

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 7, 2000**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 00/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Cooking Lake, Uncas, Ministik, and the Bruderheim area I am presenting a petition on behalf of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It is signed by 212 citizens from those areas.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present petitions on behalf of 165 Albertans primarily from Calgary urging the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 160 people from the Calgary area urging the Alberta government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present to the Assembly a petition signed by another 116 Albertans that hope that it's less than a 99.99 percent chance. In fact, they're petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to also table a petition. This petition is signed by 226 Calgarians from Dalhousie Drive, Capri Avenue. It's quite an interesting petition, but the citizens "urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table 11 pages of signatures of 241 Albertans calling on this Assembly to pass a real bill that will ban "private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta. On behalf of concerned citizens of Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Josephburg, Partridge Hill, Whitecroft in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I have 201 names to present.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission and on behalf of 194 concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Brookville, Fultonvale, and Josephburg in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I present a petition urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]."

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of 208 concerned citizens in Fort Saskatchewan, Ardrossan, Whitecroft, Deville, Colchester, Partridge Hill, and Josephburg in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan I'd like to present this petition which is urging "the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." That brings to a total of 815 petitions presented from the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan just today.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on freezing tuition increases now be read and received. I believe I presented it yesterday.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd ask at this time that the petition I tabled on March 6 registering opposition to private health care now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday be now read and received by the Assembly.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday signed by 111 Albertans opposed to the purpose of Bill 11 be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 5, 6, 7, and 9.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter of congratulations I sent yesterday to the acting head coach of the University of Alberta Pandas volleyball team. As you know, on Saturday the Pandas won their sixth straight national university women's volleyball championship. This is a fantastic achievement of which all Albertans can be extremely proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1911 March 8 has been identified as the date to recognize the achievements of women. I'd like to table an information bulletin on International Women's Day, which as we all know happens tomorrow.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of the agreement between the Blood tribe, the Peigan Nation, and the Siksika Nation, the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, and the province of Alberta which was signed on January 14 in the year 2000. The repatriation of the 251 sacred ceremonial objects listed on the attached schedule will become entrenched in law following the proclamation of Bill 2.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table five copies of a document that all Albertans will be receiving in their homes this week. It is Bill 11, printed with laymen's descriptions of the various clauses of the bill. It is accurate. [interjections] It is accurate, and I challenge anybody in this Assembly, since there is some interest across the way in not having accurate information out there. I'm sorry for them with respect to that, but this is the bill. This is the bill, and I wish to table those copies with the Assembly.

Further, Mr. Speaker, just so we are open with respect to what we're doing here, I'd also like to table with the Assembly five copies

of the accompanying press release, which is also accurate and . . . [interjection] Well, it doesn't seem to be of interest to those folks either. Nevertheless, I'm tabling it.

1:40

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

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is a letter to Jake Kuiken, president of the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers, regarding National Social Work Week, honouring the outstanding efforts of social workers in Alberta, who make a huge contribution to the children of Alberta.

The second, Mr. Speaker, are two documents relative to the steering committee membership and terms of reference for the independent caseload review. This is in response to issues raised in the Children's Advocate report last year. The membership and the terms of reference, I believe, will do a thorough job and are committed to studying thoroughly beneath the surface as well as the usual caseload contained.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document called Private Highway, One-Way Street: The Deklein and Fall of Canadian Medicare? This is a study that's been released today by the five top health economists in Canada: Evans, Barer, Lewis, Rachlis, and Stoddart.

Stripped to the bone, the Alberta proposal appears to be little more than taking lousy odds on very small payoff, and gambling with the health of Canada's health care system, for the sake of a few . . . health care providers who would stand to gain considerably in the short term. It is troubling that the rest of Canada has been so slow to take notice of Alberta, and that the premier has taken so little notice of Albertans' vehement objections.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the requisite copies of 11 letters. They were written by residents of St. Albert, Stony Plain, and Edmonton, and all of them are expressing their strong opposition to Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a report by an injured worker that outlines the serious contradictions between information provided by caseworkers to injured workers, the WCB Act, their policies and their procedures.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon two packages: the first one a set of messages from 283 Calgarians opposed to the undermining of public health care and the second package made up of 499 messages from Albertans in Calgary, Edmonton, Vermilion, and St. Albert. With the petitions that makes 950 Albertans registering today they will not be bamboozled by this government's Bill 11 PR campaign.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a number

of letters from concerned Albertans which represent a tiny, tiny sample of the correspondence we're getting in the constituency office, a tiny sample. The first one is from Maureen Doucette. Then we have Karen Anderson. We have Baldwin Reichwein. We have Nabil Azar. We have John Zurawell. He's so concerned that he's twice written different letters. If I tabled them all, I'd be here for the whole afternoon.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a transcript of a confrontation between Andy Marshall, CEP local 115A, and Conrad Black, owner of the *Calgary Herald*. Mr. Black's threat to decertify the union after two years is both an indictment of Alberta's unfair labour laws and an indication that Mr. Black is engaged in union busting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters here from E. Palichuk, Maureen Huson, Mr. and Mrs. Frasch, Joan Ambruck, and Valerie Parks, all expressing that they do not want their tax dollars diverted into profits for shareholders for private, for-profit hospitals.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to be able to introduce a longtime and one of my best friends in the world. He's in our gallery today. He also happens to work for the Alberta government within Children's Services. I would ask that my friend Mark Kastner stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a good friend and one of the great entrepreneurs in this province. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask Mr. Bruno Muller, president and CEO of Caron Transport, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the Assembly students from three classrooms in two different schools: from Win Ferguson community school accompanied by Mrs. Pat Sprague and Miss Joanne Hadley and also a group of students from Ministik elementary school accompanied by Mr. Arnie Duncan. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was even money whether you were going to recognize me or not. So now that we've won that bet, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mr. Al Browne, chairman of the Alberta Gaming Industry Association, an organization that got together on

their own recognizance over a year ago, and they've all formed this Alberta Gaming Industry Association that works with government, with its stakeholders. With him is Mr. Don Waldorf, president and CEO of the association. I would ask that both take their chances and stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview and introduce through you to the Assembly 27 visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. They are a grade 6 class from St. Martin Catholic school, accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw, and I would ask if they would now please rise and be welcomed by the Chamber.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Valerie Holowach, who is the past chairman of Lakeland community health council, presently a member of Lakeland regional mental health advisory committee, and currently a councillor of the city of Fort Saskatchewan. She's in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that she now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of people from the Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan constituency: Bob Fischer, past president and charter member of the Fort Saskatchewan Lions Club; Stella Chorney, a registered nurse with 40 years' experience, presently working in the Fort Saskatchewan health centre; Klaus and Renate Harder – Klaus is retired from the construction business and domestic engineer – Peter and Nancy Dolhaniuk – Peter is retired from the Capital health authority, and Nancy is a stay-at-home grandma – Orest Holowach, retired, entrepreneur, and president of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan Liberal association. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they now stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three guests from Lipany, Slovakia, one from Sherbrooke, Quebec, as well as my wife Dianne, who is accompanying our guests today. Jana Majtnerová is an exchange student at the Camrose composite high school, and she's also staying with us for the year. She's accompanied by her parents from Slovakia, Anna and Jozef Majtner, who are also taking the time to visit our great province, and also Amelie Fauchon, a participant in the Katimavik youth program, who is staying in Camrose at the present time. As I mentioned, my wife Dianne is accompanying the group. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive your warm welcome.

1:50

head: Oral Question Period

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

### Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The evidence against the Premier's private hospitals scheme in Alberta continues to mount daily. Doctors who know the health care system are telling Albertans that the Premier's scheme for private hospitals is wrong, that

it's a prescription without a diagnosis. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans believe this Premier when the spokesperson for 1,700 physicians in Calgary has said that the private hospitals scheme of the Premier will increase waiting lists and reduce the number of health care professionals who are available for the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this doctor take the time, read the bill, and understand that this is a protection of the public health system. As a matter of fact, that's what the bill is entitled: the health protection act. There are other doctors who have other opinions. I understand that Larry Ohlhauser of the Alberta Medical Association says that this is the route to go. So, you know, there are all kinds of opinions on all sides of this issue.

I would say: let Albertans decide for themselves what is right. The bill only went out today to all the households, and I look forward with a great deal of anticipation to the thoughts, the unfettered thoughts hopefully, of Albertans. Albertans don't need to be led by Liberals.

I know that the leader of the Liberal opposition is out there saying that Albertans cannot think for themselves. I know that she's out there insulting the intelligence of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, but let Albertans think for themselves. Let Albertans provide their honest opinions, and let them do it without the malicious untruths and misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has just insulted 1,700 physicians in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, why should Albertans believe this Premier when a spokesperson for physicians in the Capital regional health authority says that the Premier's private hospitals will not lead to cost savings nor to improvements in the quality of care?

MR. KLEIN: I apologize. Dr. Ohlhauser is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but again this is the college that is deemed to be supreme in terms of determining medical discipline, medical expertise, the regulation of medical practices, Mr. Speaker. So if this hon. member over here is saying that Dr. Ohlhauser has no credibility, let her stand up and say so. I would like to hear that coming from her mouth.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, who did this Premier consult with other than vested interests and spin doctors to draft this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad she finally asked the question. We started the consultation process last November, when we put out the policy statement and asked Albertans to respond to the policy statement. We heard from medical professionals. We heard from health care economists. We received reports for; we received reports against. The Liberals certainly engaged themselves in a campaign. CUPE engaged themselves in a campaign. The MDs engaged themselves in a campaign. The Friends of Medicare engaged themselves in a campaign.

There have been almost four months now of public consultation. This follows a blue-ribbon panel report on this very, very issue that urged us to bring in legislation of this nature. So I would say that this bill has probably been the subject of more consultation than any other piece of legislation ever brought before this Assembly.

MRS. MacBETH: And he still can't get it right, Mr. Speaker.

We know the Premier's not listening to physicians in Alberta, so let's look a little bit further. Respected health care economists Robert Evans, Morris Barer, Steven Lewis, Michael Rachlis, and

Greg Stoddart, most notable health economists in Canada, say that this government has made a completely wrong diagnosis on this bill, saying it's a Trojan horse private hospitals bill that the Premier has put forward. Deklein Klein's medicine seems to be their message. My questions are to the Premier. Why should Albertans trust a Premier's private hospitals scheme when renowned health economists are saying that it is nothing more than a prescription to dismantle medicare?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the others, but I've heard the name Steven Lewis before. I don't know if it's the same Steven Lewis, but if it is, he is world renowned as being the socialist guru of Canada.

MRS. MacBETH: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this Steven Lewis is the head of the Saskatchewan hospital utilization commission, and this Premier would be smart to look at it.

Mr. Speaker, since these economists state that there is a great deal . . . [interjections] Settle down, you guys; just settle down. Since these economists state that there is a great deal of money to be made by wrecking medicare, will this Premier now admit that his private hospitals bill is a prescription for profit for his special-interest groups?

MR. KLEIN: The answer is no. But, again, I would repeat a statement I made in the Legislative Assembly a few days ago, Mr. Speaker. She alludes to special-interest groups, but she doesn't have the courage to stand up and name them either inside this Legislative Assembly or outside the Legislative Assembly.

As I indicated before, there are reports. There are some physicians who support the legislation. There are some physicians who oppose the legislation. There are some physicians, I would suggest most of them, who want to read the proposed legislation and understand what it says.

Relative to reports, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, there are reports and reports and reports. I recall last week the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness tabling a report from the World Health Organization. Is this hon. member suggesting that the World Health Organization is not a reputable organization? If she says the WHO is not a reputable organization, stand up and say so, because the WHO says that

services may be offered by providers of all types. Provided that health practices and health facilities meet certain quality standards, which they will have to in this legislation, and that they are subject to several levels of managerial flexibility, their ownership status should not matter.

This is coming from the World Health Organization, one of the most prestigious organizations in the world. Does she believe that this organization is wrong? If she does, stand up and say so.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this Premier going to listen to our practising physicians, the ones that are right there on the front lines in Alberta? Is he going to listen to noted Canadian health economists? Is he going to listen to Albertans and withdraw this bill for the third time?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, you know, nothing in life is absolutely certain except taxes and death, as they say. But, yes, we will proceed with this bill. There may be amendments; maybe the Liberal would like to propose some amendments. But in this unprecedented exercise of consulting the public, all the people of this province, perhaps there will be some amendments as we move this bill through the Legislature. We want to make sure that it's absolutely right.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, part of this consultation process – certainly it's the medical community, certainly it's the federal Minister of Health: again, unprecedented to share our legislation with the federal government. But most importantly it will be the consensus and the thoughts and the wisdom, the wisdom of the people of this province, that will guide us and steer us as we work this legislation through this Assembly.

### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the key role of the Speaker is to preserve decorum in the House. Once again we are not getting off to a very good start, and I frankly do not believe that we are a good example to the citizens of Alberta nor to the children in this gallery. What is particularly disconcerting to the chair is if an hon. member is denied an opportunity to participate and to hear what is going on. This becomes a prime concern.

So the chair has just received this note from one hon. member, and the intent is to deal with the privilege of the hon. member: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you are aware that I incurred a significant and permanent hearing loss in both ears approximately 11 months ago. Accordingly, I try to manage my environment in order to offset the hearing loss as much as possible. For example, our whip arranged for me to sit in the middle of our seating in the Legislature, and the Sergeant-at-Arms kindly arranged for me to have an upgraded earpiece that ties into the Legislature sound system. Generally speaking, from a hearing prospective, I can function reasonably well in the Assembly. The exception to the rule is during question period. At the outset I acknowledge members on both sides are guilty of heckling. However, the volume by a number of members – and the member does go on to make mention of them – is very troublesome. In most question periods I have a very difficult time in hearing answers. Whatever you could do to lower the volume would be very much appreciated by this member.

It would also be very much appreciated by the chair, as I'm sure it would also be very much appreciated by the citizens of Alberta. I will stand again.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Third main question.

### **Private Health Services (continued)**

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has told us that he would be mailing out his private hospitals bill for Albertans to read. In fact, what he is sending out is a doctored version that puts his own spin on his private hospitals bill. You know, students who haven't done their homework have long known that they could use *Cole's Notes* to fake their way through the exam. Well, now what we have in Alberta are Klein's notes, which are in fact full of malicious misinformation. My first question is: why is the Premier insulting the intelligence of Albertans by putting his doctored spin in the margins of his private hospitals bill?

MR. KLEIN: No spin, no doctoring, Mr. Speaker. The only spin doctoring being done around here is being done by the opposition Liberals. The bill is there in its entirety. Yes, there are explanation points. There are explanation points, but we trust the intelligence and we respect the intelligence of Albertans to read the bill, to read the explanation points, and if they have any further questions to contact the appropriate authorities in government so that they can get an even better explanation.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the leader of the Liberal opposition

that she was the one who said that Albertans cannot understand legislation. She was the person who insulted the intelligence of Albertans. We're not doing that. We are saying to Albertans: "Provide us with your wisdom and provide us with your honest input and put all the political rhetoric aside. Put all the political rhetoric aside. We trust you to help us with this legislation. We trust you, Albertans, to help us with this legislation."

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do respect the intelligence of Albertans, and Albertans know that there is no difference between a hospital and a surgical facility which allows overnight stays. So how come the margin notes don't explain the significance of surgical facilities and surgical services?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the leader of the Liberal opposition would like to take advantage of the opportunity that was provided to her to have a technical briefing on this particular matter. [interjections] No, she doesn't want it, because she doesn't want to know the facts. She doesn't want to know the facts.

If she wants a short clinic on it right now, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the legislation is there verbatim from what was tabled in the Legislature in Bill 11. I know that is somewhat troubling to the opposition, but it is important that this be provided to the public of the province.

Secondly, because there is necessity to use certain legal language in a piece of legislation, we have provided accurate explanations of any of the more complex parts of the wording in the margins of the presentation. If the hon. member across the way feels that any of those notations are inaccurate, certainly raise the issue.

What really is bothering, I think, the folks across the way, Mr. Speaker, is that they do not really feel comfortable about not being able to criticize and vet legislation, because we're going directly to the people on this particular issue. So I think that is the important approach that's being taken here.

In terms of the wording in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, and the commentary, I think it accurately portrays and explains the context of the bill. I'm hoping that the opposition will be supportive of initiatives such as this rather than trying to pick it apart.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's quote another noted Alberta physician, this time Dr. Tom Noseworthy, who said last night, quote: let's call a spade a spade; an overnight stay for acute care service or intervention equals a hospital, end quote. Why does the Premier feel the need to try to fool Albertans on this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: I'll have the Minister of Health and Wellness respond, but again this is another example of misleading information. She talks about acute surgical care. We're not talking about the same thing. What she needs to do is read and understand and be honest about the bill.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the legislation is quite clear in defining a hospital as a facility which provides a broad range of service: emergency. It deals with the major surgeries which require a complex set of diagnostic procedures and backup procedures and may involve several days in hospital or not. That is, I think, a very well-accepted concept of a hospital. I would like to remind the folks across the way that the legislation is very clear. It's clearer than in any other part of this country in saying that there will be no private hospitals, no full-service private hospitals in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is precedent all across this country with respect to there being specialized surgical clinics dealing with a particular area of treatment and expertise. We have in the province of British Columbia, for instance, the Cambie clinic, which is dealing with a whole set of surgical services. [interjections] I know that's not Liberals, but it's pretty close. British Columbia. Pretty close. [interjections]

I can go . . .

### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

THE SPEAKER: I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has indicated her intent to rise and to question today. I'm listening attentively to the responses because a gentleman has been recognized, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. I'd hate to conclude in my mind that the questions have now been raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. If they have been, then she will be ignored later.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, to conclude your response.

2:10

### **Private Health Services (continued)**

MR. JONSON: Well, just to conclude quite quickly, Mr. Speaker, all across the country there are examples where you have surgical facilities which are providing service for insured services, and some are also providing services for uninsured people. If anybody across the way wants to be fair about this particular legislation, we are actually putting in more protection, more assurances around this particular approach than any other province in this country. For instance, there's an extensive section of the legislation which deals with making sure there is not extra billing for services which are optional to the patient, and I could go on through the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Klein government is spending about another million dollars in taxpayers' money to tell Albertans what to think about its private, for-profit hospital bill. The government has no interest in hearing what Albertans think. It has chosen rather to tell them what is good for them to think. To the Premier: how can the government justify sending Albertans misleading interpretations about what Bill 11 will do, such as telling them that section 23 will not affect their recourse to the courts, when in fact section 23 is designed to prevent legal challenges even when the minister can't show that contracting out to a for-profit hospital will save money or reduce waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would say to the leader of the opposition third party: let Albertans decide. Let Albertans decide, and then we will have the full debate. We will introduce second reading. It will then go to committee. At that time, the thoughts of Albertans can be incorporated into the legislation. If there are appropriate amendments to be made, they can be made at that particular time. If this hon. member has some thoughts about how the section to which he alludes can be improved, then send them over. Help us with this.

You know, it's not simply the role of the opposition to get out there and spread false and malicious information and to oppose just for the sake of opposing, Mr. Speaker.

It's also the role of the opposition to help to make legislation better.

This is fundamentally good legislation. It protects public health.

It provides options. It sets down very, very strict rules and regulations for the operation of surgical clinics, rules and regulations that didn't exist before but could have been put in years ago when the leader of the Liberal opposition was the minister of health. She could have done that years ago, Mr. Speaker.

We're having to deal with these issues now because it is absolutely necessary according to all medical experts to find new and better and more efficient and more effective ways of doing things and at the same time protect public health and abide by the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try and help the Premier understand what's wrong with the whole bill, but before that let me ask him another question on this privative clause. Why does the privative clause in Bill 11 give greater immunity from legal challenges to the minister of health than the Disaster Services Act gives to the minister responsible in the case of a natural disaster even though Bill 11 will be the biggest disaster to hit Albertans in generations?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the hon. member's comment: let me tell you what is wrong with the whole bill. Those are his words. Is he opposed to the first whereas?

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta to provide leadership and support in the delivery of quality health services in order to maintain and improve the health of Albertans.

Is he opposed that?

Is he opposed to this? "Whereas Albertans cherish Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system." This is all part of the bill.

I mean, I could go through page by page by page and ask him to stand up and say clause by clause what he is opposed to. Is he opposed to the third whereas? Is he opposed to the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, the eighth, the ninth? Is he opposed to all those whereases? Is he opposed to this very important clause, that "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." Is he opposed to that? If he is, stand up and say so.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown no courage in calling private hospitals private hospitals in this bill. That's what's wrong with this bill.

Let me ask the Premier the last question. Why is the government spending a million dollars to bury Albertans in misleading and one-sided information about his private, for-profit hospitals bill while making it difficult for Albertans to provide feedback on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad for one thing. At least this member is honest in the amount. In the amount. The Liberals yesterday were touting around, throwing around this figure, another example of misinformation, untruths, not telling the truth, throwing around \$3 million, here, there, at least five or six times. At least this hon. member is close to the figure.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the release of the policy statement on the delivery of surgical services last November and now with the introduction of Bill 11, the Premier has consistently stated that he is looking for feedback from Albertans on the proposed policy and the legislation. From my constituency the accountability issue is the key concern identified. They are concerned about being charged for procedures they shouldn't be charged for. There are concerns that the restrictions imposed by the bill on

facility fees, enhanced services, and queue-jumping won't be enforced. My question is for the Premier. What mechanisms are in place to enforce the provisions of Bill 11 once it is passed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of mechanisms, and if there need to be more mechanisms, we will depend on the wisdom and the guidance of Albertans. That's why we're sending out the bill.

It's indeed an important question, because, as the member points out, Albertans want to be confident that they will be protected from any illegal or unethical activity on the part of health professionals or the operators of health facilities, be they surgical facilities or conventional hospitals as we know them today. So there will be several mechanisms in place that will ensure full and complete compliance with the requirements of the legislation. You have to remember, Mr. Speaker – and I needn't remind you because you're one of the finest lawmakers around; at least you were when you sat as a minister in this Legislative Assembly. I need to remind all members that the law is the law, and you do not break the law.

First of all, the College of Physicians and Surgeons will assess and accredit any facility that is contracted by a health authority to ensure that the facility has the trained staff, equipment, and support services to allow that procedure to be safely done in that facility. Mr. Speaker, I would remind hon. members that the college is the body that has the expertise. It is probably one of the most revered bodies in the field of medicine of any jurisdiction in the world. All jurisdictions have colleges of physicians and surgeons.

2:20

The college also has an ongoing role to monitor and enforce the ethical behaviour of any physician licensed to practise in the province, including physicians working in a surgical facility or a public hospital. The college can impose fines or even remove a physician's licence to practise in Alberta if that physician is found guilty of unethical or unprofessional behaviour.

The minister of health will be able to monitor the actions of surgical facility operators, and Bill 11 gives him the power to request any information necessary from a surgical facility, including the 47 that are now operating, including the 38 that were approved by the Leader of the Opposition when she was minister of health. He has the authority to . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think we could ask for a tabling of the document, hon. member.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Knowing that monitoring and oversight are critical to my constituents, my second question is also to the Premier. How do we know that Bill 11 will work and do what it is intended to do?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly want the bill to do as it hopefully is intended to do. As I pointed out before, ever since we released our policy statement in November, we have undertaken a very full and vigorous dialogue with Albertans on this legislation. We have consulted. We have asked questions. We have had discussions not only with health experts and health professionals but also with everyday Albertans. The mailing out of the bill today is just one more step in that very intensive consultation program.

We have revised our policy statement proposals in the legislation to reflect the views and the concerns that we have heard. I believe now that we have a better piece of legislation because of it.

Mr. Speaker, I need not remind you that we went through this exercise once before with Bill 37. Subsequent to that there was the

blue-ribbon panel, the consultation process, as I pointed out, and now the mail-out of the bill. I can't think of a more intensive public consultation program than that.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Premier: in what way would the regional health authorities be held accountable for this legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I would remind this Legislative Assembly that as of the next civic elections two-thirds of those authorities will be elected.

Bill 11 clearly holds health authorities accountable for finding the best and most effective and most efficient way of delivering publicly funded health services to their residents, and it has to be done in accordance with the bill. Once the bill becomes law, they will have to do it in accordance with the law. It will be the health authorities that will have to clearly demonstrate to the minister that any proposed contract will be of benefit to the publicly funded system and to their patients. That is key.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, any more questions?

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans take Bill 11 from their mailbox, they will find that the government has attached their own spin campaign, and contrary to what the Klein notes say, queue-jumping will remain alive and well in this province. Earlier access to diagnostic tests and uninsured services means earlier access to specialists. My questions are to the Premier. If the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, why has he done nothing to stop queue-jumping in the public sector for people who can afford to pay for an MRI in the private sector?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, without sounding personal, you can perhaps ask your boss over there. She's probably closer, at least related to someone who's very, very involved in private-sector MRIs.

Mr. Speaker, as to . . .

MR. SAPERS: Talk about sleazy. Answer the question.

MR. KLEIN: You should know about sleaze. You should know about sleaze.

### **Speaker's Ruling Decorum**

THE SPEAKER: Actually this question period is due to adjourn today at 2:41. That's 16 minutes from now.

We do have options. We could declare a coffee break, take a recess. That's always an option. I could consult with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on how to keep law and order in the Assembly. Her background says that she was a law enforcement agent. I'm sure she would provide me with good advice as to how to keep decorum in the House in light of her record of participation in the House. Those are two options. Or we could continue.

The hon. Premier has the floor.

### **Private Health Services (continued)**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the question, there are some differences relative to the rules that regulate MRIs relative to the operation of public hospitals and surgical clinics. I'll have him explain to the hon. member.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, very succinctly, first of all, this legislation provides very strong control and penalties actually for queue jumping, against any ability to pay for faster service in the system. I think that should be recognized by the opposition across the way because it is a very important control in legislation.

With respect to MRIs this is one of those anomalies, quite frankly, in the overall way the health care system in Canada has developed. Across this country the interpretation is that because the actual MRI service, the running of the equipment, is something that is conducted by technicians as opposed to doctors, this is a diagnostic service that is outside the parameters and requirements of the Canada Health Act. I think that is interpreted the same way across this country as I understand it in talking with my colleagues across Canada.

So what is happening in Alberta is consistent with practices across this nation. That is the situation with MRIs.

MS LEIBOVICI: If the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, why has he done nothing to stop queue-jumping for an insured service if a person can afford to pay for an uninsured service at the same time, as is potentially happening in eye surgery in this province right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there is one case involving Dr. Gimbel that is now under investigation.

Relative to queue-jumping, in the publicly funded system, whether it's in a full scale hospital as we know it or in a surgical clinic, for a required medical service queue-jumping will clearly be prohibited in this legislation. It's as simple as that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, if the Premier is opposed to queue-jumping, will you stop the current unfairness in diagnostic queue-jumping that's happening in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness did a good job of explaining the anomaly, as he put it, relative to diagnostic services, particularly MRIs.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the so-called issue of queue-jumping, we have provided in the legislation which is before the Legislature and the people of Alberta a process of being able to control and to police and to provide penalties if there is preference given to people on the basis of their ability to pay or to get some other type of special consideration, a control that is not there in other provinces, as I understand it. So this particular piece of legislation, I think, should be recognized as being very protective of the public health care system but, more importantly, very protective of the right of access on an equitable basis across this province of the citizens of Alberta to the insured services under our health care plan.

2:30

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my constituents have asked me about the timing of the proposed health policy regarding the contracting of surgical services within the administration of the public health care system. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister tell my constituents what it is in government policy that leads you to bring forth legislation at this time?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the minister of the day, the government has been working and has brought before this Legislature this overall issue on two previous occasions, as I recall. Our desire, of course, has been to provide in this province a good,

publicly funded, publicly governed health care system to comply with the Canada Health Act, but as was identified in the debate on Bill 37 and subsequently by the report of the blue-ribbon panel, we do not have in existence in this province the legislative power, the legislative structure to deal with the whole issue of making sure that we have a system which complies with the Canada Health Act and is operating in the interests of all Albertans.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the fall of the previous year we initiated a policy paper to make sure that everybody was well aware of what our concerns and our plans were. We have followed that up, because there was very much interest expressed in us having the proper legislative structure in place, with the legislation which is currently before the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, in direct response to the hon. member's question, this legislation, Bill 11, addresses a number of issues. I won't list them all. It addresses the whole issue of surgical facilities. It bans private hospitals. It puts penalties in place with respect to charging for or in any way giving people preference in a queue or in a waiting list. That should only be done on a medically required basis. It is very protective. It also recognizes the fact that in this country we do need to look at other options, better options, more efficient options in providing services to the people of this country.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that many surgical procedures are already contracted out by health authorities, could the minister tell us what, if any, benefits have been seen from this contracting process?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of examples, but I will just at this particular point in time mention one, and that is that in Calgary – I choose Calgary with respect to cataract surgery because that is a very high-profile example. The regional health authority in Calgary reports that under the contract arrangement which is in place right now, which was in response to our policy statement being issued a couple of years ago, although it doesn't have the force of law which it does in the legislation, they have gone into arranging contracts with, as I understand it, three different providers. Today they are able to fund 500-plus additional operations at the same amount of money as was the case three years ago. As I understand it, the people that have received that service are quite pleased with the quality, the success of the operations. I think that's a good example.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans take Bill 11 from their mailbox, they will find that the government has attached their own spin campaign, both with misinformation and missing information. My questions are to the Premier. Why do the margin notes in this handout contradict what the bill says with respect to appealing to the courts when the bill itself makes it clear that the minister's decision cannot be challenged? Why the contradiction, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that section of the bill speaks to ministerial authority, and I'll have the minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is correct that there is one section of the bill which provides for ministerial approval being given with respect to certain decisions that are not appealable to the court system. I think that in this province – we're probably a little low in Alberta actually – we have about 15 or 16 other statutes where when



it comes to administrative decisions that have to be made within a particular system or particular department, for the sheer practical need to get on with business and get things done, they are not appealable to the court.

For instance, one of the examples in here, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister shall through regulation approve the forms and format and the information that needs to be provided in the contracts that are devised and reported to the minister for approval. I think that's a very practical provision. We need to get on with business with respect to the health care system. It's very common to other legislation in this province and this country.

MS OLSEN: Well, hopefully the minister will read Mr. Klein's crib notes.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MS OLSEN: My second question: why doesn't the Premier tell Albertans that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has no bylaws to describe what a major surgical service is? I don't see that in the Klein margin notes, Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: What was the question? Well, you can go ahead and answer it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. members across the way have – perhaps it is just something that happens with individuals. It could also be some selective loss of memory. When we were in this Assembly debating Bill 37, one of the concerns at that time from the opposition actually was that the College of Physicians and Surgeons were on the verge of approving a set of bylaws or regulations which would license and allow private surgical clinics to operate in this province.

At that time, our concern and their concern were somewhat similar, and that was that this Legislature, this government did not have in place the proper legislative power and provisions and protection to deal with that particular situation should it occur. It is quite clear that the College of Physicians and Surgeons sets standards. They deal with the issue of whether there is adequate medical expertise, whether a facility can deal with a particular procedure. There was considerable pressure on the college to proceed with that particular set of bylaws, Mr. Speaker.

At our urging and that of others they held off on this until we were able to put forward a comprehensive piece of legislation which addressed that legislative gap. That is a very important part of Bill 11.

MS OLSEN: Well, you can hurl all the insults you want at me, Mr. Minister, but that doesn't tell Albertans the contradiction.

### **Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. I think we'll spend the remainder of question period going over some of the rules. The number one rule that everybody agreed to – and the three House leaders signed a document to this effect – is that a question will have a succinct preamble, and there will be no preamble to the second question or the third question. Now, virtually everybody today who participated violated that rule.

The question is, I guess: what's the sense of having the rule if, in fact, leaders from all three parties get together, write the document, sign it with their names, and then they don't enforce it with their own member? They give it to the Speaker. What's the Speaker

supposed to do with it if their own members themselves, who've signed it, don't want to enforce it? So, no preambles on the second question and on the third question. That's a given.

This chairman has accepted guidance from three House leaders with respect to a document. The Speaker does not have to do such a thing. The members in this Assembly may get together and amend the Standing Orders and change the Standing Orders. They have not done that. Pending such a decision, this chairman has said that he will abide by advice and recommendations provided by the three House leaders. But, in the end, decorum in the House will always take precedence over that.

Secondly, there are only hon. members in this House. There are no last names to be used in questions or answers, and once again a great variety of members in this House seem to just somehow violate this on almost a daily basis. There's no need to. There's no need to at all.

2:40

Thirdly, *Beauchesne* is very, very clear about what the questions are to be and how the responses are to be. One only knows by the experience in this House – this is only day 10, and today's a pretty good example of that – that if you ask an inflammatory or an argumentative question, well, you're going to get an argumentative response. It can't be both ways. This Speaker is not going to stand up and decry one member because of inflammatory words in one portion and then tell the other member to sit down when the other member wants to use a similar kind of language. You govern yourselves. As I indicated last week, it's like a hockey game, I guess. If you want to go around bashing yourselves in the head with hockey sticks, go ahead. Go ahead. The chairman will remain standing at the end of the match. He'll be the only one.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now we'll recognize three hon. members for participation today.

### **Sandra Schmirler**

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, today it is with the deepest sympathy that I rise to acknowledge the passing of Sandra Schmirler, one of Canada's greatest ever women curlers. Sandra Schmirler died at the young age of 36 last Thursday in hospital in Regina, Saskatchewan. To Sandra's husband, Shannon, and daughters Jenna and Sara I express my deepest sympathy in their loss of a wife and mother. Sandra fought a courageous battle against cancer and remained hopeful to the end that she would return to the ice.

In her lifetime Sandra balanced marriage, motherhood, and a working career together with a very, very successful curling career. Sandra, the skip, brought together her curling team in 1990, and together they dominated women's curling throughout the 1990s both at home and abroad. Sandra led her team to win the Canadian and the world championship titles in 1993, 1994, and 1997, and then in 1998 her team brought home the first-ever Olympic gold medal awarded in the sport of curling at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. All of us were brimming with pride. I know I was. Sandra was a true champion in all respects, which won her the admiration of her peers and fans alike. Her Olympic foursome was voted the team of the year for 1998 by sports editors and broadcasters across Canada. Then in 1999 Sandra was inducted into the Curling Hall of Fame.

Mr. Speaker, not only is Saskatchewan proud of Sandra Schmirler, but all of Canada is proud of Sandra for her long list of accomplishments and the distinction that she brought to the sport of curling.

She always carried herself with grace, optimism, and that fierce determination until the very end. Through the media coverage of her curling matches and her interviews it was as if we all knew Sandra. Her legacy will forever remain in the hearts of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this Assembly I ask all Albertans to join me in expressing our heartfelt condolences to family, friends, and teammates of Sandra Schmirler.

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

#### Jackie Parker Park

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mill Woods Presidents' Council, a group made up of the presidents of the community leagues in Mill Woods, continues to be a powerful force in community affairs. One of the council's original committees, MCARFA, the Mill Woods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association, has been instrumental in bringing facilities to Mill Woods. This afternoon I would bring the attention of the Legislature to their latest project in the development of Jackie Parker park.

Jackie Parker park centres on a lake used this time of year as a skating oval. Trails wind off into Mill Creek Ravine. The thousands of trees planted in the past now shape a woodland landscape. Under the leadership of Mike Middlestadt, chair of the Jackie Parker Project Committee, enhancement to the park, one of the few parkland sites in Mill Woods, is being undertaken. A copper-roofed pavilion overlooking the lake and the park will become the centre for community and cultural events. Featuring a great room and huge indoor and outdoor fireplaces, the pavilion will be used year-round. A terrace down to the lake surrounded by picnic sites, fire pits, benches, and trails will provide residents a place to walk, skate, picnic, and relax.

MCARFA has raised most of the million and a half dollars needed for the pavilion through casinos and golf tournaments. The city and the community lottery board along with community leagues have also helped. Still, about \$175,000 is required to complete the financing. An invitation has been extended to the corporate community to join the project as sponsors.

On behalf of our constituents the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and myself say thank you to the presidents' council, thank you to MCARFA, thank you to the Jackie Parker Project Committee and to your chair, Mike Middlestadt. You make Mill Woods a better place to live.

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

#### Allegations against a Member

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday of last week I rose and was recognized on a point of order during the tablings prior to question period. However, as is the current custom, the point of order was heard long after question period, and few of the viewers would have access to *Hansard* and read the comments or the subsequent apology offered by the Opposition House Leader.

Contrary to the allegations made by the opposition Environment critic, the record shows that I have acted on behalf of the constituents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan with respect to their concern about gas exploration and continue to do so. In fact, I met with a group the previous evening, and I understand that they will soon be having a meeting with the EUB. I expect and I believe Albertans expect that it's an elected member's responsibility to verify and fully portray the truth of statements made in this Legislature.

A second failure of this responsibility occurred when the Liberal

Environment critic stated that she was filing a petition signed by 102 concerned residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. However, the addresses clearly show that most of these residents were from Edmonton and other areas of northern Alberta and that only five reside in the constituency I represent. I believe it's the responsibility of elected members not to repeat unfounded, unsubstantiated, unvalidated, or untrue allegations, and in light of the apology offered by the Opposition House Leader, I trust that such false allegations will not be repeated.

THE SPEAKER: We have notification today of four points of order prior to the chair dealing with a ruling on a purported case of privilege.

We'll go in this order for the four points of order. First, the hon. Government House Leader. I've also recognized the Deputy Government House Leader. So this is the first point of order?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm handling the points of order today. I've actually discussed the first point of order with my colleague the House leader, and we will be withdrawing it.

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

#### Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. DICKSON: On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition. Sir, with respect to the exchange between the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, there was reference to a report by the World Health Organization. My authority would be *Beauchesne* 417: "Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised" – and this is the important part – "and should not provoke debate."

2:50

The hon. Premier referred to a report that had been tabled in fact in this Assembly by the Minister of Health and Wellness, and that had been done on February 29. In fact, reference was made to it by that same Minister of Health and Wellness. It appears at page 152 in *Hansard*, where he says:

I think, a very credible, documented, supported set of arguments pointing out that a health care system, provided it is publicly financed and publicly governed, can benefit from a degree of competition from new ideas, from innovation that could be provided by the private sector.

Those of us who hadn't read the report took the minister at his word. It was later that we had the opportunity to read the report and found out that contrary to the authority that was represented by the Premier this afternoon, the report deals with developing nations, where public capital is short and governments have very limited options. The report in fact went on to praise Canada's medicare system as unique and serving Canada well. So the reference to private/public partnerships was restricted to Third World countries, impoverished countries.

The concern is that by the Premier looping back to cite a report that had been given a distorted kind of importance by the Minister of Health and Wellness on February 29, it could do nothing other than provoke debate and high feelings in the Assembly, which you've remarked on in another context, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that every answer that was given today, no matter how innocuous, seemed to

provoke debate, and it depends on the manner and the tone in which the question was asked.

With respect to the document which the Premier referred to, it is a question of interpretation. Often reports are used to support a particular position. I will also point out that while the report dealt with Third World and developing countries, one of the points that it made was that where there is a lack of capital, you need to look at options with respect to developing a health system.

We have a very good health system, Mr. Speaker, but it has been recognized nationally and by most if not all Premiers that we cannot continue to fund and operate this system as we have in the past. We need to look at new and better ways in which to fund health care and ensure that we alleviate pain and suffering and meet the needs of those who need to access the system.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is a question of interpretation, albeit there were some lessons to be learned from the report, and that's why the report was referred to. Again, it's a question of interpretation, and there is no point of order.

THE SPEAKER: It would appear to the chair that what we've just heard was a clarification of two positions with respect to this particular matter. There's absolutely no doubt at all that *Beauchesne* 417 says that the answer "should not provoke debate," but 409(1) says that "it must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate," and on several occasions today the chair interjected with respect to this matter.

Now, we're going to have these comments with respect to these points of order very, very narrow, and the reason the chair says this is that today is Tuesday and today is the day and an opportunity for private members to advance work and business of their own. It should not go unnoticed that private members' business may not be dealt with if we spend the whole time frame discussing points of order and the like. The chair would be quite concerned if in fact that was a strategy. I'm not suggesting for a moment that it is but if in fact it was a strategy.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Every time I come to question period, my hope is that there's no need to raise points of order.

#### Point of Order Clarification

MR. DICKSON: The item I'm raising, Mr. Speaker, would have to do with when the Premier said in response to the Leader of the Opposition that she should have taken advantage of a technical briefing on Bill 11. You're going to be dealing with that in a moment with respect to the alleged question of contempt, of privilege, but it's clear from all of the material and evidence that you have heard in the last two days that the Leader of the Opposition received notice at 12:28 p.m. inviting her to a technical briefing at an unspecified place at an unspecified time. I made the submission yesterday that it was clear that there was no genuine intention of informing the Leader of the Opposition on the technical aspects of the bill before it received first reading. So for the Premier to come back, to loop back and throw it out, there may be some watching, listening who didn't understand that there had been no genuine invitation to the Leader of the Opposition to participate before the bill had received first reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. There

certainly was a genuine invitation open to the Leader of the Official Opposition. In fact, that invitation still stands, and to date she has not exercised that invitation. I'm advised that on Monday, I believe, the interim leader of the third party took advantage of the invitation and was provided a briefing. The invitation still stands.

As concerns your dealing with the matter later on, I'm well aware of that. However, Mr. Speaker, again there is really no point of order with respect to this. What the Premier indicated was that the offer was made. The offer is still open. The Leader of the Opposition has not yet taken advantage of it.

THE SPEAKER: I gather, hon. members, that again we're dealing with another point of clarification, not a point of order.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

#### Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, you will consider this to be a legitimate point of order. I refer to a comment made by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert where, when referring to the notes in the Bill 11 householder, which was the subject of some discussion today during question period, she stated: these notes are a blatant lie. I would refer you to *Beauchesne* 489, where it states very clearly that the use of the term "lie" is unparliamentary. Typically, as you have indicated to the House in the past, we are to take members at their word, and I would respectfully request that you ask the hon. member to apologize for that remark.

MR. DICKSON: I think the short answer to that is this. I don't think the Premier or the Minister of Health and Wellness individually authored that document. The lie refers to a document that was produced by a corporate entity, the government of the province of Alberta. There's no authority I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker, until you advise me otherwise, that says that saying that a government publication is a lie is in any way actionable within the context of Standing Orders or the rules of *Beauchesne*. This is referring to a corporate representation from the government of the province of Alberta, not with respect to an individual member, and I think that it can be dealt with on that basis.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I can't let those comments go unchallenged. Everything this opposition member and everything her colleagues have done over the past few days that we've been in this Legislature has been to try to make the question of what is being put out on Bill 11 inextricably linked to the Premier and the minister of health. That's been their clear intention. It's been demonstrated time and time again. They're trying to put those words and trying to associate them personally with ministers. We've raised points of order in the past about dealing with issues rather than dealing with personalities, and now they're attempting to say: oh, no, we were just dealing with the words on paper that somebody else wrote, and we didn't have that intention at all. Mr. Speaker, you've got to call them to order on this sort of thing.

THE SPEAKER: The point of order has to do with something apparently that may or may not have been said. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert was not recognized today at all by the chair. It's also true that on frequent occasions during this session there's a great deal of discussion going across the way. The chair has stood on numerous occasions – numerous occasions – and said that that's not to be permitted or tolerated in this Assembly. Yet

members continue to want to pursue and have their private discussions when some hon. member has been recognized and another then would follow and be recognized.

3:00

The chair did hear some very atrocious language. The chair did not hear – did not hear – this particular phrase. The chair will check the *Hansard* to see whether or not it has been picked up in the Blues and if it is recorded in the *Hansard*, and the chair would be prepared to revisit this should it be recorded. But if it is not recorded, it's very difficult for the chair to deal with the matter. There has been no opportunity recognized to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

The chair did rise on several occasions today and point out that there was an absurd amount of heckling going on. The chair will be more aggressive tomorrow with respect to this and will name names. The chair will also provide to any citizen who has contacted his office in the last hour and a half wanting to know who appears to be the loudest of the hecklers the name of that particular Member of the Legislative Assembly. It will not be a badge of honour to wear.

### **Privilege Contempt of the Assembly**

THE SPEAKER: The chair is now prepared to deal with the question of privilege as raised by the Opposition House Leader and is now prepared to rule on the purported question of privilege raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader last Thursday, March 2, and argued yesterday, March 6.

As the chair understands the matter, the Opposition House Leader's purported question of privilege is twofold: one, that Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, was released to the public or at least the media before it was presented in the House, and two, that the Leader of the Opposition was not allowed to remain in a meeting with the media, referred to as a technical briefing session, which was held very early in the afternoon of March 2 and just prior to the introduction of Bill 11 in the House. This briefing session took place in the, quote, press conference room, end quote, which is found on the first floor of the Legislature Building next to the press gallery offices.

Last Thursday there was a third point about a possible assault on the Leader of the Opposition, but it is the chair's impression from what was said yesterday that the Opposition House Leader is not pursuing this matter any further, at least in this forum.

At the outset the chair notes that the Opposition House Leader provided notice of his question of privilege during the daily Routine on March 2. He did not provide written notice two hours before the start of the sitting, as required under Standing Order 15(2), but the events giving rise to the purported question of privilege did not occur until an hour or so before the House commenced that day. Accordingly, the chair finds that the notice was provided at the earliest opportunity.

On the issue of the purported release of Bill 11 prior to its introduction in the Assembly, presumably the Opposition House Leader is alleging that there is a contempt of the House. To refresh members' memories, breaches of privilege and contempts of the Assembly are treated in the same manner. Both are referred to in section 10 of the Legislative Assembly Act. These similarities were discussed in the chair's February 24, 1999, ruling found at page 161 of *Hansard* on another purported contempt brought forward by the Opposition House Leader.

A contempt is defined in *Erskine May*, the 22nd edition, at page 108.

Any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of

Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

In this case there was no supporting precedent referred to by the Opposition House Leader or anyone else who entered the debate.

The chair has reviewed a ruling by Speaker Francis in the Canadian House of Commons on January 19, 1984, with facts very similar to those now before this House. The 1984 incident involved some members of the opposition being excluded from a media lockup where it was alleged that a copy of a bill was released prior to first reading. In ruling against the purported question of privilege – and I quote from *Hansard* for January 19, 1984, at page 563 – Speaker Francis said:

There are any number of situations where drafts of Bills have been circulated and no further action has been taken with regard to them. Surely the Chair cannot be placed in a position of determining whether a document or a piece of paper, or whatever it is – it is certainly not a document of the House – can or cannot be circulated, or that the Speaker in some way should regulate the persons to whom such a document could be circulated.

In this case the Government House Leader and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore both indicated yesterday in the House that the media were provided with copies marked "draft," so it could not have been the bill introduced in the House.

The chair has scoured the authorities and has not found any instance where the purported release of a bill has constituted a valid question of privilege. As pointed out by the Opposition House Leader, the issue of the early release of a bill was raised as recently as a few weeks ago in the Canadian House of Commons. On February 21, 2000, at pages 3666 and 3667 of *Hansard* Speaker Parent found that there was no question of privilege with respect to the purported early release of Bill C-23. The chair would specifically note that he found four instances of this question arising in the Saskatchewan Legislature – in 1993, 1991, 1988, and 1975 – and in each case the Speaker has found that there was no breach of privilege.

Although there is no prima facie question of privilege on this point, the chair echoes the comments of various Speakers that it is in keeping with the role of the Assembly and the respect that it should be accorded that bills in their final form should first be reviewed by the Assembly after first reading. In the chair's experience this is the accepted practice in Alberta, and the chair would expect it to continue.

On the second issue raised by the Opposition House Leader, that the Leader of the Opposition was denied access to the technical briefing session, the chair notes that he does not have control over the press conference room. It is not booked through the Speaker's office, nor does the Speaker exercise any control over its use. It is not part of the precincts. This would be distinguishable from the office of the Clerk Assistant, which the Opposition House Leader alluded to yesterday, who is in her own right an officer of the Assembly.

Even in the federal Parliament, where the Speakers of the Commons and the Senate exercise control over the entire building, it has been held that restricting attendance at a media lockup does not constitute a question of privilege. To quote Speaker Francis' 1984 ruling at page 593:

The Chair obviously recognizes that the parties represented in this House may from time to time request rooms. They may or may not choose to invite members of the press. They may choose to invite their own supporters or include or exclude their own supporters. They may on occasion include members of other Parties or not include them. That is not a matter for the Speaker to decide.

Allowing or not allowing a member to attend a media briefing does

not constitute an impediment or an obstruction to the member performing his or her parliamentary duties, which presumably is the privilege that the Opposition House Leader alleges was breached.

Accordingly, the chair finds that there is no *prima facie* question of privilege on this point either. The chair wishes to thank all members who participated in this debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order with respect to the third matter, the question of assault, which the Opposition House Leader did not address in his point of order. I would ask that you consider in your ruling additionally asking for an apology. He referred to a person who is well known in the building, who has no opportunity to come here to defend herself, and I think not proceeding on that allegation leaves her in an unfortunate position. I would ask the hon. Opposition House Leader to withdraw that allegation.

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. Government House Leader chooses to rise on a point, as he did, and cite certain things, then we can have such a point of order debated and argued. At this point in time the chair did indicate that in terms of what was discussed yesterday, no matter was pursued. There was no matter pursued either, if the chair's memory is correct, by the Government House Leader at the time. But if the Government House Leader chooses to rise, as he just did, and pursue a point here today, I trust that he's made his argument. So we'll give opportunity to the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

3:10

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity. I'm not sure how to respond. I had framed the issue as clearly as I could. I told you the matters that we were pursuing. There's nothing that has been said in the Assembly by this member that I believe to be inaccurate.

I'd made it very clear yesterday the issues that we were seeking a ruling on. What the Government House Leader is asking for, I don't know what authority he has for that. I didn't hear any authority cited. He may be unhappy with the extent to which I had narrowed my argument yesterday, but, with respect, I'm the author of that. He had his opportunity, I suppose, yesterday. If he felt that the issues in front of you weren't expansive enough, weren't comprehensive enough, he had some options available to him, and he chose not to avail himself of them. So I would respectfully suggest that he's estopped now from being concerned that you didn't pursue in your ruling matters that would have been wholly irrelevant to the issues that were before you.

I'm not sure how else to respond to it, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader. I'd like some citations to deal with here in what we're talking about.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, you allowed the initial discussion, so I'm simply responding to the response of the hon. member across the way. If you're suggesting that at this stage I need to provide a citation . . . [interjection] Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that yesterday, during the time when this matter was debated, the hon. House leader did raise the issue of the assault and did make it something which he wanted you to consider. It's a fine technical argument to suggest, as the Opposition House Leader has done, that it wasn't officially raised. However, I am looking at *Hansard* from March 2, page 229. This is the hon.

Opposition House Leader, and here's the quote:

The Leader of the Official Opposition attended at the media room with this member. When she entered the doors of the media room, a young woman, an employee of the government – and I think it serves little purpose to embarrass the individual woman.

Too late, Mr. Speaker.

I take it she was acting on instructions of the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, or the chair of this meeting, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This young woman came up, told Mrs. MacBeth that she could not enter the room. Physically, in terms of the Criminal Code, in my view, it would be an assault, because without the consent of Mrs. MacBeth she applied – it was a physical application of force.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way did raise the issue, and the hon. member should do the honourable thing and simply withdraw the remark and apologize.

THE SPEAKER: The matter in question is, again, one that should remind all members that they are responsible for what they say in this House. If an hon. member wants to take liberty with the English language, any language for that matter, and make statements in the House which he/she feels they may not be accountable for either that day or sometime in the future, then others will judge other than the members of this House.

This matter is one that is perplexing. An accusation is made about an hon. member saying something, and one hon. member in fact quotes from *Hansard* that the hon. member said something. Then the hon. member, in this case the Deputy Government House Leader, is demanding an apology from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think that the chair will take all of this under advisement and review completely what has been said in the *Hansard* with respect to the matter. It was certainly not a matter that was raised and pursued by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo yesterday in his remarks with respect to the request for a ruling.

The bottom line is that all hon. members should be very clear about what they say in this House. The fact of the matter is that others have written in a more public forum than this Assembly about the incident in question.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than  
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

## Bill 202

### Marriage Amendment Act, 2000

THE CHAIRMAN: When we last met to consider this matter, an amendment was proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and we are proceeding from there. This amendment has been circulated and is known as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South wishes to speak to the amendment.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do in fact wish to address the amendment before us because the amendment strikes out section 5, which is the use of the notwithstanding clause.

There's been a number of members in the Assembly who have raised the question of jurisdiction. The Member for Edmonton-

Strathcona, the Member for Medicine Hat, the hon. Justice minister have posed the point of view that this particular bill is not within the jurisdiction of the province of Alberta and hence inappropriate. I want to make the record quite clear, Mr. Chairman. If you look at section 91 of the Charter where it talks about the distribution of legislative powers, it does say in there that the House of Commons has jurisdiction over marriage and divorce, but under section 92, where it outlines the provincial jurisdiction, you'll note under section 92(12) that the provinces have jurisdiction over the solemnization of marriage in the province.

Further, I would also refer hon. members to the Alberta Law Reform Institute's recent Family Law Project, which was released in October of 1998, where they note in a footnote that

the federal power embraces the substantive law. By way of qualification of the above jurisdiction, s. 92(12),

which I referred to earlier,

grants exclusive legislative power to the provincial legislatures to enact laws relating to the "solemnization of marriage."

Again, the Law Reform Institute confirms that particular jurisdictional issue.

We've made several references to the Layland case, and when it comes to jurisdiction, I think it's important or useful to refer to that particular judgment as well. It is a court case called Layland versus Ontario, March 15, 1993, and I'm going to quote from the document.

The applicants, who were both male and who were cohabiting in a sexual relationship, applied under s. 8(4) of the Marriage Act . . .

And of course this is in Ontario, Mr. Chairman.

. . . for judicial review of the refusal to issue a marriage licence to them. They argued that the limitation which prevents persons of the same sex from marrying violated their equality rights under s. 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Here's a case where in fact two individuals applied for a marriage licence and it was clearly within the provincial jurisdiction.

3:20

I'm laying out the case that in fact the bill, as we have it, with respect to the powers of the province of Alberta does have jurisdiction over the solemnization of marriage, and in fact it would thus make it appropriate for us to be able to use the notwithstanding clause to make that particular case.

Moving now to the question of the use of the notwithstanding clause – and I might repeat some of the things I argued earlier on the point of order. I would point out to all members that this is a private member's bill; it was drafted by myself. It is a very simple bill. It lays out a definition of marriage in a preamble talking about the importance of marriage, and so far I haven't heard anybody really disagree with that particular notion. But it was also very clear and it was clear in all the debates of everybody in the Assembly in second reading that the notwithstanding clause was a deliberate insertion into the bill, a very important part of the bill and one that everybody understood when they voted on it.

In second reading, Mr. Chairman, there were a number of good arguments made about why we use the notwithstanding clause and in what circumstances. I want to refer you to another number of quotations from a research paper, a background paper on the notwithstanding clause. In this particular paper the Attorney General of Manitoba at the time made these comments. He said:

The rights of Canadians will be protected, not only by the constitution but more importantly by a continuation of the basic political right our people have always enjoyed – the right to use the authority of Parliament and the elected Legislatures to identify, define, protect, enhance and extend the rights and freedoms Canadians enjoy.

Allan Blakeney, who was the Premier of Saskatchewan at that time, also made these comments. He said:

It contains a Charter of Rights which protects the interests of individual Canadians, yet in several vital areas allows Parliament and Legislatures to override a court decision which might affect the basic social institutions of a province or region and this is fully consistent with the sort of argument we have put forward that we need to balance the protection of rights with the existence of our institutions which have served us so well for so many centuries.

Mr. Chairman, I would say that marriage is one of those institutions that deserves our protection.

The use of the notwithstanding clause in the bill. If this amendment is passed, it's akin – and I'll use the marriage analogy – to going down the aisle with your spouse-to-be, going in front of the minister and saying, "Yes, I believe in the importance of marriage and its use for society and the benefit, but I really don't want to make my vows today because I want to keep my options open." If we do not use the notwithstanding clause, we have left the door open for challenges. That's clearly why the notwithstanding clause was inserted into the bill to begin with.

Several members have said: well, that's never going to happen; that's unlikely. Mr. Chairman, I would just refer you to an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* of Saturday, October 23, 1999. This is written out of Kingston. It says:

Gays and lesbians should go for broke and fight in the courts for marriage rights instead of accepting any compromises offered by governments, a legal conference was told yesterday.

In the same article it talks about a Supreme Court Justice and the comments that were made, and I'm quoting again:

Conference participants were bolstered by a keynote speech Thursday evening from Supreme Court Justice Claire l'Heureux-Dube, who asserted court fights for non-traditional couples are "full of promise" considering their legal gains over the last decade.

Going back to the Layland case, the dissenting opinion clearly indicated that there is a thought out there, there are people who hold the view that they want to push this matter further, and I think that for anybody to suggest otherwise would be naive.

One thing I haven't heard, Mr. Chairman, from the people who are opposed to the notwithstanding clause at the conclusion of this bill. While they are firm in the value of marriage, while they're saying that they don't want to change the definition of marriage, I've not heard one of them yet say in opposition that in the event there was a court challenge, they would use that mechanism. So what they say and what I hear don't seem to match.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member is reminded that under Standing Order 8(2)(b) we're going to have to move to the next item of business, so the chair would invite the hon. member to consider moving at this point, so that we can get the committee to report to the Assembly, that we adjourn debate on Bill 202 at this time.

MR. DOERKSEN: I'd be willing to do that, but I'd also be willing to call the question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. DOERKSEN: Okay. In that case, then, Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that we rise and report progress.

MR. HAVELOCK: I'd be happy to do that. Thank you. I'd move that we rise and report progress, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 202 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 202.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

### Canada Health Act

502. Mr. Shariff moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reaffirm its commitment to the five principles of the Canada Health Act and ensure that all provincial health care legislation continues to comply with these principles.

[Debate adjourned February 29: Mr. Smith speaking]

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss Motion 502. Public health care is very important for our country, our province. Perhaps every one of us should know that our first greeting to one another is about our health. Good health is the foundation of everything else in life. It is no wonder that health matters touch us at our core. If our health is vital to us, we need to have a clear understanding of the issues surrounding it.

3:30

The Canada Health Act with its five principles stipulates that the health care system must be publicly administered and operated on a nonprofit basis by a public authority. It also stipulates that insured services must be comprehensive. It also says that the system must be universal, that all individuals are covered under the system. The act says that people must be covered no matter where and when they move within the country and that there are no charges for insured services. It seeks to maintain a universal level of quality across the country. It means that all Canadian citizens are guaranteed a certain level of quality and accessibility.

The principles of the Canada Health Act are followed closely by Alberta laws, and Albertans have a high regard for these principles. This is one of the foundations or treasures of Canada. As I travel outside Canada, I'm very proud that we have a public health system that covers my worries, my concerns, for myself and for my relatives. It's also something that I feel assured that when I need it, I have it.

We should look at the health care system in total. The economy of our society today is heavily based on a service economy. Among the service delivery there are few options. Publicly owned and publicly operated, publicly owned and privately operated, privately owned and publicly operated, or privately owned and privately operated: those are the options in the general context of service delivery in our society nowadays. Each one has its pros and cons.

We are faced with a fast-changing and progressive world. We need to be adaptive and innovative. The health care system has been serving us very, very well, but it is under great pressure from utilization. The growing demands for services, the growing number

of services, the long waiting lists, the cost rising faster than normal growth, the lack of staffing, constraints by organizational behaviours, new and costly technologies, and limited tax dollars all have been plaguing our system.

We have seen more tax dollars put into the health care system across Canada, but the problem still exists. A key government function is to get the most public good out of our limited tax dollars. We need to be pragmatic, trying new and innovative approaches in order to do so. Imagine that Alberta becomes well known for our excellence in medical services, that people from other parts of the world come here to be treated, bringing reputation and revenue to our locality. On the other hand, imagine Albertans having to go outside the country to find better treatment and paying for it.

I believe that our health care system should remain publicly managed and publicly funded with universal accessibility for every Albertan with high quality at an affordable public cost. In order to protect our treasured public health care system, the ways of service delivery should be pragmatic and flexible. It is common sense that there is more than one way of doing anything. When we talk about the Canada Health Act, again, this is core to our heart. The universal health care system was developed, as I recall, about 30 years ago, and it became the identity of Canadians. There is a comfort, a peace of mind that when the day comes that we need it, we'll have it. It's an insured program covered by public dollars.

I recall that in 1984 Parliament unanimously passed the Canada Health Act, and this act stipulated the five principles of the Canadian health program. It also established criteria and conditions for insured health services and extended health care services provided under the provincial jurisdiction. When we look at the system itself nowadays, we see that it has grown because of the technology, the number of people, the different professions involved, and the clients, or patients.

We need to look at it and see ways to keep it from bankruptcy, from going into ruin. The health care system with its five principles is highly regarded in Alberta and across the country. It's the envy of the world. In order to keep that, we need to look at ways and means of keeping it, improving it, making it better as the world changes, as our society changes.

When I look at the debate on health care across Canada, I'm encouraged because it has become a debate. There's a need to debate the public issues so that we can have input from our citizens, so that we can have the formulation of a policy based on public input. There are definitely different ideas of how to do things, but if you look at why we do things, we believe that we need the public health care system as, again, it is the identity of Canadians.

We need to keep it. But now what to do with it? What we do now is look at different aspects so we can improve it. Mostly what is different, while we have differences of opinions, is the how to do it. We should not forget that the whole objective is to uphold the Canada Health Act with its five principles. We need to have programs that uphold that principle to get to that objective. We also need to consider different ways of doing that, and the debate is more on ways of doing things. I think that in the general context in our society usually we get the blame for not doing or upholding certain things, not because we don't have the same objective but because we are doing it in a different way, the accuser usually using the way of doing things to destroy our common objective.

So when I look at the health care system in Alberta with the mandate saying that the government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principle . . .

3:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member

for Calgary-Fort, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hlady	Olsen
Broda	Jacques	Paul
Burgener	Johnson	Pham
Cao	Jonson	Renner
Cardinal	Klapstein	Sapers
Day	Klein	Severtson
Dickson	Kryczka	Shariff
Doerksen	Laing	Smith
Ducharme	Langevin	Soetaert
Dunford	Leibovici	Stelmach
Fischer	Lougheed	Strang
Forsyth	Lund	Tannas
Friedel	MacBeth	Tarchuk
Fritz	MacDonald	Taylor
Gibbons	Mar	Trynchy
Gordon	McFarland	West
Graham	Melchin	White
Haley	Nelson	Woloshyn
Havelock	Nicol	Yankowsky
Herard	Oberg	
Totals:	For – 59	Against – 0

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

### School Uniforms

503. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce a pilot project to examine the feasibility of a school uniform policy in Alberta schools as current research gathered from other jurisdictions shows a correlation between the requirement to wear school uniforms and a decrease in school violence.

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and begin debate on Motion 503. This motion really started for me over two years ago when I received a call from a constituent asking me what I knew about school uniforms and the decrease in violence, the increase in attendance, and so on and so on and so on. So I started reading and researching the Internet and receiving correspondence from people across North America on school uniforms. In fact, I just received an e-mail from Barbados.

I will admit that in the beginning I was skeptical about the whole issue. I thought, like most others, that uniforms were an old idea brought back from the past to solve educational problems of today, yet as I read more and gathered more research, I began to realize that uniforms do have a place in our educational system. I think the motion I am proposing today takes into account the last two years,

and I also think it's the right way to proceed in Alberta.

Motion 503 proposes a voluntary pilot project in a few selected Alberta schools to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of a school uniform policy in improving the school environment and decreasing school violence. Mr. Speaker, my purpose in bringing forth this motion is really twofold. First, I believe that school uniforms can positively influence the school environment. They are not a cure-all solution to school violence or other problems in our schools; however, there is data from across North America that seems to link uniforms to stability in schools.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I realize that in Alberta's public school system uniforms are not commonplace. This is why I'm proposing a voluntary pilot project. I want to get the debate on this topic going. One common concern that I've heard from my constituents and from people across Alberta is that there are not enough Alberta-based examples of data on public schools adopting uniform policies. If we can get a few schools to engage in this pilot project, I believe this will show that uniforms are a good idea for our schools.

I know that when people think of school uniforms, the first image that pops into their head is the old-fashioned Ivy League look of girls in pressed skirts and boys in a suit and tie. In fact, school uniforms of today are much different and much more casual. Take for example the Quinte secondary school in Belleville, Ontario, where the students wear khakis and a white T-shirt with the school crest, or the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary, where the students wear black trousers and a white shirt, or simply a school in the States where the students wear jeans and a T-shirt. The key to the effectiveness of school uniforms is not making the kids look formal and fancy. It is certainly a sense of community when all kids dress equally.

In the sense of community, students and schools can gain many benefits. I want to discuss these benefits, but I also want to supplement the discussion with examples of actual schools from across North America that have implemented uniforms. Mr. Speaker, one of the most important benefits of a uniform policy lies in the fact that all students wear them. This makes it much easier for principals and teachers to identify and act quickly when there are outsiders or intruders in our schools. Principals can point out and respond to who belongs and who doesn't. This can actually lead to unwanted outsiders not going into schools and creating conflicts within the school building. Also, in urban centres, where the student population can be in the thousands, uniforms can be an important tool to identify in the mass of teenagers those who are its students. Without uniforms there is the potential for teenage gang members or drug dealers to anonymously walk amongst students. Uniforms can make a real difference in fighting to keep unwanted elements out of our schools. Threats to students must be responded to quickly, and when intruders are easily identified, school staff can act quickly to either stop the situation or prevent it from occurring in the first place.

The Scarborough Academy for technological and environmental computer studies exemplifies this. Before a school uniform policy was implemented, it was on the Toronto school board's list of possible closures because the school had lost control of some of its students. Fights, drugs, and lack of respect were common. But, Mr. Speaker, when uniforms and a code of conduct were introduced, the school underwent a vast improvement in the school environment and culture. It is now off the closure list, and the students and teachers actually enjoy showing up for school. As well, in New York City, the largest urban centre in North America, half a million elementary students started wearing uniforms in 1999. A recent poll by the New York City board of education showed that over 80 percent of parents supported all students wearing uniforms.

Mr. Speaker, uniforms themselves cannot solve all the problems



of school discipline and safety, but they are one positive contributing factor. Working with all stakeholders in a community – students, parents, teachers, principals – uniforms can be part of a strong overall safety program.

Another benefit of school uniforms is the curtailing of peer pressure. When all kids are in uniform, there is less focus on clothing and less competition relating to clothing among students. Mr. Speaker, when everyone is in a school uniform, students and their parents don't have to worry about keeping up with the latest fashions and spending hundreds of dollars during the process. Designer fashions are very expensive and can eat up the budget of a family, especially if a few kids are in school at the same time. Take for example if a child likes Tommy Hilfiger, a popular brand of clothes amongst teens. Well, a Hilfiger jacket will cost you, oh, maybe \$150; a pair of jeans, around \$100; and a shirt, maybe \$65. That's well over \$300 for one outfit. There are many parents who just can't afford this. I'm sure that all of those in the Assembly who have had kids in school know the economic pressures put on parents. Besides being expensive, when students are caught up with trying to wear the latest fashions, it diverts a lot of time that could be spent more productively on learning.

4:00

Since a uniform policy was instituted in 1998 at Nellie McClung junior high school in Edmonton to combat fashion-related pressures, many students have said that the school environment has become more stable and there has been less distraction caused by what students are wearing. Mr. Speaker, the students at Nellie McClung are being taught self-assurance, confidence, and how to be a responsible citizen in a team environment, and that sounds pretty good to me.

Mr. Speaker, conversely, when students focus on fashion, this can lead to some kids being ostracized, because their families simply can't keep up. Everyone knows how hard it is for students, especially teenage students, to feel that they fit in. Adolescence is a precocious development stage for kids, and many teenagers have limited reserves of self-esteem. What school uniforms do is eliminate one of the factors or reasons why a child would feel left out. It creates a level playing field for children at school.

In fact, in Calgary two students took the initiative to organize a petition to promote school uniforms. They felt too many of their peers, including themselves, were being made outcasts because of what they wore. These students felt that there was too much focus on clothing and economic differences. Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why I am fighting for this motion today. When kids are standing up and starting petitions trying to get us to fix problems they see as important, I am happy to stand up for them. I agree with these students. Uniforms are a great way to make students feel more included and to create a sense of community in the schools.

Uniforms do lower peer pressure. In fact, a 1998 study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals showed that three-quarters of the schools with uniform policies noted a reduction in peer pressure amongst their students after adopting a uniform policy. Three-quarters is a significant number. What it signifies is a lot of children not being picked on or pressured that otherwise would have been without the uniform policy. In my mind that is yet another positive effect of uniforms.

Peer pressure and isolation are such negative experiences for children in school. A student's emotional state can be really affected if they feel alone. Mr. Speaker, we as parents can try as hard as we can to help them and give them support, but sometimes that is not enough. It is their fellow students, their peers, that kids really want to associate with and feel welcomed by. I know that uniforms will

not solve all the problems of school isolation, but they will help. Uniforms remove one aspect why a student may be picked on or singled out. The evidence is there. School uniforms promote stability in schools and contribute to students feeling safer and more included in their schools. I think it is a very positive thing.

Mr. Speaker, I have illustrated today the positive impact that school uniforms have on a myriad of school issues. I think Motion 503 is a fair proposal for Alberta schools because it is voluntary and seeks the co-operation of schools and information can be gathered.

I will close by again urging everyone in the Assembly to support this motion as a positive step towards an improved school environment. Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respect the intent of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek with this motion. I'm not sure if it is – in fact, I'm quite sure that it's not – the answer we need for violence in schools. I respect the fact that you think it might be one of the things that may help, but I'm not sure it would.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I think back to my teaching days, and I think of some children that may have been ostracized or picked on. If it wasn't clothes, it was something else. The answer to that isn't everyone in a uniform. The answer to that is programs. It's intervention with families. It's school morale, school programs. It's a thousand and one other things that we can do in a school.

If we want to have a study that shows that it definitely decreases school violence and what you're saying is that you want to ask that provincially we set it up so that studies are done, that's quite a chunk of coin. If you really are serious about implementing this, why are we mandating it at this level? Shouldn't we be asking for volunteers? Shouldn't we be asking school boards to ask school councils and local communities? [interjection] I know that it's done in some private schools. The Nellie McClung school is one example. That's an all-girl school right here in the city.

AN HON. MEMBER: A great school.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is a great school. A great school.

This is something that starts at the local level, and a school board says: "You know what? Let's talk to this parent group, let's talk to these students and see if they would like it."

MR. DICKSON: A good example is Sacred Heart.

MRS. SOETAERT: A good example would be Sacred Heart in Calgary-Buffalo, where they did that. That was instigated by that community, by parents, and I would bet you that would have successful outcomes because it came from them.

Now, if we say, okay, Sturgeon comp, you're all going to wear uniforms – and you said that it could be just jeans and a T-shirt with no symbol on it, as I understand it – then you're going to walk in and a kid is going to have some emblem on the T-shirt. What are you going to do? Make him turn it inside out? I have done that in the past with some disgusting T-shirts, asked them to turn it inside out. Quite honestly, with jeans and T-shirts they say: well, that's not a dress code; we wear that all the time. So I don't think you've addressed that issue. It still may be the Nike runner comparison to the regular runners that I may buy somewhere for myself.

MS OLSEN: Loser.

MRS. SOETAERT: I know. I am.

What we should do is let it come from the local levels. Let it come from the schools who want to do it.

MRS. FORSYTH: That's what it's about.

MRS. SOETAERT: It isn't. This says that we're going to mandate it. At a time when this government is chronically underfunding public education . . . [interjections] I woke them up, Mr. Speaker. The truth hurts. The truth hurts. Maybe there are some truth squad members who'd like to hear this. Chronically underfunded. Kids are crowded into classrooms. Do you want to stop violence in classrooms? Let's present the rats in a cage comparison here. You don't put a bunch of kids in one small hallway at the bell during room-changing time. That's how you prevent violence. Give them some space. You don't put 43 kids in one classroom if you want kids to get along. If you want to talk about issues in violence, try funding education properly, and you'd see what kinds of programs would happen out there. Now I'm awake. Here we go.

You know, I think it's a pat on the head to say: "Oh, let's put them all in uniforms. I'm sure they'd really like that, and then all the violence will stop." What a bunch of baloney. The issue is funding in this province. The issue is not crowding kids in classrooms. The reality is that when schools need extra rooms added on, they need them not yesterday but two weeks ago, two months ago, six months ago. Let's take Bellerose comp, for example, a wonderful school. Absolutely crowded in there; 110 percent capacity. You know what? What those kids need is more space. They don't need uniforms. They need more space. When we're talking about inner-city schools, what do they need? Lunch programs more than uniforms, that's what they need. They need food.

You know, if a community wants to, if local councils want to do this, it should come from them. It should not be forced upon them by the government saying: "You're going to try this out. Oh, this is a school where we've got a high violence rate. We're going to put you all in uniforms." That's certainly not the answer. If we want to fund for enough counseling time, for smaller class sizes, for less crowded buildings, I think that would be a step in the right direction. You don't force people to wear a certain outfit and think that that will stop violence. So, Mr. Speaker, if this comes from the community and from the kids and it's their idea and they want to do it at the school, you bet it will work, or at least it has a chance of working. If we mandate this on some community, it certainly won't.

4:10

MRS. FORSYTH: It's not mandated.

MRS. SOETAERT: The member says, "It's not mandated," but somebody is going to be a pilot project, so I guess somebody would offer to do that. I would hope that that comes from the school.

They have it already. Vimy Ridge school has it already. So I'm just saying that the information is there, and if it's from a community that wants it, it may work. Otherwise, if this government were really serious about violence in schools, you would look at more counseling time, something that has been drastically cut, smaller class sizes, proper funding for inner-city schools that need lunch programs. That's what you would look at. That would be a sincere effort.

So just those few comments. I can't support it because I want to see it come from communities. If the students at one of my high schools or one of my schools support it, that would be fine. But as it is right now, no.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Livingstone-Macleod.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It does get a little confusing from time to time, knowing what last names and first names of constituencies are. That's the wonder of rural Alberta.

I'm really pleased today to rise and speak in support of Motion 503. I think it's a wonderful initiative anytime someone comes forward with an idea of how to help schools cope with the ever increasing problem of peer pressure and that type of thing, to bring forward a voluntary project that they themselves designed and that could be part of a research program.

I think that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek is definitely on the right track trying to urge our government to establish this voluntary pilot project by examining the effectiveness of school uniforms, and I stress "voluntarily." It's got to come from the grass roots. It's got to come not only from the students, but it's also got to come from the people that work within the school to make it an entirely complete school project.

There's a lot of pride that comes from being involved in a pilot project, a pilot project that can help maintain school decorum, and I think each and every individual school that would volunteer to be part of a pilot program would see the benefits of it and then institute that pilot project into school policy. It's a lot better to have it come from the individual. It's a lot better to come from the individual students, the grass roots, because that pride is instilled.

Motion 503 is a reflection of our commitment to engaging Albertans and guiding our policy through input from our communities. What I mean by this is that we are a Conservative government who listens to what Albertans have to say. This leads to better representation of the interests of Albertans, because instead of a policy being driven, as I said earlier, from the top down, it's based on stakeholder-driven consultation and, more importantly, community-based delivery.

I'd like to illustrate a few key educational initiatives that we have undertaken to improve our children's development and prosperity. The first is the Alberta initiative for school improvement. This is a new approach to support the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and the community to work together to introduce innovative and creative initiatives. What this means is that individual school boards will have the autonomy – I want to repeat that. Individual school boards will have the autonomy and the flexibility in deciding what areas of improvement they would like to focus on. For one jurisdiction it might be smaller class sizes. For another it might be early reading programs. The key to all of this is creating the right initiatives for each community and hence finding the most effective way to improve the learning environment.

Mr. Speaker, this \$104 million investment in this program over the next two years will ensure that schools have the capital for the program to work and be effective. An example of our government's commitment to ensure safe and caring schools is reflected in First Things First: Our Children, the government of Alberta's three-year plan for education. An education system that helps Alberta's young people become self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society is a top priority of our government, and the well-informed, collaborative effort of all educational partners ensures that schools can prevent violence and become safe and caring communities.

Another example of our government's commitment to

community-based initiatives was the Children's Forum held last fall. The forum was not an end but rather a starting point, a starting point for government and for all Albertans concerned about children. The forum involved stakeholders from across Alberta from various backgrounds and professions, all with a vested interest in the well-being of our children. The participants at the forum came up with several key recommendations which were delivered to the government by the chair of the event, Mrs. Colleen Klein. These recommendations will be taken and used to examine our government's existing children's services, and what will happen is that these services will be improved upon, strengthened, or in some cases refocused to better serve Alberta's children.

The initiatives that I've described lead to the key point that I'm just about to illustrate. We as a government are always striving to improve the prosperity and chances for success of all Albertans, especially for our young people. We recognize this can best be accomplished with the hard work and input of fellow Albertans. Listening to what Albertans say runs this government.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things Albertans are saying, especially in my constituency, is that we want our schools to be safe and to promote the best learning environment possible. That's why I'm standing here today in support of my colleague's motion, because it will make our schools safer and will promote a stable learning environment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I understand that school uniforms are not a panacea in solving issues like school violence or peer pressure, but, Mr. Speaker, the data from across North America shows that the majority of schools who have implemented a uniform policy have seen a general improvement in the school environment. This includes schools like the Nellie McClung academy here in Edmonton or the Sacred Heart elementary school in Calgary. These are examples in Alberta, but there are not enough public schools undertaking uniform policies to make a reasoned estimate of their effectiveness. This is another reason why I support my colleague's motion. Motion 503 proposes a voluntary – a voluntary – pilot project in a few schools to gather the needed data, not done on a provincewide basis or as a province-wide endeavour.

The pilot project that the hon. member is proposing is the most logical and effective way to proceed. Rather than trying to force schools in Alberta to comply with some heavy-handed approach without any community consultation or any local school involvement, my colleague is only asking for a fair and balanced plan. The voluntary pilot project which a few schools may undertake will get the Alberta-based data needed to make a reasoned decision on uniforms. Motion 503 is an illustration of both the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and our entire government's commitment to community-based initiatives and constituent input into policy.

The school uniform policy my colleague is proposing will create other benefits for both students and parents. One such benefit is that more focus is given to learning and less to clothing. This happens perhaps because everyone is wearing the same thing. In essence, Mr. Speaker, the uniforms become the students' work clothes. Instead of worrying about fashions and hype, kids can focus on the reality of getting an education. Uniforms can promote good behaviour and an orderly learning environment. This means teachers can spend less time on discipline and hence more time on teaching.

4:20

School uniforms are a concrete and visible means of restoring order and discipline to the classroom, yet the uniforms of today are

not overly stifling to a student's ability to express himself or herself. Uniforms today strike the right balance between instilling equality and order and keeping the school environment casual and fun. When implemented, school uniforms seem to make schools safer, decrease peer pressure, and stabilize the school environment. These are, of course, laudable and positive outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I think we should support this motion as a positive step for school safety and remember our larger commitment to the prosperity and the development of Alberta students. This means getting enough teachers in our schools, having those schools equipped with modern technology, ensuring that the infrastructure of our schools is maintained, and of course keeping our schools safe.

I am happy to say that we have kept our commitment. This is illustrated in some of the initiatives I have mentioned today and especially in our recent budget. We have laid the foundation for future successes and ensured that our students will have access to a great system. Along with our investment in education we continue to use innovation as our compass.

Our government is always looking for a new and creative way of doing things to serve Albertans effectively. This is where community-based initiatives and stakeholder consultations are most important. This ensures that we listen to Albertans and develop good policy. Mr. Speaker, I think that Motion 503, if passed, will continue this commitment, and I therefore hope that all of my colleagues in this Assembly will support it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. [some applause]

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my cheering fans here. I rise today to speak against this motion. Part of the reason I'm doing that is because this government allows for charter schools, and some of those schools have already decided that their students will wear uniforms. That's a criterion to get into the school. We have schools that have maybe no uniform codes, but you can't have coloured hair. I believe Austin O'Brien might be one of those schools. There are all sorts of limitations already put on kids. You can cite the Nellie McClung school, which actually from its inception has had uniforms. I mean, it's great. If people choose to send their kids there, that's great. That's their choice to do that.

However, to suggest that this should be the standard I think is wrong. I would suggest that violence in schools – and first of all let's not forget that peer pressure has been around for years and will exist. It exists in different forms at different times throughout changes in society, and we're not going to see that disappear. There's a lot of peer pressure now to not smoke, to not drink, those kinds of things, and those are things that impact violence in schools.

However, I become very concerned when we talk about the notion of suggesting that a standard be set voluntarily or not. If that's the issue the hon. member is bringing forward, then the motion is moot because that happens now. It happens now. There's a voluntary process that exists, so I'm wondering why studies can't occur with those specific schools that you've already talked about: private, public, charter, whatever. I'm wondering, you know, if the member has thought about undertaking some studies with those particular schools: Vimy Ridge, Nellie McClung, the Sacred Heart school in Calgary, and any of those other schools that have a traditional-type uniform.

I look back to the tradition in the U.K., where every school has kids in uniforms. I can tell you that a lot of those schools have a lot of similar problems that exist here. They all may wear the same uniform, but it doesn't mean that it's going to deal with the issues of

poverty, the issues that a kid has coming from a home where alcohol and substance abuse exist or those kinds of things. With that comes some different issues for some of these children. It doesn't help kids with fetal alcohol syndrome if you're going to put him in a uniform. We have to address these issues in a different way. If you really want to address violence, let's look at poverty, let's look at putting programs in place. That's crime prevention, but uniforms are not crime prevention.

The whole idea of the safe and caring school program. My son was in a school, in fact, that was part of that program. Some great things were happening, and there were some great changes, but you know what? The kids didn't have to wear uniforms for those things to happen, for the changes to occur.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that many of the kids already have uniforms in school, and I think my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert alluded to that, all those places in and around that area. I would not want to see money diverted away, especially with the schools in my neighbourhood, from breakfast programs, lunch programs, snack programs, peer leadership programs, mentoring programs and have that funding diverted into school uniforms, because many of the kids in my constituency need much more than that. I don't think it matters. You know, for some of those kids getting to school is a huge chore. What they come dressed in isn't an issue for them. Getting there is a huge challenge. So I can think of many more ways to address these issues than necessarily putting a child or a youth in a uniform.

I would suggest to you that if you're looking at where the violence starts, it's at the junior high school level, where you would find much resistance from those kids. And why should a kid have to travel outside of their school area because the school has decided to have uniforms?

There are all sorts of other issues, and I have yet to see anything tabled by the hon. member that suggests that all of these concerns would be addressed by the adoption of a pair of jeans and a T-shirt or a kilt and a pair of kneesocks and those kinds of things. Those are choices that people should make on their own. Those schools are there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, very much.

THE SPEAKER: I hate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, but under Standing Order 8(2)(c) the time allocation for consideration of this type of business today is now concluded.

4:30

head: Government Motions

#### Adjournment of Session

5. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:  
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is primarily administrative. This side of the House expects that we will have a lengthy and interesting session. However, to give members opposite the opportunity to have full and complete debate on this, we feel it's necessary to move the motion at this time. Again I reiterate that it's mostly administrative so we can adjourn in the future, which I expect will be quite some time down the road.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a few moments to talk about this motion to adjourn already, so early in such a fun-filled session. Though it is administrative, in the words of the Deputy Government House Leader, I actually believe him. I really do, but I just want to express a few questions or concerns that maybe will be considered in the future; for example, actually set times for sitting in this Legislature. I know it's been something we've talked about for the seven years I've been here.

MR. HAVELOCK: I've been here 10.

MRS. SOETAERT: You've been here 10? No. You came in the same time I did.

MR. HAVELOCK: One-thirty to 10.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's a possibility, 1:30 to 10. From 1:30 to 10 could be a possibility.

However, one of the things I would appreciate and I think Albertans would appreciate and maybe those of us with a family life would appreciate is knowing the actual dates that we will sit in this Legislature. That's not uncommon across this country, to actually have set dates for when they start and finish. And you know what? Some places have a fall session every year. Yes, they really do.

MS OLSEN: Really?

MRS. SOETAERT: They really do. So, you know, that's a concept that maybe this government could think about. I'd be interested to know: are we going to have a fall session this year?

DR. TAYLOR: We had one.

MRS. SOETAERT: We've had one in seven years. I'm really glad that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is going to leap into debate any moment now, or he could point of order me if he's really upset.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be neat to actually know when or if we're going to have a fall session and actually set that date every year. I think that would be quite a concept, which isn't known in Alberta, but certainly I think we could do that because there are other strides we have made in this Assembly, so I bet this one wouldn't be too hard for this government to leap to. I think certainly this year will be a hot year, that we will need a fall session, so it would be nice if I could see that motion put forward at some time, that a fall session will start on such a date.

This is an adjournment, so if we adjourn early in the spring session – heaven knows, it's on the table now. It could be done in what? How many days does this take to go through? Two? One? It could be done Thursday. Then certainly everything's been left on the table, unless of course they bring closure to a great many things. It could be an awfully short session, so the reality is that we should all be concerned. Will this go into the fall? Will there be a fall session in Alberta in the year 2000?

Ah, Cypress-Medicine Hat says no, but he's not the Deputy Government House Leader, so I'm not going to put my eggs in that basket. I am going to hope that the Deputy Government House Leader will bring that issue forward to his caucus and say: you know, guys, it's about time we really were democratic in this Assembly and set dates that we actually sit in this Legislature, start

dates in the spring and start dates in the fall and really go from there. I think it would be a real concept. A real concept. And you know these parliamentary trips that each one of us is trying to get an opportunity to be a part of, which I think are very informative and very good? Well, then you'd actually be able to say, "No, I can't go in November," or "Yes, I can," but right now things are up in the air with all those kinds of things.

I think the people of Alberta would appreciate it. There are issues that they know could be tabled in the Legislature, talked about in the Legislature, but they say: "Oh, are you going to have a fall session this year? Maybe you'll present my stuff in the fall." Well, we're never sure in Alberta if there's going to be a fall session.

So I just wanted to express the concern that, number one, we've already got an adjournment motion and we're just starting. We're just starting, unless of course Bill 11 is scrapped, maybe Bill 3 is really fixed, and maybe we are out of here in a week or two. Sad, because there are a great many issues that people in Alberta want us to talk about. I'm sure that would be an exaggeration, and I don't think they have any intention of really using that adjournment motion right away.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned that this motion is already on the table but with the hope that maybe next time we will actually have set sitting days in the Legislature. Some things have improved. I'm trying to think of one, and I will in a little while, I think. The election of the Speaker: there's one. Even though our side is outnumbered on that, the process is still there, and sometimes it's a pretty interesting election.

I just have to say that I'm disappointed this motion is already on the table. We've barely been here – what would you say? – 10 days. Those are a short 10 days. [interjection] I'm sure Calgary-Fish Creek is going to hop into debate pretty soon.

Mr. Speaker, with those few concerns I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some concerns about Government Motion 5, the adjournment motion. Like the hon. member for the area of Riviere Qui Barre – that would be one of her areas in the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert – we can only become alarmed at the haste with which the government introduces this adjournment motion. I myself have not even had the opportunity yet to respond to the throne speech, yet hon. members are anxious to get the adjournment motion on the Order Paper, and we have so much to do. We look at page 3 of the Order Paper, and we see there have been scarcely 13 government bills introduced.

I don't know what they're thinking. The only thing I can surmise is that they're afraid of something. And when this government is afraid of something, Mr. Speaker, I can only see Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act – or, as some people say, the privatization act – and this is the reason for this hasty motion, this adjournment motion. When we look at the concern that has been expressed by Albertans, the government with this adjournment motion can fold their political tent, so to speak, and get away from the intense political pressure they are experiencing over Bill 11. Many Albertans, it doesn't matter where they're from, whether they're from Grande Prairie, Red Deer-South, Calgary, Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan – all over the province, including Fort McMurray, people are very, very concerned about not only the direction of health care. Suddenly people are just coming up in the streets and they're saying: "Mr. MacDonald, we can't trust this government anymore to deliver a good, sound public health care system. They cannot be trusted."

I'm sure all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly must be hearing this, so this has to be the reason for skittering away and having this motion so soon on the Order Paper. Ten days into the session and here we are talking about adjournment. We have issues to deal with. We have issues, of course, relating to health care, Mr. Speaker. We have issues relating to education, whether it's in the elementary system or the high school system. We have the universities. Students are gathering, and they're protesting in a very sensible Canadian way about the high cost of university. We have a skilled-labour shortage in the province. We have industries that are very, very anxious to provide jobs for Albertans. They can and they will, but there are no skilled people to come forward and take these jobs. We have issues that are brought forward all the time by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning regarding municipal governments. We have issues relating to senior citizens of this province. We have seniors who feel that this government is making them feel guilty because they may require at some time in the future health care.

4:40

We have a very young population in this province. It is the youngest population in the country. There is less than 10 percent of the entire population that is over 65. It is not going to be for another generation yet, Mr. Speaker, the year 2016, before this province reaches the average age of retirement or, shall I say, 65, which is currently going on record in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. So whenever seniors are gathering – and they're gathering in large groups these days, particularly in this city, the city of Edmonton – regarding health care and Bill 11 . . .

#### **Speaker's Ruling Relevance**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, before the Assembly right now is a motion dealing with adjournment, and relevancy is always a consideration. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is very eloquent, and if the fear is that should this motion go forward – the Speaker has to be very careful about intervening in the debate, but assurances should be given to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that should this motion be approved, this House would not be adjourned until the year 2016.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. MacDONALD: Goodness.

Mr. Speaker, all these issues, including the issues that are very important to seniors, issues on agriculture, environment, electricity deregulation, issues relating to user fees, have to be discussed at length before we should entertain an adjournment motion. This concept that 10 days into the session we should put forward our adjournment motion to me is almost a reflection of paranoia by the government. This is a snapshot. It's a snapshot in time. It's really a polaroid of what this government thinks. Do they want to have debate? Do they want to have debate on these issues? I think not.

We're always conscious that in the fall of 1997 there was no fall session of the Legislative Assembly. Before we go to the citizens of Alberta to determine who should form the next government, this may be the last opportunity to discuss this issue. It is very important that everyone from all sides of the Assembly gets to discuss these issues. With this motion, which I would describe mildly as a legislative guillotine, I'm surprised. I'm surprised that it would be brought forward, and I would be surprised that hon. members of this Assembly would support it at this time. Of course, if we don't have our adjournment motion now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, our House leader, in May or maybe in June is going to spot on the Order Paper some day the adjournment motion. He's going to be

able to come to our caucus meeting and say: I believe we have a week or two left in this session.

Now, this could just be a parliamentary ploy, but I think it is an affront to all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. When we think of Albertans, when we think of the discussions we're going to have here this spring, we must think of the long term, not of schemes for re-election but think of the long term. We think perhaps to the year 2016, when 14 percent of the population will be over 65, or perhaps to the years in the future when we're not going to have enormous reserves of natural gas and oil from which to get royalties as we sell this gas and oil. The province is changing quite quickly. Last week, for instance, we talked about our land, particularly our land base and our land that's reserved for agricultural purposes. There are many long-term planning issues, and it is just not proper for those issues to be discussed after the legislative guillotine that Motion 5 really is introduced.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to any other hon. member of the Assembly, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo seems keen to engage in the debate. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I can't help but think as I look across at the Member for Calgary-Varsity that there was a time when the member for that constituency would have had probably a very different view of the Legislature and when we'd shut things down and when we wouldn't. Actually, I'm thinking of the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the current minister of gambling, when he was involved in the Tuxis and older boys' parliament.

You know, I can't help but think that that member would have looked forward with great excitement to the prospect of another Tuxis and older boys' parliament resuming in Red Deer. He would have gotten in the car or on the bus to travel up, representing his area in Calgary, to participate in debate. I can only imagine the kind of excitement he brought to participating in that process and how disappointing he would have found it if the minute he got off the bus to roll into the Tuxis and older boys' parliament in Red Deer or wherever it was held that particular year, somebody told him, "Well, great to see you here, Calgary-Varsity, but get your calendar out, because we're deciding when we're sending you home." He would say to himself: "But, gosh, it's only a few days I get this little excursion away from home. I've got all kinds of new friends to meet in the parliament. I've got all kinds of new experiences to have. Surely you wouldn't deny me that by bringing down the curtain before we barely get out on the stage."

Mr. Speaker, that same frustration that I can imagine the Member for Calgary-Varsity would have brought to his first Tuxis and older boys' parliament may be akin to what some of us feel when we see this motion on there. I'm going to speak against it for a couple of reasons.

The first one would be the provision that the House stands adjourned "until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council." Now, Mr. Speaker, I've certainly got no lack of confidence in either your office or in the Lieutenant Governor, and I know you do a fine job in terms of deciding when the Legislature should resume sitting. But how much better it would be if we went back to the plan that had been engineered by you, Mr. Speaker, and the gentleman who went on to become leader of the Liberal opposition for a time, when the two of you were House leaders and you negotiated a pact that had at least a fixed date when the spring session would commence and a fixed date when the legislative session would commence in the fall. We knew in advance that it might start a few days early, a week

early, but we could intelligently plan our time and our business.

You know, what it is, Mr. Speaker? It's simply a measure of respect for individual members. It respects the ability of individual members to design their plans and their calendars in a way that most people do in the regular world. It makes sense that we take away this little bit of gamesmanship, this little bit of surprise that now is vested in Executive Council and the Premier in terms of determining when the Legislature should commence. I look forward eagerly to the day when we see one of these motions and it says, "You shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker, which date shall be no later than October 15" or whatever.

4:50

I think we lost a lot when that agreement came to the end of its term. We've been able to continue some elements of that in terms of private members' business. We see some vestiges of the leadership provided in that initial agreement from 1993, but I must say, Mr. Speaker, that what we have now is but a shadow of the much bolder scheme that had been negotiated, agreed to, and implemented in that period from 1993 to 1997. So I just have that concern.

What possible reason, other than some narrow partisan advantage, would the government have for not committing to, if you will, a drop-dead date when the spring session would commence and a drop-dead date when the fall session would commence? It doesn't preclude the Premier from reconvening the session earlier. It just seems to me like such an intelligent way of proceeding. I'm disappointed we've lost that, and this is perhaps an opportunity to raise that.

Now, the other reason why I stand to register some concern is the notion of recessing the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature. We discovered a couple of years ago that the government, Mr. Speaker, doesn't read their parliamentary authorities, because when they canceled the fall session in 1997, I think it was, we heard the Premier defend that by saying: well, ladies and gentlemen of the province of Alberta, we don't have any more legislation; we don't need a fall session because we don't have more legislation. That ignored completely the other huge reason why we sit as a Legislative Assembly. It's not always to pass legislation. Sometimes it's to hold government accountable.

You know, as frustrating as it is for you, Mr. Speaker, in terms of question period, in terms of riding herd on this bunch of cats, and as frustrating as it is for members here who sometimes would like a higher level of decorum and respect for each other and for other members in the Assembly . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MR. DICKSON: Well, there may be some who don't share that sentiment.

But, you know, it is the one time, it is the one place, it is the sole forum where Albertans can hold their government accountable. They hold it accountable through questions in question period, they hold the government accountable through written questions and motions for returns, when we're allowed to debate them, and they hold this government accountable through vigorous scrutiny of estimates and tough questions to ministers, who have to justify some \$17 billion in taxpayer spending.

Mr. Speaker, those are also compelling and important reasons why the Legislature must sit. Yes, it's a light legislative program the government puts in front of us. Yes, it's disappointing in the sense that it misses so many of the issues that Albertans want to see addressed. I talked before about the gaps. We have yet to see the details of a vigorous public legal education program, the notion of

how we're going to make our Alberta Human Rights Commission independent of government. There are so many issues, the issue of homelessness in Calgary, much of it in Calgary-Buffalo. Those are things that we should be discussing in here.

What we find is a government that rather is fixated on figuratively turning off the lights – oh, I know the lights aren't turned off here – locking the doors, and dispersing MLAs to their areas. We should have been tipped off to this when we saw when the throne speech was scheduled. Imagine the lunacy of bringing together 82 MLAs from all over the province, with all of the attendant costs associated with that, to sit for one hour, plus or minus, and hear a throne speech and have some cookies and some punch downstairs, and then we dispersed to our 82 constituencies again. What lunacy is that, Mr. Speaker? If you wanted to economize on time, why wouldn't you have the throne speech on a Monday so we stay the next day to start debate on that throne speech?

Mr. Speaker, the essence of this motion is that it reaffirms the monopolistic control that Executive Council has over the time of this Assembly, the management of this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: That's because there are 64 of us and 16 of you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, our minister responsible for innovation . . . [interjection] Science and innovation. It's hard to get the titles right, Mr. Speaker. He can't wait for the interesting questions we've got for him at 8 o'clock tonight. He wants to get involved early. He wants to know what some of those questions are. He wants to be tipped off, but he's not going to be. He's going to have to come back at 8 o'clock. We have so darn many good questions for that minister that we're going to keep him busy from 8 until 10 o'clock.

Mr. Speaker, the point I'm making is simply this. In this Assembly, as rough as it may be around the edges, as tumultuous as it may be for 50 minutes four days a week, as unsatisfactory as it may be to those of us looking for concrete answers to specific questions, it's still the very best forum Albertans have. It's the only forum Albertans have to try and ferret out how their tax dollars are being spent or misspent, how their resources are being managed or mismanaged, whether their needs are being addressed, and, if so, whether they're being addressed adequately. I wish government would put as much time, energy, and resources into representing the citizens of this province. You know, you may have 64 seats. The issue is whether this legislative agenda that we see here reflects the priorities of those Albertans.

DR. TAYLOR: We'll have 74 after the next election.

MR. DICKSON: You know, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat already wants to make predictions in terms of the next election. Maybe, Mr. Speaker, that's really what this is all about. This little legislative session is but a very, very short hiccup on the way to the next election.

That's not what Albertans put us here for. That's not what they pay us for. That's not why they give us staff. They expect us to be wrestling with the issues like wait lists in Calgary. They expect us to be talking about long-term care facilities in Medicine Hat. They expect us to be talking about the access to mental health services in Airdrie, Alberta, and there's a whole bunch of other issues in Airdrie that citizens want to see addressed. Those people send me notes. People in Airdrie, Alberta, are sending notes to Liberal MLAs expressing their concern that they don't feel they're being represented on the private versus public health care issue.

MS HALEY: I don't think so.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, because I know the member for the Airdrie area has got lots to say, I would think that she would have a lot to say about the issue of public health care. If she doesn't, that's for her and her constituents to resolve.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that this is the forum for the rest of us who do want to take advantage of that opportunity to challenge the government to talk and to act and to commit resources to deal with those things like how we reduce wait lists in this province. Has there yet been a single opportunity in this House to address that? Has there been a question to talk about how we're going to reform primary health care in this province? No. But the government wants to lock the doors, bar the doors, get MLAs back out where it's safe, protect the ministers.

You know, the front bench in this House have what I call the armadillo complex. Mr. Speaker, it's all about protection. It's all about hunkering down. It's all about, you know, digging a little hole in the sand and hoping that all the pesky questions go away.

5:00

But they don't go away, Mr. Speaker. The only difference is that there isn't a forum outside of this place for the questions to be asked and for ministers to have to respond. I might say that the squeamishness we see on the part of the front bench, the Executive Council of this province, may be directly related to the intensity of the issues that Albertans are feeling and the strength of Albertans' sentiment. That's okay. I understand it's not comfortable for the front bench, but that just goes with the territory.

If you're chairman of the Calgary caucus, you know, there are responsibilities, too, and maybe in this place the chair of the Calgary government caucus doesn't get a chance to answer questions. It's too bad, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he should. Maybe he should. When we do that rewrite of the rules, maybe we should make sure that the representative of the 20 government MLAs in this place should have to answer some questions about those key issues in the city of Calgary.

The member for Three Hills has offered so much advice. I'm sure she's going to be taking her place in the debate in a moment, so I want to afford her every opportunity. It's only a couple of minutes after 5. She'll have until 5:30, and that should be enough to accommodate her 20 minutes' worth of comments.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about the concern with respect to the process of scheduling sittings. I've outlined some of the concerns the opposition has. The focus of the government on adjournment is something that I lament, and we've talked about that each year when this particular motion comes in. I'd just like to challenge the government to maybe take this motion – why don't we just put this on a shelf? Why don't we just suspend this motion? Why don't we just leave this aside? Let's see if first we can earn the confidence of Albertans by talking about those issues that are important to them, by demonstrating our responsiveness to their needs and their issues and see this as a bit of a prize. This will be the treat at the end. If we do a good job on behalf of Albertans, maybe we take this thing off the shelf sometime in June, and if we've done a good job and we can justify to our constituents what we've done here, maybe it's time to revisit this question, and we could vote it then. It seems awfully premature to be dealing with it at this stage.

So I think those are the comments I wanted to make. I'd just finish by saying: before the guillotine comes down pursuant to Motion 6, will there be an opportunity to see in detail what the government's response is to the challenge from Claudette Bradshaw, the federal Labour minister, who's told us what the federal government would do for the homeless in our province? We haven't heard what the province is going to do. Is there going to be time to hear

about whether we establish that independent Human Rights Commission? Are we going to be able to resolve that?

Are we going to be able to resolve the problems with Calgary schools? We're one of the biggest provinces; we've got a space utilization formula that doesn't work, and all members I think know that. We have too many communities in Calgary that don't have schools. We have other communities that are going to lose schools because of an absolutely arbitrary, capricious, school utilization formula. Are we going to fix that problem before we take our summer break?

Mr. Speaker, those are all concerns. I'd sooner see us debating this motion about Calgary Stampede time in July instead of doing it now, so I'm hoping that others will pick up that sentiment and suggest we hold the vote off on this until maybe early July, because then we will have determined whether we've earned the right to be able to leave here and go back to our constituencies.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join into this debate on Motion 5:

When the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the Fourth Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Mr. Speaker, this is my fourth spring session since first being elected and the fourth time I have seen this motion or one very similar to it brought in before we've been in session for even a few weeks. This is the 10th day, day 10, that we have been in session, and we have this motion brought in. I am still trying to determine whether this motion is brought in by the government to make mischief or if it is demonstrative of its disdain for this Assembly and what we are to be accomplishing here.

I know that the mover of the motion said that it was purely administrative, but that kind of administration that far in advance I think perhaps could be calling into question an organizational deficiency if the end has to be put so close to the beginning. So I question that, but I think it's more perhaps mischief making in that they want to give the members of the opposition a chance to stand up and go through all the things, as my colleagues have done here earlier, that we see lacking in this process or that we would like to see agreed upon in advance. So perhaps they are doing us a favour by giving us this opportunity to speak to it, or perhaps it's mischief in having this motion hang over our heads like the sword of Damocles, because there it does hang.

This motion is now on the Order Paper, and it will stay on the Order Paper until the day they pop up and go: well, it's tomorrow. So I think there is an intention there that it stands as a bit of a threat to us that if all does not go the way the government had hoped, that's it. The guillotine would come down, as Calgary-Buffalo puts it, or the sword that's hanging over their head, the scimitar, as Edmonton-Gold Bar put it.

If it's not that sword of Damocles or the mischief making, then, unfortunately, I would see it as the disdain that the government has for . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Democracy.

MS BLAKEMAN: For democracy, for what we're trying to do in this Assembly.

The first year that I was elected there was no fall session. There simply wasn't a fall session, and there was certainly a lot of business

of interest to the people in Alberta that could have been discussed in a fall session.

So there's no element of trust involved, certainly on my part, with this government when I see a motion like this and I hear some reassurances: no problem; there'll be a fall session. Well, sorry, but for 25 percent of the time I've been in the House there wasn't a fall session. So that element of trust is not upheld here.

AN HON. MEMBER: It would have been a summit. Do you think a summit is going to be . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, well, yes. Summits can be called, but they do not replace the business that goes on in this Assembly with all members present.

So I would like to see some assurance, more than an assurance that there will be a fall session in this year of 2000. I think that would be a good example, a good way to start the millennium, that we do in fact have a spring and a fall sitting. This motion doesn't give me any indication of that.

I agree with some of the speakers earlier about fixed dates for when the session indeed sits. I for one make a point of going out and booking to go in and speak with all of the seniors' residences in my riding. They would prefer that I come in before July and August, but I have no way of knowing whether I can go ahead and book those visits at this point because I don't know when we'll be starting, when we'll be finishing, nothing. So I have to leave it to the last moment, and certainly I've had the request from the seniors' residences that they would prefer to have a better idea of when I might be coming or a bit more advance notice.

The work of this Assembly and this disdain for democracy or for the work of this Assembly I see coming through more and more often. There is the use of the standing policy committees, which are not available to members of the opposition. There's the entire budget process that we see, which I am shocked about, where we have a prescribed 20 days of debate, but the 20 days are really two-hour time slots, and they manage to run two of them at the same time so that counts as two days' worth of debate.

5:10

Well, we had a member in this Chamber earlier today who admitted that the public didn't access *Hansard* very much. So how is the public supposed to be keeping up with this budget debate? We have it brought forward on a Thursday. We're debating it the next sitting day. How is the public supposed to be getting their point of view through to their members to have it brought forward and included in the debate on the budget?

We have a throne speech now that has basically been televised and released through media releases and one-on-one media interviews long before the Lieutenant Governor gets a chance to read it out. Where is the respect for this Chamber in that process? We've got a budget speech that is for the most part released prior to our actually hearing it read out in here through all kinds of announcements and reannouncements and heavy hints and media releases and one-on-one interviews again.

So where is the respect for this Chamber? In my opinion, putting forward this adjournment motion on day 10 of the spring session is just another indication of the disdain held by this government for this Assembly.

MRS. SOETAERT: Good point.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you.

I'll conclude my remarks.



THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to conclude the debate.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you. To simply close briefly, Mr. Speaker. It is customary – and this side of the House is certainly used to the opposition members railing against this motion. It's part of the gamesmanship which the Opposition House Leader so eloquently argued against, yet he's one of the masters at practising it within the House, and we do appreciate that.

It is political, because the members opposite know full well that we are facing a lengthy session. The members opposite know full well that we will be dealing with many of the issues which they have raised, and we'll be dealing with them seriously. But, of course, the opposition members have to commit to also dealing with them seriously so that we can get on with the business as opposed to simply being involved in the gamesmanship which I referred to earlier.

As concerns previous fall sessions, Mr. Speaker, I could be mistaken, but it's my recollection that since my election in '93 we have always had a fall session with the exception, I believe, of one year. Now, if I'm not mistaken, I think that was the unity debate, and it still gave the opposition the opportunity to call the government to account with respect to issues at that time.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition also knows full well in advance when session is going to start. That's well publicized.

As concerns what our constituents expect of us, they expect us to represent them effectively whether we are in session or out of session. Simply being in session does not guarantee effective representation, Mr. Speaker. In fact, quite often I find it much more effective to be dealing with my constituents directly on issues of concern.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that I've tried to address very briefly the issues raised by the opposition, but to reiterate, I understand and they understand that a little bit of this debate is politics; it's gamesmanship. We have come to expect that. In fact, I quite enjoy the debate that often takes place around this motion, and I will enjoy raising with the Opposition House Leader probably in May or June when we're still here that they really had nothing to fear with respect to the passage of this motion.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

### Spring Recess

6. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:  
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday,

March 23, 2000, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2000, at 1:30 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the breaks. I believe this coincides with the spring break taking place in both Calgary and Edmonton during that time. I don't believe this is a controversial motion in any way, and I would hope all members would support it.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

### Easter Recess

7. Mr. Havelock moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:  
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 20, 2000, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned for three sitting days, until Monday, May 1, 2000, at 1:30 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is for the purposes of allowing members to take advantage of the Easter festivities and the Easter break.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we call it 5:30 p.m. and that when we reconvene this evening at 8, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader that we now do rise until 8 o'clock, when we reconvene in Committee of Supply, all those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.  
The motion is carried. The House is adjourned.

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

