

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Wednesday, February 4, 1998 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/02/04  
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This petition seems timely. It's signed by 19 people, and they are urging the government "to make it mandatory for the Government to hold two sittings of the Legislature each year, in the Spring and the Fall." What an original idea.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of motion that immediately following question period I will rise under Standing Order 40 to argue the urgency of the following:

Be it resolved that this Assembly congratulate the University of Alberta law school for being selected as the site for the civil law institute, a research initiative of the Canadian Bar Association, and recognize the efforts of June Ross, the academic director of the institute.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to serve notice at this time that at the appropriate time later in the afternoon I'm going to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the shortage of hospital emergency beds in the province.

This will be pursuant to Standing Order 30.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm filing four copies of the document 1997 Alberta Progress Report on the National Action Program on Climate Change. This document was prepared by the Department of Energy with the assistance of the Department of Environmental Protection and shows that Alberta has taken a wide range of sensible and cost-effective actions to respond to the issue of global climate change.

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

MS OLSEN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of a document Choices, Chances, and Child Care in Alberta:

Results From A Provincial Survey Of Daycare Parents prepared for the Greater Edmonton Area Child and Family Resource Association.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a letter that I sent to you today requesting that you instruct the Leg. Assembly Office to prepare a statement that would be made available to any member upon request that would provide greater detail for the MLA expenses listed in the report of selected payments to members. Once this report has been prepared, I propose that I will be tabling all of the reports submitted to me by government members.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table excerpts of Children's Advocates' reports from 1994-95, '95-96, '96-97, and a June 1997 quarterly report, all citing the critical need for the Department of Family and Social Services to improve their tracking of deaths of children in care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two copies of letters that were sent to Ms Kathleen Huber and Ray Goyette commending them for their special efforts to recognize people who are blind and visually impaired during White Cane Week, from February 1 to 7, 1998.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of an issue summary report generated out of my constituency office which has to do with public education funding and pertains to some letters that have been written by parents of students who are attending Westminster junior high school. They are concerned about the deterioration of that school and are very concerned about the inadequacy of public school education. Along with my report, which I am tabling, I will ask the pages to deliver some correspondence to the Minister of Education and to the Provincial Treasurer from these parents.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to table this afternoon copies of the Dignity Foundation's Catch Them Before They Fall conference report. The report contains something in the order of 70 concrete recommendations that I'd urge the government to carefully consider.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table four copies of the Newfoundland government's new legislation, an Act to Amend the Human Rights Code, passed there on December 11, 1997. This includes sexual orientation under their Human Rights Code, leaving Alberta and Prince Edward Island as the only provinces that exclude protection to these communities.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon and introduce students from Avalon junior high school. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. François Boucher, Mr. Andy MacGregor, Mrs. Beth Duff, and Mrs. Annette Smith. I would ask these students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three parents of students who are enrolled at Westminster junior high school, very involved and active parents, parents very concerned about the quality of education for their children, in fact, for all children in the province. I would ask that Laura Karius, Liz Sawada, and Lois Flakstad please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you Ian Bell. He's a student at the University of Alberta. He was not one of those students that was outside protesting, and he's pleased to be here today and see what happens in the House. Ian, would you stand and be recognized by the House.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

**1998 Winter Olympics**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell this Assembly and all Albertans about the tremendous group of young Alberta athletes who have joined Team Canada at the 1998 Winter Olympics, which begin on February 7 in Nagano, Japan. There is one statistic about this team that is quite significant and should be a source of great pride to all Albertans. Of 152 athletes on Team Canada 46 call Alberta home. In other words, although Alberta makes up 10 percent of Canada's population, we have contributed almost 30 percent of the athletes on Team Canada.

Alberta athletes will take part in 12 of the 15 events in which Team Canada is scheduled to participate. From alpine skiing to women's hockey to snowboarding Alberta athletes will have a big role to play in the success of Team Canada.

Longtime members of this Assembly might remember that just prior to the groundbreaking success of the Winter Olympics in Calgary, this Assembly resolved to ensure that Alberta athletes constitute 20 percent of Team Canada's membership in future Winter Olympics.

Clearly, a decade later we have surpassed that goal substantially.

**1:40**

This success is a credit to many people. Coaches, trainers, managers, parents, family members, event organizers, and other community members are what make amateur athletes so successful in Alberta.

Then of course there are the athletes themselves. We heard in

this Legislature last week from the Member for Calgary-West about the pride that parents have in their children who strive for and achieve Olympic stature. That member said so eloquently what all of us feel about those who work and train and sacrifice to meet their personal goals.

That pride becomes especially evident during a major event like the Olympics. In a letter I sent earlier this week to each Alberta athlete in Nagano, I tried to express that pride on behalf of all Albertans.

One of my greatest pleasures as minister responsible for sport is the opportunity that I have to meet with our young athletes. Whether I am meeting with an Olympic athlete or a Canada Games athlete or a team at a local hockey tournament, I am always inspired by the grace, skill, and dignified character of young Albertans who participate in sport. I can tell this Assembly that when those athletes represent Alberta outside their province, they do so with class, with distinction, and with great pride for their home.

Mr. Speaker, I know I join with all members of this Assembly in wishing the very best to Alberta's athletes on Team Canada and to all our nation's competitors in Nagano. Regardless of how many medals Canada wins, I know that Team Canada and Alberta athletes in particular have already won the hearts of everyone here. They represent the very best Alberta has to offer, and they deserve our support and encouragement.

Go, Canada, go. [applause]

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful that Albertans have such strong representation at the Winter Olympics. These young athletes proudly represent not just their hometowns or our province but our entire nation. They also represent the dreams of every young athlete who aspires to excel at their sport.

Mr. Speaker, I coach 11- and 12-year-old girl's basketball. This is the age that girls begin to lose self-esteem. By the end of every season these girls have the hearts of Olympians and the self-confidence to know that an Olympic goal is something they too can aspire to. Having 46 athletes from Alberta is exactly the kind of role model these young people need.

All of Alberta will be proudly watching our athletes in action at the 1998 Winter Olympics. We, too, give them and their coaches our support and encouragement. [applause]

head: **Oral Question Period**

**Video Lottery Terminals**

MR. MITCHELL: The Premier keeps telling people that Albertans are not concerned about video slot machines. Mr. Speaker, in fact he said that only 2 percent of Albertans have ever indicated that they were concerned. Yet his own polling right here indicates that as early as 1995 three-quarters of Albertans were telling the Premier that video slot machines are highly addictive, and three-quarters of Albertans were telling the Premier that video slot machines create serious problems. The Premier knew that Albertans were concerned about VLTs, yet he kept putting more and more of them into our communities because his government puts money first and people second. Why does the Premier keep saying that Albertans aren't concerned about VLTs when his own polling has said all along that they really are?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals themselves should be very, very aware of the situation vis-à-vis VLTs, gambling in general, as opposed to other issues. If the leader of the Liberal

opposition hearkens back to the election – I know he doesn't like to – of last year, he started off on VLTs, much the same as he has started off in this Legislature, and all of a sudden the issue died. I didn't hear the leader of the Liberal opposition talk about VLTs at the end of the election, because he obviously found that it was a nonstarter.

To put it in context, Mr. Speaker, yes, there is concern about VLTs; there's concern about gambling, as there are concerns about other addictive activities such as smoking and drinking and other kinds of morality questions in society. But the Conservative polling in the last election – and this was done by independent firms – showed that in the scheme of things when people were asked, “What is most important to you in society?” people were saying, “Health care is the most important thing to us,” people were saying, “Education is very, very important to us,” people were saying, “Good solid infrastructure is important to us,” people were saying, “Protection of the environment is important to us,” people were saying, “Jobs and the economy are important to us,” and you know, people were saying, “Taxation is important to us,” to keep our taxes reasonable.

When they were asked, “Where do you rank the issue of gambling generally in terms of Albertans' overall priorities?” we got about a 2 percent response compared to huge responses relative to health and education and infrastructure and taxation.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Urgency of Questions**

THE SPEAKER: I'd just like to kindly remind all members that the purpose of question period is to deal with generally current, urgent matters, and if we were referring to documents published in 1995, it being 1998, the current situation should prevail.

Go ahead.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the VLTs were just being brought into their peak in 1995. I think the document is quite relevant.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, with respect, it was you who referred to a document arising out of a 1995 poll if you recall.

#### **Video Lottery Terminals (continued)**

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. All right. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Then I guess I'd like to say that of course it's not a nonstarter in Calgary with Jim Gray; it's not a nonstarter in Lacombe.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier seems to be defending his position by some polls that he's never released publicly, in fact millions of dollars worth of polls over the last number of years – we only have one – would he release the rest of those polls that he's using as a defence of his position, even though we know full well what Albertans are telling him? They're telling him to get rid of VLTs.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the poll I alluded to was the poll that guided us through the last election, and I think it was a very successful poll.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier said a number of months ago that he would release any polls paid for by public money and given that he has used a poll, a document, in this Legislature to influence debate, will he release, consistent with *Beauchesne*, those polls so that we can check his figures

against the only figures we have, which say that three-quarters of Albertans don't like video slot machines? Put your polls right here on the table in this Legislature, Mr. Premier. Put them where your mouth is.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the poll that I referred to – and I've only referred to the one poll – is the poll that we used prior to the election campaign so we could address the issues. What we wanted to do – and this goes back to the election of 1997 – is identify the issues so our candidates, all 63 of those who were successful, could go out and address the issues.

Our polling showed that people were concerned, that their main priority was health care and education. Those were the priority items. Again, I have to reiterate that people were concerned about infrastructure, good municipal infrastructure: roads and water treatment plants and sewage treatment plants. People were concerned about their environment. People were concerned about programs for seniors. Mr. Speaker, people were concerned about taxation.

I didn't get a lot on the campaign trail about video lottery terminals or any other kind of gambling. It showed up in our polling at that particular time, polling that was paid for by the party. And I don't ask for their polling. Again, there would be no reason to ask for their polling. I don't ask for their party polling on these particular issues. Certainly I would agree that if we were to do polling today, perhaps the concern might be more paramount today than it was a year ago, because without doubt there is a lot of controversy surrounding this issue today in the advent of two major municipalities, mainly Calgary and Edmonton, dealing with the whole question of plebiscites.

THE SPEAKER: Second main opposition question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

#### **1:50 Emergency Hospital Services**

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the Premier's acknowledgement that health care is Albertans' number one concern, let me ask this. When you are being rushed to the hospital in an emergency, the very last thing you need to deal with is the fact that there might not be a bed for you. Yet this is the reality for too many patients in the Edmonton region, where the emergency rooms in all five acute care hospitals are once again full to capacity. For Edmontonians the prospect of having to spend precious minutes in the back of an ambulance trying to find a hospital that can take you may be scarier than the injury. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health. What happened to this government's promise of safe and accessible health care for every Albertan?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is the case that during the period of last night there was almost a continuous red alert with respect to the Royal Alex and periodically with respect to the University of Alberta hospital. This is a procedure which is common across hospital systems in terms of routing ambulances to the site of appropriate care. I'm advised that as of approximately 11:30 this morning the red alerts had ceased at any of the Capital region's hospitals. In terms of access to permanent beds, it's my understanding that currently there are two people waiting for admission at the University hospital in their emergency area, at the Sturgeon hospital one, and at the Royal Alex, which, as I've said, was the centre of activity last night, there are nine.

Mr. Speaker, to go beyond that, in terms of the long-term approach the Capital regional health authority has been adding to their capacity. They have added 18 acute care beds, they have added 24 long-term care beds, and they have just very recently opened a further dozen long-term care beds to take the pressure off the acute care side.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister would be good enough to share with Albertans what his new standard is for an acceptable number of red alerts. Is it once a week? Is it three nights a week? Four nights a week? What's the new standard that people in this city and this province should cope with?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, periodically a very busy time in emergencies is a fact of life within health care systems all across this country, and I think that is relevant because it is something that applies to the whole system. Upon checking with respect to Calgary, things were, yes, over this past day and weekend very busy at the Peter Lougheed, but I am advised that there were no red alerts in that particular city. Also, historically I think it is noted and agreed to by all that these months, late January, February, are the busiest times traditionally in the health care system, and that has been the case for a number of years.

I would like to just finally, Mr. Speaker, reiterate what I have just indicated. I have outlined a very significant addition of bed capacity in the Capital region, which I think shows that the Capital regional health authority and all of the people working there are planning and working very responsibly with respect to the situation that they are facing at this time of year.

MR. DICKSON: Since this government is giving the Capital regional health authority tens of millions of dollars less than what they say they need just to hold the line, does the minister expect and is he advising Albertans that we can expect more red alerts in the balance of 1998-1999?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I think the hon. member across the way is acknowledging, we have added a significant number of dollars to the budget of the Capital regional health authority. I outlined this in some detail - I believe it was only yesterday or perhaps a couple of days ago - with respect to the overall 7 percent increase in funding for the Capital health authority this year. If we go back to our previous injection of funds in November of '96, it brings it up I believe to about 15 percent over two years. So certainly we are responding to our priority in this area.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

#### **Child Welfare**

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, 52 children who received the protective care of government have died since 1994. I will table reports verifying those figures from the department itself. Yesterday the minister of social services stated that only 34 had died during the same period of time, suggesting that perhaps his department had no departmental responsibility for 18 who were no longer in care at the time of their death. It would seem that the government is attempting to shield itself from any responsibility on the basis that files were closed. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Were any of the deaths, 18 deaths, due to unnatural, undetermined, or suspicious causes?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there need to be a couple of clarifications. First of all, there have been 36 children in the last three years, from April 1, 1994, to January 15, 1998, that have died while in care of the department of social services. That's absolutely tragic. Any time a child dies, in our care especially, it is extremely tragic.

Mr. Speaker, I'll go through and tell you what those cases were. Sixteen cases were a result of acute disease. Five cases were sudden infant death syndrome, which raises a very interesting point on the medical side. Perhaps we should get into investigating why there's a higher incidence there. Three cases were involved in motor vehicle accidents. Four cases were suicide. One case was an accidental drowning. Three cases were natural causes, with the children being profoundly disabled. Two cases were injury caused by another. One case was a drug overdose. One case, as I explained yesterday, is still undetermined but appears to be acute disease.

The second point of clarification that needs to be made, Mr. Speaker, is the difference between in care and out of care. In care means that they are a direct responsibility of the government, the department of social services. We have supervision with them essentially constantly, and it's something that is extremely important to us. Out of care means that the children's parents or that the family unit is, for example, taking a counseling course or taking an anger management course or something to that degree from our department.

MR. MITCHELL: How many is too many?

2:00

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition just asked a very important question. The answer is too many. The answer . . .

#### **Speaker's Ruling Recognizing Members in Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: Actually one of the procedures that I'd been seriously thinking about reviewing is how the Speaker recognizes who will ask questions in question period. Normally our procedure right now is that an individual or caucus would notify the Speaker that that person has a question and then two supplementaries with it. But I've noticed that there've been a fair amount of interjections as we've gone through, and perhaps the revision to it might be that, sure, the Speaker would recognize the first person for the first question, and if there are a fair number of interjections from that particular caucus, we'll simply go to another member in that particular caucus who has made some statements, and do it that way.

I repeat, this matter is only under review, and at the moment I'll continue to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

#### **Child Welfare**

*(continued)*

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. I need to be clear on what the minister is saying. If a child is in care at some point during the reporting year that the department closes their file and then they die, you are saying, you are telling this Assembly that the department has no responsibility to investigate their role in the child's death? Yes or no.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again a very interesting question. What we do in any so-called out-of-care cases, if there is some-

thing that is suspicious at all, absolutely we look into it. If there's something that the medical examiner deems as being suspicious, the Fatality Review Board looks into it. I must reiterate that this line of questioning – this department, this government has absolutely nothing to hide.

MRS. SLOAN: If there is nothing to hide, will the minister put the record straight on how many children in fact have died and when his government will follow the lead of other provinces to enact public inquiries and full public reporting on the circumstances around children's deaths in care?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, this is a line of questioning that actually originated from Ontario approximately three or four years ago, where the press in Ontario jumped on the Ontario government. There is a clear line of procession of any child that dies while in care. It is very common; it is very clear as to what the procession is. What first happens is that a medical examiner declares whether or not it goes to the fatality review. It automatically goes to the Fatality Review Board. As the hon. Minister of Justice explained yesterday, the Fatality Review Board looks at each and every case of a child that dies in care from social services. If they deem it necessary, if they deem it essential, if they deem it in the taxpayers of Alberta's best interest, a fatality inquiry review then takes place. This is before a court. It's before a judge. It is a public document. Quite frankly, I will say again that if there is anything that is found that is lacking in this department, it will be looked after and our policy will be changed.

### Hospital Services

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I see that the Health minister is in fine form this afternoon talking about bed capacity in Edmonton. Well, I'd like to talk a little more about the shock therapy that this government has applied to Alberta's health care system, and I'll deal with facts. The fact is that in Edmonton hospitals are on red alert 40 percent of the time. And that was just last year; that was 1997. Who knows how much more it will be in 1998? The fact is that acute care beds per thousand population, but any old way you want to calculate it, have dropped by 44 percent in this city since the early 1990s and 34 percent in Calgary. I ask the minister a very simple question. Will the minister move immediately to free up the funds to reopen all of those hospital beds that got closed under this government's scalpel?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the government – and we'll give equal credit here to the Capital health authority – as I just indicated, has increased funding to the Capital health authority. The Capital health authority, operating I think in a very responsible way, has increased their acute care and long-term care bed capacity, as I outlined in answer to a previous question. So, Mr. Speaker, this is occurring.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, just to remind the hon. member, we have provided approval of funding for the expansion and reconfiguration on a more efficient basis of the University of Alberta hospital's emergency area. We have provided for additional funding for other particular capital projects, which further enhances the system's capacity. I think this overall direction is very important to put on the record.

Now, the overall baseline funding or budget allocation for the Capital health authority has been increased as previously outlined. I think the other comment that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that in the course of health care restructuring there has been a

shift, as I think all planners would agree, to home care and long-term care capacity and emphasis because of a need to respond to our aging population.

MS BARRETT: Is the government's determination to keep these hospital beds closed, the ones that used to be open, the ones that used to be available to acutely ill people now being occupied by long-term care patients because there are not long-term care beds for them – is it this government's policy to keep these beds closed so they can force frustrated people who are tired of sitting in emergency hallways for three days into the hands of private, for-profit health care deliverers?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. Government policy is to provide for adequate funding to our health authorities in this province. Secondly, it is to develop a continuum of care from emergency to acute to long-term care to community care. This is a trend. It is a model of the modern health care system, of the health care system of the future which we are aspiring towards.

In the case of the Capital health authority, I think particularly in responding to this overall trend, they are working in that direction. They have developed some innovative long-term care models such as Laurier House in conjunction with the Caritas group and the group there, the CHOICES program for seniors. That is our overall policy.

MS BARRETT: You know, even if the minister came up with the money, given that the Calgary General hospital is slated for demolition and the Holy Cross is going to be a private, multi-use facility, will the minister tell us how the Calgary regional authority could expand acute care beds without being forced to contract with private outfits such as HRG? They've got nowhere else to go.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to preface this answer by indicating that this is a time of year when, due to various medical conditions, particularly the flu epidemic, which I understand is the case in Calgary, hospitals are running at or near capacity. I outlined that in answer to a previous question.

I think the focus of the Calgary regional health authority has been during the past years on their reconfiguration of their acute care capacity. It's my understanding that they are now putting a further emphasis on long-term care services models within their system. No, Mr. Speaker, it does not have anything particularly to do with private health care.

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

2:10

### Natural Gas Pricing

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently many Alberta natural gas producers have indicated to me that the Alberta natural gas price is not on par with North American pricing. To the Minister of Energy: is this because of pipeline constraints?

MS BARRETT: Sit down.

MR. WEST: It's their question period too; isn't it?

The price of natural gas in North America varies for many reasons. You could say that El Niño this year and the warm weather that's been in North America has affected it, but that's general to both the United States and Canada. Those variables

affect both of them, but in Alberta here and in Canada, there are two things that affect the cost of natural gas: one is transportation, and the second is our pipeline constraints in order to get it to marketplace. Those two affect Alberta dramatically. The estimated cost to our Alberta producers because of pipeline constraint in a seamless system to our markets in the United States is between 75 and 85 cents per gigajoule on any given day.

MR. STRANG: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is: many producers in SEPAC and CAPP are concerned by the lack of direction by this government towards increasing pipeline take-away capacity. Does the province of Alberta support the Alliance Pipeline proposal? And I'm sitting down.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's evident by the first answer that the province of Alberta needs additional natural gas pipeline take-away capacity to our major market in the United States. Currently the proposed Alliance Pipeline project is before the National Energy Board. Alliance has acknowledged and accepts the ethane policy in this province, and as such this government supports the Alliance Pipeline project. It's expected to be one pipeline option that could help to bring the Alberta price and the North American price closer together. I trust that the National Energy Board will ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in hearing this application and will render a decision in an expeditious manner.

MR. STRANG: Mr. Speaker, will the recent merger between Nova and TransCanada PipeLines have any effect on the price differential?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, again, that is a new merger that's coming forward between Nova and TransCanada PipeLines, and the provincial government supports that merger. There is good reason to suspect that they, along with some of the other pipelines proposed, will bring good competitive margins to our producers in the province of Alberta. TransCanada PipeLines and Nova do not compete. One is a domestic distribution system, and one is in the export business. So they make a good merger. It makes a seamless system from our producer in the basin right through to the markets wherever they be in the United States, as we have today.

One other thing is that TransCanada had proposed a Viking Voyageur line which will take product down into the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. I have met with those governors, and they are encouraged by any proposal which will bring that to fruition. I think that if the previous Alliance, the proposed pipeline Viking Voyageur, and this merger go ahead, we will see a good shift for our producers in the province of Alberta.

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

### Community Lottery Boards

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community Development said the other day that to get the share of the community lottery board money, the municipalities would have to pay the administration costs themselves. On the same day in Calgary the Minister of Municipal Affairs seemed to announce that the province would pay for these administration costs. I would like to address this to the minister responsible for community lottery boards. Who are Albertans to believe? The Minister of Municipal Affairs or the Minister of Community Development?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there was a discussion in Calgary with the municipal government in Calgary around the issue of community lottery boards and the administration costs associated with them. All members of the Assembly probably are aware that when they received their material, their guidelines on community lottery boards, the government said that they would expend \$1 million over and above the \$50 million in the program to assist community lottery boards in the administration of that, understanding that there are costs associated with the cutting of cheques, with tracking, reporting, promotional material, brochures, things like that. So we had made that commitment.

What happened in Calgary was that it was simply a miscommunication, a misunderstanding, as to the \$1 million, and there was a feeling that this was a new \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, there is no new \$1 million. I wrote a letter to Mayor Duerr and councillors and clarified that for them. I think there is a full understanding that we are committing \$1 million to the administration of this very valuable program. It will be distributed to all of the communities that apply for it in this province this next year.

MR. GIBBONS: So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that all those people in Alberta that read the Calgary papers get the letter too.

My first supplementary is: why does the government insist on always downloading onto municipalities to pay for provincial programs?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the media, but I don't do all of my research in the local papers. I don't think that probably every Albertan does either. The people who are in the communities have received this information, and I think that's been clarified.

Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand how contributing \$50 million over one year to the communities in this province, to volunteer groups in this province is anything that could possibly be called downloading. In fact my discussions with municipalities are that they welcome this money for facilities that are in there.

I just went over the process of dealing with the administrative costs that will be associated with this program. We consider our programs partnerships. I must say, frankly, so do most municipalities. We are asking municipalities to support their community lottery boards, perhaps provide them a meeting room, maybe even a pot of coffee when they have a meeting. But the heavy administration costs are going to be borne by the \$1 million from this government over and above the \$50 million. The one thing that people told us is that they do not want these valuable community program dollars eaten up in unnecessary administration.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting to listen to all this because in the last few months we've witnessed the transfer from one ministry to another and it's dropped from \$18.61 per to \$18.

My second supplementary: why does the minister feel that her department needs 2 percent, or \$1 million, to write cheques when the municipalities are getting nothing?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if the hon. member would take the time to read the news releases and the program information – the editorial comment that preceded his question on the difference between, I don't know if he said \$18.61 or \$18.21, which was one figure that was given, and the \$18 – he would have noticed that it said approximately. He would also

understand that it's by population. So we will divide the \$50 million by the population figure. It's simple math, and it will work, and it is approximately \$18 per capita. It could be \$18.01. It could be \$18.05. We will use the best up-to-date population figures.

Mr. Speaker, we are contributing \$1 million in administrative costs to this program. We want to make sure that the \$50 million in video lottery terminal revenue is disbursed across this province to the communities for community programs that they deem priorities. It is interesting: I have not had one call from one community group in this province – and I have checked with the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who is chair of the secretariat; nor has she – that disagrees with this program.

2:20

### Private Health Services

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Health announced plans to introduce legislation during this session to give him the authority to control or prohibit private health facilities wishing to provide inpatient surgical services. Concerns have been raised in my constituency regarding the possibility of government approval of private hospitals. My question is to the Minister of Health. Would he please explain to the House his intention regarding the purpose of this proposed legislation?

### Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member and hon. minister, the chair interjected yesterday in a similar type of question dealing with forthcoming legislation as raised by the hon. leader of the ND opposition, and I would be consistent again today. This is not the place to discuss legislation in this House, so phrase the question very specifically. We'll have ample opportunity over the next several months to discuss legislation.

### Private Health Services

*(continued)*

MRS. O'NEILL: My question, then, is to the minister. Could you explain whether this proposed legislation will have any impact . . .

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. I think we'll move on to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

### Hydrochloric Acid Vapour Leak

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last September the people who live in the northern part of Red Deer, in the surrounding community, were subjected to a 30 kilometre cloud of toxic vapour. This toxic vapour leaked from a leased temporary storage tank. Breathing hydrochloric vapour can cause serious respiratory ailments and even death. The incident investigation report released by the Department of Labour had a startling conclusion: the storage tank was not suitable to contain this corrosive material. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Since the Alberta fire code requires that an inspector be notified when a storage tank is leased or relocated, why did your department not identify this serious problem despite the fact that there were two other leaks that occurred at this same site before the September incident?

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Clearly a very technical question, talking about specifics. We'll take the question under

advisement. I do know that the occupational health and safety team located in Red Deer was Johnny-on-the-spot. They had evaluated the issue and then further to that made subsequent field visits and followed up with an incident report.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, does Johnny-on-the-spot mean four days? It took them four days to start this investigation.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it means, as I said earlier, that a site investigation was made from Red Deer and then they subsequently went out to the site.

MR. MacDONALD: A final supplemental. I can imagine the travel time costs for the inspectors from downtown Edmonton to just north of the city limits.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you raised a question.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I will report and advise the member on travel costs associated with that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### High School Departmental Exams

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On numerous occasions the Minister of Education has urged the school boards and the schools to find new, innovative, and alternative ways to deliver education. Forest Lawn high school in my constituency presently operates under the Copernican or quarter system. This system has proven to be very beneficial. The cancellation of the November and April departmental examinations by the minister creates a major barrier to this program. Can the minister explain to the 1,200 students at the Forest Lawn high school, their teachers, and their parents, the rationale behind this arbitrary decision?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all I'd like to say that the decision to cancel November and April sittings of departmental exams was not arbitrary. While this government is committed to promoting innovative ways of delivering education, we must also be fiscally responsible. The cost of providing those additional exam sittings was roughly \$1 million, but only about 2 percent of the students who were writing diploma exams were writing in November and April. As an example, in the English departmental exams roughly 25,000 students wrote the English diploma exams in 1996-97, but only 406 of them wrote in the month of November.

I do recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the issue raised by the hon. member is not only an issue because of the quarter-mester system in Forest Lawn but also in other schools that operate on the Copernican school system. I have heard of the concerns of his constituents as well as others in other parts of the province, and I have directed officials in my department to meet with the principals and the administrators from those schools that operate with a Copernican or quarter system, such as Forest Lawn high school, to discuss options so that we can promote not only the flexibility and the innovation of the quarter-mester system, but also do so within our fiscal parameters.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Forest Lawn high school is considered a high-needs school and it is so important for the school and the students to keep operating under this

system, would the minister commit to a meeting with Mr. Morgan, the principal, and Mr. Fred Graham, chairman of the school council, to discuss this very serious issue so that this issue can be resolved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, you know, there are roughly 1,800 schools in the province, and I have been to hundreds of them to meet with school councils and principals and administrators. Because of the nature of this problem being as serious as it is and our desire to try and resolve it in a manner that's still fiscally responsible but allows the quarter-mester system to continue, I would be pleased to make that commitment.

### Health Care Costs

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, in the middle of negotiations between Alberta doctors and the government of Alberta, the president of the Alberta Medical Association has now said that his membership has only been able to find a pittance – I believe that's the word he used – of the planned-for savings in physician services and drug costs, even though the \$100 million that was being sought was a key feature of the last agreement that the government had with the doctors. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Will the minister please inform the Assembly if the president of the AMA is right, if in fact it is only a pittance, and how much of the sought-for \$100 million in cost savings has actually been achieved?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to first of all agree with the hon. member across the way. The matter that I am agreeing with him on is that, yes, we are in the middle of the negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, certainly there was a goal that was part of the last agreement with the Alberta Medical Association whereby the parties involved – in this case, specifically the doctors – had agreed to make their best efforts to achieve an overall savings of, I believe, \$100 million but specifically \$50 million with respect to drug utilization. To this point in time, although I am sure there have been efforts, there has been no identifiable savings achieved.

The one caution I think I would make about saying that there's absolutely no saving involved is that we do have the rising costs of drugs, and they are continuing to go up, but perhaps there has been some effective effort to slow down that rising trend as far as drug costs are concerned.

MR. SAPERS: I'm glad the minister mentioned the planned drug savings, Mr. Speaker. Will he confirm that at least the \$50 million in scheduled drug cost savings will continue to be a feature of the current negotiations between the government and the AMA?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I agree with the hon. member that we are in the midst of negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association, and all I think it would be proper to indicate at this time is that in the course of our negotiations we are certainly talking and discussing and working towards coming to agreement on measures which will make the system more effective and efficient.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Health is leaving the appearance that he's blaming the AMA for the failure to find these cost savings, will the minister please confirm exactly

how much of the \$50 million the minister's own drug expert committee said could be achieved? How much did your own committee say could be saved?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I might very briefly, I think I do have to comment on the preamble to his question. I fully recognize that physicians are a very, very important and integral part of our health care system. They, along with the nurses, aides, technicians – everybody in the health care system has worked very hard during the past number of years to improve our health care system and make it more effective and efficient. I'll answer the question, but with that type of preamble, I think that deserves a response.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the expert drug committee that is alluded to here, that was not the centre of discussions on policies and efforts to bring down drug costs. We do have, however, a joint committee or body in the province called the pharmacological institute, which involves pharmacists, doctors, and other people in the health care system who work at identifying possible drug savings. The \$50 million was identified in the last round in the negotiating process as a result of some consultations back and forth with that body.

### Student Finance

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, some young adults, some single parents, and some young married couples are facing different financial barriers when they opt to further their education in postsecondary institutions. My question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Mr. Minister, would you inform the assembly what the average ages are of students attending both technical and postsecondary advanced education institutions? [interjections]

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, it has tremendous ramifications on student finance. You just can't get around it, because the higher the average age is in our postsecondary system, the more challenges student finance has. I stand here ready to answer the question if you'll allow it. Thank you very much.

Heather Wilkie, who is the elected leader of the college and technical students, at a public standing policy committee on Monday evening indicated that in her opinion college students ranged in age from 26 to 28, and I believe her.

We have a situation in Alberta. We know from our own statistics that by the time an Albertan reaches the age of 26, they have the highest incidence of postsecondary education experience of any province in Canada. We're very proud of that. We'll welcome Albertans of any age into our system.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My loaded supplementary to the minister is this: what is the average debt load of the average student who graduates from our postsecondary institutions?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I know the average is \$12,000, which is of course significant, but when we start to look at university students, I think we need to pay particular attention in that area. What we have is, first of all, that about 50 percent of the students in our postsecondary system at the university level don't get involved in student loans through our department, but of those that do, we would find that probably the average debt would be something in the order of \$16,000 to \$17,000. This is a significant amount.



We've been trying to work at the front end of this with our Alberta opportunity bursary program. We work through while they're at school because we'll pick up the interest cost on that. We're now looking at the end game with this, and we're talking very seriously with the federal government to get them to join Alberta in a remission system. We think we can make a significant move against student debt by having a remittance program both on the federal and the provincial sides.

MR. McFARLAND: Will the minister responsible review the policy, particularly for those students who don't normally reside near the institution of their choice, which governs student loan financing when loan/lease cost vehicles are compared to personally owned, high-maintenance cost vehicles, and that consequently results in a problem to the applicant for a loan?

MR. DUNFORD: Yeah, I think that's fair enough. I think that is something we need to look at. We have some anecdotal evidence of course that comes through the system. You'll have a single mother with four children that has to drive, in some cases through winter, to get to her postsecondary education. You know, I think most of us as reasonable people would expect that she would have access to a reasonable vehicle. On the other hand, we have young, single men who, as we are wont to do at times, attempt to show masculinity through having some sort of Dodge Ram or big, heavy Chevy that they're using a lease arrangement with, and we think it's quite legitimate for us to say: "Look. Family income and family support is extremely important for a postsecondary education system. The family has a responsibility here, and we mean to have them exercise that responsibility as meaningfully as possible." After all, it's we taxpayers of this province that are underwriting this whole program.

THE SPEAKER: The time for question period has now left us. We have one point of order, one request under Standing Order 30, one request under Standing Order 40, and we will take them in that order.

First of all, the point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

#### **Point of Order Tabling a Cited Document**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise citing *Beauchesne* 495, in particular subsections (2), (4), and (5). *Beauchesne* 495 deals with documents cited during debate. Earlier in question period today the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, made reference to a poll, The Spectrum of Gaming: Challenges and Opportunities, and the Leader of the Official Opposition is more than willing to table the required numbers of copies of this poll in the Assembly should that be required. However, in response to the question raised by the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier referred to other polls several times. He obviously introduced those polls in a manner that would influence debate, and therefore I would request that under *Beauchesne* 495 and precedent established in this House I believe by Speaker Carter, when a document is cited directly for the purposes of influencing debate, the member be called upon to table that document in the required numbers as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, the reference which the Premier made to a poll was one which he stated had

been conducted by the party. He actually did not raise the matter of polls but rather was simply trying to respond that the polling that the party had done indicated quite clearly that VLTs were not a significant issue. He was just simply trying to answer the question as best he could, and I don't see a need for him to table that poll.

**2:40**

THE SPEAKER: No further comments on this from any hon. member?

The Blues make very, very interesting reading with respect to this, and I quote Mr. Klein:

Mr. Speaker, the poll that I referred to, and I've only referred to the one poll, is the poll that we used prior to the election campaign so we could address the issues. What we wanted to do – and this goes back to the election of 1997 – is we wanted to identify the issues so our candidates, all 63 of those who were successful, could go out and address the issues.

Further, there's comment from the Premier with respect to funding of a poll that was done by sources of funds other than government funds, in this case party funds, and that is not required to be tabled. Further, I must say that there was an alluding to polls but no citing of any specific information from a poll. *Beauchesne* makes it very, very clear under 495, documents cited. But the point is that if the, quote, poll in question has been paid for by funds other than government funds, then there's not a requirement to be tabled in this House.

#### **head: Request for Emergency Debate Hospital Emergency Bed Availability**

THE SPEAKER: Now we have a Standing Order 30, and perhaps all members would want to refer to their Standing Orders to see exactly the procedure for a Standing Order 30. This is the first one that we've had to deal with in this session, and it's to be dealt with in matter and procedure other than a Standing Order 40.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe the pages have now distributed to all members copies of the motion. I'm seeking leave at this point to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the shortage of hospital emergency beds in the province.

I'll speak briefly in favour of my request for this relief, and I know my colleagues from Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Riverview wish to make brief arguments in support as well.

Mr. Speaker the health of those Albertans requiring emergency medical care is what's at issue, and I respectfully urge all members to consider there can be no more important issue than the health, safety, and well-being of those Albertans that we've been elected to represent. There's nothing that this Assembly could deal with or discuss that ought to or should take precedence over a matter of the physical safety of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, a red alert condition represents a crisis in a city's emergency department, and this condition is becoming increasingly frequent. In fact, last year for more than 30 percent of the available hours that Edmonton hospitals operated, they operated under a red alert condition, and despite assurances from the government and from the regional health authority that these would be resolved and ameliorated, what we find is that the same condition is happening even more frequently to this point in 1998. Then we had the incident just days ago of one gentleman traveling for 75 minutes to find an emergency bed in this city. This is an

Edmonton resident, not somebody living 200 kilometres away. My sources at the Foothills and Rockyview and Lougheed hospitals in Calgary confirm that the same kind of problem is happening there. Emergency medical services in the city of Calgary are also finding themselves in a crisis situation simply all too regularly.

We simply do not have an adequate number of beds. There's absolutely no elasticity in terms of our emergency bed capacity, and all of this problem is compounded and aggravated, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that the Capital and Calgary regional health authorities have indicated that the failure of the government and Alberta Health in particular to meet their financial needs will have serious impact in reductions in service throughout their respective systems.

So for those reasons I want to urge every member of this Assembly to support – and of course I want to urge you, Mr. Speaker – and to recognize the compelling urgency of this particular issue and enable the kind of debate that I think has to happen and has to happen this afternoon.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to support this motion that has been presented to this House by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. The city emergency wards are in crisis. This crisis has gone on too long. We all know about the unfortunate 75-minute ambulance ride that occurred on Sunday. The only positive thing I can say about this is that it did not happen during the workweek during rush hour. This patient was rushed to St. Albert, where it was realized that there was no ICU, intensive care unit. They had to take this patient back to the Royal Alex. Fortunately, the red alert was off at the Royal Alex by the time the ambulance arrived. This is an issue that concerns all of northern Alberta. Thirty-three percent of the hospital beds in this city are occupied by people from communities in northern Alberta. I urge the House to allow debate on this motion.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members are well aware, Standing Order 30 is the process to adjourn the normal business of the Legislature to deal with an issue of urgent public importance. After noting the motion for a Standing Order 30 debate, I would recommend the Assembly not be directed or vote in favour of this particular motion. The issue of the number of emergency beds in this province is important to this government, and I would like to assure members of the Assembly accordingly, and of course all Albertans, but it is not a matter that requires an immediate debate by this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is the result, I believe, of a front-page story in the *Edmonton Journal* this morning. It is true that the emergency wards of the Edmonton area hospitals experience a high volume of patients at this time of year, just as do emergency rooms in hospitals across Canada at this time of year. It is the peak season for flu, for colds, for pneumonia, for falls due to slippery sidewalks, and for road accidents. However, I have been in contact with the Capital health authority, and I can assure this Assembly that the Capital health authority is appropriately managing the situation, as do all hospitals at this time of year.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain to the members present what a red alert actually entails. Red alert is the name given to the process whereby ambulances can be diverted from one emergency area of one particular hospital that is experiencing short-term peak in volumes to the emergency ward of another less busy hospital. The whole intent of red alerts is to ensure that patients receive the best possible care in a timely manner. It should also be remembered that even when a hospital is on so-called red alert, it will still accept a critically ill patient requiring immediate attention.

Just as an example, Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the Capital health authority has opened 24 additional long-term care beds, 18 additional acute care beds, and five additional transition beds in the past few weeks to deal with this normal seasonal increase in volumes. As well, the health authority has advised me that it will be opening another 12 long-term care beds immediately to help ease the pressure on acute care beds. It is clear that the authority is dealing in a responsible and professional manner with the increased number of emergency room patients.

In an overall context, Mr. Speaker, because it has been alluded to, I would also like to point out that funding for the Capital health authority was increased by \$81 million this year and will be increased by another \$40 million for the coming year, along with a onetime allocation of \$12 million for medical equipment. This extra funding gives the authority the ability and the capacity to address pressure points, such as the current situation, as they occur. In fact, I've been advised that as of noon today there are no red alerts on in the Capital health authority. No red alerts on in the Capital health authority.

Mr. Speaker, I have also – and it was referred to in the statement on the motion – contacted the Calgary regional health authority regarding their emergency room situation at the present time. They have advised me that they are busy this time of year. Last night the Peter Lougheed centre was extremely busy, but they are not in a situation where they have had to go to the measure of declaring a red alert at any of their facilities.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, let me say that fluctuations in the volume of patients in hospital emergency wards are normal. They are emergency wards, and therefore the number of cases can never be predicted. This is the traditional high demand season, and high volumes are expected. The Capital health authority is managing the increased volumes as they should be, and all patients are receiving quality care.

Based on this information, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Assembly that while the regional health authorities are under pressure at this time of year, they are managing the system to ensure that patients are served. I respectfully suggest to the Assembly that there is no need to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to debate the motion presented by the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

2:50

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is timely and important, and I urge you to rule on its urgency and to rule that this debate has to take place today.

Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. We cannot tell our constituents one more day: don't worry about it; the government is here to help. We cannot tell our constituents one more hour: it's all right; don't worry about those red alerts. What the Minister of Health fails to understand as he tries to downplay the urgency of

this motion is that there has been this incremental gain, this incremental creep, really, in what's happened in emergency rooms throughout this city, throughout this province.

What used to be considered an emergency, what used to be considered critical, what used to be considered a red alert is now commonplace. It now happens every day. It's now the norm. That's the sad truth. So when the system actually goes to red alert now, it means that we are maxed out, we are peaked, and that happens more and more frequently.

Any time that you spend with an emergency room nurse or doctor or a paramedic or an ambulance driver is time that will be well spent, and the one consistent message that they will give you is that the system can't handle the emergency volume. It can't handle it in this region. It can't handle it in most regions in this province. In fact, the Capital health region has the largest volume of emergency demands placed upon it in the province. The Royal Alexandra hospital in the downtown of this city is one of the busiest downtown emergency hospitals anywhere in this country, and it goes on red alert more frequently now than it ever has in the past. This is dangerous for the people in this province that rely on emergency care. It can't go on.

We are about to enter budget debate. We are about to enter debate on the estimates of this government, where they're going to be putting forward the details of their spending plan, which they have pledged to Albertans will fix up the mess that they made. We are going to be called upon, every man and woman in this Assembly, to debate those estimates and to come to some reasonable conclusion whether or not the amount of money that this government says it might spend on health care will be adequate to meet the need. We need to make sure that that budget debate is informed by the facts, informed by the kind of debate that should take place on the floor of this Assembly today to examine the crisis in emergency access today. It can't wait. It can't wait another minute, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: I'd like to speak to the urgency of this matter, Mr. Speaker. When a hospital system in Edmonton is on red alert 40 percent of the time – and that was just last year – things are worse. Yes, we are at a peak season. The minister is right. So things are even worse than 40 percent now, and that should be pretty obvious.

Let me just give you some statistics to tell you the urgency of this matter. In 1993 there were 3.3 hospital beds available per thousand population in this city. We're down to 1.8 beds per thousand population. Even Calgary, Mr. Speaker, is faring better. They started off in 1993 at 3.2 beds per thousand population. They're down to 2.1. But they're doing better than Edmonton.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, having ushered my mother through the emergency system over a three and a half year period, I have seen nothing but deterioration. It broke my heart to watch my poor mother, who could not even get a gurney in the hospital, couldn't get a gurney for 13 hours, stretched over a chair while I'm trying to hold her body to help ease her agonizing pain. If you think it was bad then, it's even worse now. Just go to emergency. Have a look at what it's like.

The bills that are scheduled to be discussed today are private members' bills and they're opposition bills. If the Official Opposition wants to adjourn those bills to discuss this matter, I urge members to agree with them.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark rose a little earlier, and I'm prepared to recognize her and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. Perhaps there should be something further added to the context of the debate at this point in time. The standing order provides some latitude with respect to this, but urgency is the issue.

MS LEBOVICI: Definitely, Mr. Speaker. I agree, and there can be nothing more urgent than the health care of Albertans throughout this province. When we look at the Edmonton area in particular and we hear the sad tales of individuals who have not been able to access health care, who have had to lie in emergency waiting for beds, when we hear of the backups that are occurring and the many stories of individuals who are shuffled from hospital to hospital in ambulances without the care that they require, there can be nothing more urgent than to discuss that this afternoon. The reality is, as the hon. member from the New Democrat opposition indicated, that this is a private members' day, and as a result, I would urge the government to respect the wishes of the opposition parties on both sides of this House and agree to this urgent debate.

I have in my riding, as you are well aware, a hospital. It's called the Misericordia hospital. On any given day you can walk into that hospital and into that emergency room and look at the board. They have a board, which I'm sure every hospital throughout the province has, in emergency, and they have the names of the individuals with red dots, I believe, beside them who cannot access the beds that they require. The last time I was there, there were 14 individuals who could not access the beds they required in emergency and could not get the care they required.

I know that we have heard this from other members in this Legislative Assembly. There is a responsibility on each and every one of the members on the government and the opposition sides of the House to deal with this critical issue of health care. It's not good enough anymore, Mr. Minister, to say: it is in the budget. The reality is that it is not in the budget and it is not addressed adequately in the budget. We know that because of the Premier's television commercial that he provided three weeks ago. The regional health authorities . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. We are into the question of urgency, and I think I've heard enough. Standing Order 30 clearly provides the authority in this decision not to the House but to the Speaker. Quite frankly, the Speaker is kind of disappointed. He hasn't heard anybody give rational arguments as to what's so urgent about this. If the question is: the government should decide . . . [interjections] Listen; listen. I'm making this comment, and I'm going to go through it very, very carefully because Standing Order 30s are very important orders, and the Speaker will periodically allow such urgent debate, provided there are arguments that are provided by the hon. members to this effect. So let's read Standing Order 30(2). It talks about urgency, and that is the question, of urgency.

Now, I received notification of this particular item earlier this morning, as was very appropriate, and I spent nearly three and a half hours doing my research on the question of urgency with respect to this matter. Under Standing Order 30(7)(a) it says, "The matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency." The quote: "genuine emergency." One of the interesting things about genuine emergency is that there is no clear clarification from all members. We certainly heard a difference

of opinion with respect to it, and one could almost conclude that if you are going to have differences of opinion on what constitutes a genuine emergency, then perhaps there is some difficulty in arriving at that, if there is genuine emergency with respect to this.

3:00

Given the importance of the issue, I want to note some other things. I have studied the Order Paper. I looked at the Order Paper and read all the motions that are on the Order Paper, and I found only two motions that relate, perhaps even indirectly, to this question of hospital emergency beds: Motion 546 and Motion 562. As well, we've had some debate over the last several days with respect to Bill 201, which has been before the House, a few minutes remaining yet today. I listened attentively. I read the text and I read the debate earlier today, and I found very few examples relating to emergency bed problems in that debate.

I read the questions, again in *Hansard*, that were raised on Wednesday last, on Thursday last, on Monday – yes, I read it yesterday as well; it was done yesterday – and today was the first day that this question of emergency beds actually came up. Members have had opportunity since last Wednesday in response to the Speech from the Throne, and I've read all the comments given by all the members on the Speech from the Throne and only two – two – indirect references to this subject matter, and they were done in only a few lines from all the text that was given. Members have had opportunity as well over the last number of days to provide members' statements. One member, and one member only, again indirectly referred to this matter. So the question here is genuine emergency.

Today in the question period five minutes plus were devoted to the questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. The leader of the NDP opposition's questions extended to some six minutes with respect to this matter.

A Standing Order 30 is put to this Assembly. Arguments have to be made, should not be made by the Speaker – the Speaker is asked to make a ruling on it. It is up to the hon. members to make the arguments with respect to the point of genuine emergency, and quite frankly, in this case I've taken a little more time than I would normally have taken in terms of responding to the ruling that I'm going to give, but this does not meet the requirements under Standing Order 30.

A Standing Order 40, the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Glenora*.

MR. MITCHELL: The red alert was on the weekend, and we heard about it this morning.

THE SPEAKER: I've ruled on this matter. Members had an opportunity to provide that input when I gave great, great leverage in terms of doing this. Please, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for your clarification, and perhaps you can provide that today, or perhaps you can address the Assembly at a later date. I just want to have a clear understanding of your ruling.

It seems to me that previous Speakers have ruled in this Assembly on questions put under Standing Order 30 that because in fact there have been previous opportunities for debate, because in fact there have been questions raised in question period, because there have been bills or motions on the Order Paper, the issue isn't an urgent matter because there are other opportunities to debate it. If I understood your ruling on this Standing Order 30, you have said that because it hasn't been raised in another context, because it wasn't recognized in throne speech debate, or

because it isn't directly referred to in other legislative instruments, it can't be considered urgent or a crisis.

So I'm just wondering, Mr. Speaker, if you could clarify for the Assembly whether that's a new precedent and a new standard that you're establishing and that we should therefore ignore previous rulings, or if there's some other way that you could explain that contradiction.

THE SPEAKER: There's no contradiction, hon. member. If the hon. member had been listening to what the Speaker had said, it would be very, very clear to him.

But now having been invited to provide further information on this matter, the chair would be very happy to do it by way of explanation. When an hon. member says, "We've known about this since Sunday," the Speaker says: why wasn't it raised on Monday?

MR. MITCHELL: It happened on Sunday.

THE SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Gold Bar* in his remarks with respect to urgency . . . [interjections] I'm explaining this out of courtesy to the Member for Edmonton-*Glenora*, who happens to be the Opposition House Leader. Now, Opposition House Leader, if you cannot control your forces, I won't give you the explanation out of courtesy to you. You've asked for the question; you shall get the response.

If an hon. member who stands in this House and wants to make an argument for urgency says: "We've known about this since Sunday. This is a matter of genuine urgency," this now being Wednesday, the chair says: why wasn't it raised on Monday?

MS BARRETT: Because we didn't know.

THE SPEAKER: You didn't know? Well, I'm sorry. That's enough of that then. I mean if you're four days late, I can't make further comment.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-*Glenora*, proceed with your Standing Order 40.

MR. SAPERS: I take it we'll have a chance to talk in your office, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate that.

THE SPEAKER: Do you want to deal with your Standing Order 40? Would you like to deal with it?

MR. SAPERS: I'm saying that sincerely.

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, I am moving directly to my Standing Order 40, and this, too, is urgent, and I didn't find out about this a moment earlier than I provided you notice, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

**U of A Selection as Site for Civil Law Institute**

MR. SAPERS: The issue is that the University of Alberta law school has been selected after a national search to be the site for the Canadian Bar Association program or initiative that's loosely known as the civil law institute.

Mr. Speaker, it has often been said that Canadians and in fact

Albertans and in particular Edmontonians do not celebrate their achievements quickly, loudly, or often enough. I think that it behooves this Assembly to seize upon the opportunity at the earliest possible moment to recognize this significant achievement and to forthwith issue our congratulations in recognizing the efforts of the University of Alberta Faculty of Law and in particular the academic director of the newly formed institute, June Ross.

THE SPEAKER: Well, in the case of Standing Order 40s it's not the Speaker who has the privilege of providing some comments; it's the whole House who does. So now I give it to the whole House. Might we have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora? All those in favour, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? It's carried. Please proceed.

Mr. Sapers moved:

Be it resolved that this Assembly congratulate the University of Alberta law school for being selected as the site for the civil law institute, a research initiative of the Canadian Bar Association, and recognize the efforts of June Ross, the academic director of the institute.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'm tempted to say that I'm speechless, but you wouldn't believe me. I don't want to do anything that would take away from the sincerity of the congratulations which I would like to participate in, and I would encourage members to join with me as we recognize the achievements of the University of Alberta law school. I think the irony of the earlier debate will not be lost on any reviewer of *Hansard* in times to come.

Mr. Speaker, the University of Alberta law school has been selected recently as the site of the civil law institute. This is a national program which will bring opportunities for Albertans to be at the cutting edge of reforms that will be dealing with the complexity, the cost, and the timeliness of seeking remedies through civil court proceedings. This will, I believe, work hand in hand with the Minister of Justice's commitment to review the justice system and his recently announced justice task force, which I understand he's invited members of the opposition to participate in, and I believe that task force will be able to contribute through its work to the work of the newly formed civil law institute.

Anybody who has had the necessity to seek remedies in civil court knows of the frustration firsthand because of the complex procedures, because of the length of time it takes, because of the cost of filing motions and having to keep on top of so many details, having to constantly return to their lawyer for advice, and often that adds to the expense. So I think that anybody who has ever come across that kind of frustration should be applauding the work of the University of Alberta law school in working with the Canadian Bar Association to see that this initiative takes flight and also for making sure that it happens right here in Alberta.

Before I sit down and allow other members to join in the recognition, I would like to make special note of June Ross, a faculty member at the University of Alberta law school who has been named as the academic director for the institute.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As a 1971

graduate of the University of Alberta law school I'm very proud to join the debate and offer my congratulations as well on the selection of the U of A law school as the site of the civil law institute. I was thinking that it's so entirely appropriate that it be at the University of Alberta where the civil law institute should be located, because it's been in this jurisdiction in the province of Alberta where, I suggest, both our Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench have provided absolutely outstanding leadership in terms of trying to find ways to make the civil law system more accessible to Albertans, more effective for Albertans.

3:10

I don't have to go further than to cite the leadership of Chief Justice Moore and his court in the development they've done with minitrials, with special chambers applications, a very aggressive case management program. I think of what's been done by our Court of Appeal, which probably has the highest degree of computer literacy of any appellate court anywhere in Canada. I just think we've shown a great deal of leadership in this province through the initiatives of both bar and bench.

In terms of alternative dispute resolution, an area where so much can be done – and the scope in the area of civil law is just enormous, and I think this kind of a research centre will simply help facilitate and promote more of that work, which we've seen to such great advantage. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it's Albertans who benefit from the kind of work that will be undertaken at the civil law institute.

For all those reasons I'm happy to add my congratulations. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also offer congratulations to the University of Alberta's law school not only from our ministry but also from the government caucus, that I'm so proud to be a part of. While other speakers before me have talked specifically to the law school and the justice angle, I simply want to point out to all Albertans that being able to attract the civil law institute, sited at the University of Alberta, is just another expression of the quality of the postsecondary education system that we have in this province. Time after time we get recognized either at the university, at the college, at the technical school, or at the Alberta vocational school level, and this is simply another expression of that. Again, on behalf of the caucus that I represent and our ministry, we want to offer congratulations to the law school and congratulations to June Ross.

[Motion carried]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 201**  
**Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights**

[Debate adjourned February 3: Mr. Stevens speaking]

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

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I concluded my remarks by noting that there is at least one piece of Alberta legislation which ensures Albertans have access to a comprehensive health system when needed, and that is the Regional Health Authorities Act. Section 5 states that a regional health authority shall:

- (i) promote and protect the health of the population in the health region and work towards the prevention of disease and injury,
- (ii) assess on an ongoing basis the health needs of the health region,
- (iii) determine priorities in the provision of health services in the health region and allocate resources accordingly,
- (iv) ensure that reasonable access to quality health services is provided in and through the health region, and
- (v) promote the provision of health services in a manner that is responsive to the needs of individuals and communities and supports the integration of services and facilities in the health region.

We do need to have a health care system that is accessible, accountable, and responsive to the needs of our communities. Obviously it is the right of all Albertans. But we do not need Bill 201 to do this, and there is no reason to support Bill 201.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it was just last week that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods read Longfellow in this Assembly. I recall thinking at the time that it was indeed a fine idea that the immortal words of a poet would be used to reflect an idea here. So this past weekend I was rereading a poem, and I found myself thinking of Bill 201 and the fact that it lacked purpose. Interestingly, I was also reminded of the comments of the hon. Leader of the Opposition in his response to the throne speech, comments which in my view were sadly absent of substance but long on unreal, unfounded despair.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude my remarks today by reading the first and last stanzas of that poem. Unfortunately time does not permit more. That poem is T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, and it reads as follows:

We are the hollow men  
 We are the stuffed men  
 Leaning together  
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
 Our dried voices, when  
 We whisper together  
 Are quiet and meaningless  
 As wind in dry grass  
 Or rats' feet over broken glass  
 In our dry cellar . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: We have a point of order. Hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, a citation, please.

**Point of Order**  
**Reflections on a Member**

MRS. SOETAERT: Standing Orders 23(h), (i), (j). I find it very

insulting that the member across the way would be so personal and describe a member on any side of the House through a poem that is quite insulting. Certainly they can attack policies or bills, as many of us do in this House, but when you get into personal attacks on people, I find that quite insulting and quite beneath the member. I'm sure his vocabulary is so extensive that he doesn't need to be personal.

MR. STEVENS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I made it abundantly clear that I was commenting on comments, and I am using perfectly legitimate, classical poetry to do that. It was not an attack on the hon. member but a comment on his comments.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, there seems to be a difference of opinion. But, again, let's be nice to one another.

Please continue.

**Debate Continued**

MR. STEVENS: So I left off at this point:

Shape without form, shade without colour,  
 Paralysed force, gesture without motion . . .  
 This is the way the world ends  
 This is the way the world ends  
 This is the way the world ends  
 Not with a bang but a whimper.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, interestingly enough, under this ruling that we have in terms of the minutes, I think there was probably just a fraction of the seconds left. I was going to interrupt with five minutes left to give you the thing, but I see nobody else moving, so I gather there are no other speakers that want to speak on this. No additional speakers? Well, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate on Bill 201.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today in this Legislative Assembly, with respect to the government's response to our Standing Order 30 on red alerts for ambulances, there was a very timely, appropriate example of why we need this Bill 201, the Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights. One of the features of this bill that I would like to highlight at this time is that this bill allows Albertans to take the government to court when the government would fail to provide even the most basic of health care services, ones that we should be able to rely on at all times.

The fact that there was a red alert in every hospital in Edmonton on Sunday, the fact that there was not an available emergency service outlet from any hospital in this city on Sunday would be a classic example of how that provision would be useful in holding a government accountable for health care services provided to Albertans, for Albertans and would be a classic example of how necessary it is that Albertans have the opportunity to hold this government directly accountable when it doesn't provide adequate services.

**3:20**

Mr. Speaker, because the government doesn't give us public information about red alerts and the pressures on emergency, we have learned for the first time today, this morning in fact, that this weekend every hospital in the city was on red alert. We didn't know that before this morning; we found out today. The Minister of Health said that it's not an urgent situation. Clearly, if there

is not an emergency room available on the weekend in this city, two seconds from now something could occur: a bus accident, a dangerous leak of toxic substances. In fact, such a case was raised today. We could be right back to where we were on the weekend, finding out about that only this morning.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that when the Minister of Health stands up and will not respond to what is the most reasonable of requests and most reasonable of issues – that is to say, we should have emergency service available somewhere in this city at all times – then we need this bill and we need this bill desperately, badly.

There is a litany of problems with this health care system. Health care professionals are saying that emergency services are in crisis, amongst many other services, Mr. Speaker. The fact that this government will not acknowledge reality, will not begin to dispel the myths it has created that everything is okay, the fact that this government caucus, the private members in this caucus will not support this bill begs the very question raised by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, which is: who exactly in this House are truly the hollow men filled with straw? The answer is obvious. And T.S. Eliot was a lot more thoughtful than any member across the way in this House, I'll tell you. He was a Liberal.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of second reading of Bill 201, Alberta Patients' Bill of Rights, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barrett	Leibovici	Paul
Blakeman	MacDonald	Sapers
Bonner	Massey	Sloan
Carlson	Mitchell	Soetaert
Dickson	Olsen	White
Gibbons	Pannu	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Amery	Haley	McFarland
Boutilier	Hancock	Melchin
Broda	Havelock	O'Neill
Calahasen	Herard	Paszkowski
Cao	Hlady	Renner
Clegg	Jacques	Severtson
Coutts	Johnson	Shariff
Day	Jonson	Stelmach
Ducharme	Klapstein	Stevens
Dunford	Kryczka	Strang
Evans	Laing	Tannas
Fischer	Langevin	Taylor
Forsyth	Magnus	Thurber

Friedel	McClellan	Yankowsky
Fritz		
Totals:	For – 18	Against – 43

[Motion lost]

### Bill 202

#### Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1998

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 202, amendments proposed to the Child Welfare Act. The underlying intent of the amendments proposed are to clarify the responsibilities of the child and family services authority and to further clarify those circumstances when the identity of children and the release of the identity of children should occur in order to protect those children's safety.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I have many concerns about the regionalization of child welfare. I have outlined those on a number of occasions with the minister and the Department of Family and Social Services, but it is important for me in my preliminary remarks to also voice the concerns that have been voiced by others in this Assembly and outside with respect to the regionalization plans.

In April of 1996 a past member of this Assembly raised questions in this House about the standards, accountability, legal liability, secured funding, and the utmost assurance of the safety and well-being of children under the province's proposed plan. That member asked questions to the Minister of Family and Social Services. She asked them with respect to all of those areas: could there not be additional areas or improvements made to ensure that services provided for children were done so in a comprehensive manner and were not restricted by the lack of integration, the lack of co-ordination, or the lack of funding by government in the future? Specifically, Ms Hanson asked the Premier:

Since the type of questions an authority must provide are not spelled out, what's stopping the authority from choosing not to offer something as critical as counseling for abused children or even subsidies for day care? It's not detailed.

The Minister of Family and Social Services at the time responded and said that the ministries

have to develop three-year business plans, which become part of [the ministry's] business plan. Therefore, there's ongoing control. The legislation will be in place. The standards, the monitoring, the funding, and the support staff will be in place, all verbalizations which, I would propose, have not transcended into reality as of this date.

Regionalization is proceeding. We have the Calgary regional authority already appointed. To date there has been no broad circulation of the monitoring and standards framework of the funding model that has been proposed. I would suggest that in that respect the government should be taking a breath and stepping back from their plans to regionalize.

3:40

Another important group who has raised concerns about children and their welfare in light of regionalization was the city of Edmonton in their submission to the Edmonton city council. They said:

A smart city does not allow the basic needs of children to go unmet . . . There are more than 12,000 pre-school children in

Edmonton whose parent or parents live in poverty, earning less than Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off line. There are also 15,000 children between 6 and 12 years of age, currently attending school,

whose nutritional needs are not being met. Prudent and wise remarks made; regrettably no action by government. Now it would appear that those responsibilities, the responsibilities underlying child welfare, will be passed off to that city as well as others in the province, and they will be left to struggle with the problems.

The other concerns that I would like to reference this afternoon were outlined by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. In 1994 they published a report called *Children at Risk*. What they said in that report was that regionalization would mean the government wants to divest itself or society of responsibility for child welfare and hence for children. Provincewide consultation processes give rise to the conclusion. The conclusion is described as involving carefully structured questions that lead to a predetermined conclusion in support of the framework for privatization and divestment.

Since the government justifies decentralization as putting control of services back into the community, the *Children at Risk* document explored the question of what is meant by community. The conclusion was that when the government refers to a community, really what they are meaning turns out to be a regional authority; however, the regional authorities were set up with no regard for real communities. For example, the five bands of the Yellowhead Tribal Council are in three different authorities.

*Children at Risk* pointed out as well: there was rhetoric about services being community orientated but misleads people to believe such services did not previously exist; in reality, child welfare workers have long been community orientated and their work is primarily involved working in communities delivering community services.

It is also important to note that in the area of Family and Social Services this government has imposed approximately a 35.6 percent reduction in funding over a 10-year period from 1986 to 1996-97. That is an important point to raise this afternoon because it magnifies the reality that regional authorities, once formed, will be operating with insufficient funds, much as the regional authorities in health care today currently are. Who will be responsible? Who will pick up the slack? Who will catch the children who fall through the cracks, and who will report on their welfare? All of those things are not sufficiently addressed.

The province, in response to one of my letters last fall with respect to the monitoring and evaluation framework, sent me a copy of the children and family services policies and procedures handbook. In essence, in summation this document talks about budgets, business plans and forecasts, salary and benefit disclosures, contracting with service providers, and a contracting policy as well as insurance and a hold harmless policy, not the type of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework you would expect an accountable government to provide before they regionalized a program for the most vulnerable citizens in our society.

I wrote another letter outlining my concern that this was not adequate. The response from the hon. minister outlined that Ms Paula Tyler had been appointed as the new manager of services transition and that she would be establishing as one of her responsibilities an overall integrated project plan. Well, to date I have not seen a copy of that plan. I don't believe that plan has been tabled in this Legislature. We continue, it would appear, to be proceeding at high speed to regionalize, and there's no overall integrated plan.

Now, why should that bother us? Well, perhaps the government might learn from their regionalization of health care and all the hazard and harm that occurred because they lacked a plan. The Premier himself has acknowledged that. He acknowledged it when the worst of the cuts had taken hold, and it would seem only prudent that that lesson teach the government about planning before they rush to regionalize.

With respect to the monitoring and evaluation, I would also like to talk about the Children's Advocate. In my opinion, one of the very gravest flaws in the responsibilities outlined in the act as it exists is that it does nothing, speaks nowhere about the relationship of the regional child welfare authorities to the Children's Advocate.

Now, what we have seen in the last five years is Children's Advocates year after year providing comprehensive, thorough reports and recommendations about how the government could act and improve the child welfare programs. In contrast, in the minister's business plans, his budgets, and his policies we see no evidence that the government has acted on these recommendations. Many of them were of a serious nature. They outlined the government's lack of tracking of deaths of children in care. They outlined the issue of aboriginal children being in limbo because of the lack of permanency planning. They outlined the inconsistent administrative review practices within the department, the inadequate services for 16 and 17 year olds, the reluctance of the department to place children with noncustodial parents, et cetera, et cetera. No evidence that these concerns, issues, and recommendations have been dealt with, and now this government proposes to devolve all of these responsibilities to regional authorities with no framework, no monitoring, no standards, and insufficient funds.

My intent within this act – perhaps before I move to that, I'll talk briefly about the funding model. Shortly after I was appointed as the critic of Family and Social Services in the spring of '97, I attended a large forum in Edmonton where the ministry's funding model for the regional authorities was being discussed. There was probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of 150 people, many of them parents, recipients of services, many of them nonprofit service providers in the system. What was common amongst all of the attendants was a concern about the funding model as it existed and was being proposed by government.

Basically, the original tenets of that funding model included criteria for the funding of child welfare on the basis of four need factors: the population of children zero to 17 in the region, the aboriginal population of children zero to 17, children in low-income families, children in single-parent families. One glaring exception was the special-needs funding, which was pointed out numerous times, and the government moved then to establish a committee but has not published anything in the way of a final draft of this model, at least that has been formally tabled in this Legislative Assembly or to me as a member.

The main concern – and I think it's a real concern and one that this member and my caucus share – is that these authorities will not be adequately funded. I've already referenced the fact that the ministry as a whole has imposed a 35.6 percent reduction in its funding. Given the ideology of this government, it is most likely not about to change its course. Therefore, I think the reality is that these regional authorities will be asked to assume almost unassumable responsibilities with insufficient money.

This, the reality that we don't have any current drafts of the funding model, no current or comprehensive drafts of the



standards, the monitoring, or evaluation framework, prompted me to propose the amendments that we have to the Child Welfare Act. They are brief but concise, and they clearly spell out what the public can expect in the way of accounting, in the way of reporting, and in the way of responsibilities from the minister, the ministry, and the authorities.

Given the climate in which these amendments are being proposed, I would assume that all Members of the Legislative Assembly would be supportive of these. In fact, what they do is they verify . . . [interjection]

**3:50**

MRS. SOETAERT: He laughs.

MRS. SLOAN: I know that the member thinks it's very funny. Vulnerable children to me are not funny, and I think we should be doing everything in our power to protect those children and to ensure that the public . . . [interjections] I wondered how long it would take you. Actually, I thought maybe you'd gone to sleep, but you were really listening.

What we're trying to do is show clearly to the public that these are what you can expect from the authorities, the ministry, and the minister once regionalization proceeds.

I need to make a point, Mr. Speaker, that this caucus, this opposition, is not sure regionalization is in the best interests of children or the child welfare system at this time. When it was originally announced, we put forward that there was support for community-based care. We had no idea that the government would proceed without comprehensive standards, without a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, and without sufficient funding.

To speak also about the current reporting within the department's annual report, it would come as no surprise to members in this Legislature that I find the current reporting inadequate. The amendments proposed are to further clarify what information should be contained within the annual report. As these services are divested, we know that there will be private contractors, there may be a greater utilization of volunteers, there will be nonprofit providers, there may be some type of conglomerate structure that contracts their services to a variety of regions. If we do not have requirements in the act that spell out how many service providers are being utilized and how many children they're providing services for and what type of services they're providing, how is the public really going to determine whether or not the systems are working effectively and as efficiently as they should?

I would suggest that we should be building our system of child welfare services in this province on an integrated model. Other provinces have taken that courageous and bold step. They have amalgamated departments in justice, social services, education, and health to provide an uninterrupted, integrated framework of services for children. We don't see that happening here, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the reality that we see is that these services will be fragmented. They will be devolved to communities across the province. They will be devolved to groups such as the aboriginal bands, many of whom have expressed concerns in terms of not perhaps their desire to improve the system and be involved but their abilities to assume the responsibilities completely, given the lack of government support, the lack of government direction, and the lack of government funding.

I would like to have faith that our children in this province, particularly our vulnerable children, are in good hands, but I do not have that faith, particularly in relation to those issues raised in the House this week around the reporting of abuse, neglect, and

deaths of children in care. We see no clear indication that this government has an idea of how many children have been abused, neglected, or have died. That comprises another section of amendments that I believe in the future must be in existence within the Child Welfare Act. We must know in each region how many children have been abused, neglected, or have died. If we don't, how are we going to be able to assess whether increased funding is required, whether there needs to be a change in administrative practices or perhaps a change in the service providers?

The reality is that now, as of this moment, as of this current status of the Child Welfare Act, regional authorities will not be required to report the number of children who have been abused, neglected, or who have died while under the care of government. That, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, is unbelievable. I'm not sure that the members of this Legislature have really considered that reality. This is like an unraveling afghan, and I would propose that the amendments we have incorporated within Bill 202 are necessary to fully make the system accountable and responsible to the children and the citizens of this province.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I rise with a great deal of pleasure today to speak on such an important topic as the welfare of Alberta's children. As a father and as a community member the well-being and safety of our children is always of concern to me. At second reading we normally discuss the intent of the bill. I am sure my hon. colleague across the way had the absolute best interests in mind when this bill was drafted. However, despite our common goal to work towards creating an environment that is safe and secure for our children, unfortunately we have a disagreement on how best to achieve that goal.

It was only yesterday that I stood in this House and used an example from my earlier childhood days about the ostrich digging its head in the sand. The ostrich is a big bird with a really long neck and can see really far beyond the horizon that is accessible to many of us who are vertically challenged. Yet despite having that long neck, there is a saying that the ostrich buries its head in the sand, refuses to see what is way ahead there – the vision for tomorrow, the vision for the future – and digs and buries its head in the sand. I really would have enjoyed entering into a debate on this subject. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, for me this bill is appearing to be redundant and does little to advance the safety of our children.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is made up of two parts, the first of which calls for an expansion of the level of reporting by child and family services authorities. The amendment would require each authority to submit an annual report to the minister outlining the programs and services it provides under the Child Welfare Act. There are 14 separate requirements of that annual report, ranging from the number of children being provided with protective services to a list of programs provided in conjunction with other government departments.

**4:00**

I don't need to remind the hon. member that the ministry overall on an annual basis deals with about 10,000 children. You can just imagine the volume of work. I have a couple of issues with this reporting requirement. The first refers to the proposed section 2.2(3)(f). For the benefit of the hon. members, this subsection requires each child and family services authority to include in its annual report to the minister "the number of children suffering from neglect and abuse while being provided with protective services." Let me repeat: "the number of children suffering from neglect and abuse while being provided with

protective services." Mr. Speaker, I take issue with this provision due to the fact that it is inflammatory. If a child is receiving protective services, there is no reason that they would be suffering from neglect and abuse. Let me repeat that again: if a child is receiving protective services, there is no reason that they would be suffering from neglect and abuse. It would also be negligent for anyone who knew of a child suffering from neglect or abuse and did not report it. In fact, under section 3(6) of the Child Welfare Act that person could be fined up to \$2,000 or six months in jail.

Another issue I have with this part of the bill is that it amends the wrong act. Mr. Speaker, there are two pieces of legislation in place which directly affect child welfare in this province. The first is the Child Welfare Act; the other is the Child and Family Services Authorities Act. This is the statute which the child and family services authorities is governed by. This act even has a section, section 14, which outlines the procedure for the authorities to report to the minister. Granted, there's no provision for child and family services authorities to report to the minister in the Child Welfare Act, but then again we don't need two statutes duplicating themselves. Bill 202 should really have amended the Child and Family Services Authorities Act, and the only excuse I can see for this is a lack of research and a lack of attention to detail.

Mr. Speaker, Family and Social Services currently requires reports from contracted service providers for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. Any potential duplication of reporting requirements could have resource implications for both the contracted service providers and the department. It is not clear how tabling a summary of reports in the Assembly would be of any significant benefit. The proposal to table this information also raises potential confidentiality issues. I suspect the bill was drafted with the aim of increasing accountability. Child and family services authorities are accountable organizations under the Government Accountability Act and are therefore required under that act to submit annual reports to the minister. This information could be incorporated in Family and Social Services' annual report.

Further, the Child and Family Services Authorities Act requires an authority to submit to the minister any records, reports, or other information requested by the minister. If this level of accountability was not enough, under section 2 of the Child Welfare Act, Mr. Speaker, the Children's Advocate is empowered to

receive, review and investigate complaints or concerns that come to his attention respecting children who receive services under this Act.

The advocate prepares and submits annual reports to the minister, who tables the report to the Assembly within 15 days of its next sitting, if not earlier.

The second part of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, calls for the Child Welfare Act to be amended so that the name of a child in care may be released to ensure their safety or well-being. We already have provisions in the Child Welfare Act for the limited release of names of children in care. Section 91(2) of the act outlines provisions for confidentiality. It states that "the Minister or any person employed or assisting in the administration of this Act" shall preserve the secrecy of the identity of persons coming to their attention under the act. With the best interests of the child in mind the police could be considered to be assisting in the administration of the act and therefore be made privy to necessary information about the child.

It goes on to detail the limited circumstances where the child's

name may be released. The minister or designated person may release a child's name and any other identifying information to the guardian, parent, foster parent, or their lawyer; the child's lawyer, physician, psychologist, or social worker; a police officer or an agent of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General if they believe an offence has been committed; the child's teacher; the board of an approved hospital or health unit or a regional health authority responsible for providing services to the child. It can also be released to any person employed or engaged by the minister or by a child and family services authority, to the Children's Advocate or his delegate, or to any person with the consent in writing of the minister, the child, or a guardian of the child. So there are enough ways in which this information can be released.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the provision in Bill 202 allowing for the disclosure of the child's name directly contravenes the confidentiality provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The disclosure provisions of both the Child Welfare Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act I believe are broad enough to ensure the safety and well-being of children in care while at the same time providing enough confidentiality to protect the privacy of these children and their families.

The welfare of Alberta's children is a serious matter. For such a serious matter we certainly need to identify real solutions. In my opinion, Bill 202 is not a solution. Unfortunately, it is an ill-conceived attempt at patching a perceived legislative gap.

I will not be supporting this bill in second reading, and I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to do the same. I also urge my colleagues in the Assembly to once again look at the vision that they can see way ahead and develop the policy and programs and plans that address the needs of our children who are yet to be born and the children who presently live within the boundaries of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

4:10

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, thank you to the Official Opposition for agreeing to the speaking order today. It may come as a surprise to members of this Assembly, but when you're a caucus of two, believe it or not, they keep you going, the public does. I'm in meetings constantly.

Speaking in support of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that on the last day of his life the late Grant Notley raised in the Assembly during question period the troubled life of a child who had been moved within 14 foster homes over the course of less than 10 years. He committed suicide at the age of 13 years. He was a ward of this government, and the government let the kid down. Grant Notley was well remembered after he died for having had the heart to raise that issue. He did so in a very tender way, a very sincere way, because he understood that children who are wards of the government often fall between the cracks and there aren't enough people in the system to look after them.

A recent tragedy just last week in Red Deer, almost a repetition. A different story, a different name, a different life, a different mother; nonetheless, a child who had been at one point removed from his home because of suffering abuse at the hands of his common-law father I guess you'd call it. I don't know what to call it. He died in hospital last week, having suffered

another beating. These children do need comprehensive care.

I often stand to speak about Liberal opposition bills and say: well, it's okay, but it's inadequate in X, Y, and Z. For the first time in my memory, and I do believe this – oh, except for one time when the former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar copied one of my bills from the previous year word for word. I did congratulate her on that. I wholeheartedly endorse this bill, Mr. Speaker, wholeheartedly. There's nothing the matter with providing a comprehensive system and a system of accountability for children who are in the care of government or its agencies.

I can tell you that the Member for Calgary-McCall I think is misguided insofar as he suggests it would be a breach of . . . [interjection] Pardon me?

MS OLSEN: An ostrich with his head in the sand.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yeah. Okay. Sorry; they were adding some editorial comments for me.

I think he's misguided in his statement that, you know, it's too dangerous to allow the name of a child in care to be disclosed under any circumstances. To be disclosed in the responsible fashion that this bill outlines is the only way sometimes to ensure the physical and mental safety of children, the only way. [some applause] Thank you. I should add that the author, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, made a pretty good point of stating in the bill that the name of the child in care could become public if the person disclosing the information has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that disclosure is necessary to ensure the safety or well-being of the child to whom the information relates.

Well, if the person irresponsibly . . .

MS CALAHASEN: No. I've never known of an instance where a child . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister will have an opportunity. You're on my list of speakers. Right now we have the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you. In the good old days, Mr. Speaker, you'll remember what we used to do. When the New Democrats were the Official Opposition and the Conservatives were the government and one party was speaking and another one wanted the person to answer a question, we'd sit down and say: go ahead and ask the question and I'll answer. I cannot give the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services – did I get it right? – a specific example. However, I can extrapolate from the Red Deer situation.

If a social worker had been aware of the circumstances that that four-year-old child had been in and couldn't get anybody else to listen, couldn't get any department official to listen for example, then I believe that social worker would have done the responsible thing by submitting the information to someone other than those directed or authorized by the act to receive it. If that means going to a newspaper, perhaps that's what it means. I think it would be extreme.

But my real point in supporting this clause is this. People generally will not undertake frivolous activities, particularly if it comes to an accusation about an adult who is responsible for a child and not acting responsibly. You can land yourself in court over that. There are two civil routes of law to do it, not to mention provisions from within the Criminal Code, not to mention a number of statutes of Alberta. So my point is this: if that's

what it takes, then that's what should be allowed. It would be an action of last resort, and I believe that is the intent of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. She's nodding her head in agreement, so I can safely say that I have interpreted this bill properly.

I will close by saying that I think it is appropriate to receive from an independent arm's-length agency, via the minister admittedly, accurate and comprehensive reporting not after the fact of tragedies but on an annual basis so that the public knows whether or not child welfare services is able to do its job. At the end of the day, I would submit to you, if regionalization and privatization continue to develop, we will be in exactly the same situation we were in in 1983-1984, which is way more children falling through the cracks.

It took a tiny little two-member opposition, led by the late Grant Notley at the time, to convince the Lougheed government to reverse its policy. The Lougheed government did the responsible thing. It reversed its policy. It also hired a lot more child welfare workers, who have been laid off in the last four years due to funding cuts.

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, no, no.

MS BARRETT: Well, social workers, I should say, who have been laid off, which has made more stress. The caseloads of child welfare workers have gone up because there aren't enough social workers in the department.

There isn't a flaw in this bill because it's not allowed to be introduced as a money bill, but if it were, I'd be supporting it, particularly if it called for more funding for social workers, including child welfare workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take a few brief moments to speak to this bill. We've heard a number of passionate, I would say, comments in this House over this subject through the debate of this bill and also in question period.

If I could see anything in this bill that would lead to better safety for the children in our care, I would support it. I certainly agree that the principles of accountability underpin everything that this government does, and it certainly has to be a priority in the area of child welfare. I agree with that. However, I cannot agree or support the idea of laying out in front of the public the kind of information proposed in this act in the kind of detail in which it is proposed.

Mr. Speaker, I've had some experience as an MLA and as a minister. I've learned that the confidentiality of personal information must be regarded as a personal trust by public officials. I have not always seen that evidence, but I must tell you that I personally believe very strongly in that. Often people and organizations for their own reasons or motives put to me the argument that it is in the public interest for government officials to talk about individual cases within their mandates. When I had the honour of serving as Alberta's Minister of Health, reporters, when they were working on a story of course, would frequently say to me: don't you think the public has the right to know how a particular patient was treated in the health system? Or perhaps even the odd time an opposition member would try a similar approach and accuse me of dodging an issue because I wouldn't discuss an individual's case, even if that case were being discussed publicly elsewhere. As a public official, however, I don't play to that agenda.

What the public has a right to know and a need to know, I

believe, are policies, practices, and procedures. They have a right and a need to know how a health system or a child welfare system functions, where its priorities are, and where its pressures are. I don't think the public has a right or a need to know about an individual's circumstances. Certainly a child's privacy is especially essential and must be protected. It's not just a matter of protecting an individual's name. Any feature or aspect of a case that could lead to the identification of a child in care must be protected as well. It doesn't take much information to be leaked before an individual is identified and his or her personal information the subject of much speculation. In making public aspects of an individual's case, such as the type of services provided to a child, the duration of a particular child's involvement with the care authority, the reasons for terminating care of a specific child, all of which this bill does propose, in my understanding of the bill and my reading of it we would be making public case-specific information that I believe could lead to the violation of that child's solemn right to be protected from identification.

4:20

In my current portfolio of Community Development we undertook to improve the systems and procedures we have in place to protect the privacy of information we collect from seniors in order to provide their services. We were gathering that information for all of the best reasons: to make sure that we could provide the most accurate service, the most appropriate service. Based on information and advice that we received from the Information and Privacy Commissioner and, I believe, supported from opposition benches, in particular by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, we were led to ensure privacy of personal information.

This bill before us today, in my opinion, would seem to want to move government in the opposite direction, and I believe it would impair those protective systems in the case of children. I will not support any bill that would let the circumstances of a child's life be the subject of political debate and/or possible point-scoring either inside this Assembly or out. Mr. Speaker, to me that is just not worth the risk. Bill 202 I believe puts us on a slippery slope where precisely that could occur. That concerns me greatly. I believe that the very laudable principles of accountability and responsibility can be met and indeed I believe they are being met without sacrificing a child's risk of right to privacy.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I have to urge this Assembly not to support Bill 202.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there's been some misunderstanding about Bill 202, certainly by the comments from Calgary-McCall. When he talks about "head in the sand," I would venture to say that the ostrich is on the other side. However, I do agree with the minister. I don't think that the public has to know the details about every child and the trauma they are going through. What we do need to know is that they are safe and that they are being taken care of. The part I think the minister was referring to was section 3(b)(j.1):

. . . the public if the person disclosing the information has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that disclosure is necessary to ensure the safety or well-being of the child to whom the information relates.

Now, an example last July is the exact reason why this clause should be in here. Last July a 15-year-old foster child went

missing. It was presumed that she had run away. The girl's foster mother filed a missing person's report, and the police and the foster care worker were contacted. Both told the mother not to release the girl's identity to the media. The police said it could not release the picture and the name without the Department of Family and Social Services' consent. The department claimed the police needed to request consent to release the girl's picture and name. In effect they tossed the responsibility back and forth, wasting valuable time. In the end what happened was that the foster and the birth families contacted the media, contacted the opposition critic for Family and Social Services, giving their full consent to release the child's name. It was the family's fear that it would be a greater risk if the girl remained on the streets.

So if that's the department's policy, the rigidity of this policy in this case perpetuated the risk. If one child is safer because of one piece of legislation, I don't understand why members opposite wouldn't support it.

Now, this bill is not a large piece of legislation. It makes a few amendments in a few areas. It is something; it is at least a step in the right direction. I would urge all members to read it, because I'm sure if they spoke to the people who deliver social services in their areas, they would say that this could be used and that it would help keep children safe.

I want to point out a few things that I see in this bill that I think are so important. One, to me, is entrenching the role of the Children's Advocate, because with all the things happening in this regionalization, I have heard nothing, I have no sense of security that that Children's Advocate will still be present in the system. I think if this is an accountable government, then they shouldn't be afraid of an independent Children's Advocate who can do fine reports that give good, solid suggestions about what is wrong with the system and where it can improve and table them for all the Assembly.

[The Speaker in the chair]

No system is perfect. When you're dealing with 10,000 children in care, it's a difficult role. It's a heavy responsibility for the minister. We don't deny that, but the reality is that if a Children's Advocate gives him something to work with, gives him a base from which to spring the next year, something from which he can improve, why would he not accept that? All this will do is entrench the Children's Advocate in the Child Welfare Act. I don't know why anyone would oppose that. I guess that would be putting their heads in the sand. I just couldn't control myself; sorry about that.

Another point with this bill that I think is very important is that this would require the new regional boundaries to report the number of children receiving service and the type of service. I think it's already done, but it isn't set up in the new regional authorities.

AN HON. MEMBER: It will be.

MRS. SOETAERT: They say it will be. I don't have a sense of security from just a comment across the way because often we hear comments, but they're nothing but that. There's nothing in the legislation to support that.

MR. DUNFORD: Colleen, you may be lots of things, but insecure is not one of them.

MRS. SOETAERT: Touché.

Back to the seriousness of this bill, which I strongly support and I urge all members to at least read. That is a statement because I know for a fact that some members don't read the legislation. They just accept it the way it is except to say no, except to say yes. [interjection] Actually, just read the local paper, *St. Albert*, and you'll know who openly said that he hadn't read all the legislation. So I speak from what the Member for Redwater actually said.

I want to point out a few things that this bill would do, and I know there are many people that want the opportunity to speak to this today. This bill is an attempt to prevent and make public inadequacies in the funding, standards, and monitoring and evaluation models for children's services presented by the government. It does this by requiring that a summary be tabled of the child and family services authorities' annual reports. The reports would contain a list of service providers contracted to provide services to children; the number of children served and the type of service provided; the duration of each child's involvement and reasons for terminating involvement; the number of children suffering abuse, neglect, or who have died while being provided with protective services – and sad though it seems, we do have children within the government's care that are being abused – a summary of recommendations resulting from investigations conducted by the authority in abuse and neglect cases; a summary of any recommendations made by the Children's Advocate relating to the authority and the actions taken in response; a list of the referrals of the authority from other government agencies; a list of referrals from the authority to other government agencies; a list of programs provided by the authority in conjunction with another government department.

This bill is an attempt to monitor and make public information that has historically been difficult to access or is unavailable. It is simply trying to make this government more accountable, and I would say that if they don't have their blinders on, that shouldn't be a problem.

**4:30**

I know that the people who deliver the care in the regions I represent care about children, and that's their bottom line. It's not the dollar; the children are the bottom line. So this basically is an amendment to the Child Welfare Act that requires the minister and his ministry to be more accountable, something he shouldn't be afraid of. I actually would look forward to comments from the minister if he gets that opportunity.

The other thing that's certainly from the Children's Advocate perspective:

At a broader government level, the cumulative effect of the fiscal constraint experienced by human services departments is creating increased demand on the child protection system, the last resort for vulnerable families who cannot access supports essential to their survival . . . it is time to examine the impact of decisions made in the last several years as they affect the health, education, financial security and protection of . . . our children.

This bill may not be the perfect legislation – I don't think you can have perfect legislation when we're dealing with an imperfect world, when we're talking about 10,000 children in care – but certainly it takes a step to help children and to help this government be more accountable. I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite will have read through to see what they can glean from it. If there's something they can support in it, it's certainly the role of the Children's Advocate. If there are things you cannot live with, in committee you can always take them out.

You tend to have a few more votes than we do, so it shouldn't be an issue. But if there is something in this legislation that you know will help the children of this province, then I would urge all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for children's services.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I'm very, very proud to stand and be able to debate Bill 202 for a number of reasons: first, as the minister responsible for children's services and, secondly, as an MLA who represents community groups who have been involved in this whole process of what we call devolution of authority and responsibility to communities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 looks at allowing two major things to occur. One is to allow names to be used of children who are in an abusive situation and, secondly, accountability measures. I'd like to address those two as well as some of the far-ranging issues that have come forward from the various members who have stood up and spoken on this specific bill.

As we move to a community-based system, what we have done is we have built in accountability as a key component. Bill 202 requires child and family services authorities to submit annual reports to the minister. The authorities are in fact required to submit annual reports to the minister. The authorities are accountable organizations under the Government Accountability Act. They are subject to reporting requirements under that act. In addition, an authority is also subject to the Child and Family Services Authorities Act. This act requires an authority to submit any records, reports, or other information requested by the minister. The minister can obtain under the act the information items set out in the proposed Bill 202.

I should also add, Mr. Speaker, that the authorities are agents of the Crown. They must meet a range of government requirements in their administration and operations. Each authority must provide ongoing information to government through business plans, annual performance reports, and monthly and quarterly reporting requirements. Each authority enters into a detailed agreement with the government at the time of the transfer. The government monitors each regional agreement.

Under the Child and Family Services Authorities Act the government must monitor and assess the authorities in the carrying out of their responsibilities. We will carry out operational reviews on each authority at periodic intervals. The authorities and service providers are held accountable under the Child Welfare Act, social care facilities act, child welfare and day care regulations, Financial Administration Act, and Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Children's Advocate prepares and submits annual reports to the minister, who tables the reports in this Assembly. This is a requirement under the Child Welfare Act which remains in force.

Relative to confidentiality and provision of information to police, the proposed Bill 202 would allow confidential information to be given to the police or Justice minister to ensure the safety or well-being of the child. We agree that the police must have information if necessary for a child's safety or well-being. We certainly provide it, but it is not necessary to amend the Child Welfare Act for this purpose. The Child Welfare Act in section 91(2) already allows for disclosure of confidential information to any person assisting in the administration of the act. This

includes the police. In addition, the disclosure to the police or to the Justice minister is allowed in a number of specified circumstances under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I guess that's why I was asking the hon. member from the ND opposition to cite specific areas where that would be possible.

Confidentiality, provision of information to the general public. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have serious concerns about Bill 202's proposal to release identifying information on a child welfare case to the general public. This bill offers no safeguards to protect children or families from violation of their right to privacy. This proposal directly contravenes the rules of confidentiality under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The rules of disclosure under the Child Welfare Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act ensure the safety and well-being of children in care, and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, they provide the necessary degree of confidentiality to protect the privacy of these children and their families. There is already a mechanism under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, under section 31, for disclosing personal information to the public where there is a significant risk of harm or where the disclosure is in the public interest. This mechanism is far preferable to Bill 202. It includes very stringent safeguards to ensure that a person's right to privacy is not violated without need. This includes notification to the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

I want to speak about the kinds of insecure feelings that are being emanated from the opposition relative to how the regionalization will take away responsibility from government. That's the very intent. When we talk about the Child and Family Services Authorities Act, it means we are going to give the community the authority and the responsibility to take care of its own. Mr. Speaker, 12,000 people have spoken up and said: "We want it. We wanted it in the beginning. You took it away. Now give it back, and let us take control of our own lives." That's when I begin to get very emotional when we're talking about these kinds of issues. When people speak across the province, all 18 regions have come forward and said: "We want this. Let us take it, but let us do it on our time and the way we want it." That's exactly what we've done.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an easy thing for a government to do in fact. It's very difficult for them to be able to say: "You planned something that you see is going to be good for the community. You planned something that's going to be good for the entire nation." Then we go back and try to play politics and say: "Jeez, we don't trust you. We don't trust you to do this. We don't trust you to be able to deliver these services the way you think you wanted them, the way you feel they should be done." I take exception to that, especially with all the volunteers in the province who have worked very, very hard to see this become a reality.

When we talk about regionalization, it means that we have to ensure that standards are in place. We have standards presently. Those standards, Mr. Speaker, are very good standards to date, but it doesn't mean we have to die there. It means that we can allow the communities to improve the standards, to increase those standards as they see fit. I see that happening throughout this province wherever I go, in all the meetings I've had throughout the province. I believe that as we move forward in the draft documents on the standards, when we bring it forward and the communities are ready to take it on, they will improve this even more than we have.

4:40

I want to speak about the funding model that has also come out and the resourcing. Mr. Speaker, the funding model that we have we have sent out to the communities and to anybody who will respond. Well, I've got to say that I haven't received any comments from the opposition relative to whether they support this funding model, in an official letter or otherwise. I think it would really be important for them to look at it, to look at it and see what the communities are saying and to give me some feedback as to what's happening there. I would really appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, we've received many, many comments on this. The consultations that have occurred have certainly given us something to be able to look at and to be able to take forward. I know that it's going to be good, because it's the people who are now speaking out and saying: this is the way it should be; this is the way it shouldn't be; make sure we have certain components attached. One of the areas that has been identified is handicapped children's services. Yes, we are listening to those comments that have been brought forward by the community.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about integration because that's something that was mentioned by the member. The issue of integration is that they say other provinces have done a better job. Well, in terms of pulling together one superministry, I for one believe that's probably not the way to go, not according to what the people have been saying and saying: look at how you as government in the various departments can come together to be able to better serve the needs of people. We have looked at every other province and tried to figure out what they are doing. In B.C. what they did was they appointed a superministry, and then that superministry was to be able to look at services that will be clumped together to see whether or not they can provide even more help where there are service gaps. I feel that that's an area that is still top-down rather than bottom-up. I think that's a very important part, because our system is definitely a community-based system, and they have indicated how they want it done rather than us telling them how they want it done. We're responding to the people.

There are other areas in the nation that have done a number of other things but not to the degree that we are, not to the degree of where we are saying to the community: you lead us, you tell us, you give us that framework we have to work with, and we'll help you; we'll give you the supports. That's exactly what's happening, Mr. Speaker.

Monitoring and evaluation. Well, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about monitoring and evaluation, we have an evaluation committee. We are already doing monitoring and evaluation in the Department of Family and Social Services relative to programs. We are now going to make sure that we move that over as well as increase what is needed for the communities as we move to regionalization. Yes, the monitoring will continue in that respect because we have to make sure that whatever's going to happen through the transition and with communities taking over responsibility and authority, they will be ready to be able to deal with this.

Mr. Speaker, I say that it's a boy crying wolf, it's a lady crying wolf relative to the issue of regionalization. I feel that the communities are now ready to be able to take over whatever they want to take over. They tell us they're ready. Let's give them that opportunity.

I just want to read something which is really, really important. This is the region 9 Focus on Children: Boundaries Change for

Children's Services. I for one cannot support Bill 202. I believe that as we move to this regionalization, if we listen to what is being said here from region 9, we will make the best decisions if we stay focused on the needs of children and youth. Not systems, Mr. Speaker; on children and youth. That to me speaks volumes when we're talking about moving to regionalization.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 202, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, and speak to the intent of the bill, which I think was very carefully done by the member presenting. I would think that the government would view it favourably, as it fits into their goal of open and accountable government. Certainly it is designed to assist in that by laying out the reports that would be helpful to the government in their monitoring and evaluation of the system. I think the reports that are called for allow for better tracking of children, and that's allowing the government a better evaluation of the process they're putting in place.

I think the new children's services design certainly will start out as being experimental, and I appreciate the number of people in the community that have contributed to this. I value their input and their time. It has been a long process for them, and I think everyone would like it to succeed. Given that, I find the proposals that are put forward in the bill – it's good timing for us all to take these things into consideration, given the ongoing process of the redesign of children's services.

When we talk about reporting and record-keeping, I think the government has proven over the years to be the best record keeper. Certainly the government is, I think, the only one with the resources to keep records of that number and complexity and be able to collate them and work that raw data into a useful report. Again, that report is used for monitoring the process and for evaluating and hopefully for going back to correct if there is something that comes up as needing adjustment. I think it would be very hard to be asking the new children's authority to be incorporating that huge job of record-keeping and reporting, and they will be required to report as part of what they are to do.

When I look under the Child and Family Services Authorities Act, the government is responsible for

- (a) setting objectives and strategic direction . . .
- (b) establishing policies and standards for . . . services;
- (c) monitoring and assessing Authorities . . .
- (d) allocating funding and other resources to Authorities;
- (e) providing administrative and other support services to Authorities.

So given that, I think the suggestions in this bill fit right in and should be helpful to you.

The authorities themselves are responsible for

- (a) promoting the safety, security, well-being and integrity of children, families and other members of the community;
- (b) planning and managing the provision of child and family services;
- (c) determining priorities in the provision of . . . services and allocating resources accordingly;
- (d) assessing . . . the social and other related needs of the region;
- (e) ensuring reasonable access.

They are also to be

- (g) monitoring and assessing the provision of . . . services.

I ultimately look to the government for the full reporting, and

I think it needs to be public reporting. I think those reports need to be tabled in the Legislature so that the public has confidence in the government and in what the government's activities are. So I would expect the hon. members on the other side to be welcoming these suggestions.

A number of people appear to have been confused as to why this bill would be suggesting that there are opportunities or there may be occasions when it would be a good thing to be releasing personal information about a child in care. I think perhaps there needs to be an amendment to ease the concerns of the members opposite. Certainly the bill is recognizing the urgency of a situation when a child has gone missing, for example, and allows for the release of the child's identity in order to help locate the child. It compromises confidentiality only if it would be considered to aid in the safety and well-being of the child. I think that's something that touches all of our hearts when we read about that in the paper or hear about it in the media, when there's a child who has gone missing or who has run away and there's an attempt to try to locate them. You do want to ask for the assistance of the public when you do that, so I think there are very specific circumstances in which you would want to be using this.

Certainly the Liberal opposition has been very firm in its support of the FOIP principles, and I don't think this compromises it in any way. I think what we're trying to do with this is recognize that there are times when we do need to ask for the assistance of the public in order to secure the safety and well-being of a child.

4:50

As a number of my colleagues have mentioned, entrenching or enshrining the role of the Children's Advocate underneath the legislation is critical. The Children's Advocate has been a very loyal advocate to children in this province. I would think the government would view the reports that have been produced by the Children's Advocate's office as a great tool in assisting them in their programs that are to be for the benefit of children. I know it's been controversial at times over the years, but I think the work that has been done there is valuable. I'm concerned that with the redesign of children's services there may not be a place or that the place for the Children's Advocate would not be guaranteed in there. I think it's critical that we do have another body that is checking, monitoring, ensuring that what we all want and believe is happening for the benefit of children is indeed happening. Certainly the Children's Advocate has been helpful to us all in the past in pointing out where we may not have been as thorough as we could have with programs for children or where they were slipping between the cracks.

I have to say that I'm sure the government has designed the programs and has worked with the community to design the best possible programs, but once you get a program up and running, you always find out where it is that the cracks appear and the children are slipping through them. In that, I think the Children's Advocate is a helpful advocate for the government as well. Therefore, I think it's important that this office is enshrined inside of the legislation. I wouldn't want to see it slip away or be manoeuvred out of the way.

One of the other points that's raised in this bill is the question of protective services and early intervention programs. Once again, it's something that I'm really concerned about. I feel that sometimes as legislators we are penny-wise and pound-foolish. We look to save the dollar now, when it will compound and cost us a great deal more in the future. In particular, I'm referring to the context that some of our children are growing up in which

may eventually put them in the care of child welfare and which we don't seem to be dealing with in a rigorous way, in that our programs are coming, in many ways, after the fact. I would like to see more concentration on the preventative aspects, and I'll just very briefly run over some of the things I think need to be looked at.

Poverty. Children are not poor in isolation. They are in poor families or low-income families, so I think we have to remember that we don't just talk about poor children. They do live in families that are poor as well. What are we as legislators doing to work with that, to assist families to work their way out of poverty or train or educate themselves out of it? What more could we be doing there? We seem to be getting more impoverished families here and more impoverished children, not less, so somehow we're not going in the right direction there.

I think minimum wage is critical for a number of people in our society. In Edmonton-Centre I have a lot of single people and single parents with children. A lot of them are working for minimum wage, and they are trying to hold it together by working two and sometimes three minimum wage jobs. I think we have to seriously understand what the current level of the minimum wage does to our economy and to these families and look to increasing it as soon as possible.

We know that the statistics on the increase in child welfare correspond to the cuts which reduce the welfare cases. We seem to have impoverished children in this move and put them at even more of a disadvantage than when we started, and I don't think that was the intention.

I think we have to look for proper nutrition for children, which I find a horrific thing to have to be saying about children in Alberta. We are a wealthy province, we are a lucky province, we are a privileged province, and we have children who are going to school hungry. We have children in school who are not doing as well as they could because they do not have enough nutrition in their bodies to cope with it. So are we looking at hot lunch programs? Are we looking at the support for the auxiliary programs in the schools? Where are we with child care?

This is an issue that has hit home. I have a constituent who has had her children apprehended by child welfare. The parent is trying to get the children back, but she's in a catch-22. She must provide a three-bedroom apartment, but she can't afford to do that on single status. Child care is a real issue for her when she gets the children back. She is trying to look for work, but she can't get child care until she has work. If she leaves the children uncared for, she's in trouble again, so there's a catch-22 that has been . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, there's an interjection here, on a point of order I presume.

#### Point of Order Relevance

MR. SHARIFF: I just want to call a point under *Beauchesne* 459, a point of relevance. We are, I believe, debating Bill 202, Child Welfare Amendment Act, and what I'm hearing is a debate about poverty and hot lunches. I'm just wondering: what relevance does it have to the proposed bill?

THE SPEAKER: It's okay, hon. member; there's no need to interject.

I want to credit the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on raising this matter dealing with relevance under *Beauchesne* 459.

However, I would like to draw to the hon. member's attention that actually a wide bit of latitude has always been afforded to hon. members during second reading of a bill. Perhaps the hon. member who so diligently has been reading *Beauchesne* might wish to refer to *Beauchesne* as well beginning at section 659, and I'm sure he'll find some other statements with respect to this.

Please continue.

#### Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue my points about early intervention programs and the context in which we have children who may be in a situation where they then come under child welfare, I think we also need to look to what educational training and apprenticeship programs are available. Certainly that falls under intervention programs and the community support that is available and supportive to break the cycle.

Those are the comments that I wanted to bring forward in second reading of Bill 202. I think there is much in there that is intended to be helpful to the government in its pursuit of good care of the children that come under its guardianship. I think there is an intent here to assist the government in being open and accountable to the people. Because it's not only the reality but the perception of openness and accountability and honesty that is important to people, I would have thought the government would find that helpful.

I think, again in closing, that the ability of the government to monitor the program as it is ongoing, to evaluate it, and to take any corrective measures that are necessary is much helped by the requirements that are put forward in this amendment act.

With those few comments I thank you for the time this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

MR. CLEGG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 202. I feel very strongly that this bill makes unnecessary changes to the Child Welfare Act.

Secondly, I want to make it absolutely clear in this House that I am not in opposition to this bill. I have a real commitment to the children of this province and certainly to the constituency of Dunvegan. Being my age, Mr. Speaker, which is not too many days away from getting the old age pension – I have five children and 16 grandchildren, which should make me kind of an expert on children.

In our society today things have changed. I can remember in the late '40s even – and I believe that the Child Welfare Act came into place about 1985. I might be wrong there, too, because my research isn't as good as it should be. However, our society today has drastically changed. When I was a young person and first married – and by the way, this is my 42nd year of being married. You've got all the history of myself.

MR. DAY: Dorothy is a wonderful woman.

MR. CLEGG: Yeah. She needs a medal by the way. Yes.

It's not good that things have changed. You know, we talk about the good old days, and when we talk about the good old days, they weren't so good in many ways. But as far as families, they were very good, and there was no need for a Child Welfare Act. Unfortunately, those times are not here anymore.



After the Child Welfare Act came into place, there have been improvements to it, and certainly there can always be improvements to any act, whether it's the Child Welfare Act or any act in the province. However, I don't believe that this would do anything to improve the Child Welfare Act. In fact, I think it would be more cumbersome, if that's the word, or redundant or duplicate. If there's any inefficiency in the act, I don't think this corrects it. In fact, I think maybe it makes it worse.

We have a lot of people working in the department of social services and really doing a tremendous job for us, and when I use that term "us," I mean the people of Alberta. They want to be congratulated for the job they are doing, and certainly in difficult times I might add, because like I said earlier, these health providers are doing a good job, but there's tremendous pressure for them to do more and more. Of course the opposition will say, "Well, if you gave them more money, then they could have more providers," which in fact is partly true, but because we have more providers – we've proved as a government that more money doesn't always show the efficiency in our system. So I don't think it does anything to change that.

The Children's Advocate obviously already submits annual reports to the minister. That report is in fact tabled in the Legislative Assembly, and I might add that Farmers' Advocate – see, I'm a farmer by trade. I like to use that term as much as I can. You know, being a farmer by trade, we've got to get all the publicity we can. That Children's Advocate is doing a great job and giving good, valuable service to the children of Alberta.

Confidentiality. I strongly believe in confidentiality. I sometimes forget, but I do remember that the Liberals – I think it was about a year ago – were very concerned that a child's name was released. Now, if I read the amendment correctly, they seem to want to let that name out in the public. I'm very much against that, because confidentiality is certainly a very important part of our Child Welfare Act.

In closing, I just want to make a few remarks on regionalization. I remember when John Oldring was then minister of social services. He came to Fairview. I think there's a lot to be said for regionalization, and if anybody on this side of the House or that side of the House thinks there aren't going to be problems with regionalization, they're wrong. But the fact is: why should somebody in Edmonton be telling us in the Peace? The needs for the children up there are certainly different than they are in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere.

Regionalize not just children's services but get the education part of it. I've talked to many teachers that have children attend school, and they have no information. So we have to have those boards set up so that health and education and children's services are all co-ordinated together. I say this in every department, and I say it in Education: the education needs and the dollars that are needed in rural Alberta are different than they are in urban areas. This is the same as this regionalization. I'm so convinced that when we get the regionalization of social services, children's needs in rural Alberta will be better looked after.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**THE SPEAKER:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

**MR. DICKSON:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always interesting to follow my friend from Dunvegan, who always manages to take an issue and offer a perspective that some of us may not have thought of before.

I was absolutely fascinated to hear him touch on the fact that there didn't used to be abuse of children. That may be a startling

revelation, hon. member, to a host of native children in this province, now adults, who experienced abuse, sexual and other, while in residential schools. We have a whole history of problems that adults in this province are experiencing, native and nonnative, who were victims of sexual abuse, incest, a host of other kinds of abuse. So one might fairly say that there's a reporting, that there are mechanisms, that there are systems that didn't used to be there 40 or 50 years ago, but surely let's not suggest in any fashion that these problems didn't exist 40 or 50 years ago.

Moving on to deal with Bill 202. I'm absolutely delighted to find how many keen privacy hawks we have in the government caucus, Mr. Speaker. It hasn't always been evident. In my five years in the Assembly I'm not sure I've ever seen such rabid enthusiasm for protecting the privacy of Albertans when it comes to the release of information by government.

This is an issue that is of particular interest to me because it was my constituency office that a Calgary mother approached in July of 1997. She was absolutely beside herself trying to locate her 15-year-old daughter, had been to a Conservative MLA's office and I think had been told that just nothing could be done, and this woman, quite desperate, had some contact with my constituency office. It brought home the fact that sometimes we do such a good job in terms of statutes like the Child Welfare Act, in terms of setting out very strict rules, that we don't afford the kind of flexibility that's sometimes required simply to make good decisions for the benefit of Alberta children. I think that's what was demonstrated here.

#### 5:10

Nobody's talking about throwing out the confidentiality principle in the Child Welfare Act, but let us recognize, because it most certainly happened in the summer of 1997, that there were compelling, good reasons why there should have been some public disclosure to try and assist tracking down a 15-year-old girl who was on the lam. There were some very serious beliefs that this girl was very much at risk because of a group she had run with before, and it was imperative to try and find this young woman as quickly as possible. I have no trouble in saying I'd like to think I'm as much of a privacy hawk as any of the converts opposite, but I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I put the interests of children beyond all other interests. If it's necessary to have flexibility so that in those rare, exceptional cases there can be public disclosure trying to find a runaway child, then I think that should be done.

With the Young Offenders Act, despite all of the provision and injunction against revealing the names of young offenders, there's a limited provision there, if there's a young offender that's escaped and the police are trying to apprehend, to allow the state to be able to advertise publicly the name of a young offender. It doesn't happen very often, it's not something we'd want to see done very often, but the exception exists. Similarly, we need an exception, we need the flexibility in our Child Welfare Act to be able to deal with this. I just say again that our job here is to try and solve problems, I think, not to create other problems. If we found the Child Welfare Act's confidentiality provisions are too absolute and don't admit of enough flexibility, then surely our job, members, through the Speaker, is to try to creatively build that flexibility back in. I'm indebted to my colleague from Riverside . . . Edmonton-Riverview. I don't spend enough time in Edmonton anymore, Mr. Speaker, since the Legislature canceled the fall session. But I'm indebted to my colleague for addressing the kind of flexibility that we need.

The other point I just want to make very quickly is I very much

appreciate the suggestion that we should stipulate some things that ought to be provided for in an annual report. You know, to a lot of us all we know about different government offices is what we see in that annual report that's tabled by the minister and passed around. I have to say that some of them are excellent in terms of the kind of information you get, and they give you a very accurate sense of where there are problems within the mandate of that particular official or department or whatever. But I have to tell you that too often I find the reports are deficient, that there are things that I'd like to see and that aren't there. I think what's really important to be able to do is sort of a comparative analysis to be able to find out whether we're making progress from one year to the next, whether problems are shrinking or expanding. It's useful to have some constant elements. Not only is this proposal in section 2 so helpful, I'd like to encourage ministers of

the Crown to do this with each office that has a statutory obligation to file an annual report. Not to be exhaustive, but why don't we at minimum prescribe some of the key elements that ought to be in those reports? There's no report that would be any more important than the one that's filed pursuant to section 2.2(1) in this act.

Those are the points I wanted to make. I think, again, that in those few cases – and members should recognize that this would rarely be used – where publication of a child's name is clearly in the interests of the child, let's ensure we've got the flexibility to be able to accommodate that situation and that kind of urgent request.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]