

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, January 28, 1998 1:30 p.m.
Date: 98/01/28
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: I would ask members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away since we last met.

Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others.

We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

May we also extend congratulations to all of those who follow the tradition of the Chinese New Year on this first day of the year of the tiger.

As is our custom we pay tribute on our first day to former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. With admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. They have joined us today and are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

John Drobot
July 3, 1926, to January 17, 1998

THE SPEAKER: On Saturday, January 17, 1998, John Drobot passed away. Mr. Drobot represented the constituency of St. Paul for the Progressive Conservative Party. He was first elected in the November 2, 1982, general election and served until June 15, 1993. During his years of service he served on the following committees: Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations; Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices; Select Standing Committee on Private Bills; Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts; Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs. He was appointed to the Special Ombudsman Search Committee in 1989, he served on the standing policy committee on agriculture and rural development, and he was chairman of the special committee of the government caucus for the decentralization of government operations.

On a personal note, he was affectionately known by all members in this Assembly as our cowboy poet, and he had a way with words that was really second to none. Of the years that I served in this Assembly with Mr. Drobot, I can recall that Mr. Drobot did not speak frequently, but when he did rise, a total silence came over the Assembly, and every member and everyone in the gallery focused their one hundred percent attention on him. It was an extraordinary feat that has never been equaled by any other member that I've had the privilege of serving with.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember our former member as you have known him.

Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

Amen.

You may be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to present a petition on behalf of 3,341 Albertans who have signed the petition urging the government to maintain the current level of funding for private schools at \$1,815 per student. The petition is signed by residents of Alberta from across the entire province and was spearheaded by the citizens for public education committee in Medicine Hat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 259 residents from the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency regarding private school funding.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the ND Opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice under Standing Order 40 that following question period I intend to ask the unanimous consent of the Assembly to consider an urgent matter, that being the status of Maple Leaf Foods in Edmonton. I have copies.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will rise after question period today and seek the unanimous consent to consider the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize and congratulate Vietnamese and Chinese people in Alberta who are today celebrating the start of the year of the tiger.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to propose a Standing Order 40 after question period, and it is:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize and congratulate the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia community hospital on its recent program achievements.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 38(1), regarding notice, to allow the introduction of Bill 201.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has requested that unanimous consent of the Assembly be granted to waive Standing Order 38(1)(d) to provide for the introduction of Bill 201, Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. May we have the Assembly's unanimous consent?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 201
Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to beg leave to introduce my Bill 201, entitled the Alberta Patients' Bill of

Rights, which is designed to ensure that patients are aware of their right to receive appropriate and timely health care and to ensure that patients are treated with dignity and respect within our health care system.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 201 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 38(1), regarding notice, to allow the introduction of Bill 202.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has requested that unanimous consent of the Assembly be granted to waive Standing Order 38(1)(d) to provide for the introduction of Bill 202, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1998. Might we have the Assembly's unanimous consent?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Bill 202
Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1998**

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1998, intended to clarify the responsibilities, authority, and accountability of the child welfare regional authorities.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 202 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, today I will table in the Legislative Assembly copies of my expense claims for the current fiscal year relating to temporary residence, mileage, travel, and committee fees, which I don't collect. Other records pertaining to constituency records, purchase orders, and receipts are available for review in my constituency office or at an arranged meeting for anybody who would like to see them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

1:40

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table with the Assembly for all Albertans copies of my MLA expense accounts as they relate to committee fees, travel, mileage, temporary residence. I encourage anyone interested, as I have done since I was first elected in 1993, to call me or visit me at the constituency office if they want any detail or explanation on any of these expenses or expenses related directly to my constituency office. It's all there. It's all available. It's all open, it's all accountable, it's all transparent, and it's honest.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table with the Assembly four copies of all of my expense claims related to temporary residence, mileage, travel, and committee fees, as

well as an open letter to my constituents inviting them to come to my constituency office if they wish to pursue any of the records pertaining to my purchase orders, receipts, or expenditures made consistent with the operation of my constituency office.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity today to table four copies of all my expense claims relating to temporary residence, mileage, travel, and committee fees. Other records that are pertaining to constituency records are available for review in my constituency office.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise today to speak over the din in the House here. There seem to be a lot of questions relating to expenses. I table today mileage, travel, and committee fees – the pittance that they are; they're all here for those that wish to see them and view them – and an open letter to my constituents inviting them to come and view all of them.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today four copies of my mileage and travel receipts, and if I had any temporary residence or any committee fees, I would be tabling those as well. I would also invite any member of the public to contact my office for review of any of the things there.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. I think, hon. member, we'll speed up this process. Deal with the tabling and keep the debate later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does seem as if we've hit a sore spot though.

I would also like to table in the Legislative Assembly copies of my expense claims relating to any expenses that I've had with regards to mileage, travel, and committee fees, also an open letter to my constituents, which reiterates public statements . . .

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member who takes accountability, transparency, and responsibility . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, this is a point for tablings today, not speeches.

Anybody else have any tablings?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling written notice that I will be tabling for the purposes of time the reports on all MLA expenses: every single MLA and their expenses. I'll be tabling that in a matter of days in the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to

table four copies of an open letter to my constituents welcoming them to my constituency to review . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Sit down, please, hon. member. We'll go to Edmonton-Ellerslie. Tablings is what this subject matter is.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I have actually two tablings today. One is similar to ones you've seen today, which I think is very important to provide information when constituents have asked for it.

THE SPEAKER: It's called tablings, hon. member. Please, the name of the document.

MS CARLSON: It is tablings and I am tabling it.

The second tabling is with regard to minimum wage. I have a letter from Jayanti Negi, who does not support any kind of a decrease to the minimum wage as was discussed by this government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also am tabling copies of my expense claims relating to mileage, travel, and committee fees.

Also, at this time I'm going to be tabling two more documents, concerning activities of the ATPC and the ministry of Economic Development.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will table an open letter to constituents and copies of my mileage, travel, and committee fees.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would table four copies of my expense claims for the past year.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to also table at this time my expense forms and an open letter to my constituents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table an open letter to my constituents making them aware that my records are open to their perusal.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to table in the Legislative Assembly copies of my expense claims relating to temporary residence, mileage, travel, and committee fees.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling four

copies of my expenses for the past year in an open and accountable way.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two further tablings that I'd like to leave with the Assembly. The first, with your permission, is four copies of the Liberal Party of Alberta and caucus education policy entitled Education for a Better Future, which details our commitment to a legislated 20 percent cap on postsecondary tuition.

The second is four copies of a document entitled Edmonton Smart Education. This was a document that was prepared by several of the Edmonton area postsecondary institutions and was part of the Team Canada and Team Alberta travel mission down to Latin America. I understand it was available in Portuguese, Spanish, and English and that it was very well received.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: In the Speaker's gallery today are a number of members of the late John Drobot's family that I would like to introduce to all members of the Assembly, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names. Ms Elana Drobot, daughter of the late John Drobot; Mrs. Leanne Vinge, daughter; Mr. Jim Vinge, son-in-law; Mr. Lorne Demchuk, nephew; Mr. Russ Kowtun, close family friend of the late Mr. Drobot; and Mrs. Evelyn Kowtun, another close family friend of the late Mr. Drobot.

The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 31 students from Corinthia Park school in Leduc along with their teacher Mrs. Eva Thompson and parents Mrs. Debora Wheeler, Mrs. Twyla Phillips, Mrs. Donna Parson, and Mrs. Cynthia Clubine. Please extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 34 students from Frère Antoine school; their teacher Mr. Paschal Hamel; parents Mrs. Norah Verhesen and Mrs. Terry Ferguson. They're in the public gallery. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you Michael Husband, a science student at the University of Alberta. He was not one of the students outside protesting today. He's here to see how the legislative session works and to watch Liberal shenanigans. He has a bright future. I would ask Mike to stand and receive the welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce three guests today, two of whom traveled from Calgary to observe the proceedings of the Legislature. I would like to introduce an old boyhood friend from Calgary, Don Shaben, his brother Neil of Edmonton, and another family friend, Gail Vickery, of Calgary. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 10 students from the University of Alberta who were out there demonstrating at noon hour today. They are members of the group known as STORM, Student Organized Resistance Movement. I will simply name them by their first names: Kyla, Benji, Kim, Eddy, Patricia, Shawn, Kari, Andrew, Roberta, and Allison. I ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

[Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order! Order in the gallery! Order! That's enough.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce two constituents from Livingstone-Macleod, Elizabeth and Slimm Spendlow. They reside in the very beautiful, very progressive community of Pincher Creek. They're seated in the members' gallery right at the back there. I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Without public debate and perhaps most notably without a plebiscite the Conservative government shackled our communities, many of our families, and many of our children with the burden of video slot machines. Now the government is hiding behind the policy of local plebiscites, which they won't even honour, to delay taking video slot machines out of those communities which have already asked them to do so. One of the Premier's key advisers and a key Conservative Party member is in fact leading the charge against video slot machines in Calgary at this very moment. To the Premier: what does it take for this Premier to understand that video slot machines are addictive, that they are wrong, and that they are destroying families, hurting children, and hurting communities?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the leader of the Liberal opposition says is not true. As a matter of fact the VLTs were removed from Rocky Mountain House. I understand that they have been removed from Sylvan Lake. There is a court case, and this is presently before the courts in the regional district of Wood Buffalo. If that is resolved to the satisfaction of those who voted

to have the VLTs removed, then I'm certain the commission will remove them.

Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of VLTs and the issue of lottery money was the subject of a meeting in Bonnyville that a number of municipal leaders from across the province attended. I quote from the report that was subsequently prepared as a result of that meeting. It was an intensive public consultation process. Contrary to what the leader of the Liberal opposition says, there was public consultation. I read from the report: we support a mechanism which would allow a local council to limit the number of machines in its own jurisdiction if the council so chooses. As a result of that and as a result of further consultation it was the recommendation of the municipalities, who by the way are now feeling a little bit of heat and now say, "Oh, the province should take it over" – it was the municipalities themselves who said that the issue of VLTs and the removal of VLTs should be left up to the municipalities.

MR. MITCHELL: Of course the consultation never even addressed the question of yes or no to VLTs.

Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier have to wait for any kind of plebiscite at all when he didn't use a plebiscite to bring video slot machines in and, if he had the moral courage now, he could take them out across this province with a stroke of his pen?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the leader of the Liberal opposition that in your own constituency, sir, the people of that community voted to keep VLTs in. Again I go back to the recommendation of the Gordon report. [interjections] In the community of Barrhead they voted to keep VLTs. [interjections] Does democracy only apply when it goes the way the Liberals want it to go? Are they saying there was something wrong with the vote in Barrhead? Well, I would challenge the leader of the Liberal Party to go up to Barrhead and tell all those people there that they were wrong, that they didn't know what they were doing. I would challenge him to do that and take the media along with him and see what the people in Barrhead say.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I thought that you were now completely neutral in this political process.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, the Speaker has made no comment whatsoever.

MR. MITCHELL: The Premier has, however, Mr. Speaker, kind of cast aspersions.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that there are some very specific, select special interest groups that want VLTs. Why is the Premier listening to these special interest groups and not to the churches, to the pastors, to the families, to the community groups, to the people across this province who know that they are wrong, who understand that they are hurting people and want them banned from this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was one of the fairest pieces I've ever seen today in the *Calgary Herald*. As I mentioned earlier, there was a public hearing yesterday in the city of Calgary relative to this issue. It was a front-page story in the local section, and it had the pros and the cons. I'll tell you who these special interest groups that the Leader of the Opposition talks about are. They are community associations. They are indeed the same church groups – as a matter of fact I sent a cheque for

\$80,000 to a church in my constituency, a Catholic church, St. Stephen's, under the lottery program, a church that is going to benefit in terms of building a community facility.

Calgary city council heard, yes, from the people involved in the hospitality industry and in the restaurant industry, but they also heard from numerous community groups who receive tremendous benefit from lottery dollars. Does he want these dollars all to dry up? Then, if they do, maybe the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition can go out and explain to all these church and community groups who benefit why the money has dried up.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Alberta Tourism Partnership Corporation

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In justifying the early termination of this government's contract with ATPC, the Minister of Economic Development indicated that there was no agreement on funding for next year. I tabled in this House today two documents dated December 4, 1997: a letter from the ATPC to Economic Development indicating a funding commitment of \$8.1 million for the next year and a proposal from ATPC for a new performance reporting model. The December 4, 1997, letter states that the deputy minister has confirmed \$8.1 million in government funding for ATPC next year. My questions are to the Minister of Economic Development. Has \$8.1 million in funding ever been allocated to the ATPC in the 1998-99 Economic Development budget? A yes or a no.

2:00

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I am not able to answer that question because the budget numbers won't come out until budget night.

However, I want to make it abundantly clear that the province of Alberta has been very supportive of promoting tourism, not only inside Alberta, but outside Alberta, and we are committed to that promotion. That has never wavered.

What the hon. member alluded to was an early cancellation of a contract. That again is not accurate. In the agreement that was signed between the province and the Alberta Tourism Partnership three years ago, there were specific outlines of funding that were available over the three years. In the first two years there were specific dollars that would be awarded to the Alberta Tourism Partnership. However, for the third year, fiscal '98-99, the partnership was to come forward with the funding framework that would be agreed upon by the government and put in place and accepted prior to January 1, 1997, or the contract automatically terminated March 31, 1998. Mr. Speaker, that was the provision of the agreement. That arrangement was not satisfied, and therefore that provision of the contract was not met, which automatically triggered the termination.

However, once again I want to say to the hon. member because of some misinformation there that the province is committed to continuing to promote and fund the marketing and promotion of tourism within this province and external to this province.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was no secret when the Premier announced his \$641 million in spending during his televised address on January 8.

My second question, also to the Minister of Economic Development: why did the deputy minister indicate at a December 4 meeting that \$8.1 million in ATPC funding was being provided

when you had commissioned, Madam Minister, an internal audit of ATPC operations back on October 20, 1997?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, just for clarification for the hon. member, deputy ministers do not determine budget numbers. There is a Treasury Board process where numbers go through and have to be ratified. The result of the Treasury Board process is in fact what amounts to the budget and comes forward into this Legislature. So any comment on budget numbers prior to budget night is not allowed.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is also to the Minister of Economic Development, whom we seem to be having quite a struggle getting answers from. Why didn't the minister respond to Travel Alberta's new industry performance framework proposal, given her commitment to the Auditor General to improve accountability and performance in tourism promotion?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, the funding proposal was to have been ratified before January 1, 1997. However, saying that, ATP did come forward with a subsequent funding framework that they proposed in the middle of August. When I looked at the framework, which got me actually involved in the review of the other conditions of the current agreement, it became abundantly clear that the accountability and performance measures of the current agreement were not being met. As a result, we had an audit that we entertained as a result of the Auditor General's concern over the performance measures that were there and that had not been met, called the leveraging report.

Mr. Speaker, I was not prepared to enter into a different arrangement until such time as I could satisfy requirements of the current agreement. The first, on the funding, had not been satisfied; the second, on the performance measures, had not been met. Therefore, I was not prepared to extend it any further until I could have assurances that the performance was there, and it was in fact not.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of young Albertans are having to change their minds about their futures by not attending universities or colleges, or else those that do are finding themselves burdened by monstrous student debts when they exit. My question is to the minister of advanced education. According to your comments this past summer and also the Speech from the Throne yesterday, there are references to legislation that would cap tuition fees. Will the minister commit to introduce such legislation this session?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, no, I will not commit to that. What the Premier and I have agreed to is that there is a process whereby we will hear from students at the standing policy committee. As a matter of fact, that's been scheduled for February 2. From there we'll go through our ordinary process. If we find after cabinet and caucus that there's a commitment to legislation, then of course I will commit to that, but no commitment at this time.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, just to supplement that, the minister

and I had a very good meeting with student union leaders from colleges and universities around the province about a month ago, and they indicated to us that they were perfectly satisfied to go through the process. I understand that they will appear before the standing policy committee on February 2. I would assume that the administrations of the various universities and colleges will also be at that meeting. The students seem to be keen to enter into a good, healthy debate and put their case forward. It was alluded to in the throne speech. I think this is something that certainly needs to be given full consideration, but let's have the open and public debate on this issue first.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, my second question is to the minister of advanced education. Has the minister tracked in any method the number of students who do not attend advanced education institutions because of the cost?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we don't have any hard numbers on that particular point, but I believe we have enough anecdotal evidence that would indicate that there are a number of young people in the province that have not entered our postsecondary system because of the threat of the cost of that education. Really, hon. member, that had a great deal to do with the recent announcement of the Alberta opportunity bursary program. As you're aware from the announcements that have been made on this, we are directing what could be \$30 million a year directly at students who demonstrate financial need. It's our hope that that's one step on a road to where we can feel assured that any student that meets the criteria of any of our postsecondary institutions in this province will have an opportunity to get a postsecondary education.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister of advanced education also. I'd just like to ask the minister if he doesn't understand the fact that the shortage of skilled and well-educated workers in Alberta is a direct result of the government's policy of allowing tuition fees to escalate beyond their affordable levels.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, that actually is a lot of the rhetoric that takes place, but I would define it as a canard because really what we have is an increase of 7 percent in enrollment in the system since 1994. Clearly what is happening is that the institutions are adjusting to the new realities they were faced with in terms of the budget cuts. So we could say that productivity within our system has really gone up. Also, you know, the institutions have been able to maintain the access for our young people and actually increase it, as I've mentioned. So there's more going on here in terms of skilled trade shortages than just students not being able to get into the postsecondary system. It's a hot economy. The Alberta advantage is in place and away it goes.

2:10 MLA Expense Disclosures

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, fraudulent abuse and misappropriation of public funds by what must be at least half of the former Conservative cabinet in Saskatchewan landed those people in Her Majesty's bed-and-breakfast for a period of confinement during the last few years. Appropriately, I would say. Subsequently, the NDP government changed the reporting rules on MLA expenditures to include telephone and related expenses, travel expenses, constituency service expenses, constituency assistant expenses,

including – listen to this – details of suppliers, amounts paid, and brief descriptions of items or services purchased. But the Premier, two days ago, was telling the reporters in the gallery: just trust us. What's the impediment? Why can't we have legislation introduced and passed this session so that all members are obliged to file this information?

MR. KLEIN: Is that to me?

MS BARRETT: It is.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, I was alluding to a statement made by the Canadian taxpayers association. The statement was: how do we know that an MLA isn't spending money to buy a \$200 bottle of wine as opposed to a \$20 bottle of wine? Well, I said, you know, that is somewhat ridiculous, and there's a matter of trust and there is a matter of common sense. It was said in that context.

Mr. Speaker, this whole situation relative to MLA expenses goes to the whole freedom of information legislation. It has to do also with the rulings of the commissioner of freedom of information and the Ethics Commissioner. The law clearly states – and I will have the minister supplement – that this legislation has to be reviewed. The minister has called for the formation of an all-party commission – an all-party commission – to look at all of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, including this very question.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will have every opportunity to participate and bring about any changes if indeed there are some deficiencies in the legislation.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan also has a freedom of information act, and it didn't stop them from bringing in rules that make sure MLAs are accountable.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: why doesn't he introduce the legislation, let it pass, and if there's a problem with freedom of information, fix that later? Why not? They're in a hurry to introduce the HRG act, after all.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, here is an opportunity for all of the parties to participate. All of the parties. This is truly a matter for a committee of the Legislative Assembly to deal with. Here's a gorgeous opportunity for full participatory action to identify deficiencies in the legislation and correct those deficiencies, if necessary. I would think that the hon. member would welcome this opportunity.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the kind offer of the tabling provided by the Provincial Treasurer earlier today, which indicates at least some level of goodwill, will the Premier at least now commit to filing once a month with the Clerk's office information regarding all MLA expenditures from the government – I'll do the same, by the way – including constituency office purchases and constituency salaries and all of the things that are itemized in the Saskatchewan rules, on a voluntary basis until we have a new law?

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the Speaker did not interject to the basis of the first two questions because they were directed with respect to prospective legislation, but let me make it very,

very clear that *Beauchesne* 409(6) says, "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." The processing of MLA packages is not within the administrative competence of the government; it is within the administrative competence of the Legislative Assembly. That is not the government, hon. member. The hon. member herself knows, as a member of the Members' Services Committee, exactly what the Speaker is talking about.

So may we now proceed, please, to the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: At the end of question period.
The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Alberta Tourism Partnership Corporation (continued)

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent an area largely dependent on tourism. There is constituency concern surrounding the recent announcements regarding the canceled agreement, our contract with ATPC. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Could the minister please clarify for the members of the House whether her department will continue to provide funding for tourism marketing and promotion and remain committed to tourism in this province?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, that question I can answer. Absolutely. We will continue to promote this industry . . . [interjections] I'd like to answer the question if I might, Mr. Speaker, because . . .

THE SPEAKER: I'd like to hear the answer.

MRS. BLACK: . . . quite frankly this industry is a very important industry to this province. They're the fourth largest industry and, quite frankly, we have to promote tourism in the same fashion we promote other industries, not only inside the province but externally. We are committed to continuing to fund the promotion of tourism through tourism initiatives.

The process we've put in place – and I want to make it abundantly clear – is that with the announcement I made on Monday, by placing an interim manager in place, which is Price Waterhouse, we will come forward with a new framework which will actually go out to the industry itself and ask them to tender, to do the marketing promotion on behalf of the government. That will be a process that I think will allow all industry players to become involved and to fashion that.

The one thing that'll be very important, though, is to have the co-operation of the industry as we move forward. I can say today, Mr. Speaker, that the calls we have had since announcing the interim manager have been very, very positive. In fact, they have met with not only the players from ATPC but also board members and the chairman of the board. The co-operation is coming forward very, very well, and we're very pleased with the response to the interim management team.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental question to the minister is: how will we ensure little disruption in the industry so as not to lose momentum on the ongoing good work?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, with this contract terminating

March 31, 1998, it was very important to get an interim team in place prior to that. That is why I moved to meet with the board and alert them to the transition on January 16, so there would be two and a half months of lead time for a management team to come in, work with the industry, work with the people at ATPC, to move forward so we would have as little disruption as possible when we went out with the request for proposals for a new program to come into place.

We're trying to make sure that we don't have any disruption, and quite frankly as promoters of tourism in Alberta it is incumbent upon all of us to move in a positive direction and to focus on the forward approach. I believe that with the request for proposals going out April 1 and with a group coming in to make the selection by the end of June, we should have a new contractor fully operational by September 1.

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

Poverty

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are going hungry. The Calgary regional health authority's report *Health in the Calgary Region* states that 23 percent of Calgarians do not have enough money to buy food. An Edmonton Food Bank study reports that 52 percent of food bank users could not meet their children's dietary requirements. My question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why are one quarter of Calgary's families going hungry?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing this to this Assembly. I think it's a very important issue, and it's something that this government and myself in particular are very concerned about. What I'd like to do first is to set the stage for her question. I think that's an extremely . . .

2:20

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, there's really no process in the question period for setting the stage or anything else. There was a question; if you have an answer, proceed.

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, then I'll answer the question. The numbers they have used, first of all in Calgary. The question posed to the recipients was: have you ever gone hungry in the last month? It was a telephone survey. But there is an inherent problem in the type of figures that are used to define poverty. The classic one that is always used is LICOs. Quite frankly, to explain how LICOs works: if the people who have the highest income increased in Canada, if the people who had the lowest income stayed the same, and if the basic food expense stayed the same, there would be fewer people in poverty. Obviously, this is something that is not a realistic measure of poverty.

It's time to talk reality. Two weeks ago I went and talked to a person who was in poverty. This was a lady in the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood. I sat across from her, and I said: as Minister of Family and Social Services what can I do to help you? Mr. Speaker, do you know what the answer was? "You can get me a job." That's the focus of this government. That's the focus of this department.

Two hours ago I went to the school lunch program at Prince Charles elementary school. I asked the principal there: "What can we do to make things different here? What is happening?"

What is the reason these kids are coming to school hungry?" Mr. Speaker, do you know what the principal said? He said that number one is parenting skills, number two, poor role models. This is something we have to work on. This is something we have to work on hard. Across Canada . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. minister, we're getting the full helping on the first question.

Hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry you have to blame the parents for this.

Is the government keeping statistics on how many food bank recipients are former SFI recipients?

DR. OBERG: I'll respond to her interjection in the question. I was not blaming the parents. I was quoting. I went out and saw what was happening. I was quoting what the principal of the school said.

The food bank is another interesting issue. I'm glad she asked that, and I'd be more than happy to get into this. In a recent study put out by the Canadian Association of Food Banks, Alberta had the lowest utilization of any place in Canada at 1.5 percent. Anytime anyone has to go to the food bank, it's not right, but we are working at this as a department. We have the lowest rate of utilization in Canada, and it's something that we're striving for.

MS BLAKEMAN: Excellent.

Perhaps you could tell me what is the government's performance measurement for an acceptable target for food bank use in Alberta then?

DR. OBERG: As I said, Mr. Speaker, in a perfect world there would be no food bank utilization.

Provincial Budget

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's Speech from the Throne our agenda for opportunity mentioned investment in education, some increased spending for Family and Social Services, and there was a reference to a consideration for taxes. My constituents in St. Albert have a question, and I would like to pose it here today to the Provincial Treasurer. When are we going to hear the details of the budget and the expenditures that we referenced in yesterday's speech?

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member and hon. Provincial Treasurer, the budget date to my knowledge has not been announced, so . . . Oh, he wants to do it? Well, fine. Then proceed, but we're not talking about the budget in question period.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Albert has had good input into the budget process, as her constituents also have. Certainly they were a vital part of the electoral process just some months ago which brought her to this House. I can say that members on this side of the House and the media have quite appropriately been wondering when budget day is. I haven't even had that question from the opposition. But this is an open and accountable government, and I'm happy to share with the Member for St. Albert that on February 12 we will be presenting the budget for '98. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Well, I would have said to the Provincial Treasurer: "Could you kindly inform the House what day the provincial budget will come down?" He would have gotten up and said, "February 12." It would have been done, and we would have been on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Hepatitis-tainted Blood

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many as 5,000 Albertans may be affected with the hepatitis C virus as a result of receiving blood that was tainted during transfusions. Questions surrounding how this occurred were answered in the Krever report. Now these same Albertans want to know what this provincial government is going to do. Key meetings tomorrow in Vancouver with all provincial deputy ministers of health will discuss compensation for victims. My questions today are for the Minister of Health. What specific plan has he instructed his deputy to bring to this meeting so hepatitis C victims in Alberta, in Lethbridge, in Calgary, in Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Camrose – what and when and how will they be properly represented at these meetings?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member, in fact all hon. members, would agree that it's important on this matter that we have a fair and reasonable and national approach with respect to responding on the hepatitis C issue and responding overall with respect to the Krever inquiry. The member is quite correct in that officials are working on the very complex matter of reviewing the Krever report and all of its implications. Within the month ministers of health and the federal Minister of Health and his officials will be meeting to receive their analysis and suggestions and then moving from there for what I certainly hope will be an overall national approach, which I'm sure all federal and provincial politicians want to see as a fair settlement.

MR. MacDONALD: Will the Minister of Health this afternoon support this nationwide humanitarian compensation package so costly and timely lawsuits, as the one that was started in Calgary by 55 people, will be avoided?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this is, as I've said, a very important, very serious provincial and nationwide issue. We are not as ministers of health across this country – and I'm sure the federal minister would also appreciate this – going to approach this overall situation piecemeal or respond in any great detail to any particular proposal, albeit we are very aware, very cognizant of the background to it and the difficulties involved.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said – and I think it's very important – we are going to take an overall national approach to this issue and deal with it as expeditiously and as fairly and as reasonably as possible.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Health is now so concerned about the nature of this disease, why did he wait until a few weeks before the Krever report to start a public awareness campaign and why not sooner?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the overall area of prevention and awareness is a priority within the programs of Alberta Health. With respect to blood-borne conditions this is something that is ongoing as far as Alberta Health is concerned. With respect to

hepatitis C, yes, we have put an added emphasis in this particular area, but it has always been a matter of attention and concern as far as Alberta Health is concerned.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Charter Schools

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this government introduced charter schools in the province, they were supposed to improve public education for Alberta students. Recently we have seen some evidence that some charter schools in the province are struggling, at least in how they are administered. Can the Minister of Education explain why some charter schools are having problems with their administration?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, overall charter schools are working quite well. There are, however, some charter schools that are facing challenges and have responded in the best interests of students. Where needed, they've asked for additional assistance from the Department of Education or from their supporting public boards. As an example, more and more charter schools are finding it valuable to work with an experienced superintendent.

I think it should be noted that charter schools are still relatively new in the province of Alberta. I have observed board members who are very, very dedicated and bring a great deal of personal experience and professional skills to the board tables. So I think, Mr. Speaker, we can do more to help charter schools get through their sometimes rocky periods, but overall the support for charter schools by parents of students who attend those schools has been very, very strong.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is for the same minister. Would the minister please tell the Legislature what the government is doing to help the board members develop their understanding and skills as a governing board?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all we provide a charter school co-ordinator to work directly with the board members of charter schools to give them hands-on assistance and guidance. Over and above that, we also provide an annual development session for board members. We also facilitate additional board development sessions through the department of community development. By helping these boards with their leadership and management skills, we think they will continue to improve over time.

MRS. LAING: My second supplemental to the same minister: would the minister please explain to this Chamber what your department is doing to make sure that student learning is not affected while boards go through this learning curve?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, while I think it may be true that some boards have had some difficulty with governance issues, I think that is a separate issue from the delivery of education. I think that my observation of these charter schools and the observation of parents of students that attend charter schools is that the education has been very sound indeed. So I think that in monitoring charter schools throughout the province of Alberta, we can be satisfied that the delivery of education is happening in a very positive way, although we do need to provide such boards with help on the governance issue as it relates to charter schools.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

2:30

Child Prostitution

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year in this Assembly the Child Welfare Act was amended to say that a child involved in prostitution is a victim of sexual abuse. The government indicated that one of its purposes for this change was to allow police to charge the pimps and the johns who prey on children with sexual abuse. To the Minister of Justice: how many pimps or johns have been charged with sexual abuse under the Child Welfare Act since this change came into force six months ago?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information at hand. However, I'd be quite happy to provide it to the hon. member at a future date.

MS OLSEN: Amazing, because the minister of social services gave that same answer on December 10.

Can you explain why no one knows whether or not this government has prosecuted a john or pimp under the Child Welfare Act?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I can't provide an answer to that. Again, I'll take a look at it. However, what I will assure the House is that under Bill 1, which was just tabled yesterday, rest assured that we will vigorously pursue that legislation and we will make sure that we assist young people in need on the streets and use that legislation to the fullest extent possible.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. How many times in the past six months have you used this amendment to the Child Welfare Act to take a young prostitute off the streets and into protection, as that amendment has allowed for?

DR. OBERG: Again, I'd like to set the stage for this question, Mr. Speaker. What happened with the amendment to the Child Welfare Act – that was a very important critical first step in bringing forward the bill that is now Bill 1. The bill has been lauded by the province, lauded by people across North America, as being the first bill of its kind against juvenile prostitution in North America. If the hon. member would have asked me the first two questions, I would have told her that there have been none prosecuted under that because, as I just explained, the amendment that we did in the first sitting of this Legislature was to set the stage for this very critical bill that is Bill 1.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Student Debt

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hundreds of young adults in my constituency of Calgary-West who pursue now or plan to pursue postsecondary studies in the future, my first question to the minister of advanced education is: what is the current average debt level of students graduating?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question from the member. In terms of average debt there's quite a range,

whether it's university students we're talking about or people in the college or perhaps even in the apprenticeship systems. If you're asking for an average across the whole system, it's about \$12,000. However, to be fair, on the university side it's probably more in the area of \$16,000 to \$17,000. We want to make sure that we start trying to deal with this so that we don't have it going much higher.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my second question, also to the minister of advanced education: what is your department doing to ensure student loan debt does not become a barrier for students now attending or wanting to attend postsecondary studies?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're really trying to be proactive both at the beginning of a student's career in a post-secondary system and then of course after they have successfully completed postsecondary education. Again, as I talked earlier in today's session about the Alberta opportunity bursary, that's a way in which we'll work with the institutions to identify students in financial need and provide them with a bursary that can get them into the first and hopefully through two years in the postsecondary system.

On the final end we do a number of things. I guess first of all we actually pay for the interest on the financial debt as a person is moving through the postsecondary system and do that for six months after graduation. Alberta has a remission program that I don't believe is perhaps well understood by students in the province and perhaps their parents. But we have a system in this province where we will remit or forgive Alberta student loans if the graduate has experienced a loan amount above a certain level. We think that it would be very, very meaningful if the federal government would join us in a remission type program because most of the students who graduate from our system that end up with what is viewed as large student debt – basically that's all the Canada student loan system. So I think there's a lot of work that can be done in that area.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. My second supplementary is also to the minister of advanced education. I understand that most of students' debt is actually federal loans. What is the federal government doing to reduce student debt?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, this is the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and it's not within the administrative competence of ministers of this Executive Council to speak on behalf of the federal government.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

School Boards' Financial Disclosures

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government spends in the order of \$3 billion of Albertans' money, a quarter of the provincial budget, on education from K to 12. Once the money is handed over to school boards, in fact the taxpayers lose sight of their dollars. A good portion of that of course is salaries, and we understand that. But a large portion and a larger portion as we speak every day is being contracted out for goods and services to the private sector. To the Minister of Education: will the minister commit to some openness and accountability in this regard and allow taxpayers the right to see where those funds go precisely and what the service was contracted for?

2:40

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it's true that we spend about \$3 billion in the area of education, K to 12, throughout the province of Alberta, and the majority of that money goes towards the grants that go to school boards throughout the province of Alberta, notably the per student instructional grant that goes to the 530,000 some students that are in our school system.

Mr. Speaker, I found that school boards for the most part have been accountable in terms of where they spend their money. People are elected locally and ought to be accountable locally to the people who vote for them, and that means school trustees. There has been some question as to whether school boards are spending money in particular areas, notably in the area of special-needs students, and I think it's appropriate that the provincial government call to task school boards to be accountable for money that we grant them for programs in those particular areas and for school boards to be able to satisfy us that they in fact do spend money in those particular areas.

It is a balancing act, Mr. Speaker, of making sure that we ensure that there's some local autonomy for school boards who have the ability to recognize particular issues and concerns that may impact upon their students in their area. Balanced against that, as the hon. member said, is the accountability to ensure that money that we grant to them for particular program areas is in fact spent in those areas. Overall I think school boards have been accountable through the auditing process, where they are compelled to say where their money is being spent, and they are being accountable to their local electors of school trustees.

MR. WHITE: A supplementary, sir. By the answers you've just given, I understand that you will not, then, be putting into place any regulations in your department to demand these disclosures of all boards. It's a voluntary process currently. Is that the case?

MR. MAR: No, that's not correct, Mr. Speaker. School boards are obliged each year to provide their annual spending reports, which are audited financial statements. That is a requirement and is not a voluntary requirement of school boards.

MR. WHITE: My final supplementary, sir. The question is, again, as it relates to items that are contracted out for goods and services to all boards to a private entity or an agency of some description. Will you be asking or demanding through regulation that these purchases be itemized so that the average taxpayer will be able to determine the contractor and the goods received?

MR. MAR: I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a question for school trustees to answer to their local electors. The level of goods and services and contracts that are provided by outside bidders will differ greatly from school board to school board. I think that school boards are able to answer those questions to people who ask them.

THE SPEAKER: That being the end of question period – actually there was considerable progress made today. Twelve hon. members had an opportunity to raise a series of questions, yet three hon. members remain on the list: the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the members for Edmonton-Glengarry and Edmonton-Ellerslie. Whether or not they have an intent to return tomorrow, they should advise at the appropriate time.

We have two points of order today. First of all, the leader of the ND opposition.

Point of Order Tabling Returns and Reports

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You quoted *Beauchesne* 409(6), "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government." What I was referring to was a voluntary action indicated by the Provincial Treasurer when he said during Tabling Returns and Reports that he was prepared to file, you know, MLA expense information on behalf of government members tomorrow in the Assembly. My question to the Premier had been: will the Premier ask the government members to commit to doing this on a monthly basis, including information regarding their constituency accounts?

Each MLA gets a monthly printout from the Legislative Assembly indicating expenditures made on salary, rent, equipment, and so forth. That was the information – along with the travel expenses and other MLA expenditures, references that the Treasurer made earlier today – I was seeking on a voluntary basis, on a monthly basis, to be supplied to the Clerk's office. Therefore, I believe it was within the Premier's ability to answer.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. As indicated by the Provincial Treasurer during question period, the expenses for all MLAs would be tabled in the House in the near future. Also, as stated by the Premier, this is primarily a matter for Legislative Offices. I think the ruling you made earlier in basically asking the member not to continue that line of questioning was the appropriate ruling.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the ND opposition, I have a question that you need to clarify for me before I deal with this point of order. You mentioned the Premier and you mentioned the Clerk in your comments. Clarify what you had in mind.

MS BARRETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker. What I'd asked was: now that they were prepared to do this on a voluntary basis, would they be prepared to issue the monthly expenditures by providing them to the Clerk's office? The reason I specified the Clerk is because the House doesn't sit all the time, 39 days last year as a matter of fact. So the Clerk's office struck me as probably the pretty obvious place where you'd file this information if members of the public or the media wanted to go and look at it. Did I do okay?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, sorry. There was no point of order. You haven't given me any citations dealing with the point of order.

MS BARRETT: I did so.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. You did not.

MS BARRETT: *Beauchesne* 409(6).

THE SPEAKER: *Beauchesne* 409 is very, very clear on this. I would ask hon. members to please remember that the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is an employee of the Legislative Assembly, not of the government, as are all officers of the Legislative Assembly. There's absolutely no connection between the operation of the government and the operation of the Legislative Assembly. This is a free, independent institution that protects the rights of all members, and under no direction would any Premier, I believe, anticipate in directing any Member of the Legislative

Assembly to participate in any kind of release of any information with respect to hon. members.

Secondly, it is the office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta that provides an update on a monthly basis to each hon. member. That is for the information of the hon. member. My clear instructions to all officials in the Legislative Assembly Office have been that they will provide that information only to the hon. member, not to anyone seeking that information on behalf of the hon. member, not to anyone delegated by the hon. member to go and obtain the information, and should the hon. member choose to make that information available, it is entirely up to the hon. member to do that.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition knew full well that answer before she asked the question. She's certainly been in this House for a great number of years. I make it very, very clear that if an hon. member chooses to release public information about the operation of his or her office and they are disclosing the salaries of their employees or anything else, it is their – their – responsibility for it. It will not be the Speaker or any official associated with the Legislative Assembly Office who will take any responsibility for what might come out of that as well.

A point of order, Edmonton-Glenora.

Point of Order Answers to Oral Questions

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, 6th Edition, section 417, "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate."

During question period the minister of social services in an attempt to answer an excellent question put by my colleague from Edmonton-Norwood continued to set the stage or set the table or whatever it was that he was trying to do to deflect attention away from the fact that he couldn't answer the question or was refusing to answer the question. The question was very specific about amendments that this Assembly passed in a previous session to the Child Welfare Act, and instead of addressing that issue, of course, he proceeded to cloud the issue by referring to Bill 1, which would be an anticipation situation.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I know you wouldn't have allowed that, and I'm just wondering whether or not we can expect to see some caution put into the minds of members of Executive Council so that they are not breaching accepted parliamentary traditions of this House by deflecting answers to legitimate questions by invoking things that would otherwise be ruled out of order because of anticipation. When we put questions, we put them in good will to members of Executive Council and expect them to try to the best of their ability – and maybe this is it – to answer those questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Briefly, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that the minister was attempting to provoke debate. In fact, I find it interesting that that argument would be raised by the Opposition House Leader in light of the way and the manner in which they ask their questions.

The minister provided an answer. Taking a look at the Standing Orders and at *Beauchesne*, I can't find anything in here that indicates that the opposition member must like the answer he receives. Therefore I don't believe there is a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The rules are very, very clear. Questions should be brief. A preamble provided for the first question. Responses should be brief, to the point.

The Speaker indicated today that 12 hon. members had chances to raise questions. It was actually quite good. The average is usually less than 11. So we made some progress, and I think hon. members will heed the advice provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and he will accept it himself when he raises questions and all the ministers who respond to him will also heed and keep the spirit of the House going on.

Now we have three Standing Order 40s.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40
Maple Leaf Foods Inc.**

THE SPEAKER: First of all, the leader of the ND opposition.

Ms Barrett:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly express its disappointment with the lack of leadership provided by the Premier and the minister of public works in refusing to get tough with Maple Leaf Foods Inc., thereby allowing the systematic dismantling of their Edmonton meat packing plant.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Order 40 motion I wish to sponsor should be on the desks of all members of the Assembly by now. The urgency is that as we speak, semitrailers are backing up to the docks of the Maple Leaf plant, carting away every piece of equipment that they can. Maple Leaf isn't doing this because they need the equipment in other plants. According to the UFCW - I've been in the plant, and I know this to be very close to true - at least 80 percent of the equipment was custom-built for the Edmonton plant. Besides, all of their other plants except for one are on strike or lockout, so you know they're taking the equipment away. To put where? Not to put into active use. The reason Maple Leaf is taking the equipment out is to make it harder and more expensive for a future competitor to reopen the plant.

We need to urgently discuss why the government signed such a one-sided deal with Maple Leaf, and I'm talking about the lease agreement. Given that it's the equipment that makes the hog plant useful, why did the government give it to Maple Leaf? Which is apparently what's happened. According to the letter that I received today from the minister of public works, it says:

In addition, I must point out that Maple Leaf has the right to remove any and all equipment that is owned by them, which, as you are aware, they are currently doing.

But the information I have on the lease indicates that the government has the right to lock those doors and prevent Maple Leaf from taking that equipment because the government owns the land and the plant.

Now, the urgency is that this equipment is being taken away. The government is not exercising the clout that it has the legal right to do. It had no obligation to extend the lease for Maple Leaf beyond December 31, 1997, no obligation whatsoever. The urgency is that taxpayers' money is being carted out of that Maple Leaf plant on 66th Street, rendering the place virtually useless as a potential hog processing plant in the future.

I ask all members of the Assembly to please support me in my request for unanimous consent to deal with this urgent matter.

THE SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion as proposed by the hon. leader of the ND opposition?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Gee, I didn't ask who was in favour yet, but I will ask. Those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Defeated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Year of the Tiger

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not risen to speak to a Standing Order 40 before, and I didn't expect to be doing it today, as I understood we will be able to recognize the contributions of Albertans through a new and less adversarial process. I appreciate the Speaker's mention of this special day. I'm sure your words are appreciated, but I was looking for the acknowledgment and congratulations of the entire Assembly.

I would like to plead the urgency of this request. Today is the Chinese New Year. To postpone this recognition to another time is akin to wishing someone happy birthday a week after their birthday or Merry Christmas on Boxing Day. It loses the immediacy and the honour that it should convey. I believe that we should honour and respect the Vietnamese and Chinese communities, which hold this day special, and I therefore ask for unanimous consent to allow me to have this motion passed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre? Those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Hon. member, under Standing Order 40 you now have up to 20 minutes to speak on behalf of the motion. The Speaker will then recognize other members who might also wish to speak to the motion. The limit of time is 20 minutes, and once that's concluded, we'll ask the question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize and congratulate Vietnamese and Chinese people in Alberta who are today celebrating the start of the year of the tiger.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. That was really exciting. [interjections] Well, it is. I think it's an exciting day when we can recognize the contributions of the many different cultures and the diversity that is Alberta today.

I am particularly proud of the various cultural communities that are in my constituency. Many of them are of Vietnamese and Chinese origin, and I know that today, which is the first day of the Chinese New Year, is a very important one for them. It is the beginning of their calendar year. I think it's appropriate to congratulate the Chinese and Vietnamese peoples and to recognize

the important contribution that they make to the rich diversity of all of us who call Alberta home.

A few points of interest. The Chinese calendar is basically lunar, with a year of 354 days, but intercalary months have been inserted to keep the calendar year in step with the solar year of 365. So it does put this celebration into January and sometimes even into February. The Chinese New Year begins on the first day of the new moon in the second month. There are different elements involved in the Chinese zodiac, and this is the year of the Earth tigers, which is of special importance. The last year of the tiger was in 1986, and the cycle comes around every 12 years.

I have been very fortunate to work with the Vietnamese and Chinese people in my community. My own life has been enriched by them. I'm very pleased to be able to stand today and acknowledge this day and its importance for them and for all those that join in celebrating it with them. I thank you for the opportunity to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in support of this motion. As the hon. member indicated, this is the year of the tiger according to the Chinese zodiac. This year of the tiger is predicted to be bold and filled with drama. I think perhaps there's a message there. This is the first day of our legislative sitting as well. Anyway, it is a special day, and many Asian people, including those in China, Vietnam, Korea, and Cambodia, celebrate the New Year according to the calendar, in which the lengths of the months are dictated by the cycles of the moon, and that is why, I guess, the New Year falls on a different day each year between January and mid-February.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that this is the biggest celebration for the Chinese community in the entire year. Celebrations usually continue for a six-week period. The first day of the New Year belongs to the family. When kids wake up, they put on their best clothes and greet their parents. Their parents will give them a little red packet with money inside it for good luck. The days following are spent visiting relatives and friends, exchanging congratulations and good wishes, greetings meaning good luck, and I'm going to leave the actual pronunciation of that greeting to one of my colleagues that I'm sure would want to speak. But greetings meaning good luck and prosperity can be heard all around.

3:00

The New Year coincides with the coming of spring in China. It's also a significant time of the year for the cleaning of the soul, paying off debts, settling old arguments, and turning over a new leaf, similar in a way to some of our New Year's resolutions that some of us make.

Mr. Speaker, Canada Post has just released a beautiful stamp to commemorate the Chinese New Year.

I had the pleasure of participating in the opening of an exhibit at the Provincial Museum in Edmonton about a month or six weeks ago demonstrating the contribution of the Chinese community to the province of Alberta's development. I would invite all members to take the time to visit the museum and this exhibit. It is a simple exhibit but very poignant, very telling. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when you visit this exhibit and you go through it, you want to know more of the stories behind the stories that are there. It's quite a dramatic exhibit. I certainly invite members, as I say, to visit that and today, on this very special day, think of the contribution of that community to the development of our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion and join with all members in wishing happy New Year to those Albertans of Asian descent who today are celebrating the advent of a new year.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an exciting moment for me to be here thinking about my roots, my heritage, but also I'm very honoured to represent Albertans in talking about the Chinese New Year, the Vietnamese New Year. I'd like to bring in the perspective of the sciences, the natural cycle of the calendar, of the moon and the sun. In fact, this is the New Year following the lunar cycle. We call it the lunar New Year versus our normal New Year, that we know is following the sun, the solar cycle. In early history of mankind the calendar was based on the moon cycle. I read that in ancient Egypt and ancient China they started out like that. In the past the American natives – aboriginals we call them these days – used the moon cycle to measure the time. Many moons ago: I remember a statement like that.

This is not just a Chinese or Vietnamese New Year; this is a lunar cycle New Year for humanity. In the oriental calendar this is the year of – I read it in a Chinese book – 4697. I don't know what the first year is, but at least it's written like that.

This is the year of the tiger, one of the 12 zodiac signs in the year. To any of you here who were born in the years 1926, '38, '50, '62, '74, '86, maybe '98 too, this is your year. Right? It is an opportunity to shine in your job, which leads to a very bright future. Your prospects are promising for this year, but avoid risky ventures and remember to save for a rainy day. That's just like our provincial plan for managing our finances. The year of the tiger is one of the most revered birth signs. The tiger has been associated with power, courage, and pure will, and I sense that it is in this government's spirit. There's a tiger inside. Thus, you are strong and aggressive and rarely hesitate to say what you think. So it fits a lot of our colleagues here. Fortunately, I must say, Mr. Speaker, the magnetic personality of tiger people commands respect and also gives a strong presence.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the solar New Year the lunar New Year does not fall on a set time every year with our Gregorian calendar. As its name implies, it follows the moon cycles, and it begins on – let me make sure I have it correct here – the first day of the first moon after the sun enters Aquarius. Right? You got it? Okay. This is always between the 21st of January and the 19th of February, in that time frame.

The lunar New Year is also known as a spring festival, and it is a time of great excitement and joy for close to a billion people in the Orient. It is a family event. It is the most important festival of the year. It is a public holiday, as tradition dictates, and every activity has to be cautiously measured to ensure that you have a good year to come. For example, every house gets thoroughly cleaned before New Year's Day so that the coming year will be very fresh and clean. Also, there is the tradition of the first foot. What it means is that the first visitor that comes to your house will bring you luck or otherwise. The first encounter, too, is a tradition of significance. It's the first person you meet on New Year's Day, after you leave the home of course.

During the New Year period people acquire and prepare a lot of special foods. Okay? It's not the nutritious sustenance that we're talking about; it's the symbolic values. For example, the leafy green mustard signifies longevity. Okay? The glutinous rice including the eight various kinds of meat in there – they call it the eight treasures – and the fish for abundance. When I say

what "symbolic" means – I should say it using the Chinese language. The word for longevity, for a treasure, for abundance is close to the meaning of fish, of mustard green, of glutinous rice. So there is a symbolic meaning in there.

There is also the notion that you don't clean your house, sweep the floor on New Year's Day, because you may sweep away your luck. So if you visit a house right after New Year's Day, you may see things kind of messy, but that's the reason. Care must be taken to not break any dishes, use any knives or scissors or sharp instruments. It's just to avoid danger. It may hurt you or cut you and bring you bad luck on New Year's Day.

This is an interesting point for the ladies too. Hair must be cleaned and set prior to the holiday, for doing so during the New Year means you shorten your luck and that financial setback will occur.

The New Year is ushered in with a thunderous roar of fire-crackers and whistling rockets. This is to frighten away the bad spirits and to depart the negative energy and to bring in the positive spirit or the positive energy.

3:10

Also, I found this an interesting point. Before the New Year it is a time for us to clear our debt or at least reduce our debt so that the year can start off with a clean slate, and this is no different than our government's debt repayment plan.

Throughout the celebration the remembrance of ancestors plays a very leading role in the proceedings. The family altar is adorned with an ancestral tablet and scroll, dating back five generations. The idea here is to recall the achievements of our ancestors and to remind the current generation to continue those achievements. Each generation is supposed to leave behind a better world than we inherited. Sounds familiar – doesn't it? – to our throne speech.

So with that vision the coming year is the year of the tiger, and with all the zodiac readings saying that is a great year, I take this opportunity to wish the people celebrating this event as well as the people in the Assembly here great success, a roaring tiger year. May I say it in two languages, in the languages that are celebrating this. *Cung Chuc Tan Xuan. Gung Hay Fat Choy.* I end my speech with this.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before I call on the hon. leader of the ND opposition, hon. member, I just want a clarification to make sure the record is very correct. The hon. member indicated that 1952 was a year of great luck. Did he refer to those of us who were born in 1952 or those of who are unfortunately are age 52? That's very important.

MR. CAO: Were born.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, we referred earlier to a late member of the Assembly, John Drobot. I remember him. You're right. He didn't speak often, but when he did, you listened to him. Well, the member for Calgary-Fort doesn't speak very often either, but when he does, it's worth while listening to, at the very least amusing and at the very worst intertwined with political mistruths, but we'll let that issue go for today, because we are in a lunar celebration of a new year.

The riding I live in and represent, Mr. Speaker, is Edmonton-Highlands. It contains an area of town well known as Chinatown. It's an incredibly vibrant economic community. The shops there are always jam-packed. This place is a fun place to be, Chinatown.

You know, the thing I'd like to point out about the Chinese and Vietnamese communities is their foresightedness with respect to health care. It was in fact the Chinese Benevolent Association that originally proposed an attachment to the Chinatown multi-cultural centre, which also has a seniors' apartment building attached to it. It was them that originally proposed what they called a multilevel health facility. A long time ago I actually got the then Minister of Health, Marv Moore, to agree to fund it, but it never did happen. The foresight that was really impressive was that it envisioned a health environment where it was kind of like one-stop shopping. We do now have the lodge across the avenue. It was meant to be in between the two facilities so that the elders could have access whether they just needed a broken finger mended or maybe longer term auxiliary hospital style of care and a full range of services in between. Like I say, it never did happen, but it's interesting that the model they referred to . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: There is one over at the General hospital.

MS BARRETT: That's right. I was going to refer to that actually.

The model they referred to is now in place in one place, and that is the General hospital, with which I became familiar as my mother was in the palliative care centre there. It also was a model that was adopted by two previous Health ministers as one that they would like to see happen in the long run, understanding not only the efficiency of that kind of system but also the humanity. You know, the Chinese and Vietnamese communities are really active philanthropists, shall we say, at least in the riding that I live in and represent. They're very impressive.

In the years that I was seeking election, in the early '80s, in the years that I served as an MLA, and even in the years that I stayed in the public eye doing media work, talk shows, I didn't miss a Chinese New Year's event either at the Alex Taylor school, if it was sponsored, or the event that follows. It was at the Furama, now called the Mirama restaurant. I'll be there tomorrow at that big event, joining a lot of other people, I guess one day late, in saying to all the people of the Chinese and Vietnamese communities in Edmonton what I will now say: *Gung Hay Fat Choy.*

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although the Gregorian calendar was adopted in China in 1912, the Chinese people in communities throughout this province and throughout the world will be celebrating in accordance with the lunar calendar. I can't go much further to describe many of the traditions and celebrations, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort has already described.

I thought I might point out, Mr. Speaker, some of the attributes of people born in the year of the tiger, people who will be born in this year. "Born leader" are the key words for tigers. They're noble and fearless. Tigers are respected for their courage, even by those who are working against them. Tiger people are daring fighters. They are capable of standing up for what they think is right. They are capable of great generosity. Tigers are sensitive and emotional. They are capable of great love. They are also territorial and possessive. If you are a friend of a tiger, he or she will always want you to take his or her side against the bad guys, and because the tiger is so adorable, you often do. As lovers tigers are passionate and romantic, but the real challenge for tigers is to grasp the true meaning of moderation.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the Provincial Treasurer was born in the year of the tiger, in 1950, and I'm certain that other members of this Legislature were, myself included, born in the year of the tiger. I'm most pleased to stand in favour of this motion, and I'm delighted that we should recognize both the Chinese and the Vietnamese communities in this province and in places throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, one of the traditions that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort did not mention is that on New Year's one of the traditions in Chinese families is to gather your family together in the house and lock the doors to make sure nobody's coming in and nobody's going out. I should certainly hope that that wouldn't be the tradition in this House. To think that we would be locked behind these doors within this room with all of the people here for an entire year would perhaps not be the most palatable thing. I do wish all members of the Assembly, on both sides of the House, Gung Hay Fat Choy. May you all have a prosperous year of the tiger in 1998.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

3:20

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to join my colleagues today to give support to this special motion. Yesterday I had the honour and privilege to spend New Year's eve with more than 1,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin at a pagoda to celebrate the New Year. It was quite an experience for me because it reminded me a lot of the New Year's eves that I spent in the past in Vietnam.

New Year's is the time to reflect on the past and to spend with family members. Yesterday, as I spent more than three hours there, I could hardly meet a person who had a whole family in Canada. Because of the many things that happened to Vietnam, many of the people have immigrated to Canada with a broken family, and for them New Year's is a time that is both joyful and hurtful at the same time.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

One of the very fun traditions that we used to have is that on the first day of the New Year all of the family members get together and the senior ones are supposed to give money to the younger ones. I assume that the same tradition should apply to this House as well, and as the youngest member of the Legislature I should receive a lot of money from you guys. So each of you would owe me about \$20.

Another tradition that I have to emphasize is that nobody is supposed to work on the first day of the lunar New Year, because that will bring bad luck. I don't know why we are all here today working. [interjection] A member on my right just said that nobody is working here. We are just in this House because the Liberals want us to be. Anyway, I am going to ask for permission to probably take tonight off, because working, you know, from now until midnight will probably bring bad luck to some of us.

Going back to the New Year's occasion, I think that we are very lucky in Canada that people from different cultures can celebrate the uniqueness of their culture, can celebrate their traditions, but that same thing cannot be said about people who are living in other parts of the world. While we are celebrating this special and joyful event today, I hope that we do not forget

how blessed we are to live in a country where freedom and human rights and all of the basic values of the human race are respected. We should do more to keep our country together and should do more to help the people in other countries that do not have the privileges that we do.

I do not pay a lot of attention to the things that are only symbolic and have no true meaning, but on this occasion I think that this motion is a good thing because it will re-emphasize the importance that we in this society have today; that is, we do respect the diversity of our province. We can be different in many ways, but we do have a common set of values. Those are well reflected in the lunar New Year. Those are family values, respect for the elderly, and trying to be nice to people even if they are your enemies.

On the first day of the year you're not supposed to say anything that can bring bad luck to other people. You're not supposed to do anything that you don't want other people to do to you. I hope that that tradition will be kept throughout the year. I certainly hope that members from both sides of the House will exercise that every day of the year. I certainly try to do that, and I know it's not easy, but I hope that everybody will do that.

On a closing note, I would like to wish each and every Member of this Legislative Assembly all the best in the year of the tiger, and I also send my personal congratulations to the Canadian people of Asian origin who celebrate this special event.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my greetings and congratulations to Canadians of Vietnamese, Chinese, and other Asian origins. What we are witnessing here today is a real example of where we as a society have arrived. I don't believe that we have ever in our history had the opportunity of listening to various languages being spoken in such a House. I don't recall having heard people talk about various traditions that include what some may call fortune-telling or predicting the future, and rarely have I heard people forecasting what our strengths, virtues, and virilities are. This is the year of the tiger, as we have heard from many who spoke before me and explained to us that it's based on the lunar calendar.

Mr. Speaker, some two-thirds of the people around this globe use the lunar calendar to celebrate various occasions. This is a very historic, a very special day today, when the Chinese, Vietnamese, and people from Asian countries celebrate this as the beginning of a new year. Also, people of the Muslim faith, who will have sighted today the new moon, will break a month-long fast and celebrate Id al-Fitr. My colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-East is presently, I believe, representing us in some celebrations in Calgary breaking the month-long fast by various Muslims.

On this special day I'd like to add my best wishes, congratulations, and prayers for a successful and prosperous year for not only people coming from China and Vietnam but all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to

add my good wishes to the Chinese and Vietnamese communities on this the day of the Chinese New Year, which is, as we've heard, the year of the tiger. We've listened this afternoon to the many customs that are involved in celebrating this occasion, and as we all know, when we enter a new year, it's an opportunity to look at the past and also to look forward to the future.

Perhaps one of the resolutions that this government might want to look at in celebrating this particular Chinese New Year, which is the year of the tiger, is that they would be sincere and generous and very affectionate to those they love and trust, which, I would hope, would be Albertans in this province. That is one of the characteristics of individuals within the year of the tiger.

We often these days and in the Legislative Assembly tend to focus on divisions, and on a day such as today it is encouraging to know that we can focus on the positive contributions that everyone brings to Alberta, in this case in particular the Vietnamese and Chinese cultures. I've had the opportunity in the past to partake in celebrations with these communities, and I look forward this week and in the future as well to continue to participate in the various ceremonies that are occurring in Edmonton and around Alberta.

In conclusion, I would like to wish all those who are enjoying the new year in the Chinese and Vietnamese communities a very happy New Year. It is Gung Hay Fat Choy.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

3:30 Misericordia Hospital COMPRU Clinic

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We now have another Standing Order 40 before us, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. To the urgency, hon. member.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the urgency of this matter under Standing Order 40. In summary, the achievements are that

the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia Community Hospital has become the first publicly funded health-care program in Canada to be registered under the ISO 9000 quality standard.

Now, the urgency of the matter is that this is the first time that we can address this amazing achievement in the Legislative Assembly since this occurred.

For those who are unaware, the ISO 9000 is recognized in more than 140 countries as the benchmark for service and production quality in sectors of the economy. As a result I feel that this is an accomplishment that should not go without recognition by the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

MR. SAPERS: And funding.

MS LEIBOVICI: And, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has indicated, additional funding in recognition of this outstanding program would of course be always appreciated.

I therefore urge the Assembly to vote in favour of this motion, and I look forward to explaining the merits of the program after the vote has been taken.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Hon. member, you have unanimous consent.

Ms Leibovici moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly recognize and congratulate the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia community hospital on its recent program achievements.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great honour that I speak to the COMPRU program. The Minister of Health, when he was at the ceremony last week, was very brave in trying to explain exactly what the acronym COMPRU stands for, and I will attempt as well. It stands for the craniofacial osseointegration maxillofacial prosthetic rehabilitation unit.

I would really urge those who have not had the opportunity to have a tour of the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia hospital to go and see what can be done. What the program actually does is treat patients who are missing part of the head or neck due to cancer, birth defect, or trauma. It in fact allows individuals who would not be able to go out in public to be seen in public and to lead productive lives. The missing parts of those individuals' heads or necks are actually replaced with custom-built silicone prostheses, and they are attached to titanium posts which are surgically implanted into the bones of the head or the neck. In some cases reconstructive surgery is used and uses the patient's own tissues, especially when they're reconstructing ears. The implant technology is also used for special bone-anchored hearing aids, which restore hearing to patients who cannot use conventional hearing aids.

We heard last week also that the technology is becoming so advanced that they are actually looking at being able to replicate the blinking process. So individuals who have eyes that are implanted will actually now perhaps be able to blink.

The clinic, as I indicated earlier, has become the first publicly funded health care program in Canada to be registered under a standard called the ISO 9000. In the COMPRU clinic's case it's actually registered as an ISO 9002 quality system and is the first facility to have been able to do that. In order to obtain this registration standard, an organization must submit to a comprehensive audit by a third party and then to extensive maintenance audits to test for effectiveness. What this meant in the case of the Misericordia and the COMPRU clinic in particular was that they had to ensure that their program could meet these very high standards, that most organizations cannot meet.

Their quality system was built and developed entirely in-house, and their audit was completed in November of 1997. The COMPRU clinic also, for those who are not aware, is only the fourth of its kind across the world, which again makes it very unique. It is right here in Edmonton at the Misericordia hospital, which is in my constituency.

What to me was a very poignant part of the program was when the individuals who have actually had to come in contact with the program spoke about its effectiveness and spoke about how the ability to go out in public restored their ability to function publicly and affected their self-esteem and their ability to rebuild after battles with sometimes deadly diseases and that that was something which, in effect, could not be replaced in any other way.

The program at the Misericordia has proven itself in the world of medical research. Actually, if I may make a plea to the minister, what needs to be done is to recognize the need for this

clinic to be declared a provincewide program so that more Albertans would be able to access this needed service and to change the criteria for provincewide funding. Clearly this program achievement is a symbol of the success that we have and the excellence that we have within our province in health care.

I had indicated that the clinic is one of only four in the world recognized as reference centres for teaching and clinical trials.

One other piece of information:

In 1997, COMPRU was featured in the City of Edmonton's "Smart City" campaign, and was [also] a finalist for one of the Alberta Science and Technology ("ASTech") awards. This year, the unit has been nominated by Economic Development Edmonton for one of the Alberta Awards of Distinction and the Premier's Award of Distinction, sponsored by the Alberta Chamber of Commerce.

Again, it is with great pride that I would like to extend my congratulations to the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia hospital for this outstanding achievement.

Thank you very much.

3:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak briefly in support of the motion by the hon. member, the Standing Order 40 motion. As was indicated, I did have the opportunity and privilege to take part in the ceremony involving the recognition to the team at the Misericordia community hospital upon receiving this very prestigious award. I think the hon. member has said much of what should be said about this very significant program and the achievement, but I would like to add two or three comments.

One is that this particular type of medical advancement certainly shows the importance of research and the importance of the different areas of research, as to their findings being brought together. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, one of the keys to this program being started was a discovery – it was described to me as almost a chance discovery – that the metal titanium bonds with human tissue, with human bone. That of course was a very important development because prior to this when we were talking about replacements, prosthetics with respect to losses to the human body, as outlined, resulting from disease or injury, about all that was available to the health system were attachments which were dependent upon adhesives really, in terms of these replacement parts.

With that discovery the second thing that was important was you had to have the initiative, the insight, the leadership, the drive that was shown by the two doctors who head up the COMPRU team at the Misericordia and their overall team of staff to really act upon this particular discovery to bring it into actual application in the medical and overall health treatment fields. The people involved in that particular program – everyone, as I said, from the two doctors who are the leaders, to the nurses, to the support staff, and to the overall administration and board members connected with the Misericordia hospital – are certainly to be congratulated.

As I think everybody can appreciate, there is a tremendous advantage to this particular type of treatment, both from a health standpoint and, if I might say, from the mental health standpoint, and that is that, as was mentioned, the self-esteem, the confidence, the ability to participate more fully in their occupation and in life in general is really advanced a great deal by this particular program. It is a world leader, as shown by the receipt of this particular award. It is attracting attention from all over North America and, for that matter, as I understand it, from offshore

from the overall health care community. It is certainly a very important development in Alberta, and it's of course I think indicative of the leadership, the drive, the will that there is out there within the health care system to improve the treatment of various health conditions in this province to the benefit of individuals.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge all members of the Assembly to support this particular motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and many other places in between.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say a few brief comments and send my congratulations as well to the COMPRU clinic for their ISO designation and just say that I was most impressed when one of the Friends of COMPRU came out to the Rotary Club in Spruce Grove and did a presentation. It was phenomenal. I haven't been to the clinic, but the presentation was phenomenal: the slides they showed, the explanation, and the silence and respect and the awe in the room for the work that they do, because a lot of people didn't know what they do there at COMPRU.

I just want to say that people within their ridings should get a few guest speakers out from Friends of COMPRU so that more people around Alberta know that it's there, because we only tend to find out those things when we personally need them ourselves. They do excellent work, and I was most impressed by their presentation and by the work that they do there.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to congratulate the COMPRU clinic at the Misericordia hospital for this outstanding achievement, this ISO standards achievement, in particular because it is the first registered public health care facility in Canada to achieve this level of expertise, this level of efficiency, and to be able to sustain this level of standard of quality health care. Dr. Gordon Wilkes, Dr. John Wolfaardt, who are instrumental in and in fact founders of this clinic, are to be congratulated. Gail Huftey, who is the business manager, is to be congratulated. Each of the technicians and other workers who make COMPRU as excellent as it is are to be congratulated as well. I should mention, if I may, one in particular, Shannon Sapers, the wife of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who is one of the highly skilled technicians who contributes to the success of this clinic.

I had a very interesting time when I toured the COMPRU clinic several years ago. I was moved by what they can do to assist in improving people's quality of life dramatically, by the affect they can have on people's lives, people who have been injured and disfigured or simply genetically disfigured.

In fact, if I could just mention an example that I will never forget and that was extremely powerful to me. One of the cases that they had worked on and had pictures of was a young woman who at 18 had had a car accident. It was a very serious car accident, and ultimately she ended up with the side of her face against the engine block, horribly disfiguring that side of her face. The result was that at about 18 or 19 she became a recluse, and for 16 years or more she literally hardly ever left her home. You can imagine the profound effect, therefore, of that kind of injury on her life. After 16 years she came in contact with the

COMPRU clinic. Over the next number of months they worked, as they do, the magic that they do with so many patients and fixed her face as well as it could possibly be fixed and gave her a great deal of her confidence and, really, her life back. In fact, it was two years after that that this young woman, now in her mid-30s, got married, and she now has a family. So this group has taken people like this young woman from a place where life was dramatically diminished in its quality to as close to a normal life as many people can ever expect in our society.

I will say that it is still the unfortunate fact, due to funding limits and lack of funding, that the COMPRU clinic has great waiting lists. This is a clinic that does such remarkable work, that has so profoundly changed people's lives. It is absolutely internationally renowned. It is, without a word of exaggeration, the leader in this area around the world. These people – Dr. Wilkes, Dr. Wolfaardt, and their staff – are to be congratulated and given the highest accolades of this Legislative Assembly. They deserve the support of this Legislative Assembly, and I'm very pleased to see, Mr. Speaker, that we're having the chance to express at least with our words today our gratitude and our respect, our acknowledgment for this outstanding accomplishment.

[Motion carried]

head: **Orders of the Day**

THE CLERK ASSISTANT: Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal . . . I guess we have a number of people.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm just trying to help. I'm here to help. Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 73(1), regarding bills not moving more than one stage a day, to allow for second reading of Bill 201 introduced earlier. [interjection]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, if we're going to goof up, we might as well do it in a grand way. We do have one little item; that's why we're out of sync. We need to have written questions and motions for returns dealt with.

3:50

THE CLERK ASSISTANT: Written Questions.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pursuant to Standing Order 8(3), written questions would normally be dealt with today, but as they are only on the Order Paper, they cannot be addressed today.

THE CLERK ASSISTANT: Motions for Returns.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: As with written questions, motions for returns also cannot be dealt with today as they, too, appear on the notice portion of today's Order Paper.

Speaker's Ruling Written Questions and Motions for Returns

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: While we're on the subject of written questions and motions for returns, I'd like to remind all hon. members of the process to be followed when these items of business are called on Wednesdays. I quote the Speaker's ruling

of October 19, 1994, which appears in *Hansard* on page 2442.

The Chair will rule that when a member's written question is called, the member must actually move: written question number so and so standing on the Order Paper in my name be accepted. Someone from the government should then say whether the government accepts, rejects, or moves an amendment to the written question. Written questions would then be treated like motions for returns; i.e., accepted, rejected, amended, and debated as necessary.

As for amendments to written questions and motions for returns, should any be proposed, the Chair would like to refresh everyone's memory of the procedure that was established last year following some confusion on this issue, a procedure which seems to have worked out rather well.

Members are reminded that under Standing Order 42, amendments must be in writing, and the practice is to have 90 copies prepared for distribution. As these items of business are set down well in advance on the Order Paper and there's ample time to consider amendments when amendments are going to be proposed to motions for returns and written questions, they should be approved by Parliamentary Counsel as to form no later than the Tuesday before they are to be moved.

The proposed amendments should be provided to the sponsor of the written question or motion for a return so that he or she is able to address it on the respective Wednesday and have ample time to discuss the amendment with the responsible minister if necessary. This exchange of information should occur before 11 a.m. on the Wednesday that the written question or motion for a return is to be dealt with.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation in this matter.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thanks for that clarification, Mr. Speaker. I know everyone in the House understood every word of it.

Mr. Speaker, again I'd like to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 73(1), regarding bills not moving more than one stage a day, to allow for second reading of Bill 201 introduced earlier today.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has requested the Assembly's unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 73(1) to provide for second reading of Bill 201, Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. Would those in favour of this request please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. You have unanimous consent.

Bill 201 Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for getting us to this point.

I want to start my first formal talk in this legislative session on

a positive note. I want to say thanks very much to the Government House Leader for his help, in fact, in getting us to this point, and I simply want to ponder the rhetorical question: whatever would have been the outcome if he'd decided that he wanted to hurt? In any event, I know what he meant and I know he tried, and here we are with the opportunity to debate. [interjections] It's been a long afternoon; it's been a long session. [interjections] My House leader's kind of getting on my nerves, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity to debate Bill 201, the Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. Mr. Speaker, in establishing the significance of this bill, I'd like to take a moment to refer to government efforts in the area of health care. The Alberta government, this government, established at some point three directions as their model for health care. These are as follows: directions away from illness towards wellness, away from hospital towards community-based care, away from the traditional toward nontraditional health care providers. As I said about the Government House Leader, it's nice to think that they were trying to help with these statements of directions, because we would hate to have seen the results if they were trying to hurt with the establishment of their directions and their policy.

In fact, helping as they may have tried, we have some interesting results. The government has, far from enhancing health care service in this province, in fact removed from Alberta's publicly funded health care system certain extremely important health care services: amongst them, for example, palliative care, which is now paid for privately, or certain drugs which people used to get when they stayed in the hospital and don't now get, and a range of other services. Moreover, rather than strengthening and supporting and nurturing the public health care system, they have encouraged more private-sector involvement in the health care sector and in fact eroded the public health care system. In fact, in order to lessen the cost of labour, they have enticed more less skilled workers into the health care sector, hardly an initiative or an approach that could be construed to assist, for example, in taking people away from illness toward wellness. They have failed to get the resources that they have allocated, as meagre as they may be, to the proper places. Witness the tremendous controversy surrounding boundary allocations, particularly in this region. Witness the fact that Edmonton has huge, huge regional responsibilities for which they are not adequately compensated, this regional health authority.

They have achieved under the guise of these three directions the lowest per capita funded health care system across this country. They have been able to increase waiting lists in a variety of critical, surgical, and other areas. They have lengthened the amount of time that it takes many, many Albertans to receive emergency care when it is required. They have forced the elderly to endure increasingly difficult circumstances both at home and often in health care facilities, and they have given many health care professionals, often the best, far too little choice to stay in this province and, instead, far more reason to leave this province to search for employment.

Mr. Speaker, it's nice to think that the government was well intentioned. We would have hated to have seen what would have happened if their intentions had been otherwise.

In a province as wealthy as Alberta it is clear that we must ensure that people who are sick receive the kind of care that they require and that they deserve. Anybody can restructure the health care system in the way that this one has been restructured over the last three or four years. It's very easy to do. You simply take

one figure, subtract another figure from it, and end up with where we are right now. What you bypass, what you circumvent in the process is any semblance of proper management and proper planning to deliver upon this government's responsibility to give Albertans the best publicly funded health care system that is achievable within this country and within this province.

4:00

It is within that context, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to relate to the Members of the Legislative Assembly the substance of a discussion that I had very recently with a general practitioner in this city. I use it because we're unable to get the kind of empirical data that this government should have to properly assess the outcomes, to properly assess the level of service, the efficiency and the effectiveness of health care service in this province. I use it as anecdotal evidence, one more piece, one more brick that's built upon story after story after story of the experiences that Albertans have had, the unpleasant to despairingly unpleasant experiences that they have had with this health care system.

This doctor pointed out that he has been a Conservative. He still is, in fact, although very, very distressed about that. He says that these cuts are a hoax, that they are fundamentally a hoax, that they have not achieved what it is that this government claimed they would achieve, that they have resulted in the balkanization of health care standards across this province, that in fact we will have, if we haven't already, 17 different health care systems within the boundaries of this province. There is not consistent care. There is not consistent delivery of that care or access to that care across this province for each resident in Alberta.

He points out that the problem with the relationship between regional centres like Edmonton and satellite centres that send so many of their patients to Edmonton – and Calgary experiences this as well – has not been addressed properly by this government and, in fact, has only been addressed, if at all, on the basis not of efficient managerial determination but on the basis of political consideration.

He points out, Mr. Speaker, that the weak and the ill are those in this province who in fact are paying the price. He doesn't accept the polls that have said there is a great deal of approval for the provincial health care system, because he says of course who they should be polling are the people who have had experience with the health care system.

I think this is one of the most powerful statistics. He does point out that Alberta now has 1.5 beds per thousand population, the lowest in North America and significantly below – if I'm not mistaken, about 35 percent below – the standards that the government themselves set, which was 2.5 beds per thousand people. In fact, in the area of mental health beds we have in this province .04 beds per thousand, also the lowest number of beds per thousand in all of North America. It's lower than Mississippi and Alabama, than all of North America, Mr. Speaker.

He points out that now doctors' salaries in this province are the lowest in the country, making us extremely uncompetitive and enhancing the already significant loss of, among others, family practitioners from this province to elsewhere in the country, to elsewhere in North America, and to other places.

MR. SAPERS: No advantage there.

MR. MITCHELL: No advantage there, Mr. Speaker.

In his comments to me, he used an example, and he was visibly shaken. I think he was deeply shaken by this experience that he'd

had. Several days ago he was working in the hospital and a woman came in, an elderly woman with great abdominal pain. They did some procedures. He was uncomfortable with having to let her go, but there were no beds. In fact, there were eight people waiting for beds right then. There was no way, he felt, under the priority that he had to give these other eight people, that she could stay. Normally, he would not for a moment doubt that she should stay in this hospital. An elderly woman, she said to him: "Please don't send me home. I'm too weak. I simply feel that I cannot go." He sent her home, Mr. Speaker, and she died.

Now, it may be, you could argue, that she would have died anyway. I would say that here is a health care professional who has dedicated his life. He's one of the most senior family practitioners in this province, who has dedicated his life to the health care of people and his patients in this city and in this province. Can you imagine the kind of devastation that he must feel and what that reflects of the nature and the quality and the standards of this health care system, when he has to send a woman home who five years ago he wouldn't have sent home, to find that she died when she could have been getting better and proper care in the health care system than he was able to provide? That's not his fault. That's the fault of this government.

Our bill, Mr. Speaker, addresses that very problem. What it does is establish a bill of rights. The purpose of this bill is as follows, threefold:

- (a) to ensure that patients are aware of their right to receive appropriate and timely care;
- (b) to ensure that patients are treated with dignity and respect;
- (c) to promote and improve communication between patients and health care professionals.

Interestingly enough, this purpose is not all that far removed from the health charter that the government itself made an effort to implement but simply was unable to do effectively. In fact, it's the now minister of Social Services that failed so miserably in achieving any kind of support, I guess, within his caucus or within his party to get that done. But here were the basic objectives of the health care charter that had been promised in a throne speech by this Premier. They were not unlike the purposes that we have stated for this bill, in the bill before you: reduce public concern regarding the health care system's quality of services, reinforce the government's commitment to a quality health care system, clarify what Albertans should expect from the health care system when sick and vulnerable, provide a foundation for government accountability to all Albertans with respect to health, provide specific standards for selected key services. All great ideas.

What did they do, Mr. Speaker? They rejected it. In fact, that charter of rights should have underlined what they're saying and supported what they have said very clearly in their business plan. Their business plan states: provide a continuum of affordable, accessible, and appropriate high-quality health care services; enable Albertans to lead healthy and independent lives; seek financial contributions regardless of age based on – well, I don't agree with that; increase individual accountability and public acceptance of responsibility for maintaining their own health.

Mr. Speaker, these are lofty ideals, some of these things, in their own business plan. They're not achieved in the charter of rights which they rejected: their own idea, the Premier's promise. The most elevated of these ideas in fact are achieved in this bill. The point I'm making is that, on the one hand, they've said a great deal about wanting the purposes that we state for our bill; on the other hand, when push comes to shove, when the rubber meets the road, they have simply dropped the ball.

Our bill of rights lists a series of important client/patient rights

for Albertans: first of all, "the right to receive appropriate health [care]" – not too much to ask for, it would seem to me – "the right to be treated . . . in a courteous and respectful manner that respects the patient's dignity and autonomy." I'm not talking about health care staff being rude because I think most of them, if not all of them, are extremely polite despite the pressures. I'm talking about why people wait overnight on gurneys in emergency hallways because they can't get the bed they need in the hospital when they need it.

- (d) the right to receive health services without discrimination . . .
- (e) the right to have one's personal and health information protected from disclosure . . .
- (f) the right of access to one's own health [information] unless, in the opinion of a [relevant health professional] the disclosure could . . . result in immediate and grave harm to the patient's health or safety;
- (g) the right to refuse consent to any proposed treatment;
- (h) the right to receive information relating to any proposed treatment and . . . options.

Mr. Speaker, we also call in this bill, as we do in each bill, for the review of any regulations in health care that will be done behind closed doors outside the purview of this very public forum, that these should be reviewed as a matter of course by the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations.

There is, I think, a great gap in yesterday's throne speech. It was that the importance of public health care as a core value in our society, as something that elevates, strengthens our society, as an ideal that people around the world aspire to, Mr. Speaker, has not been captured in this throne speech. At a time when fiscal matters are apparently in order, when a government has balanced the budget and is making concrete, substantive, significant strides to pay down the debt, there is a time that we can now begin to address what all this means for people. There is perhaps no more important – perhaps some equally important: education – policy area for the well-being of Albertans, for the quality of our life, for the dignity of our society than a strong, publicly funded health care system.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, this bill is an essential element, an essential security and stabilizer, if you will, for Albertans of their public health care system. The better informed Albertans are of their rights in obtaining health care delivery, the less we will settle for the lack of resources and funding currently plaguing our system. Even Sears, Mr. Speaker, has a mission statement in public view for their customers, even Sears in the private sector, the much lauded private sector. Surely something as crucial as health care system delivery should be easily understood by all Albertans. This bill would do it. Every Albertan will be able to use this set of principles to assist them in accessing safe and efficient health care service in Alberta.

This bill is so obviously positive and so obviously a significant addition to strengthening and improving the health care system that I believe – I feel it this time – that this may be the first private member's bill that I have ever introduced in this Legislative Assembly to be accepted by the members of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This being the first debate on a private member's bill this session, I would like to congratulate the hon. member across the way for introducing Bill

201, Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. I thank the member because healthy debate regarding Alberta's health care system can only lead to productive ends, or that's what I thought before I read Bill 201.

Mr. Speaker, before delving into the rights of a patient as outlined in this bill, I must take issue with the personal accountability measures this bill establishes in relation to the Minister of Health. I seem to recall the hon. member across the way making an election promise last February saying that if his party were elected as the government, he would hire 20 to 25 new Crown prosecutors. There is no wonder the Leader of the Opposition was saying he was going to hire that many prosecutors, because he obviously knew he would be introducing this legislation. If this legislation we are debating today were to pass, the 18 new Crown attorneys this government recently hired would have new mandates, mandates not to prosecute those who have broken the law but to defend the Minister of Health in court, defend not only his name and reputation but the bankbook of this province. This does not mean that there are numerous potential cases but, rather, the potential of numerous frivolous cases, wasting court time and dollars.

The Leader of the Opposition has long been calling for the government to spend, spend, spend our surplus. Mr. Speaker, I personally do not think spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on court fees and lawyers' costs is spending our surplus in a productive manner. I know for certain that the Premier, the Minister of Health, and every government MLA would much rather see this money spent on increasing funding to regional health authorities, increasing capital grants to upgrade health facilities; in essence, used to address pressure points in the health system, not line the pockets of lawyers.

In addition to riding the bike paths in his spare time, I believe the hon. member across the floor may have been spending a few too many hours reading John Grisham novels, because what is laid out in this legislation sounds like it comes from a fictional American court case. Actually, this legislation would turn out to be more like thousands of cases, because that is exactly what would happen if this bill were to pass. I am quite sure there are a few lawyers who would be champing at the bit to file a frivolous lawsuit against the Minister of Health. Think of it, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way would not be able to ask the Minister of Health pointed questions in question period, which he continually whines about when the minister is not in the House. The reason for this would be because the Health minister would be in court. The minister would be in court detailing his government's restructuring plans, not here in the House answering the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, there is no mention of whether this legislation has a grandfather clause. Would a person be able to take any of the past ministers of Health to court if they were to protect a patient's right as outlined in this bill? That would seem like quite a feat. One section of the bill states that the minister "must ensure that . . . systems, standards and enforcement mechanisms exist to protect and enforce the rights of patients under this Act," and if he fails to do so, it "may form the subject . . . for judicial review." Excuse me if I'm wrong, but to me that sounds a little like blackmailing the minister.

What is there to stop a medical professional from telling the Minister of Health that if he does not increase spending on the deemed appropriate in the name of access to timely care or shown respect by the health professional, they will file a lawsuit against him? Mr. Speaker, what is the definition of "adequate," and who

will judge the definition of "appropriate"? I believe the recent threats by the AMA to fill hospitals with patients until they are bursting at the seams if the province does not increase health care funding is just such an example. I believe that in this case in addition to this warning by the AMA, the AMA could also file a court action against the Minister of Health.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's the first day of the debates in this particular session. Now, I wonder if we could just exercise a little more courtesy to people who are speaking; that is, colleagues on both sides of the House. We have people engaged in lively debate that are not officially recognized by the chair. So if all hon. members would show a little courtesy to the speakers, if you have some urgent matter to discuss with a colleague or with someone across the floor, then I wish you would send them a note and meet them out in the lounges that are just outside the doors.

In the meantime, let us hear the hon. Member for Redwater without these interruptions.

Debate Continued

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What if the minister either refused or could not, because of budgetary constraints, increase funding for a hospital or a doctor and a lawsuit were filed, which I believe could be done under this act? The hospital or doctor could plead that the minister did not fulfill his obligation to protect and enforce the rights of the patients outlined in this act. Could the judge and jury of the case then award punitive damages equal to what the doctor or hospital was asking for? That would be quite the system, Mr. Speaker. If you don't like how you were treated by a doctor or your hospital funding was re-evaluated by the department, sue the Minister of Health. Why bother going through the mechanisms already in place to deal with problems in the system? Why bother, indeed, when you can bypass that entirely and just sue the minister?

Mr. Speaker, this entire idea of suing the minister sounds a little draconian at best and a little Big Brotherish at worst. There is a tradition in this House, Mr. Speaker, as you well know: the physical dragging of a new Speaker to the Speaker's chair. I believe that if this bill were passed, a similar situation would occur for the Minister of Health. What elected member would like to place himself in such a no-win situation? I certainly would not. The Minister of Health must – and I stress "must" – have the ability to make sound decisions for the health care system without the ever-looming threat of legal action by any or every person.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, the opposition will be bringing forward a motion in a few weeks calling for the election of RHA members to regional health boards in 1998. Should we perhaps amend this bill to include the ability to take legal action against an elected board? I think not, and I certainly do not think Bill 201 is sound legislation.

What if a person went into an emergency room for an ingrown toenail and had to wait three hours before being seen by a physician because there were no real emergencies? Could that person sue the minister? Whose definition of care within a timely manner do we follow? The physicians who are working hard, as most do, to assist every patient as best they can? Or do we use

the definition by the person who may have waited a few hours to have a nail looked at? Mr. Speaker, the right to timely access must be protected and enforced by the minister, but whose definition would be used to base the decision on? I am quite sure this House can see why legislation such as this is truly ridiculous.

When discussing the award of fees because of a perceived dereliction of duty on the part of the minister, I wonder why only the minister can be held financially responsible. What if the court decision favours the minister, which the opposition of course has not considered in drafting this legislation? What are the consequences to the person or facility who initiated the action? Should they be held financially accountable for the court fees, the legal fees of the government, or any other damages the court sees fit? I truly believe this is an important issue. Give the dollars back to the taxpayers, back into the delivery of health services, where they belong. What is to stop a person from filing a trivial or frivolous lawsuit against the Minister of Health? Under this piece of legislation it would seem that they have no reason not to. Should the government be able to recoup its costs for defending itself, or would this government be considered guilty until proven innocent?

There seems to be some misplaced responsibility as well on this accountability process the opposition has brought forward. The minister, as outlined in the department accountability framework, is, quote, held ultimately responsible for the overall quality of health services in Alberta and is responsible for reporting to the Legislature on the health of Albertans; the minister is responsible for programming, ensuring that health services are there for all Albertans when needed. Mr. Speaker, what are the responsibilities of an Albertan? What is their responsibility to the system? Are they only to pay their health premiums and taxes and assume no responsibility for their own health actions? I believe that if we were to have a patients' bill of rights as outlined in Bill 201, we should also have a patients' bill of responsibilities. Should Albertans not take an active interest in their personal health? Should they not be concerned with their lifestyles? The federal government has recently said the Alberta government would be within its rights under the Canada Health Act to have Albertans who live risky lives pay higher health premiums.

Accountability is necessary in the health care system, and we are not arguing with that, but there needs to be personal accountability on the part of Albertans to try and lead healthy lives and responsibility for this government to provide health and educational services when necessary. That is something that I believe we can all agree on, so I question the motives of the hon. Leader of the Opposition for pitting patient against provider. Should the patient and provider not work together to ensure the system is working the best it can, or should they just argue on how and where things went wrong?

Mr. Speaker, I have used some rather extreme examples to show why section 4 of this act is beyond the scope of realistic legislation. I have done this to prove a point. I've used this to show how little thought the opposition put into the drafting of this legislation. The hon. Leader of the Opposition stood in this House on May 21, 1997, and said:

I rise once again to convince that side of the House to vote for one of our Bills. After 11 years of trying, I will say I'm eternally optimistic. If they haven't voted for all the rest, surely they have to vote for this one.

If the hon. member truly wants us to vote on a Liberal bill, perhaps they should introduce legislation that is good legislation, not something they dreamed up while reading a John Grisham novel.

As I stated in my opening, there are positive ideas to the bill. I believe the preamble addresses the needs of all Albertans to work together, from the community to the health provider to the Department of Health. This government does have the responsibility to provide and support excellent physical and mental health, and that is why we are signatories to the Canada Health Act and that is why we have also passed the Regional Health Authorities Act. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health is defining the roles of various players in the health system through the accountability framework and they are defining core health services, all for the benefit of the people of Alberta. This government does have a vested interest in the continued health of Albertans, and we are working towards ensuring all Albertans are as healthy as they can be every day.

Mr. Speaker, the need for the Patients' Bill of Rights is a little premature. We have just scratched the surface in defining roles and responsibilities of health care professionals, and accurately defining the rights of a patient can only become a reality when we know what the limitations are on the part of the health care professionals. I believe what much of this bill does is reiterate that which we have already done and what has already been legislated. So I thank the opposition for again allowing us to explain how we are working to better the health system for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the patient already has the right to receive or choose not to receive appropriate, medically sound health care. The patient has this enshrined in both the Canada Health Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act. We have stated this time and time again. The Canada Health Act has our name on it. We believe in the need to protect the health information of patients, and that is why we introduced Bill 30 during the last session. That is why we have established a panel to review the legislation to ensure that all aspects of personal health information use are accounted for and that people using the system can be held accountable if that information is misused. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition was not aware that his colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is on that review committee to ensure this government remains open and accountable.

4:30

The rights of a patient also include the right to receive information related to proposed treatments. I for one believe the health care professional who does not do this already has some very serious questions to answer in regards to their ethics. If such a case arose, Mr. Speaker, I know the respective college that governs that health care professional would quickly rise to the occasion to ensure that such a situation is immediately rectified.

I do have one question, Mr. Speaker, relating to the right to know of any treatment options. Is it the responsibility of the doctor to list every possible treatment? Should they include homeopathy treatment, vitamin treatments, acupuncture, massage therapy, self-healing techniques? Is there a limit of information the doctor would be required to tell the patients? I personally believe the patient should have access to this information, and we do live in the information age. But what about the rights of the doctor? Do we not already agree that medical professionals would tell their patients about any type of treatment they believe would assist them? I for one believe all physicians give their patients every opportunity to become healthy again. They do not withhold information from patients to keep them from getting better. Such an idea goes against everything a physician is trained to do.

We as a government have a vision of healthy Albertans in a healthy Alberta. We are in the midst of clearly assigning the

responsibilities, setting expectations, and monitoring and reporting on the performance of the system. This government has committed itself to providing health services above and beyond the call of the Canada Health Act. We are developing appropriate mechanisms for resolving consumer concerns and defining core health services and associated standards and benchmarks. Mr. Speaker, we are doing these things and doing them as quickly as possible. We are doing them in an open and accountable way, the fashion of this government.

Bill 201 has some good ideas and some rather erroneous ones. Those that I believe are positive, we're doing them and accomplishing them already. Those erroneous ones, I hope never to see them. This government believes in a universal health care system, but holding the Minister of Health personally and financially hostage is something we could not nor ever will agree on. Therefore, in closing, I urge this Legislature to vote against Bill 201.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: This has been an interesting discussion. It's funny; I'm a New Democrat and I'm about to agree with a Conservative and a Liberal. I don't know. I don't know. [interjection] Cross the floor, Halvar says. [interjections] Look; I already complimented you. I said you had a nice tie.

This bill does have pros and cons to it. I think the best part of the bill is the insinuation that increased funding for health care would necessarily need to follow the passage of the bill. However, I do note that the Member for Redwater lingered for a while on the subject of having lawyers snapping up the opportunity to sue the minister at every turn. That's a fair point, but it made me think of something. It made me think about the American system. I mean, you know, they've got the professional ambulance chasers there. Well, we've now pretty well got them too. In any event, in the American system you can file lawsuits all you want, but the fact of the matter is that they don't have a system. So I don't know why anybody would want the American approach to policing health care, shall we say.

However, I think what's important about this bill is that it would ensure that funding for our health care system would be restored. I believe the appropriate level of funding would be in the 1993 estimates and adjusted for inflation and population increase. That way we could reopen the 50 percent of the hospital beds that got closed in Edmonton and Calgary during the hack and slash years of the government.

One of the things that this bill is lacking, in my opinion, is a clear statement which speaks against private, for-profit hospitals. Now, I know the Health minister held a news conference this morning and said he's going to introduce legislation that he says will just put another hurdle in front of private, for-profit hospitals but in fact enshrines the power in him to go ahead and license such facilities. Well, I think that's wrong. In a public health care system you shouldn't have hospitals out to make money off you. I note also that last week when the government gave notice of the kinds of legislation that we could expect this sitting, there will be a bill to allow private insurance with respect to auxiliary hospitals. By private I assume private for-profit, and unless I'm told otherwise, I'm going to stick with that assumption until I see the bill.

Well, those are my graver concerns. Number one is funding, and number two is keeping for-profit hospitals out of the system.

Mr. Speaker, I lived in Britain at the time of the changeover, in the early Thatcher years, and I saw what happened. For every

dollar that was being spent in the private, for-profit facilities, the government argued: "See how much money we Brits have. We're so well off that we can afford to go to these private, for-profit facilities. And if they're so well off, well, guess what that means. That means we don't have to use the taxpayers' dollars to fund the public institutions, so we'll cut them back by an equal or greater amount." Which is exactly what happened. The consequent actions were really distasteful if one embraces the principles of universal medicare, because the physicians who had previously just worked in the public, not-for-profit hospitals saw how much money they could get by double-dipping, and they started working in the private, for-profit hospitals as well. I know because my own brother-in-law is one of them, and I don't consider his actions honourable.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a good way to start debate for the sitting of this Legislature, because I still think that health care is the number one area that needs patching. I still condemn every MLA for voting for a law that said that if we had any surplus budget, it must go exclusively to the debt, when you could see that funding cuts of a massive order were coming and where the axe was going to fall the hardest, the deepest, the heaviest, and the most painfully was going to be in health care. I condemn the people for voting in favour of that law and remind them that health care is still one of the programs Albertans and Canadians cherish most. We distinguish ourselves from most other countries in the world on the basis of what has been or had been a good system and which needs to be restored. If the principles of part 2 of this act were truly paramount in the government's mind, I'm sure the funding that I've suggested would quickly follow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm in favour of quality, accessible, affordable health care, so I am proud to stand in support of Bill 201, the bill sponsored by my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bill 201 is a bill that should never have to be law. Unfortunately, because of a government that has abandoned the health care system in this province, it is a bill whose time has come, and I am sad about that, Mr. Speaker. I'm saddened every time a constituent phones me as their MLA to have me be their advocate so that they can receive the health care they're entitled to. I am sad every time I talk to a health care professional that comes to see me and says, "I can't do my job because there's not the funding, because I don't have the support because of government policy." I am sad every time I talk to a family member who tells me that they can't understand why their loved ones aren't getting the kind of health care that they need and that they deserve, because, after all, they've been good. They've been good taxpayers, they've been good citizens, they've paid their bills, they've gone to work, they've helped build this province, and now when they need something back, it's not there for them. So it makes me sad that I have to support this bill, but I do.

4:40

I'd like to comment for just a minute on some of the observations of the hon. Member for Redwater. I've gotten to know this gentleman both in and outside of this Chamber, and I take him as a sincere and hardworking representative of his constituents. I know that the comments he offered on Bill 201 were heartfelt. I

think, though, that he should in fact examine the way some things operate in this province and in this country.

First of all, the Minister of Health may be the subject of a lawsuit whether Bill 201 exists or not. The Minister of Health is in fact named in several lawsuits right now that people have brought because of inadequate health care. The Minister of Health has to answer those suits anyway.

Now, it's not just him, and he knows that. The government has pretty deep pockets. Of course, when you sue a minister of the Crown, you're suing the Crown, you're suing the minister through the Crown, and there are all kinds of protections that we have as part of our parliamentary history. I know that the member was at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meetings in Regina, and I'm sure he had an opportunity to explore some of the rich and varied history of parliamentary tradition. He probably just forgot about some of the protections that parliamentarians have. He probably just as an oversight forgot to mention, in fact, that it's not really the Minister of Health who'd be out of pocket.

In fact, citizens have an opportunity to hold the Executive Council of any government in any parliamentary democracy responsible, and sometimes we hold them responsible through the courts. We're particularly driven to hold members of Executive Council, cabinet ministers, responsible through the courts when as a government they refuse to call the Legislature to order, which happens from time to time in this province. A government is so cocksure of itself that it'll decide it can just go ahead, run roughshod over democracy, and not call the Legislature to order so the government can't be questioned and held accountable in the most public of all chambers, being this one right here. I'm sure the Member for Redwater just forgot about that.

When he was talking about Crown prosecutors, of course the Crown prosecutors, as he well knows, primarily are involved in criminal matters, and this government has a long history of going to friends in private law firms to contract out business. In fact, I think the ex-Minister of Justice is now in private practice, and I'm sure that he could have a talk with the Member for Redwater about the government's relationship with lawyers in private practice. He could probably explain to him better the process that the Crown may go through if it was ever called to defend itself vigorously and rigorously in not frivolous but very serious and very substantial lawsuits because the government may have been negligent in providing timely access to quality and affordable health care.

I was also struck by the member's comments about a patient bill of rights and how these rights may be premature and maybe they really aren't supportable. I couldn't help but think of the drafters of perhaps the U.S. Constitution or of the Statute of Westminster and those parliamentarians who came before us who had the wisdom and the foresight to know that you have to get your values straight first. You have to put down what it is you're all about first, and then that's your framework, and you build out from there.

I'm sure the member wasn't suggesting that the government of Alberta would rather be very situational in its ethics and in its approach to governance and would rather just see what the price of admission was before it actually put forward for public debate what the actual values are that it's bringing to the table.

Furthermore, I'll note that pre-session the government, Mr. Speaker, announced and with some fanfare trumpeted the fact that they're going to be introducing a property bill of rights. A property bill of rights. Now, I'd be very interested to hear the

Member for Redwater when that debate comes up, because I'm sure we could translate some of the debate that he had about the Patients' Bill of Rights to the property bill of rights. I guess I would expect him to make the same observations and speak against the government on this property bill of rights, because it would be subject to many, many of those criticisms.

Mr. Speaker, even furthermore, I note that this government has made a commitment to the people of Alberta that it will include performance measures as part of the budget process. These performance measures are standards of expectations of the kinds of services and performance of government departments. Now, I know he's not in cabinet yet, so maybe the member hasn't had a chance to participate in those discussions, but I would imagine that when the cabinet ministers meet around tables, they discuss the performance measures of their department. They discuss, you know, what's doable, what isn't, what we can achieve, and what we can't.

Now, performance measures, a bill of rights, expectations. Is this hon. member now suggesting that the Treasurer is wrong, the Premier is wrong, that there should not be performance measures as part of the budget process, that we should not clearly set out on the table for Albertans a set of expectations about what standard government services will be provided? If we set that expectation out, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Gee whiz, people might actually expect it. If we say to people that we're going to provide timely access to quality health care, people just might expect it.

If we said, for example, in Advanced Education that we were going to provide a certain satisfaction or access or enrollment or graduation level, people just might expect it. In Agriculture, people might actually expect those performance measures. And in Labour, in Community Development, in Municipal Affairs those performance measures might actually create expectations. Is the hon. member's argument that we should strip performance measures right out of the government process because we don't want Albertans to be under the misapprehension, under the delusion that those things they can actually expect from the government are what make up those performance measures? So I'd be very interested to know how he could reconcile the government's position on performance measures, on KPIs, and all of these other administrative measures with his objections to a patients' bill of rights. I think we have to examine once again why is it that we need a patients' bill of rights.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that in Calgary right now, if you take a look at just some of the specialty services that are available in our health care system – and I'll just use Calgary as an example – in psychiatry the average wait for urgent care if you're in need of psychiatric attention is four weeks. You know what the optimum wait is? Two weeks.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Did you get that out of the paper?

MR. SAPERS: The Minister of Community Development wanted to know if I was getting this out of the newspaper. No. For the Minister of Community Development's illumination, it comes from the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association. I know she's aware of those people, and she can deal with them if she questions the figures.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The average wait for routine care in psychiatry is seven months; the optimum wait is no more than three months. In neurosurgery

the average wait for urgent care is two to four weeks; the optimum wait is two weeks. [interjection] Now I hear the Member for Little Bow making noise from his seat, Mr. Speaker, and what he's saying is that I'm absolutely wrong. I would hope that he would have the opportunity to meet with the Calgary doctors, as I have, and challenge them because he obviously knows much more about the health care system than the doctors that work in Calgary do.

Mr. Speaker, in cardiology the average wait for urgent care is two months. Two months for urgent care in cardiology. This is to see a heart specialist. The optimum wait is one week. Eight times greater than Calgarians have to wait for that kind of care, and this government questions whether or not Albertans need a patients' bill of rights to protect their ability to access timely and needed and quality health care.

Mr. Speaker, I have had physicians right across this province tell me that they tell their patients that the first thing you do when you're going to be admitted to a hospital is get a patient advocate. You get somebody to advocate for you because the system is so chaotic. I'll note there that the government's own Provincial Health Council just released a whole series of reports that say the system continues to be confused, continues to be disjointed, continues to suffer from a lack of communication, continues to suffer from the lack of any coherent plan or vision for the future provision of services. So physicians are saying that when you're going to go into a hospital, you better make sure you have an advocate. You make sure you have a family member or somebody else who's going to go to bat for you to make sure that you get what you need.

They're even beginning to coach patients about the difference between being aggressive and being assertive. They're saying: "Don't make them angry. Don't make those administrators or those people in the health authorities angry. Don't make the government angry. So don't be too aggressive, but be assertive. Don't lose your temper. Talk in a calm voice, and make sure that you just simply repeat what it is that you know you're entitled to." You know why they say don't make them angry, Mr. Speaker? Perhaps this is the most disturbing thing of all. Because time and time again patients, family members, caregivers tell me, "Don't rock the boat, because this government will see to it that you're punished." There is a punitive nature that is at work in this government, and I've had health care administrators tell me: "Don't raise this issue too loudly. Please don't raise this issue too loudly, because it'll come back. They'll know that I was your source, and I'll be punished."

4:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Name them. Tell us who.

MR. SAPERS: The minister is saying: "Name them. Tell us who." I would do that in a minute if I had their permission, but they are too frightened of this government. They are too afraid of what may happen to them. If you doubt it, you come with me the next time I visit a hospital. You can talk to the same people that I do, Mr. Minister.

The issue here is that things have gotten so upside down in the province of Alberta that there are citizens, taxpayers, who are afraid, Mr. Speaker, of what their government thinks of them. I always thought it should be the other way around: government should be concerned about what their citizens think of them. Unfortunately, because of this government's propensity for shooting first and asking questions later, for cutting blindly, for not having a plan, for not knowing what direction they're going in, citizens in this province are afraid.

In my own constituency I have people who go to bed every night afraid because they have loved ones and family members who are suffering from complex or chronic illnesses and they rely on emergency care. They know that never before in the history of Edmonton's health care system have we been in a situation where there are so many red alerts. That means that there is not capacity in our health care system to take you in for an admission, that our health care system cannot deal with their need. They go to bed frightened about that, and they call me and ask what I'm going to do about it. All I can do about it is tell them to contact this government, to speak out, and to join with us as we try to defend publicly administered, universally accessible, quality and affordable health care. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, obviously I've struck a nerve. I know this government's very sensitive. You know, they managed to skate their way back to an electoral victory by not making any promises. Okay; I respect the voters of this province who re-elected them again, and they're hoping against hope, as I am, that this government will respond to the crisis, that they'll do the right thing. The Patients' Bill of Rights is a small first step. It would simply be a signal that this government's going to put its money – actually our money – where its mouth is and it will in fact support health care and people's ability to access it when they need it. It's not asking too much for this government to say what it's going to do and then do it. It's not asking too much. It's not asking too much of this government to respond to the professionals, to the health council, to the caregivers, to the family members, to the patients who are saying that they're frightened. It's not too much, and it's certainly nothing more than Albertans deserve.

Mr. Speaker, the Patients' Bill of Rights, Bill 201, needs to become law, and it needs to become law quickly. We don't have to be afraid of frivolous lawsuits because there is a process in the justice system to deal with frivolous lawsuits. We don't even have to be afraid of substantive lawsuits if the government does its job, because if the government were that confident that it had done its job, it would be able to easily mount a defence and to answer the accusation that it had let taxpayers down. The government would easily be able to do that.

So maybe the real reason why there won't be support on the government side for Bill 201 is because they don't want to do it. They don't want to guarantee Albertans access to timely, affordable, quality care. They don't want to do it because they want to keep on marching down the path of privatizing our health care system. They want to keep on creating opportunities for for-profit health care providers, so they simply don't want to do it. They don't want to tell Albertans that up front, but what they do want to do is make sure that there isn't one single roadblock. And you know what? An entrenched bill of rights for patients guaranteeing them access to timely, quality, publicly-funded health care would be such a roadblock. I'm afraid, Mr. Speaker, that that's the real reason why these government members are going to vote against this bill: because it just gets in the way of their real agenda about the further privatization of health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 201. Although I understand the intent of the bill, I believe that it has some obvious flaws, as my colleague

from Redwater has already pointed out. Much of what it seeks to do is already provided in Alberta. I welcome the opportunity today to do two things: first, to elaborate on some of the problems with this bill, and second, to explain how Alberta's health care system already provides much of what is proposed in this bill.

The first concern I have with this bill is the limited definition of "patient". Surely a patient cannot be so narrowly defined as to be only a person receiving health care services in Alberta. A patient in our health care system is any Albertan. Should we guarantee certain rights to just those Albertans receiving health care services right now? What the Leader of the Opposition fails to recognize is that the rights of a patient are the rights that must be available to all Albertans always, rights which I believe are already secure within Alberta's health care system.

However, Mr. Speaker, there is another more distressing problem with the definition of "patient" in this bill. One which comes to mind immediately upon reading the definition: in its present form this bill completely ignores the rights of Albertans who may be receiving health care services while in other provinces or abroad. The rights of Albertans traveling or working outside of the province are not included at all in this bill. One is left wondering why the rights of these Albertans are not incorporated.

This is an issue that each and every one of us in this House should take issue with. We are here to represent our constituents, Albertans. Does your job as a Member of this Legislative Assembly stop once your constituents leave the country on travel? Do our jobs protecting the rights of Albertans stop as soon as we leave the province? Mr. Speaker, neither of these should be true, and speaking for the whole of the government caucus, that is not how we operate. We are here for Albertans even if they are not within the province.

One specific case of travel outside this province that could have led to a financial and personal loss to an Alberta family was the case of baby Grayson. We all know the case of the premature baby born in the United States to an Alberta couple. They were not expecting the arrival of their baby for some time, and as such they were without adequate travel insurance for the baby. This government stepped up to assist that whole family. Under Bill 201, what would that family have had to look forward to? Nothing. The Liberal patient rights would not have been worth the paper it was written on.

This government is here for all Albertans. If the opposition Liberals would have as much global view as this government does, they might have proposed protecting the rights of all Albertans in their bill, and, Mr. Speaker, they have not. The rights described in this bill are either already provided to Albertans or else this government is in the process of providing them to Albertans.

Three particular issues concerning these rights comes to mind: first, the protection of personal health information; second, accountability in the health system; and third, accountability of health professionals. First, with respect to protecting the privacy of personal health information, I must say that this is exactly the aim of the Alberta WellNet initiative launched in January '97. WellNet was launched in response to the Auditor General's report of September 1996 and the Minister of Health's Action on Health announcement in November '96.

These reports reinforced our commitment to develop an information system to provide better information for better health. In February of 1997 a senior reference committee was established to advise the minister and provide recommendations to the

minister on development of the new health information system. The senior reference committee includes physicians, nurses, regional health authorities, pharmacists, the cancer and mental health boards, universities and faculties of medicine, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, and Alberta Health. In June 1997, after a comprehensive request for a proposals process, IBM Canada was eventually selected as the strategic alliance partner to develop a blueprint for a new health information system and to develop a tactical plan comprised of specific projects. The accounting firm of Ernst & Young was selected as the quality assurance partner to assess and validate all processes and deliverables relating to the Alberta WellNet initiative. The top priority of Alberta WellNet is protecting the privacy of personal health information. So this initiative has already addressed one of the main features of Bill 201, the protection of personal health information. In fact, the Alberta WellNet initiative is closely linked to the draft health information protection act. Alberta WellNet will do much to address concerns across the health care system for timing and accurate information that is needed to improve the health of all Albertans and the management of the health system. It will do so with complete respect for the privacy of personal health information.

5:00

The second part of this bill, which is already being addressed by the Alberta government, is the accountability of the health system. In June of 1997 the hon. minister released a document entitled *Achieving Accountability in Alberta's Health System*, a draft for discussion. This document was the first step in providing a complete accountability framework for Alberta's health system. In fact, plans for the accountability framework were announced as early as November 1996 as part of the Action on Health initiatives. Long-term results of the framework include improved accountability of health dollars and services, better information for Albertans about results in the health system, and a health system that continually improves. All of this serves as a solid well-thought-out foundation for an accountability framework for the health system, one that is the envy of Canada.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, improving accountability in Alberta's health system is not a new priority of this government, rather an ongoing one. Ongoing initiatives such as studying standards, measuring results, and defining core health services are becoming integral parts of a complete accountability network.

The third part of this bill, which is already being addressed by this government, concerns the accountability of health professionals. As the opposition members are aware, we can never assume professional accountability. Mr. Speaker, most health professionals in Alberta are members of self-regulating associations that are established under and subject only to the authority of the Legislature. The self-regulating nature of professions has significant historical precedent in western nations. For those opposition members who are unfamiliar with the concept, the principle which underlies self-regulation is that professions enter into an agreement with the state. In return for the privilege of self-regulation the professions ensure that the public can trust the professionals they consult. If the profession in question does not uphold its end in this agreement, the state has measures which can be taken against the profession.

Many individuals employed in the health service delivery system are members of self-regulating professions, and the system works very well. There are no reasons for making significant changes to a system that is working just fine, working not just here in Alberta but all across North America and Europe. This

system has served Albertans very well in the past, and there's absolutely every reason to believe that it will continue to do so in the future.

Furthermore, professional associations provide various other important functions, including peer reviews of members, education and competence requirements for the registration of members, competence standards for the ongoing practice of members, standards for professional conduct, and disciplinary processes for members who contravene the profession's standings for competence and professional conduct.

Finally, professional associations also provide the minister and the entire Legislative Assembly with general advice. Mr. Speaker, it's the responsibility of this government to supplement these professional associations, not supplant them.

Bill 29, introduced in the First Session of the 24th Legislature of Alberta, would amend the Medical Profession Act by enabling a regular review of physicians by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. This review would ultimately help the quality and accountability of medical practice in Alberta. The amendments introduced in Bill 29 support the creation of a physician performance committee by the College of Physicians and Surgeons to implement the physician performance review program. The program will regularly review the performance of licensed physicians in Alberta. The intent of the program is not to interfere in the affairs of the self-regulating association, rather to provide regular feedback to physicians about their performance, promote continuous improvement in medical practice, and promote dialogue between physicians and patients in quality-of-care issues. With these and other measures the accountability of health professionals will be continually enhanced.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is responsible for assessing whether the health system has met standards and whether progress is being made to meet those goals. The minister must also provide information to this Legislature on the overall success of the health system. This government is accountable and open, but perhaps a better way for the opposition to ensure that patients are truly receiving the health services they require is to travel the province, meet with medical professions from all fields, and talk with patients. Perhaps they should stop reading how things should and could be done but instead get out and see how they are and will continue to be done.

AN HON. MEMBER: Have a heart.

MR. MARZ: I have. Alberta's health system works very well. Plain and simple. Albertans have access to a comprehensive community-based, functioning health care system. Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 brings nothing new to this Legislature. The bill brings nothing new or innovative to Albertans or health care recipients. The bill addresses only the reactive portion of medicine, the portion that deals with the question of what we do after someone has become ill.

This government sees the grand picture. We see preventive medicine. We see healthy Albertans who take great pride in their fitness and healthy lifestyles. They have recognized it is up to them, the people of Alberta, to have a hand in ensuring they are healthy. Everyone, including all of us in this Assembly, has a personal responsibility for our own health.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote against Bill 201. It does have some good ideas, but they are our ideas. The bill seeks patient protection, protection this government already gives them. The Alberta health system needs innovations, and as I've pointed

out, we are continuing to provide them. We do not need to rehash existing ideas.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in favour of Bill 201, the Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. It clearly outlines the rights which Albertans, all Albertans, must have when dealing with the health care system. These rights are legislatively protected, and the Minister of Health would be held responsible for ensuring that these rights are upheld.

The health care system is in a state of confusion. Pressure points have become boiling points. One only has to speak to someone who has chronic or complex health care needs or is trying to access health care across regional jurisdictions to see this. In my own constituency here in the month of January many, many people, many, many seniors have experienced difficulty accessing the health care system. They have been left on gurneys, regardless of how many new beds we have, how many beds have been opened up, how many dollars we're now planning to spend. They're still left for over 48 hours waiting for health care, health care that they should receive and will receive if this bill is law.

Everywhere we go today we're bombarded with mission statements. These mission statements are acknowledgements of failure. There are key principles; there are plaques. They're in lobbies of restaurants and hotels. Yet whenever it comes to health care, there is a maze of administration and a lack of knowing the process, and this leads to confusion. This leads to confusion of Albertans. It leads to confusion of government members as to the direction this health care system is going.

Now, this health care system is going towards a two-tiered, for-profit health care system. This bill would prevent that two-tiered, for-profit health care. It's been a failure everywhere it's been tried. In the U.S. some 40 million Americans are not insured because they can't afford the costly private health insurance which is required or can't . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: So what's your answer?

MR. MacDONALD: What's my answer? Adhere to the Canada Health Act.

AN HON. MEMBER: What's it going to cost?

5:10

MR. MacDONALD: What's it going to cost? Our health care costs are less than the Americans'. Even businesses have admitted that Canada's medicare plan provides a competitive advantage, not an Alberta advantage, a competitive advantage in the global sense. Honda officials from Japan credit Canada's health care plan as the second major reason for locating the \$300 million expansion of their plant in Alliston, Ontario.

William Blundell, chairman of Manulife Financial incorporated, believes Canada's health care provides a significant competitive advantage over other players on the world's stage.

Ford Canada president, Mark Hutchins, in 1994 said low health care costs were factored into the automaker's decision to expand its plant in Windsor, Ontario.

Former health care minister Jim Wilson told a conference in May of 1996 that our publicly funded health care system is a benefit – is a benefit – not a drawback in terms of international competitiveness. Even Lee Iacocca, automobile manufacturing guru, said before he retired that he could sell a new car – a new car – for about \$400 U.S. less if the Americans had our health care programs.

In the U.S. some 40 million Americans are not insured. I said this before: private business is profit driven. Investors want a return on their investment, and to that end patient care often takes second place to profit. Private health care providers can pick and choose their patients. Those who need intensive or long-term care can be rejected to save money and enhance the profit line. There is no accountability in a privatized situation. Proprietary restrictions apply, and the public is kept in the dark.

The two-tiered, for-profit health care program in the U.K. has become so severe that more than 1.2 million Britons are on a waiting list for care in the public sector. This is according to *The Medical Post*. As more dollars have gone into the private sector, fewer have gone into the public system. It has deteriorated to the point where the British government recently said it would inject more than 3 billion pounds into the public system.

In New Zealand, a country that members across the way, Mr. Speaker, have a fondness of talking about: the restructuring of the New Zealand economy and society. New Zealand, another stronghold of private, two-tiered, for-profit health care. The situation has deteriorated into what has been described as a disaster.

Bill 201, Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights, will prevent this from happening in this province. Partnered or paralleled systems have become even more complicated as private providers take over from public institutions. Insurance premiums have risen more than 20 percent in the past three years, and caveats have been placed against homes of more than 2,000 seniors to be certain that their health care bill is paid. Albertans who are currently paying their \$34 a month public health insurance can be faced with monthly premiums 8 to 10 percent more because private health care and private health insurance is far more expensive than the public plan.

We on this side of the House believe in fairness. It is not fair,

in my opinion, that someone with a fat wallet can get better, faster medical help than someone whose wallet is thin.

For-profit health care is more expensive and highly restrictive. The public health system will deteriorate in countries that go for the two-tiered, for-profit scheme. Private business is profit driven. I'm an admirer of profit, but as far as health care is concerned, we should not make a profit off someone's illness, particularly a senior citizen.

AN HON. MEMBER: Cars to people.

MR. MacDONALD: Cars to people. The minister of transportation, I hope he has as much concern for . . . Contrary to claims by some critics of medicare that Canada's health care system is among the most expensive in the world, Canada actually ranked 16th among OECD countries in 1994 in terms of public financing as a percentage of overall health expenditures. As a percentage of total payroll – and this is most interesting, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly hope the minister of transportation is listening – Canadian employers spent 1.4 percent on health benefits compared to an average of 8.7 percent of payroll spent by employers in the United States. Canadian employers' health care costs have increased by 74 percent from 1990 to 1994 because of the delisting of some services, drugs, early patient discharges from public hospitals to privately operated and privately insured health care services, and an increase in premiums charged by private insurance carriers. This you should take into consideration whenever you go back to Grande Prairie and talk to seniors up there.

We all should vote in favour of this bill. This is a piece of legislation that will help Albertans to have their rights outlined when it comes to health care services in a positive initiative. As well, the accountability factor that's been outlined this afternoon is clearly indicating that the Minister of Health is responsible for ensuring that this happens, and for this reason we all should support this bill.

Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]