it very carefully, and find in the speech where such a statement was made. Secondly, I would ask the hon. gentleman not to judge a book by the colour of its cover.

### head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

#### **Child Poverty Awareness Week**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly has given notice of her intention to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to present a motion pursuant to Standing Order 40. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly on the matter of urgency.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The discussion of children in poverty is urgent because today kicks off the awareness week, which lasts until Friday, and it only makes sense for the House to recognize the event today. The urgency should be obvious, because there are 124,000 children in Alberta who are living in poverty and what could be more urgent than that?

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Assembly grant permission for the presentation of the motion to be proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

Moved by Ms Hanson:

Be it resolved that this Assembly give recognition to Child Poverty Awareness Week, which is being held Monday, May 30, to Friday, June 3, 1994.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If there ever was an issue where there was a need to expand the Assembly's awareness, child poverty is it. Child Poverty Awareness Week is an annual campaign organized by the Child Poverty Action Group of Edmonton. This week of activities was developed to draw public attention to the abysmal number of children living in poverty.

Currently 124,000 children across the province, with 42,300 of them from Edmonton, live in families with incomes below the Statistics Canada low-income cutoff. Unfortunately, there is little indication that this government wants to do anything about it to reduce the number of children in poverty. In fact, if you look at the past record, it would seem that this government is intent on condemning more and more children to live a subsistence existence.

Sadly the government refuses to recognize the terrible cost caused by children living in poverty. Some of the more obvious problems caused by poverty are a higher death rate from birth defects, infectious disease, and accidents; a higher rate of premature birth weight and low birth weights; increased child abuse and emotional neglect; decreased school performance; a shorter life expectancy; a higher incidence of depression; a higher risk of chronic health problems; and a greater risk of adult social problems including unemployment, disability, and criminal behaviour. That's a pretty impressive list.

All of these problems cause a tremendous drain on our treasury. The Klein government may think that we are saving money today by denying a child a hot lunch or a Head Start program, but this is foolish, misguided thinking. Eventually the costs of ignoring a child in poverty are great. For some examples, it has been estimated that the daily cost for a low birth weight baby in a neonatal unit is \$1,500 a day. The average length of stay is 40 days, and the cost to taxpayers is a whopping \$60,000 per infant, not to mention the incalculable social and psychological costs. The Canadian Council on Children & Youth estimates that for every dollar spent on prenatal care, the government could save \$3.38 in the cost of care for these low birth weight babies.

#### **2:50**

A national study on disability and children revealed that poor children had twice the rate of mental and physical disabilities as children in high-income families. For severe disabilities the rate was 2.7 times higher. Researchers concluded that the number of disabled children in Canada could be cut by a staggering 89,000 if low income was not a factor.

Early intervention programs like Head Start have proven to be a positive investment for governments. For every dollar spent on preschool programs, it is estimated that there is a \$5 saving on remedial education, social assistance, and other social services. Regrettably, studies revealed that there is space available for less than 10 percent of the approximate 1,500 children eligible to enter the early intervention program. The Senate report on child poverty stated that Canadian taxpayers could save almost \$10 billion over the next two decades if more help were given to low-income children who are likely to drop out of school.

The evidence is overwhelming. Reducing the number of children suffering in poverty makes sense not only on human and moral grounds but on wholehearted fiscal grounds. Preventing child poverty saves us money. We all benefit when a child is given enough to eat, is given proper clothing, shelter, and educational opportunities. As a province we can no longer afford the number of children living in poverty because it's simply too expensive.

Today we ask the members to reflect upon what each of us can do to help reduce these shameful numbers. As for the government cabinet I plead with them to rethink those policies that are hurting Alberta children, like the cuts to social assistance benefits, the cuts to school supplies and recreational benefits, support and fund Head Start and a hot lunch program. We are all committed to reducing the debt, but let's not forget about the children we're leaving behind.

There are a number of events planned throughout the city this week, and I encourage all members to take part in as many as they can, because through awareness maybe we'll see some action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly for drawing this to our attention this afternoon. Child poverty is a significant issue, and it makes me reflect back on my own heritage. I'm not sure if they had a definition of child poverty or families in poverty at that time, but coming from a family of eight children with surroundings that were hardly posh, I believe our family would have fit that definition while I was growing up. Yet what is more important to me is the fact that I look back and I look at the love that I received from my parents and the commitment that they had to each other and to their kids. That's what's important.

I would have to ask the question – and it's been debated several times – what comes first: child poverty or the breakdown of the family? We look at the family situation in Canada, in Alberta, and in the world, and raising children is a difficult task these days. I just want to reflect back to a question in question period where we talked about the UN convention on the rights of the child, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised a question in terms of why we haven't ratified the convention in Alberta. We've debated that issue in this House. I know that her motives are truly for the benefit of children. Yet there's enough question about that UN convention, on some of the articles within it, that would suggest that it undermines the authority and the responsibility of parents. The role of government, Mr. Speaker, is not to take over the responsibility of child rearing but to support families and encourage commitment within that family structure, from husband to wife to the kids. That's what's important.

Mr. Speaker, I think we've demonstrated in Canada in particular over the last several decades the commitment to child poverty by creating more and more social programs. Has it been effective? Because child poverty is still with us and probably greater than it was before. I'd have to question: does funding more programs solve the fundamental problem?

I do want to make one suggestion that I think would be helpful. I'd like to suggest that certainly as a government we should encourage the federal government. We should improve the tax climate for the mothers and fathers who wish to stay at home with their children to raise them and enable them to do that. Because it is difficult financially now to raise kids. I know it. I have four kids. Mr. Speaker, I think that is one thing that we could certainly encourage.

I do want to thank the member for raising this. It is a serious issue, and I appreciate the opportunity of having been able to speak to that motion.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: The question having been called, all those in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried, let the record show unanimously.

head: **Orders of the Day**

[On motion, the Assembly resolved itself into Committee of the Whole]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
head: **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I call the committee to order.

**Bill 36**  
**Teachers' Retirement Fund Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 36 agreed to]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that Bill 36, the Teachers' Retirement Fund Amendment Act, be reported.

[Motion carried]

**3:00** **Bill 37**  
**Credit Union Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments with respect to Bill 37, the Credit Union Amendment Act, 1994. As with my colleagues I rise to support the motion. I appreciate the work of the government in bringing forward the amendment to the Credit Union Act which essentially gives the credit unions a greater opportunity to compete with and be on par with other financial institutions in the province of Alberta.

I think, Mr. Chairman, the government has been aware since the reorganization of the credit union system in the province that it has and continues to be, or up until this Bill has continued to be, at a disadvantage in offering the same kinds of financial services to its customers as other financial institutions have been allowed to do, including the government's own Treasury Branches. There's a recognition, of course, that the credit union system did have a period of transition, but I think that with the fine work that many of the executives of the credit union organizations and Credit Union Central in the province of Alberta have undertaken in the last few years, they have shown that the credit union system is workable in the province, is viable in the

province, and its history and its legacy in the province will continue for many, many more years to come. I think those people who are involved with the credit unions, with re-establishing the strength and vitality and confidence of Albertans in credit unions, deserve a tremendous amount of praise for their efforts and certainly our respect in reshaping the credit union system in the province of Alberta.

We have to recognize that we are now at a point in time where the credit union system must be allowed to compete. We have a system of financial institutions in this province that is very varied in its form and in its structure. What the credit unions certainly need the opportunity to do, and have now through this Bill been given the opportunity, is to find new ways to raise capital, to provide new financial instruments to their customers, and to take advantage of the marketplace in doing so. It has been difficult, if not impossible, for the credit unions to do that up to this point in time, and certainly it's a tremendous opportunity for them to do that now.

Just as a side note, Mr. Chairman. Some of the credit unions in the province of Alberta participated in offering a new financial service in the form of mutual funds a number of years ago. That, you may recall, occurred at a time when credit union legislation was also undergoing some changes and some amendments. There was a great deal of reluctance, I certainly felt, at that point in time in allowing the credit unions to move ahead and chart new waters with respect to the services and products that they could provide to their clients.

The Capital City Savings & Credit Union was certainly spearheading the opportunity to move into the mutual fund arena and provided ultimately through a great deal of hard work and effort and co-operation with Treasury and the Alberta Securities Commission the Capital City ethical growth fund, which was a product that has since become a product of the Credit Union Central of Canada through what is now a family of mutual funds. I think all members will want to congratulate Capital City for their efforts, because that fund has become a very significant player in the mutual fund products that are offered to Albertans.

The flexibility that will come about with respect to this Bill, giving credit unions the opportunity for movement amongst credit unions for a variety of changes that are being offered and proposed in this Bill, I think will again, as I say, give a tremendous opportunity to the credit unions in providing a better service to their customers.

There are a few things that can still improve credit unions in the province of Alberta that are not in this Bill, that do not yet put Credit Unions on an equal footing with other financial institutions in the province. Those at this point, Mr. Chairman, relate to the apparent restructuring or removal of the four pillars, in allowing the banking community to now participate in the other four pillars which are directly involved in securities such as mutual funds and stocks and bonds, in allowing them to acquire a subsidiary corporation's insurance broker businesses, so that credit unions could then compete with chartered banks and trust companies who have now been given the right and the opportunity to acquire insurance broker businesses and use that as other financial services and products to their customers, also the ability to sell insurance – auto, home, and life insurance products – directly through branches, which others have been provided an opportunity to do. One other point to mention is that credit unions will not yet have limited trustee powers so that they can access deposits from pension funds.

The Bill, Mr. Chairman, goes a great distance in putting credit unions on a level playing field with other financial institutions, but

there are still some other areas where credit unions will still need to be given the opportunity by this government to catch up to make the playing field level, as it were. So I hope the government will continue to move in that direction and continue to give credit unions that chance to compete on a level playing field basis with other financial institutions. I believe the credit unions are up to the task. I believe they will be able to compete with any other institution, and I hope the government, again, will move in that direction. I appreciate what has been done to this point in time. As I say, I am prepared to support the Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question's been called.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 37 agreed to]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Bill be reported when the committee does rise.

[Motion carried]

### **Bill 35 Seniors Benefit Act**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Committee of the Whole now has under consideration Bill 35, the Seniors Benefit Act.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are we ready for the question?

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 35. I will be introducing an amendment, and it's on its way. In the meantime I would like to say that I and my colleagues in the opposition are certainly very disappointed in the early closure in second reading of this Bill. It is a very, very major Bill, up there with the education Bill, the health regions Bill, the municipal Act, and so on.

This Bill has the potential of changing seniors' lives immensely. I think that the democratic process has been stifled here with the early closure in second reading, and now we have an announcement of closure in committee. Seniors are not impressed, and so they shouldn't be, because a Bill as important as this, that has the potential of changing their lives drastically, is being closed out. We in the opposition cannot support Bill 35, which is the legislation required to implement the Alberta seniors' program. This program is not fair to seniors. It has been introduced in an unfair way. The government is now pushing this Bill through the Legislature without allowing full debate.

**3:10**

Now, when the government decided to reduce the total amount of money available for seniors' programs, did they not consider the needs of seniors? We in the opposition believe many seniors are vulnerable. In fact, this segment of our society is the most vulnerable. Most have fixed amounts of money to last them for

the rest of their life. They have planned their retirement, and they only have a certain amount of money to work with. Fifty-eight percent of seniors have an income of \$15,000 or less per year. We in the opposition commend the seniors of this province for making their voices heard. They have really spoken out in the last while, during the consultation process and so on, and we thank them for it. It is largely because of this strong opposition, the show of opposition from the seniors themselves that the government has indeed decided to make some changes from the original proposal.

We have the amendment here now and if I could ask for it to be circulated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we don't appear to have any note on the amendment that Parliamentary Counsel – oh, okay. The House leader is going to provide it.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. They have signed it.

While the amendment is being circulated, I just want to say that the amendment was necessitated largely because of what I have just said. Seniors are indeed very angry because of especially the closure motions that are being made to this very important Bill. I feel that seniors will certainly not forget what is being done and especially at the next election, but that is the government's problem. So we'll see what happens then.

As the distribution has almost been completed, I would like us to turn our attention to the amendment. It is indeed my pleasure to move the amendment as printed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, please then give your reasons for these amendments.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Oh, yes. Yes, certainly. Okay, turning our attention to the amendment – and I certainly have a lot of reasons why I am introducing this amendment. I'll just read the amendment as it is printed. It is section 2.1(1) and (2).

- (1) The Minister shall appoint a Seniors Benefit Review Committee whose duties will be:
  - (a) to advise the Minister on and review all regulations to be made under this Act,
  - (b) to monitor benefits provided to seniors under this Act, and
  - (c) to monitor appeals made under section 3 of this Act.
- (2) When a majority of members on the Seniors Benefit Review Committee inform the Minister of their opposition to a proposed regulation, the Minister shall move that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of the Legislative Assembly.

The amendment was necessitated because the Bill is regulatory in nature. It is just a nonspecific shell. It does set out a number of things. It sets out the eligibility for benefits, who is eligible to receive benefits. It also talks about the recovery of benefits in the case that they are unlawfully obtained. Also, one of the parts of the Bill talks about the power for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations, and this is really quite a scary section in that the Lieutenant Governor will be able to make regulations without the changes being brought to the Legislature or having prior consultation with seniors. Then the last part of the Bill is consequential, repeal and commencement provisions.

Now, what this Bill will do is allow for future changes without prior legislation or public consultation. The Bill leaves all seniors' programs vulnerable, not only the four ASB programs, and these will be at the whim of the government. The government will be able, as I have already mentioned, to make changes to seniors' programs without prior consultation or legislation.

This Bill is certainly of great concern to seniors. It instills an uncertainty, a fear in the most vulnerable segment of our society. If anyone doesn't need any uncertainty or fear in their lives, it is our seniors. Some of them are indeed still active, but many of them are laid up in long-term care facilities and so on, and they can't make changes to their lives. They can't go out and find a job if they need some extra money. They can't get on the telephone and make some real estate deals or call their broker and make some money buying and selling stocks. This is gone. So this amendment will disperse some of those fears if, as stated in the amendment, a seniors' benefit review committee is appointed. This committee will act as somewhat of a security blanket for seniors. It will help to dispel some of the fears that have been instilled by this regulatory Bill. Seniors will certainly feel a little more comfortable knowing that there is some mechanism in place to allow for compulsory reviews and consultations before changes are introduced. It'll be a watchdog type of committee.

Now, seniors deserve at least this courtesy of a nonpartisan review committee. This committee could be comprised of a cross section of seniors' interagency members, and it must be as nonpartisan as possible. In fact, I would like to see members of this committee elected from some of these interagencies, the seniors' agencies such as the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired here in Edmonton, the Alberta seniors' council, and so on. There are many, many very knowledgeable, concerned, and indeed sensible seniors who would be glad to serve on such a committee.

What will this committee do? Well, basically the committee will review any further changes to regulations that the government may propose. It will make recommendations, advise the minister on proposed changes. Now, it seems to me that if I were the minister, I would certainly welcome such a committee because it would be like having an ongoing consultation committee. Seeing the good time that the minister had in recent seniors' consultations, I'm sure that he will welcome this idea.

### 3:20

What else will this committee do? Well, this committee could monitor on an ongoing basis the benefits provided to seniors. Are they adequate? Are some seniors falling through the cracks, as they say, and changes required? Also this committee would monitor the appeals process as set out in section 3 of this Bill. Again I would think that the minister will welcome this idea. It only makes sense. Now, the minister will probably come back and say, "Well, we have the Alberta seniors' council, and it's there to do this job." Well, I would like to say to that that I think the Alberta seniors' council is really quite redundant in that it is partisan, it is government appointed, and this committee must be totally nonpartisan.

Subsection 2.1(2) – and I would like to read it – says:

When a majority of members on the Seniors Benefit Review Committee inform the Minister of their opposition to a proposed regulation, the Minister shall move that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations of the Legislative Assembly.

This clause is put in there to give this committee some teeth, some power. Otherwise, the committee would, again, be of no use. It would be of no effect if it didn't have some kind of power. The amendment here is very, very clear. What it says is that when the majority of members oppose a proposal, then they inform the minister; the minister refers the matter to the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations, who will review it.

If the minister has any concerns regarding the costs of setting up such a committee, I think I can certainly allay his fears,

because I'm sure that most members would be willing to serve on a voluntary basis. Now, no doubt probably some of their travel costs, some of their lodging and food costs would have to be covered if they are having to travel to some central location for a meeting, but in any case this would not be a big cost item. All of this could be worked out later. I think it would be worth every penny if seniors can be given some little sense of security, some sense of say in their future.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is crucial. We in the opposition cannot support this Bill without this amendment. Seniors can't support this Bill without this amendment.

Now, the government is constantly bragging about its consultation process. The minister is bragging that he has listened and he is listening to seniors. Here is a chance for the government to prove that they really do what they say, and that is consult. The way for the government to prove this is to agree to this committee.

This reminds me of an anecdote that I heard recently, and it goes like this. Thunderclouds outside the window suggested that a storm was brewing. A Secret Service man casually remarked on this fact to President Calvin Coolidge. "Well," asked Coolidge, "What are you going to do about it?" The man replied: "Mr. President, I'm only a Secret Service man, but you are President of the United States. What are you going to do about it?" On this note, I can say that, well, I'm only an opposition member who has proposed an amendment, and of course in opposition we can't really sometimes do too much. We can propose things and hope that the government will agree and support them. Also, as far as seniors go, seniors can propose things to this government, and all they can do is hope that the government will listen to them and will accept what they are proposing. So just as this Secret Service man said, "What are you going to do about it?" I say to this government: what are you going to do about this amendment? The ball is in your court.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Chairman, I have just a few comments that I'd like to make in support of this particular amendment. I will begin by saying that it is distressing to each of us on this side of the House that the debate on a Bill of this importance must be done under the chill of closure. The fact that the government feels predisposed to push this through in such an aggressive way indicates, I believe, and is in fact directly proportionate to their grave concern with the consequences of this issue. They want to stifle debate because they want to stifle outcry and stifle controversy, believing erroneously that somehow this will make things better and they will survive politically.

Clearly, Mr. Chairman, this Bill is inadequate. It is as inadequate as the manner in which the government is treating seniors in this province. Seniors have said something that is very, very powerful. They have said: "We're willing to take a 5 percent cutback like everybody else. Why are you asking so much more of seniors?" The facts and figures that have been brought out during this debate by my colleagues in the Liberal caucus indicate very clearly that in many instances seniors will be cut much more than 5 percent.

It raises an interesting spectre, and the spectre is that this government has an uncanny ability to pick on people who are vulnerable. In this case seniors are being asked to lose more than 5 percent. In some cases their benefits will be significantly altered. Certainly those who will now begin to pay medical premiums will be significantly affected, particularly those who are at the lower reaches of the range at which they begin to pay those premiums. It is especially galling that this should be done to

seniors who are not in a position to recover once the rules have been changed after they have finished playing the game. It's not like somebody in their 30s or 40s who still has a future employment period ahead of them during which time they can save their money differently. They can manage their money differently, they can make an effort to work extra jobs if need be as a result of rules being changed. Seniors simply aren't in a position to do that. No matter how much the minister and his cabinet colleagues and private members in his caucus may believe that somehow this is okay and that just because he's talked to some of them everything's all right, it simply isn't. What it comes down to, Mr. Chairman, is a profound lack of fairness, a void in this government's sense of fairness that they could treat seniors in the capricious way that they have decided to treat them.

Another point I would like to make is that it's very interesting that a disproportionate number of seniors happen to be women and that once again this government finds a way to, I would argue, discriminate disproportionately against women. Time and time again we see in this society that there are equality questions that affect women differently, more adversely than they affect men, and once again we see this theme being drawn out even in this seniors' policy.

### 3:30

The motion that's been moved by my colleague attempts to offset at least some of the capricious and negative effects or implications of this Bill. It attempts to address in an open way the question of fairness and the manner in which seniors are being treated now and will be treated in the future. Clearly, seniors do not have any faith or confidence that this government will treat them fairly. This particular review committee will offer them some solace that there will be a group independent of the politics of this government that will be able to review regulations being made under this Bill and assess them for their fairness, for their equity.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, it seems that if this government were truly well intentioned in bringing in this particular piece of legislation, if truly they were not about to abuse in the future the regulations they will make under this Act without legislative authority, if they truly were doing that in a legitimate, well-intentioned way, then they would have absolutely no concern with the appointment of a seniors' benefit review committee because clearly such a committee would merely endorse what the government would know to be fair. That they would resist this amendment suggests the opposite. It suggests that here we have a government rushing through a piece of legislation under the chill of closure so it can get to regulations that it will be able to implement without the review of the Legislature and does not want to have to subject itself to some kind of objective review of its regulations' fairness by the seniors' benefit review committee that my colleague has proposed in this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask on that note that the members of this Assembly support this amendment. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ready for the question on Bill 35?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate on this Bill.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have a motion by the Member for Calgary-Currie that we adjourn debate. All in favour of the motion that we adjourn debate on Bill 35, say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, if any?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

### Bill 22

#### Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 1994

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the first opportunity I've had to speak on Bill 22, and there are just a few comments that I want to make before my colleague will probably conclude her arguments on it. There are two points that have to be made.

The first one is the opposition, the concern that is growing within the community by those that operate registries. I had the opportunity to visit a registry at the end of last week, and I asked about some of these concerns. They do have a legitimate concern. They feel that they're being placed in the position where they're the ones that are going to have to deal with any confrontation that may result because of the actions that would be taken in this particular Bill. Potentially you're talking about thousands and thousands of deadbeat dads that could be affected. I shouldn't use the term "deadbeat dads" because it could work the other way around too. They go to get their registration, their driver's licences, and they're not allowed to. Of course, that person isn't going to go up to the Minister of Municipal Affairs or whoever, the Attorney General, the minister responsible for the justice system. No, it's going to be that person on the other side of that lineup that's going to face the brunt of that action. That, Mr. Chairman, is putting them into a most difficult position. It's penalizing them as well in terms of the anticipated revenue that they had originally calculated on.

Their arguments are logical because the particular piece of legislation is not fully addressing the problem to begin with. There are other ways of doing it, and this particular caucus has pointed out on past occasions that, yes, it is time to get tough. It is time to show these parents that are prepared to forgo their responsibility in producing that child, in raising that child, passing it on to the one parent. Those ways of dealing with it, Mr. Chairman, have to be done from government's point of view that government is responsible for initiating the action and government is responsible for overseeing the action. If it means toughening up in terms of jail sentences – whatever it's going to take to show that this government is no longer prepared to tolerate what is inexcusable action on the part of some parents. Because of their irresponsibility it means that the taxpayer has to cover a big load, a bigger share of those costs that are not the fault of those other

taxpayers, simply the fault of those that choose to ignore their responsibility, those that choose to use that responsibility, that obligation as a wedge or as a tool to demand possibly further visitation rights, whatever, that may have been granted by the courts.

The intent of the Bill in recognizing that there is a problem out there is good. The government members and the government should be applauded for recognizing that, yes, there is a problem with deadbeat parents. But, Mr. Chairman, their method of dealing with it, their method of trying to enhance the enforcement of those maintenance payments is wrong. I would hope that rather than proceeding with this Bill at this time the government member sponsoring the Bill, guiding the Bill would take it under advisement. Take the concerns from this caucus into consideration. Take the concerns that are being expressed by Albertans, by taxpayers out there and come back at a later date with a Bill that has some teeth in it, with a Bill that will ensure that the government is responsible to ensure that those that are responsible fulfill their obligation and meet their responsibility and not pass it on to a third party to have to play that enforcement role.

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. member for St. Albert-Sturgeon.

MRS. SOETAERT: Spruce Grove too.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Spruce Grove, whatever else.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, I guess, Mr. Chairman. Triple S: just call me triple S, I guess.

I'd like to make some final comments about Bill 22. I'd like to say that generally I'm disappointed. That's no surprise to the member opposite. We've talked about this. I just don't feel that it goes far enough. I think that if we'd really make an effort at enforcing the Bill that we have, make some real strides towards that, it might help. When you think that \$85 million has been virtually taken away from the children in our province because of payments that are in arrears, that's a sad statement about how this government cares about the enforcement of maintenance payments.

You know, when I look at this Bill and I see the right to take away a licence or not register a vehicle, I really wonder how that'll help the mother of four children who has seen about \$50 in the last year. How will that help her? If her ex has been able to dodge everything else, he'll put the registration of his vehicle under someone else's name. He may even drive without a licence.

This Bill has not gone far enough. It's, I think, just a token. I've asked the member to address issues about hiding ownership, and I hope he will speak to that before we vote on this. Also, in reference to people who live in rural Alberta, how are they going to get to work to even make an attempt to make payments? I'd like that addressed. Sometimes I look at this Bill and I think: this may just create more hassles for a couple whose relationship is tenuous at best sometimes, and somebody's just going to be angry at the other person because they can no longer register a vehicle rather than being encouraged to make the payments.

I can't help but feel that this government has downloaded on the private sector to do their dirty work, because now that licences are privatized, suddenly we come in with this Bill for the private sector to implement. I think that's one of the big flaws, as I'm sure the licence bureaus were not consulted before this Bill came up. It's obvious by the amount of calls and concerns we've had about it. So I do express some concerns on their behalf.



DR. PERCY: Lots.

MRS. SOETAERT: Lots of concerns on their behalf.

3:40

DR. PERCY: Oh, lots of calls. Oh, yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Lots and lots.

Another thing that was brought to my attention by another member is the social insurance numbers and the fact that that will be available. I thought that was under federal jurisdiction, but I could be wrong on that. I'd ask clarification on that if possible.

I'm disappointed in this Bill by a government who can't even support a motion that says: hey, let's look at this and get something going that really does work. When you think that two-thirds - two-thirds - of the cases are in arrears, that's very disappointing. The Bill is disappointing, and I would urge the government to try to get something in place that has some teeth.

Thank you.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 22 agreed to]

MR. AMERY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported when the committee rises.

[Motion carried]

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 36, Bill 37, Bill 22. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 35. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

All in favour of the report by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

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

**Bill 38**  
**Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

MR. SMITH: Yes, I am, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I move second reading of Bill 38, the Profes-

sional Statutes Amendment Act. This Act will amend seven professional statutes: the Dental Disciplines Act, the Dental Mechanics Act, the Health Disciplines Act, the Legal Profession Act, the Medical Profession Act, the Opticians Act, and the Psychology Profession Act.

The Dental Disciplines Act was proclaimed in November of 1990 and is being amended to address problems encountered in its implementation. The amendments to the Dental Disciplines Act will permit dental assistants, dental hygienists, and dental technicians to make regulations concerning mandatory continuing education, liability insurance, and assessment of disciplinary costs. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is consistent with the policy of professional regulations for all professions. The Dental Disciplines Act also will have provisions for mandatory continuing education and is one of several ways in which the profession seeks to promote the ongoing competency of its members. It's particularly important in the health care field where techniques and technologies change rapidly. It's also being amended for the ability of assessing costs. A disciplinary hearing is important to professional associations. Without this, many would lack the necessary resources to carry out effective disciplinary action. Of course, it's important to note that the professions and occupations group put great stock in the ability of the individual associations to self-govern and enjoy peer management.

The Dental Mechanics Act is being amended to permit denturists to manufacture and fit partial dentures. Only Alberta, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia at this point restrict denturists from providing this service. Denturists with similar training in other Canadian jurisdictions are permitted to manufacture and fit partial dentures. In fact, many of these practitioners were trained to do so in the program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, which also trains dental mechanics for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they have been training denturists to make and fit partial dentures since 1961. By permitting competent dental mechanics to provide service in this area, we will be giving consumers the kinds of choices they previously enjoyed in the area of full dentures. Besides enhancing consumer choice, this amendment will also promote greater competition, better quality service, and lower cost in the provision of denture services.

With respect to the Health Disciplines Act, I would like first to acknowledge and thank the Health Disciplines Board and the various professional associations and health disciplines committees which govern the health disciplines designated under the Act. These bodies have since the introduction of the Act in 1980 provided valuable support. The amendments to this statute, which I'd like to highlight today, include the addition of orthotists and prosthetists to the schedule of designated health disciplines that accompanies the Act. Orthotists design, make, and fit braces to prevent or correct deformities to protect or improve the function of a weakened extremity. Fortunately, that doesn't apply, Mr. Speaker, to the oral pronunciation of the word. Prosthetists design, make, and fit artificial limbs. The orthotist and prosthetist disciplines fully meet the criteria for regulation under the Act, and I am pleased to recommend it to this Assembly.

Other amendments to the Act include provisions . . . [interjections] Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. It seems with the pronunciation of these terms that the Assembly feels they have a leg up on me, but that is not in fact the case.

3:50

Other amendments to the Act include provisions which further clarify the rights as individual legal entities of the professional

associations governing some of the health disciplines designated under the Act.

Finally, the regulation-making powers of the board have been amended. The board may now establish practice review committees for health disciplines designated under the Act. As well, it may now require registered members of designated health disciplines to carry professional liability insurance and may specify the minimum coverage necessary. These new powers are needed to ensure that the discipline of midwifery is properly regulated in Alberta.

This Bill will also amend the Legal Profession Act. A provision permitting lawyers to split the income earned in a professional corporation through the investment of shares with their spouses and other family members will be repealed. This provision gave lawyers a tax advantage that was not enjoyed by other professionals who practised under professional corporations. These professions, Mr. Speaker, include dentists, physicians, chartered accountants, certified general accountants, certified management accountants, optometrists, and chiropractors. We were being asked either to allow these professions the same ability to split their incomes or to remove the provision from the Legal Profession Act.

Of course, it's clear that the pursuit of this government is to create level playing fields, not to extend an artificial privilege into the marketplace with respect to individual professions. In order to accommodate all professions, we are in fact repealing this one specific Act that in fact, Mr. Speaker, applies to 232 practising lawyers out of a total population of 5,500, so it is a very small percentage to which this artificial privilege was extended. This repeal will come into force January 1, 1996. This 19-month period will permit individuals who had previously taken advantage of the provision to readjust their holdings. Development of this amendment involved extensive consultations with the legal and other professions as well as some government departments. At this point I'd like to acknowledge the work and contribution of all those who have worked on this undertaking.

Number 7, Mr. Speaker, we will be making one amendment to the Medical Profession Act. This amendment was requested by the Minister of Health, and as we are basically her service group, we were pleased to support this. It is supported by the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the faculties of medicine at the University of Calgary, the number one university in Alberta, and at the University of Alberta. The amendment will change the requirements for issuing a certificate of registration to Alberta-trained physicians and will allow the college to implement nationally recognized standards for physician training, again consistent with legislation throughout this great dominion.

We will amend the Opticians Act to correct an oversight when this Act was amended in 1992, prior to me being appointed chairman of the Council on Professions and Occupations. The amendment will give persons conducting preliminary investigations, hearings, and reviews protection from liability for actions done by them under the Act, regulations, and bylaws and undertaken in good faith. This is a standard provision in professional legislation and is essential if a professional association is to carry out effective investigations in disciplinary hearings.

Finally . . . [interjection] I wish we could amend this even further to cover some members in the Assembly. We will be amending the Psychology Profession Act to make its disciplinary processes more efficient. There will be provisions for mediation so that complaints that involve misunderstanding or miscommunication can be resolved without having to go through a formal investigation and hearing process. Provisions for complaint

investigations have been amended to clarify the role of the registrar so that complaints can be investigated more efficiently. The efficiency of disciplinary hearings will also be increased by the introduction of provisions for panels of the disciplinary committee to hear cases. This will allow hearings to be held in different communities in the province using local members of the discipline committee. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in responding to the needs of the public and of the profession, it is a process of expediting hearings and dealing with disciplinary matters.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the ensuing debate and the accompanying support from the Assembly in making these legislative moves towards a more level playing field and to more equitable professional legislation that acts for quality, for choice, for competition, and for protecting the public interest.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first comment in terms that this is truly one Act that looks as if it may just be housekeeping. There is at least one item that is potentially contentious in terms of its impact on one of the professions that's involved, but in general it appears that the Act is looking at housekeeping. If I may, I'll go through each of these particular Acts and talk a little bit about what the impact is and also put forward one or two questions that perhaps we can address in Committee of the Whole.

When we look at the Dental Disciplines Act, the amendment allows for the council to make regulations concerning the three dental disciplines and to also determine costs of the appeal or of the hearing. Another item that occurs within this particular amendment is that a particular section has been repealed, and it enables the council to make bylaws with respect to "the establishment and operation . . . of a compulsory continuing education program." Therefore, no longer making it necessary to make bylaws but to have the power transferred to regulations. The question that I have on that particular issue is: why is it better to have continuing education controlled by regulations and not by bylaws?

In terms of the Dental Mechanics Act, this is an area that will increase consumer access and choice by allowing dental mechanics to expand their practice. Alberta, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia are the only provinces that currently do not have this provision, so these changes will in effect allow for the certified dental mechanics, denturists, to expand their practice.

The Health Disciplines Act basically is something that the licensed practical nurses have been requesting for a period of time. In effect, their appearance at reviews and hearings, though they have in fact been going through that process, could at this time have been legally challenged, so we're quite pleased that this has been covered now under the amendments.

With regards to the question of liability insurance, the question that I have with this particular Act is whether or not the wording has been left so open that there may be requirements for others to carry liability insurance. So I would appreciate a response with regards to that.

Legal Profession Act. At the beginning I had indicated that there was one area that was potentially contentious, and when this was referred to by the hon. member, there were some members on the government side that, in jest I am sure, indicated, "Get the lawyers." I would hope that this is not the rationale for the

amendment to this particular Act but that in effect there is the wish to achieve fairness and equity in putting forward the amendments to this particular Act.

**4:00**

What is I guess a bit of a concern is that in 1990 this Act was put forward. So we're looking at fairly current legislation that allowed for this splitting to occur, and now, four years later, we're seeing a bit of a flip-flop in terms of it's no longer considered appropriate. So we have a little bit of the theory that what was good then is not good now, and it would be nice if the government could make up its mind.

If I may, with regards to this particular section, address some of the concerns that the Law Society of Alberta has with regards to this particular amendment. What they are indicating is that the amendment does not achieve the fairness and equity that is put forward with regards to this amendment, and in fact it is based on misleading financial analysis and focuses unduly on the income splitting aspects of the provision. Now, one of the things I think we need to be aware of is that the legal profession is currently not the only profession that has this ability of family members to hold shares of corporations, but in effect there are other professions that have this ability. If I can just list them, some of those are the pharmacists, engineers, geologists, veterinarians, land surveyors, foresters, opticians, podiatrists. So this is not a unique provision.

The other item I'd like to address is with regards to the analysis prepared by Alberta Treasury and that in fact this analysis is based on a professional corporation earning an active business income of \$102,000 per year. This I guess base is much higher than what the average income earned by lawyers is in the province, so the hon. member may wish to look again at the base on which the financial analysis was made.

In summary, the position of the Law Society of Alberta is that the income splitting aspect of family shareholders is vastly overrated, that fairness and equity dictate that the legal profession be treated similarly to other businesses and a majority of other professionals in Alberta, and that the Alberta Treasury estimates of potential revenue loss are vastly overrated. If I might just state – some of you may wonder as to whether the MLAs that are currently lawyers within the Liberal caucus will be addressing this issue. They have requested that I make it clear that they will not so there will be no misunderstanding or cries of conflict of interest.

Another issue, another Act that is addressed within this particular piece of legislation is the Medical Profession Act. Again it's my understanding that this change does not present any problems, and it is a housekeeping change.

In terms of the Opticians Act, again the amendments provide for protection from liability for any members, officer, or employee of the association provided they've acted in good faith. Again these are changes that are purely housekeeping and that the Alberta Opticians Association was hoping for.

#### **Point of Order**

##### **Questioning a Member**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, have you got a point of order?

MR. SMITH: I'm just wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would entertain a question.

MS LEIBOVICI: Sure.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your discussion on the amendment of the Legal Profession Act, is it my understanding that the opposition is opposed to this amendment, or is it in favour of this amendment?

MS LEIBOVICI: What we are saying is that there are some issues that I think need to be considered. It appears there's about 2 percent of the legal profession that is currently affected by this. I think the government has tried to address some of the carryover provisions by allowing 1996 for implementation, but I think the concerns need to be looked at. I'm not sure what the correspondence has been between the Law Society of Alberta and the Alberta government, but these are issues that I think need to be addressed.

MS LEIBOVICI: In terms of the Psychology Profession Act the amendments improve the procedure for investigation of complaints by enabling the registrar to appoint a mediator to investigate the complaint. The registrar can also refer a complaint to the discipline committee. Once again it appears that this is purely a housekeeping Bill.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close debate on second reading.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to hear the reasoned comments from the member opposite on this Bill. I will be reporting back to her and the Assembly in committee when we get to that stage. I would ask, therefore, that we move second reading of Bill 38, the Professional Statutes Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a second time]

#### **Bill 39**

##### **Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1994**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduced the Bill last week, and I'm prepared to move second reading on it at this stage. I notice, as well, that the opposition does support this Bill.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, before his very own mother, has misspoke himself.

DR. L. TAYLOR: My mother's gone.

MR. MITCHELL: His mom's gone. We wondered why he was being his old self again. When we want to get some work done in here, Mr. Speaker, we need to get Mrs. Taylor sitting up there peering down on her son. I wonder how she would have felt about him with his socks off and his shoes off and his feet up on the table one night months and months ago.

#### **Point of Order**

##### **Decorum**

DR. L. TAYLOR: A point of order.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Point of order, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I certainly did not have my socks off, Mr. Speaker, and there's certainly no record of me having my shoes off and my feet on the desk as well. Thank you. I would request that member immediately to withdraw that comment on the pains of being run through by the sword.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, it's on the record now, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking as to my observations some months ago. But if it offended the member as much as his doing it offended us, I will certainly withdraw my observation in that regard.

And what about his threat of skewering me? This is . . .

DR. WEST: That's shameful.

MR. MITCHELL: It's shameful. It is. It is.

DR. WEST: The whole conversation is shameful.

MR. MITCHELL: I want to get to the Bill actually, Mr. Speaker, if they'd stop interrupting me.

#### Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: We have some serious reservations about this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker. We certainly understand the pressure under which the government finds itself. We understand the necessity of treating doctors fairly in this regard. They have gone a great distance to accept a cut in their pay. We appreciate that what can amount to a 5 percent cut for somebody else may in this case amount to a more than a 5 percent cut in take-home pay for a doctor, because of course the doctors have fixed costs which are paid for before they are able to pay themselves. We understand that this Bill is required as a result of the negotiations between the government and the Alberta Medical Association to establish a program under which the doctors would be able to accept a 5 percent cut to their funding, which may in fact result in a higher than 5 percent pay cut to themselves.

#### 4:10

But we are very concerned as a caucus, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill is very, very rushed and demonstrates in part that the government is making up what it's doing as it goes along so that it hasn't been able to consider more broadly the implications of a cap on this professional group for issues such as the reduction of trade barriers between and amongst provinces. It hasn't necessarily considered adequately the impact of such a cap on the provision of doctors to rural areas and the provision of certain specialties. Now, the argument is made that exceptions are being made under this Bill for that, but our concern is that it is so rushed that clearly nobody will have had adequate opportunity to really consider and assess this Bill properly.

So we have grave reservations about the Bill, and we would await debate to see whether the minister and her colleagues can clarify the application of this Bill and some of our reservations, particularly with respect to the implications for free markets; that is, of professional and other work force elements between and amongst provinces, the creation of barriers that this might lead to. It's on that basis that we would have some concerns.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

#### Bill 33

#### Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 1994

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 33 deals with the financial compensation associated with a death caused by the wrongdoing of another. Before discussing the contents of the Bill, I'd like to try to put this whole thing into perspective.

Jeffrey was the father of three children, and they lived in the country while he commuted between there and his job in the city. He didn't mind the drive. When he had to go into town, he offered to take Charlie, their youngest, with him for the ride. When he got to town, he was suddenly aware that the streets were quite slippery, and he was extra cautious as he approached a high-level overpass, recognizing how treacherous they could be. He was halfway across when he saw that the truck approaching them had lost control and was careening straight towards them. The impact knocked him out, and the next thing he knew was when he awoke in the hospital. He was told that Charlie was in the operating room of the Children's hospital, and they'd know better how he was later on that day. Jeff's wife, Heather, learned of the accident from the police and, after arranging for a sitter, was torn between the two hospitals but ended up with her husband when he regained consciousness. She then went to the Children's to be with Charlie when he came out of the operating room. That was to be the pattern of her life for the next couple of weeks. Although Jeff was released after three days, they took a hotel room and almost lived in the city with little Charlie, who had been badly injured when the back of the truck swung around and embedded itself in the back of the family vehicle. His injuries were just too much, and little Charlie died 15 days after the accident.

The family was in shock. It didn't help much that Jeff was still recuperating from his injuries, and of course there were still the two little ones at home to look after, but somehow they got through it. The family doctor was a great help, as was the grief counselor he referred them to. It wasn't for several weeks that they got around to dealing with the insurance and the vehicle replacement and all of the other things associated with an accident of this kind. It was when it came to the settlement for Charlie's death that the anger truly set in, because under the current fatalities Act they were allowed a total of \$3,000 compensation. That didn't even begin to pay for the funeral expenses. How about the hotel room, the driving back and forth, the babysitter, the grief counseling, and on and on and on, all caused through no fault of their own? The most difficult was in trying to deal with it all. How do you put a price on someone's death, and how do you argue about it without it sounding mercenary and money grubbing?

Mr. Speaker, this is a hypothetical story, but it need not be. It is typical of dozens and dozens of such situations across Alberta every year. I didn't think it was appropriate to quote an actual case history and further trade on someone's tragedy. But the situation is the same, and the law reform society has been trying to correct it for years.

The Fatal Accidents Act governs the right of surviving family members to recover damages from the persons whose wrongdoing caused the death of the deceased person. The Act defines which family members have a right to bring an action for damages and the type of damages that will be awarded. Originally the Act only provided for damages for the loss of financial benefits that the surviving family members could have expected to receive from the deceased person. In 1967 the Act was amended to allow a court

to also award damages sufficient to cover the reasonable expenses of the funeral. In 1979 section 8 of the Act was enacted to allow a court to give close family members damages for bereavement. It empowered the court to award \$3,000 to the deceased's parents, to be shared equally if the action is brought for the benefit of both parents, or a similar amount to the surviving spouse and the minor children. For some time this allowance has caused a great deal of public dissatisfaction, particularly in cases of wrongful death of children. Parents who suffer the tragic loss of a child due to the wrongdoing of another find the \$3,000 compensation insulting. This amount does not even cover the cost of burial, let alone the multitude of related expenses. It is neither fair nor just.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 33 would enable the recovery of actual reasonable expenses incurred for the benefit of the deceased person between the time of injury and death. It would allow a reasonable allowance for travel expenses incurred in visiting the deceased person between the time of injury and death. Finally, it would allow expenditures for grief counseling. All of the foregoing would be allowed to a maximum of \$40,000 to the surviving spouse or cohabitant or \$40,000 to the surviving parents of a minor child or a dependent child under the age of 26. The Act also acknowledges the cohabitant or common-law spouse of the deceased person.

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no way to compensate someone for the loss of a loved one, particularly when it occurs as a result of wrongdoing. What this Bill attempts to do is help defray some of the reasonable costs associated with such tragedy. That is the absolute least that one should expect.

I ask every member to support this Bill.

MR. WICKMAN: Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I'm one of those who is very, very pleased to support Bill 33, and I want to commend the Member for Olds-Didsbury for bringing it forward. It's a Bill that our Member for Calgary-Buffalo has attempted to address in the past, what is a shortcoming in the existing legislation that falls very, very short. It's got to be the ultimate insult for the relatives of the victims involved when \$3,000 is supposed to cover funeral expenses, counseling, and everything.

Mr. Speaker, certainly the member is moving in the right direction, and certainly I, as the member representing Edmonton-Rutherford, fully support the Bill.

4:20

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to rise in support of Bill 33. I'd just point out to members that this is almost identical to private member's Bill 252, which had been on the Order Paper last autumn. The Bill, as I think has already been indicated, was based on a report from the Alberta Law Reform Institute.

I wanted to make this observation. I think one can best appreciate the importance of this Bill if you've had the occasion to talk to parents of a child that has been killed in an accident. I just would relate my own experience when I was practising law, Mr. Speaker, in being consulted by some parents who had lost their teenage son in a motor vehicle accident and were of course distraught and upset. It was an incredible feeling of helplessness, as a lawyer, to have to explain to these parents, this family, that the only sum that was recoverable was the amount previously provided.

It's not a question, Mr. Speaker, that we're trying to put a value on the life of a child or a family member, but I think what we're trying to do is in some measure respect and value the loss

of a member of a family. What made it particularly wrenching in this experience that I recall so vividly was that one child had died and seven months later the same couple was back to see me. Their only other child had also been involved in and killed in a second car accident. I thought that in the space of that half year, or a little less than a year, for a family to have lost both children – and from my numerous discussions with the parents I just thought at that time that the provisions in the Fatal Accidents Act would be an absolute insult.

Mr. Speaker, that's my own experience, but I know from other families who have lost a child through some tortious misconduct on the part of someone else that the impact is far reaching. I think what happens is this: as a civilized community, a province, what we're trying to do is in some measure respect the loss that a family experiences when they lose a member of that family. I think the former provisions in the Bill just didn't come close. The notion of \$3,000 being a specified quantum of damages truly was insulting, and that's why I'm so delighted that the government has now seen fit to move on this recommendation.

I'd just mention I guess one other concern. It's useful that the Alberta Law Reform Institute report 166 from May of 1993 has been acted on by the government, but the government hasn't acted, members, on all of the recommendations. One of the other recommendations from the Law Reform Institute was that we not get into this trap again of waiting for decades to deal with the quantum of damages. They suggest that what we do is review on a five-year basis the quantum of damages, and it could be addressed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. That particular recommendation has not been carried forward in Bill 33. I think that's an omission. My intention at the committee stage is to move an amendment to the Bill which would say that perhaps every three years cabinet would review the damages available to that family of a deceased child where there would be a claim under the Act. It would be reviewed on a more current basis, and we wouldn't fall into this situation we have where we're only providing \$3,000 damages for a family member who would fall within the scope of the Act. I think we just have to remember that the whole purpose of this Bill was to avoid members of a family, who are already traumatized by the loss, having to go to the courts to seek compensation. I think that's a noble and an important principle. I think, though, to ensure that the principle is met in all respects, it should mean that we review those damages on a more regular basis and not go a decade or two decades before we review it.

So with that, I'm delighted to see the Bill here. I'm going to enthusiastically support it, but I will be introducing that amendment. If the sponsor of the Bill were to see fit to incorporate that as a government amendment, I'd be delighted to see that happen as well. I think that change is required. Otherwise, I congratulate the government on acting on this recommendation, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
head: **Third Reading**  
**Bill 20**  
**Regional Health Authorities Act**

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In moving third reading, I just want to make a few comments. The Bill, as we described

earlier, is enabling legislation that allows for the establishment of regional health authorities, allows for the establishment of community health councils, and sets out the powers and some of the roles of the regional health authorities.

The ability to requisition was one of the issues that seemed to cause a lot of concern, and clearly through the amendments we outlined exactly what that requisitioning power would be and what it could be used for, very similar to what it currently is in the Hospitals Act.

There was a lot of concern expressed that in fact this established a voucher system. That, for probably the eighth time, I will say is not accurate. There's no such thing as a voucher system. It allows for the continuation of some of the things that are currently going on, where the Department of Health will provide funds for a person to get either equipment and/or services that they need.

The other issue was about the ability to charge for certain services and things that are currently happening today. There was a concern that we were setting up a two-tiered system. That is certainly not the case. A lot of concern expressed about the regulations, the ability to pass regulations – yes, that's true. There is a lot of capacity in the Act for that to happen, but quite frankly this is enabling legislation. There are some things that we are still dealing with with the public, getting public input to make sure that it works the proper way and provides the needs of the communities. So we have to have that ability to pass regulations to make sure that people get the services.

The whole issue about how the community health councils and the regional health authorities will have to have audited financial statements that in fact will be reported to the minister – and the minister must file in the Legislature the regional health authorities reports, so quite clearly all of this is public. It requires that things like remunerations to the CEOs and of course the board members must all be included in the filing. It also speaks to the foundations and how they can continue and the establishment of new foundations.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I would move third reading of Bill 20.

4:30

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MR. MITCHELL: It's very tricky how that member sat down so quickly. I almost didn't get a chance to speak, Mr. Speaker. I don't mean anything by it, but they'll stop at nothing to stop debate on these issues.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to summarize. This has been a detailed and very, very interesting debate, I should say, over the last number of weeks. In fact, I think it says a great deal about quality debate in this Legislature. We should as a Legislature be, I think, quite pleased in the way this particular debate has gone because it has truly addressed significant issues. It has analyzed this Bill very, very elaborately and in a detailed way. The debate has touched upon not only the specifics of the Bill but their implications more broadly for the delivery of health care in this province. Regardless of the disagreement on the two sides of this House over this Bill, I think the debate has been very responsible and very enlightening.

Having said that, as a result of this debate, not only in the Legislature but more broadly in the province, the government has made an effort to make some changes to the Act which we find gratifying, which I think argue well for the impact and the consequence of an effectively running Legislature and legislative

system. We in fact feel very, very pleased that the government has responded to some of our concerns and has made substantive changes to the Bill.

These changes include a greater emphasis on public health services outlined in the mandate for the regional health authorities in the Bill. I think that everybody who has followed this issue and who cares about the improvement in the wellness orientation of our health care system is concerned that this structure could overwhelm public health. Public health is not the domain of the traditionally powerful interests in the health establishment. Public health has emerged more slowly, has required much greater determination on the part of its advocates to see that it has emerged, to see that it is sustained, and in fact for any hope for the growth of its impact.

Public health is of intrinsic value for many reasons. It is, of course, of value because it is intrinsically preventative. It addresses health care at some of the broadest reaches in our society. It is intrinsically valuable because it is premised upon a wellness/preventative model, which runs in the face of the illness model that is consumed by our acute care facilities and institutions. So greater recognition in this Act of public health is not something to be dismissed lightly. In fact, it is something to be encouraged and upon which the government should be congratulated. I will say later in my comments that unfortunately it simply doesn't go far enough, but we accept that it is a step in the right direction, and we are grateful that the government would have taken that step as a result of input from this caucus and others in this province.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

A second area where the government has accepted some of our ideas is with respect to the requirement that the minister submit financial statements received from the regional authorities to the Legislature. This, too, Mr. Speaker, is very important and is a profound improvement in this Bill. Of course, it doesn't say for certain that the financial statements of various hospitals will be submitted to the minister for public release. We can only assume that that will be the case and certainly hope that that will be the case.

It will be very, very important that the public is able to see which hospitals are the most efficient in which areas and which are the least efficient in which areas. This is important because it will drive and focus management on being more efficient – reporting mechanisms have that effect – and it's important because it will open it up for everybody to review the most effective and efficient way for one region to contract with another region to acquire certain services that would more appropriately be offered in another region and not in the region that is seeking those services. For example, heart transplants, I'm sure, will be done in one place in this province. Other operations may be done in several places . . .

DR. WEST: Veterinary clinics.

MR. MITCHELL: Somebody transplanted that minister's heart at some point.

. . . but it will be very interesting, where services can be provided by several regions, for other regions to determine which is the most efficient and which is the least efficient and where the costs can be most reduced. This will serve to bring to a public health care system which is already very efficient some of the benefits of a market-driven system without the disadvantages of

that system, and it may well be that this could lend itself very effectively to a hybrid model, which in part we already have.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that this amendment, to require the submission of financial statements to the minister and in turn the minister to the public, will not be curtailed and that the minister will not be afraid to release the range of data, particularly financial statements of hospitals, which she has not been prepared to release, by and large, to this point.

A third amendment is that the minister is now limiting the powers of requisition by municipalities for health care related matters to certain capital projects. This again is an improvement, although in my comments later I will indicate why it doesn't go quite far enough. The reasons however, Mr. Speaker, that we will vote against this Bill are several. The overwhelming reason for me – and I want to make this very, very clear – is the manner in which this Bill addresses user fees. User fees, the government can argue, as addressed in this Bill are simply going to be those that are already in place, and it may well be that that is the case, although we've been disappointed before. But I am particularly concerned about the government's statements in that regard given the context within which they are being made.

We have a Premier who has stood up and said that he thinks we need more commercial enterprise in the health care system. We have a Premier who, without consulting his Department of Health officials, probably without consulting his Minister of Health, who found herself to be in a very embarrassing position, stood up and said that he supports the Gimbel Act, regardless of the fact that there was widespread concern that this could lead to a grave skewing of our public health care system. We have a Premier who is contemplating the possibility of selling hospitals to private entrepreneurs, doctors, and others who might be put in a position of making money by running a hospital in this province, making profits by doing that.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, it is also true that as the pressure grows and technology improves and attitudes are reoriented, more and more people are leaving acute care facilities earlier or are not going to them in the first place or are only going to them for day surgery and not overnight and so on, which means that more and more of our medical system is being pushed away from acute care facilities and therefore away from the rubric of the Canada Health Act. That means that it is easier and easier for the government to begin to impose, with some kind of legal impunity, user fees.

Compounding that erosion is the fact that there will be 17 regions which will be implementing user fees without any particular consistency. It is very unlikely that this government would even entertain to do an inventory of the user fees that are being implemented by the various regions at various times. So what we could do very readily is wake up 10 years from now and find that in fact there is tremendous erosion of the public health care system, that there has been a tremendous movement towards a two-tiered or a three-tiered or a 17-tiered health care system. This will run in the face of a fundamental value, a fundamental principle upon which the people of this province and the people of this country have established themselves, have established our identity.

Perhaps one of the most significant features of this country and this province is our commitment to fairness, Mr. Speaker. In this frenzy, this ideological frenzy that the government has undertaken, has launched itself upon to cut costs without particular regard for the consequences, I believe we are beginning to see an erosion of that fundamental principle: fairness, equality of opportunity, a basic sense of security for all Albertans, and

equality in that sense of security for all Albertans. I, for one, am fundamentally opposed to that. If this Legislature is to stand for anything, it should be standing for those kinds of values. They cannot use as an excuse some ideological obsession with market-driven forces, although those of course have a place and are very, very important, with respect to something as important as health care. They cannot use as an excuse these things to erode our health care system.

I guess compounding all of this, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that no matter what the government says to reassure us, I think they haven't thought this Bill out particularly well. If ever I needed proof positive it was last week, or the week before, when we received 19 pages . . .

MR. GERMAIN: Twenty-seven.

MR. MITCHELL: Sorry.

. . . 27 pages of amendments to a 19-page Bill. It's almost incomprehensible, Mr. Speaker. Not only that, but we actually had two ministers responsible for planning this Bill. We had the Minister of Health and then we had the minister responsible for health planning . . .

MR. GERMAIN: Who claimed some expertise in the area.

MR. MITCHELL: . . . both of whom, or the latter at least, claimed expertise in the area. So we have to ask ourselves: which one of the two ministers was responsible for the 19 pages, and which one of the two ministers was responsible for the 27 pages? Why was it that the left hand somehow didn't know what the right hand was doing, and why couldn't they have planned better to anticipate these problems? What it underlines is that if they hadn't thought it out well enough to present it right in the first place, one can only begin to assume that their reassurances now are really after the fact, closing the barn door after the horse has escaped. We have some very, very serious concerns about that. For me, Mr. Speaker, those concerns are focused fundamentally on the issue of user fees.

While there has been some acceptance of regional boundaries, there certainly hasn't been that acceptance in the case of St. Albert. It's very difficult to understand why the minister would not take steps to reassure the people of St. Albert and members of this Legislature . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: How about Sturgeon?

MR. MITCHELL: . . . and the people of Sturgeon, in particular, why they should be divorced from their hospital. Why should the people of Sturgeon be paying taxes to a hospital . . .

MR. GERMAIN: Westlock.

MR. MITCHELL: The Westlock hospital, for example. Believe me, many Albertans have paid taxes recently for that particular hospital: \$10 million. In fact, many Calgarians have paid taxes for that particular hospital. We know it particularly bothered the Member for Calgary-Currie, although he has been afraid to say that in this Legislature.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: She.

MR. MITCHELL: Sorry. Not Calgary-Currie, but Calgary-Varsity and – who's sitting beside him?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Calgary-Shaw.

MR. MITCHELL: Calgary-Shaw.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the people of Sturgeon have been divorced from their hospital. They have not been considered for their input by this minister. The Premier has not listened and he certainly has not cared about that, yet they make concessions to Sherwood Park. Well, that's great. Good. But why would they not make the same kind of concession to St. Albert? Because there's a qualitatively different political context. St. Albert would be competition for the Member for Barrhead-Westlock and for the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, and they don't want the competition for their hospitals from that particular hospital. Proper planning at the very minimum should include the people of Sturgeon in the same region within which their hospital resides, so that is another reason that we would find ourselves having to vote against this particular matter.

Public health is of overwhelming importance, and as I said earlier, at least the minister has made some steps to improve the public health commitment in this Bill. But words are words, and we've seen many words on the part of this government, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the one thing the Premier is good at, when he's not fishing, is words. He's very, very effective at spinning those words.

The fact of the matter is that we want some power behind the commitment to public health. All we're saying is that in order that public health not be overwhelmed, there should be a minimum amount of specified funding to each regional authority – now, this can be negotiated of course – a specific amount that is set aside so it can't be sucked up in the vortex of acute care health care funding, which has this imperative and which seems to dominate our health care system. We need to have a commitment to preventative health care, a commitment to a wellness model, a commitment to an emphasis in health care that hasn't been traditional to this point.

So, Mr. Speaker, while we accept that the government has improved its commitment to public health, or at least paid some verbal emphasis to it in the amendments to their Act, we are not convinced that the public health concerns arising out of this legislation have been adequately addressed. We remain committed to public health and therefore opposed to this Bill until such time as the government, the Minister of Municipal Affairs in particular – who of course has a commitment to local grassroots politics and would of all people be a member who would listen to people in the community; we know that – and his colleagues have determined that they will make a commitment to local community-based public health initiatives. We are fighting, to some extent, certain interests that are very powerful, that can overwhelm, interests such as those who advocate public health who to this point haven't had the base of power which will give us the assurance that public health will not be lost in the midst of this new regionalization.

I appreciate the continued argument by the Member for Rocky Mountain House with respect to the voucher system, but I am still very, very uneasy about that. I wouldn't be uneasy about it if I didn't have to listen to a Premier talking so openly about doing away with fundamental values and principles that are contained in the Canada Health Act. I wouldn't feel so uneasy about it if there were a Premier who stood up and said, "This is the line we are not allowing anybody to cross when it comes to the protection of our public health system."

But I am uneasy about it, Mr. Speaker, because I believe we have a Premier who at best simply doesn't know the consequences of what he is talking about or at worst has a hidden agenda, and

some days not such a hidden agenda, to do away, or to take steps which will ultimately do away, with the public health care system. If Albertans ever had to be frightened of this Premier, I think they have to be frightened when he stands up and talks about things which he clearly knows very little about and which he clearly hasn't been properly briefed on.

Well, we see it, Mr. Speaker, when he says that he's in favour of the Gimbel Act and his own department says that they're opposed to it. He hasn't had the decency to talk to his seniormost officials about that particular issue, which will have huge consequences.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is rising on a point of order. Have you got a citation?

4:50

MR. SMITH: Yes, I do, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker. That citation would be *Beauchesne* 459 and relevance. When I think of the Premier, I think of reverence. When he thinks of the Premier, he thinks of relevance.

The Gimbel Bill was introduced through Private Bills. It has nothing to do with the Bill under discussion right now. In fact, the last minutes of the hon. member's comments have had no relevance to the Bill under discussion now but have been more directed to the Bill in Private Bills. If he had more confidence in the members that he sent to that committee, perhaps he would have a clearer understanding of the Bill.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: On the point of order, thank you. This will not come out of my time, my 20 minutes, I know. It is very, very disconcerting to hear the Member for Calgary-Varsity, in a vain attempt to defend his Premier – and why would he want to defend him? I mean, the Premier could be here himself if he weren't fishing. I guess he thinks . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think that if we want to identify members in the Assembly – as you well know, hon. members have a whole host of duties, including being cabinet ministers, leaders of the opposition, and committees. There are legislation committees and so on – we have a custom of not referring to the absence of anyone.

So the point of order is presumably on relevance.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. I'll address that. I'm sure that the Member for Calgary-Varsity believes that the Premier will read *Hansard* – he probably does every day – to make sure he knows that the member has been in support of him and will one day get on that front bench and be promoted.

But relevance – it is very, very disconcerting, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Calgary-Varsity would not see a relationship between the Gimbel Act, the Premier's position on that Act, and its implications for Bill 20. What I am saying is that no matter what protestations come from the Member for Rocky Mountain House or the Member for Calgary-Varsity or any other member in this House, they do not carry the weight of the statements by the Premier of the province, who has consistently said things, whether thought out or not thought out, that could lead to the



erosion of the public health care system. So I see that they are relevant, which would be my point.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you still on the point of order?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes. There is relevance here.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Chair would observe a number of things. Although you did withdraw the part of whether another hon. member may or may not be here, you went on to make the point nevertheless, although left-handedly.

The point of relevance. We're now in third reading, so we're talking about the whole of the Bill, and you can bring in what other members may or may not think about it. But to bring in a private Bill and then somehow make that appear to be a government Bill, you know, is beginning to stretch relevance, if I hear you right, I think a bit much.

So if you would take the rest of the time remaining in your speech to conclude on the Bill we have before us, I think that would be best.

MR. MITCHELL: You know, Mr. Speaker, I was just about to finish when the Member for Calgary-Varsity got up.

#### Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: In fact, what I was going to say – and I will say it now – is that for these and some other reasons that colleagues of mine will present, I cannot vote for this Bill, and I would ask the members of the Legislature to defeat this Bill.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise to speak at third reading of Bill 20. One of the biggest challenges that is facing the western world right now is revamping the health care system. We have seen initiatives such as Hillary Clinton's take place, where she has gone through to attempt to revamp the obviously two-tiered and obviously flawed health care system in the United States.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: You sound like a Liberal.

DR. OBERG: Jeez, I'd better sit down.

Mr. Speaker, if I may start again with Hillary Clinton. Compared to what we have done in Alberta, Hillary Clinton had a job that, as I soon learned, was not nearly as challenging as what we have attempted to do in Alberta. Hillary Clinton had the job of giving health care to people that have never had health care in the past. What we have had the job of doing is rationalizing and changing health care in a system that has gone unchanged for the last 25 years. We have an excellent health care system, and we have had for the last 25 years. The problem is that we have not had an objective look at the health care system over that period of time. We have assumed that everything we do in health care works. We have seen advents of new technologies and new medications that on theory have worked and on theory have done extremely well.

Over the short time that I have been a physician, which has been around 10 or 11 years . . .

MR. SMITH: And a good one, I might add.

DR. OBERG: And a good 10 or 11 years.

. . . we have seen medication such as Lanoxin, which 11 years ago was used for congestive heart failure and was the be-all and end-all of drugs for congestive heart failure, fall into complete disuse for congestive heart failure. There are much better medications for it. Indeed, we have seen its role relegated to that of a secondary and tertiary type drug. The point that I'm trying to make on this, Mr. Speaker, is that health care is changing, and it is imperative that we in government change with it. We have not taken a look at our system.

To give a bit of background on Bill 20, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, I've been intimately involved with it, with the then minister in charge of the Health Planning Secretariat, in our series of roundtables. One very important thing that we learned and heard from the people of Alberta when it came to health care was that they were very positive on a wellness concept. We heard the word "wellness" at almost every meeting that we went to.

Again, I think there are very few people in this Assembly, especially the ones that are listening to me, who would argue with the concept of wellness. I'm sure that anyone here who has looked at it would realize that the biggest problem is: how do we achieve wellness? What do we do to build a system that promotes wellness? One of the things that has become extremely apparent to me as a physician and now as a member of government is that we have had in the past very much a volume-driven system. Rather than choosing efficiencies to be equal to lower input, what we have seen is that efficiencies are tied to higher output, meaning the more that is put through, the more funding that is received. I'm not talking about one sector of the health care system but the health care system in general.

AN HON. MEMBER: You mean doctors?

DR. OBERG: In regards to the lawyer who just spoke, I'm more specifically talking about the funding formulas that have applied to hospitals in the past.

We have seen hospitals rewarded for putting more people through their system. They have achieved more funding because of doing this. Not whether the outcome is positive, not whether the procedures that are being done have a positive outcome, but purely to put people through the system. This is one of the problems that was identified time and time again as we traveled around Alberta.

It soon became very apparent that in the health care system in Alberta – I think it's time for a glass of water, Mr. Speaker – there were two opposing forces. On one hand, we have preventative type of health care such as public health, mental health, AADAC, to name but a few. Basically, the job of these people in the health care system is to keep people well, to promote wellness. On the other hand, under the present health care system with acute care hospitals we have part of the sector being rewarded for volume. As I can see, I'm getting the hook here. What we had to do was get a system that would lead to wellness and lead to the incentives on wellness.

5:00

One of the points that I would just like to address is a point that has been raised by the opposition, and that was of public health funding. We felt that public health funding had to be given differently in different areas. We all know that a preventative program in Brooks may work differently than a preventative program in Fort McMurray. We know that the needs of a preventative program in Brooks are different than a preventative

program in Fort McMurray, and we also know that the people who are best capable of identifying the health care needs of the local region are the people from that local region. Therefore, what we have tried to do is not take the centralist approach and impose the ideas from the top down, as has been suggested in the past by the opposition, but rather leave the freedom to use the dollars for public health in the best possible way for the local communities. We felt that by doing this, we could get a better outcome and essentially more bang for the buck for the health care dollar.

Over the past six months I have talked to numerous people. To give one example of why we are revamping the health care system, in talking to a group of pathologists, they told me that 10 percent of the lab tests and the lab fees charged in Alberta could be eliminated purely – and I repeat "purely" – by eliminating duplication and tests of convenience. I think that is a damnation of the system, and I think it's time that it's changed. I really see Bill 20 as taking a major step in revamping the system and moving to a wellness-type system.

Mr. Speaker, to belittle the changes that are occurring in health care is wrong. They are massive changes. In talking about restructuring health care, I say that we are not doing that but that we are actually changing the philosophy of health care delivery in Alberta. I think it's an extremely positive step and Bill 20 is well on the way.

One of my last points that I would like to say is that when I answer questions, I put every question and every answer down to two basic philosophies. The answer that I give must satisfy two basic criteria, and those are: (a) is it cost-effective and (b) is it better or equal patient care? Mr. Speaker, I really feel that Bill 20 envelops those two concepts and that we are well on our way to changing the health care system in Alberta to a system that will be the envy of the world.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the Member for Bow Valley would conclude his comments with a series of two questions: is it cost-effective and is it good for patient care? Of course, that sort of puts into a nutshell one of the problems the Liberal opposition has with the government's remaking of health care: they've got those questions absolutely backwards. It should be patient care coming first all the time. Unfortunately, what happens is that this government's strategy is to put the bottom line above all else.

Now, I notice that we're presented with a Bill to debate the Regional Health Authorities Act, and regionalization is of course a terrific idea. It's regional planning, regional co-ordination, regional funding, a regional provision of service, regional governance: all extremely worthwhile ideas, definitely the way of the future. We know that regionalization is a great idea, Mr. Speaker, because we find it in such complete and thoughtful documents as The Rainbow Report and in the Liberal campaign platform from the June 1993 election. So we're convinced about regionalization and the merits of regionalization, and that's why we were looking forward to such a good Bill and such good debate about the concepts of regionalization.

Instead, we have Bill 20, which is more to do with the financial reordering of things in health care than it is about regionalization, because there's actually very little of substance about regionalization. Everything, as we've noted again and again and again in

debate, is being left to regulation, and that's really a shame, because it of course creates a problem. That problem is that (a) most people in the field have no idea what Bill 20 really stands for and (b) it means that this opposition can't in good conscience support this Bill. Regionalization is something that is certainly worthy of support. Unfortunately, this Bill isn't about regionalization primarily. Primarily it's about commercialization of health care. It's about user fees. It's about a voucher system. It's about a lot of confusion.

Mr. Speaker, groups such as the AHA, the Alberta Healthcare Association, have said: "This Bill is rushed. We can't really tell where this Bill leaves us. Unless there are significant amendments and changes made, unless the government can come clean and tell us what this means in terms of our relationship with our employees, with our unions, unless we see other changes happen in other legislation first, we're not going to be able to embrace this Bill, nor are we going to be able to meet the financial targets that have been imposed upon us."

We've seen almost every group of health professionals, whether it be the physicians through the AMA or the chiropractors through their college or the physiotherapists or the pharmacists, the occupational therapists, on and on it goes, the nurses, all coming forward one after another and saying: "We don't know where we're going to be after this Bill is passed. We have no idea what the financial relationships are going to be. We don't know how we're going to get paid. We don't know who we're going to have to go to for money. We don't know whether we're going to be negotiating our contracts with the regional health authorities, with the community health councils. We don't know whether we're going to have to go directly to the government." You read one part of the Bill, the Bill makes it clear that all the authority will rest with the regional board. You read a little further in the Bill, the minister takes back all that authority. You go some place else in the Bill, and it talks about these community health councils.

The College of Chiropractors is of the opinion that they'll be dealing at a local level with the community health councils. You talk to other health professionals and they'll tell you, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, we'll be talking directly to the regional health authorities." People are saying, "Well, how do you get on these regional health authorities?" Well, you have to be appointed by the minister. You have to be appointed by cabinet. "Well, that's interesting. How come they're not allowing any health care professionals to be appointed to these authorities? Don't they want people who know the business to be involved in decision-making about the business?" Well, it would appear not.

Now, the reason given is that we don't want these turf wars to happen. We don't want to see the physicians pitted against the pharmacists, pitted against the public health people. So what we'll do is we'll eliminate them all from the decision-making loop. But, no, we won't really eliminate them, because maybe we'll appoint them to these community health councils. That again raises a whole series of questions. Who will be in charge? Who will be making the decisions? Will these community health councils have the power to make those kinds of decisions or not? It's certainly not clear to us. It's not clear to the health professionals. It's certainly not clear to the ordinary taxpayer who's footing the bill for all of this.

Bill 20 is a starting point. Some of the notions that are in Bill 20 are good. The government has noticed some flaws and has brought forward amendments to deal with some flaws but certainly not all of them. Bill 20 is a starting point for discussion. If this government was honest in its attempt to restructure health

care in a meaningful way that really did put patient care first, that really did look for new and exciting and innovative ways to deliver health, then what we would have is a complete package in front of us for debate. We would have Bill 20. We would have all the regulations, and then, Mr. Speaker, we'd have some roundtables that meant something. Then we'd have a consultation process that actually invited people to comment in an open way, in a complete way on what the government had in store for them. We'd put all the plans on the table, we'd put all the cards out on the table, and then we'd get people to talk about whether it met their needs or not, whether or not they wanted to pay taxes for the kind of health care system that was being put forward by the government. Unfortunately, that's not at all what this government has done. What they've done instead is said: "Here's a good title. It's called regional health authorities. Vote for the title." Well, that's simply not good enough.

5:10

I note as well the comments of the Member for Bow Valley when he talked about funding and he talked about how hospitals sometimes can, I think if I understand his comments, play some kind of game with their funding. Well, I would question anybody in government to explain how the present acute care funding plan fits in with Bill 20. On what basis will funding decisions be made under that plan when it's hardly working now with the hospitals? Now we're going to have regions competing with one another. We've heard speculation that for some regions to maintain their funding base to attract high-calibre physicians, they may be moving specialty programs out to the hinterland.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course we know that there is a critical mass that's necessary when it comes to the very expensive and very complex tertiary care health programs. To start talking about organ transplant programs and other highly sophisticated programs operating out of small rural hospitals is (a) counterproductive and (b) contrary really to the role of these rural hospitals.

Speaking of rural hospitals, why is it that we haven't heard the Premier or others thinking out loud about the rural hospitals that may be closing?

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House is rising on a point of order.

MR. LUND: Yes. *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. The hon. member has been going on and on about things that aren't even closely related to this Bill, and I would urge that you call him back to this Bill, please.

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

MR. SAPERS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Rocky Mountain House, because in fact that's my point. The fact is that these things aren't covered in the Bill, and that's what makes the Bill such a deficient Bill. What we're dealing with here is an absolute fundamental reshaping of health care, and it's being left to regulation.

MR. SPEAKER: Go ahead.

**Debate Continued**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, as I was saying, we're looking here at hospital closures and bed closures, but we haven't heard anybody musing out loud. We've had the Minister of Health standing and saying: well, you have to keep all the hospitals in my constituency open, because my goodness, they're more than six miles apart or nine miles apart or whatever the number was that she used.

MR. MITCHELL: I think it's up to 15.

MR. SAPERS: Up to 15 I'm advised.

On the other hand, we've had this very same government commission a report that speculates about closing the Alberta Children's hospital. We've had the government say: well, gee, maybe we miscalculated.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

MR. LUND: *Beauchesne* 459. Would the member please somehow relate this to this Bill, because clearly there's not one mention of a closure of a hospital, there's not one mention of the Calgary Children's hospital. Does he want his mother-in-law included?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, the Chair would say that the concept of third reading is for members to make comments on the Bill as it has emerged from committee. Second reading is to the principle of the Bill; committee is to the details. So now it is in its final form, and the comments should be addressed to the Bill as it is in its final form. It is really not a platform for discussing health care in our province generically all over the map. It is a Bill dealing with the structure and the governance of regional health districts, as the Chair understands it.

The hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you for that advice, Mr. Speaker. Of course, my point is – and I'm sure that the Member for Rocky Mountain House can follow this thread – that the regional health authorities in this Bill were left to wonder how it is that they will have to compete with one another, because obviously they're being set up to compete with one another when we start hearing about rural hospitals trying to attract new specialty programs to the detriment of those centres for excellence that provide tertiary care in this province now. I know the Member for Rocky Mountain House is aware of that issue because, of course, of his duties on the committee that he chairs. I know that he's heard these points again and again, and he understands their relevance and their importance to this debate.

**Debate Continued**

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, the government introduced this 19-page Bill and subsequently introduced 19 amendments to it taking 27 pages. The Liberal opposition of course also introduced a number of amendments. Now, taken altogether, the amendments would have made Bill 20 a much better Bill, a tolerable Bill. Certainly this opposition appreciated the government tabling their amendments, because they were so substantial, in such a fashion that we had some time to study them, become familiar with them, consult with stakeholders on them. Then we came to the debate,

and we discussed the merits of those amendments. Subsequently those amendments passed. I suppose that was all right, although those amendments were far from perfect. In fact, in particular, the amendments dealing with public health and the amendments dealing with requisition powers were probably the most efficient.

Then we had the opportunity to table our own amendments. These amendments covered a number of critical areas, but perhaps the most critical, Mr. Speaker, had to do with user fees and the coming of a voucher system in health care in this province. Now, we presented those amendments in such a fashion that the government would have a chance to study them and to consult with stakeholders. But you know what? Instead of that happening, the Member for Rocky Mountain House stood up and said: I don't know what you're talking about; I don't see anything in this Bill that suggests there are user fees or a voucher system. So even when we pointed that out, we're still being told: "Well, just trust us. We don't expect this user fee system to expand. Just trust us. We don't see this voucher system expanding." Well, you know, those words, "just trust us," are about as empty as a Paddle River gravel pit.

Mr. Speaker, this notion, "We're from the government, and we're here to help," just doesn't cut it anymore. People don't want to hear that. They want to see substance. They want to believe in their government. They want to believe that this legislation is the right thing to do, but instead they're left with these sorts of hollow promises: "Don't worry about it. User fees won't expand. Don't worry about it. We're not going to allow further commercialization of medicine." It doesn't matter that the Premier has already said that he's in favour of it. It doesn't matter that a senior advisor to the government is a physician who has already put forward such a plan totally privatizing the health care system. Don't worry about that. Mr. Speaker, that should give people who are worried about health care as much comfort as it gives Alberta seniors who were told: don't worry; your taxes won't go up. Well, we saw how long that lasted.

So what we're left with in essence is a Bill that has a great title: the Regional Health Authorities Act. If it was the title alone, Mr. Speaker, we could support that because, as I've said, regionalization is the way of the future in health care. But once you get past the title, there's little here to support, because this Bill falls far short of the promise of regionalization. It falls far short of what stakeholders have been telling the government and the opposition they want to see in regionalization. This Bill in this form that now comes to the Assembly for third reading does not deserve the support of the Assembly, and I would urge all members to vote against it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

**MRS. ABDURAHMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 20, and it's with deep regret that I do that because indeed I fully support regionalization of the health care delivery system. Indeed, it's long overdue. The one thing that I was looking for in Bill 20 was a health care system that was depoliticized, and that has not been met within Bill 20. Now, you might want to ask why indeed would I say that?

I think the first thing that you have to look at is the geographic representation of the 15 health regions. It defies logic how these regions have been drawn up, and I do not believe they will serve the health care system in the positive way that restructuring and rationalization of a health care system for the province of Alberta

should have been done. One of the things that has not been clearly acknowledged in Bill 20 is that you've got your provincial delivery system, you have your regional delivery system, and you have also your local delivery system. Take, for example, whether it be region 1 or region 10: when you try and rationalize and analyze how the funding is going to be done that takes care of provincial, regional, and local, it just does not meet any logical reasoning behind it.

#### 5:20

The other aspect of the 15 regions, that preventative health care, public health, or community health, however you want to call it, certainly is not the focus of that delivery system, the way the geographic boundaries have been drawn for the 15 regions. That in itself is a negative. For the past 15 years public health policymakers and professionals within that delivery service have been saying: we've got a sickness-driven system, and it's time we had a wellness-focused system. Bill 20 does not do that. In fact, Bill 20 raises more questions, Mr. Speaker, than it indeed answers. I don't believe there's anyone within the health care profession that can actually see clearly from Bill 20 where they're going to fit into the delivery system.

We've heard an hon. member who has the profession of an MD raise some interesting questions in his closing comments. Those questions should have been addressed already. They shouldn't be asked at this time, as one of my colleagues has also noted. The whole aspect of the mental health delivery system once again raises a deep concern with me, Mr. Speaker. We're debating the merits of whether Alberta Hospital Edmonton should remain, other than the forensic services. We shouldn't be debating that and looking at third reading of Bill 20. We should know the answers. What's needed to ensure that people with mental illness get adequate care, whether it's the time that they need to be in an acute care system, whether it's a community-based system? With regards to Bill 20 we're starting to see some of the impacts already, where people with mental illnesses after four days in the acute care system are being discharged back into the community without adequate support systems.

The other concern that I've got, Mr. Speaker, that once again Bill 20 doesn't address – and whether the regulations will adequately address it is still to be seen. There's great speculation out there that health care professionals are going to be paid under the regional budget. Now, how do you bring the private-sector health care professionals together under a policy-making board that is going to somehow pay these individuals? What does that have in the way of an impact to a private-sector clinic, whether it be chiropractors, whether it be dentists, whether it be physicians? Are we going to see them cutting back in services and pushing that into the hospital, which ends up costing the taxpayer more money? Those questions have not been addressed.

Mr. Speaker, I submit to you that indeed this Bill is politics from beginning to end. That to my mind is so disappointing when in actual fact we have led the way in the province of Alberta in health care and knowing that politics has got us to the point where we need to rationalize how we've delivered it, inasmuch as we went out and spent money as if it was going out of style building hospitals here, there, and everywhere, introducing unnecessary programs. Here we are again, not rationalizing the way we've composed these 15 health care regions to make sure that we have the most efficient, effective health care system that has outcome measurements in it, that all health care professionals through outcome measurements are held fully accountable, and that the

Albertans gets the best level of health care possible. That has not been seriously looked at.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if indeed some of those areas that I'm talking about, outcome measurements, aren't addressed seriously in the regulations, then we're not going to change things in our health care delivery system. We still won't know whether the surgery that's being done in hospitals indeed is cost-effective, and we still won't be able to tie it to the privileging of physicians within our hospitals. Those are the issues that should have been addressed.

We should also have been analyzing how mental health delivery systems have been changed in Europe and south of the border. What is the impact? In fact, Mr. Speaker, if we look at Prime Minister Major in the United Kingdom, his comment about the beggars in the streets of London: the ramifications of that comment are clearly showing that many of those unfortunate people that are begging in the streets, whether it's London or whether it's New York, indeed are mentally ill.

I for one will not support a Bill where I could see Albertans who suffer from mental illness going the same way as they've done in the U.K., in the U.S.A., or in Italy, where they end up in our correctional systems and they end up unfortunately on the streets living within our underground. Now, we live in a province where we have extreme temperatures. For someone who suffers from schizophrenia or who is a manic depressive to be out in minus 40 degrees temperatures, is that what we're wanting? Yet here we're debating the merits of closing Alberta Hospital Edmonton rehabilitation and acute care services.

So, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will not be voting in favour of Bill 20, and it's with a lot of reticence. This government had a golden opportunity. The groundwork had been done, and quite frankly I think the government's blown it. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the short time we have available to us this afternoon, just a couple of

comments to introduce my remarks on third reading of Bill 20. Like my colleagues I, too, rise to speak against Bill 20 in third reading.

When we were debating Bill 20 in second reading, a number of concerns were raised about the specifics of the Bill that dealt with issues that were of concern to members of the opposition, even though we did on a number of occasions express and continue to express and expressed in Committee of the Whole our agreement and support for the concept in the Bill of regionalization. It is an issue that I believe all members of the Assembly agree is a restructuring process that has to take place within the health care system, but beyond that the flaws that were contained in the Bill, fundamental flaws in terms of the potential for erosion of universality in health care, are the pivotal point and the reason why members in the opposition are simply unable to agree to this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, you'll recall that in second reading I stood to speak against the Bill and in fact moved a reasoned amendment to allow the government some time to come back and rethink this Bill and some of the deficiencies and flaws and issues that still required a great deal of attention that the Bill did not address, that the Bill did not speak to, in terms of the potential for eroding universality in health care. I suggested the reasoned amendment, and members opposite voted against that reasoned amendment: to take some time to look again at that. You'll recall that the Minister of Health rose and said that a reasoned amendment on Bill 20 was a preposterous notion because the Bill was crystal clear, totally understood, that everybody was fully aware of what the Bill was intended to do, and it said it in its clearest form. Of course . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, it being 5:30, Standing Order 4(1) requires that the Assembly do now adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

