

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, June 4, 1991**

8:03 p.m.

Date: 91/06/04

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

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Committee of the Whole will come to order, please.

Bill 1 Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act

MR. CHAIRMAN: When the Committee of the Whole adjourned on May 6, the debate was on the amendment of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Oh, excuse me, hon. member. Before proceeding, could we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Introduction of Special Guests**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Smoky River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are two very special people sitting in on the evening's activities. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Ruby Hill and Chris Jones, who are members of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. They contribute very significantly to developments within the province. I would like them to be recognized by the entire House, and I would ask that we recognize them in the usual fashion.

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

Bill 1 Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act (continued)

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's most appropriate that we would resume debate or consideration in committee of Bill 1, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act, in the middle of Seniors' Week. In the province of Alberta it's been an issue surrounding . . . Seniors in the province of Alberta have received much discussion over the last several months, I think probably to the dismay of the hon. Premier, who stood in this Assembly when the Legislature first convened or opened early in March and announced to Albertans that his number one Bill for the session was going to be enabling legislation to establish the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. I suppose this was going to be another of the Premier's much-vaunted public relations moves to prove his love for a particular group of people in the province of Alberta, hoping that would satisfy them and all would be well.

I'm here to report to you, Mr. Chairman, that all is not well with the government's agenda with respect to seniors in the province of Alberta, and the record speaks loud and clear.

Because shortly after introducing this Act which was supposed to indicate the Premier's deep-rooted concern for seniors in the province of Alberta, his partner there, the Provincial Treasurer, introduced his much ballyhooed so-called balanced budget. That budget, when you start looking into it, included a number of measures that impact on the women and men that built this province, the people we call seniors. Those things that it included are called budget cuts. Now, we've tried to establish that in the vernacular in this Assembly. We've tried to get the government to admit that the C word is "cuts," that indeed they have cut programs to seniors, and we've seen minister after minister stand in his or her place – the Minister of Health, the Associate Minister of Family and Social Services, the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council, the hon. Premier – and say there have not been cuts to programs for seniors and in fact there have been increases, and the only reason seniors in the province of Alberta believe for a minute that there have been cuts to their programs is because those nasty opposition politicians go out and try and convince them that that's the case.

Well, it is the case, Mr. Chairman. Seniors in the province of Alberta know that programs they depend on have been cut, because they're capable of reading. They're capable of understanding the impact of things like a 20 percent increase in the extended health benefits program that impacts on the eyeglasses they buy or the dental services they receive. They know that when you eliminate altogether the home heating protection program, that impacts on them and their pocketbook every year. So it does have an impact on seniors. It has an impact of perhaps up to \$1,000 per year for some seniors, and for this government to continue to insist that everything is well and good, that what we need is happy talk to convince seniors their lives are wonderful, is just irresponsible. So I put that out as sort of background for the debate on this Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act.

Now, this week is Seniors' Week. We had quite a little discussion in the Legislature today about the importance of Seniors' Week and the government's reluctance to proclaim Seniors' Week by way of ministerial statement in the Legislature, so we had to debate it some other way. As well, this week both opposition parties have tabled petitions in the Legislature signed by, in the case of the Liberals, some 3,500 seniors and, for the Official Opposition, close to 13,000 people in the province of Alberta who object to the mean-spirited cuts this government has imposed on seniors and challenge the government to reinstate those harsh budget measures. So the government can't pretend that it's not happening, can't pretend that the only reason seniors believe they're being dealt a dirty deal is because the opposition convinces them of it. They've signed petitions, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition had a stack of them a foot and a half high, Mr. Chairman, to substantiate that. This government has treated seniors in the province of Alberta in a very shabby and underhanded way. I think it's a shame that when we should be debating with some measure of pride the establishment of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, it's being done under a very thick cloud, a pall if you will, because of this government's sneaky attempt to pretend to be balancing the books and doing that on the backs of people who live on limited and fixed incomes.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has proposed some amendments to attempt to make this Bill a good working piece of legislation, and those amendments centre around the belief that we need to involve people in decisions and not after the fact. I'm sure my friend for Calgary-Forest Lawn has a Latin term for "after the fact," but we need to . . . [interjection]

Yeah; a priori. We need to involve people beforehand in the decision-making process. Before the government implements changes to programs for seniors, they should go out and consult with seniors and say, "Look, you folks have worked long and hard to build this province; you've got groups that represent you; you formed yourselves into groups, the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired . . ."

Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm talking about the *raison d'être* for these amendments proposed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MR. MAIN: You're so cute when you grovel.

MR. FOX: Thank you. You're a fine one to recognize it, minister of multiculturalism.

Anyway, now that the boss has shown up, I can get into talking more specifically about the amendments. The purpose the amendments is to try and make a Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, once established, effective and accountable. You do that by making sure that at every step of the process this council and the members on it are involved with seniors in the province so they consult with seniors, they do the kind of work they need to do prior to implementing changes to programs for seniors. And it's not the kind of consultation this government is used to. That's no longer acceptable in the 1990s. Albertans have said that loud and clear to the Constitution committee traveling around the province seeking input from Albertans. People want to be consulted beforehand, not after the fact. They don't want a government that decides behind closed doors what they're going to do to programs and then, you know, has a few MLA meetings in their constituencies and pretends that's public consultation. They want to be involved ahead of time.

So this proposes . . . Are you ready for this, Mr. Chairman? These amendments propose several things. Amendment A: section 2 would be amended in subsections (a), (c), and (d) by adding "through the Minister or any other member of the Executive Council." Now, for members who maybe don't have a copy of the Bill in front of them, I'll remind them of what section 2(2)(a) says. According to this proposed Act

The purposes of the council are

- (a) to advise, report to, and make recommendations to the Government on matters relating to senior citizens in Alberta, their well-being and their opportunities for full and equal participation in the life of the Province.

Well, that's nice. All the Leader of the Official Opposition is proposing to do through these amendments is add the words "through the Minister or any other member of the Executive Council." Executive Council, for members of the Conservative back bench, means cabinet.

So the amendment, if it's passed, would cause this subsection to read:

The purposes of the council are

- (a) to advise, report to, and make recommendations to the Government through the Minister or any other member of Executive Council . . .

It's merely adding an established line of communication, of accountability. I think that's consistent with other pieces of legislation that have been passed. It's consistent with a section further on in this Bill, section 2(3), where it says "The Council shall make its recommendations to the Government through the Minister." They add the words "through the Minister" in this section but leave it out in section 2(2)(a). This amendment merely proposes to inject this line of accountability and reporting "through the Minister or any other member of the Executive Council." I think that's fairly straightforward. I can't imagine

why the government would want to vote down such a simple and effective and consistent recommendation. If they are going to vote no on it, Mr. Chairman, I want them to stand up and tell us why.

8:13

The second part of amendment A is part (b), and it just proposes that we add the words "or any other member of the Executive Council" after "through the Minister" in subsection (3). I read that section to you before where it says, "The Council shall make its recommendations to the Government through the Minister or any other member of the Executive Council." That's again consistent with so many other pieces of legislation. I can't imagine why the government members wouldn't want to support and pass this amendment. So that's straightforward.

The next amendment we're proposing through our designate here, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, is amendment B, proposing that in section 2 we strike out subsection (4)(c) where it says, "In carrying out its purposes, the Council may," and this is important,

- (c) access research and data on which to base studies and make recommendations on matters of concern to senior citizens.

Well, that sounds fine. That sounds all well and good, except that we know when this government conducts research or this government has people conduct research for them, if it turns out that it's not favourable to the government, if it doesn't reflect well on what the government is doing, if it is in any way critical of government actions past, present, or contemplated, then the government buries it. Those recommendations, that research, those reports get filed on a shelf somewhere and ignored. What we're saying is that we want the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta to be independent from government as much as possible, to be free to investigate and analyze and consult and report to government and to the people of Alberta and the seniors they're supposed to represent without being encumbered by the paranoia of a government in its death throes, a government in the final years of its lengthy mandate. [interjection]

I'd like the hon. Member for Bonnyville to stand up and tell me why he wouldn't support this amendment. It proposes that we delete that apparently innocuous subsection and replace it with . . . It would read, "In carrying out its purposes, the Council may," and this is the amendment,

- (c) conduct or direct research on any matter relating to seniors' quality of life and their participation in the life of the Province, and publishing the results of the research.

The difference there is that there's an onus on them to publish the results of the research. That means making it public. That means not only providing it to the members of government caucus or whomever government deems eligible to see such information but making it public so Albertans know what the research shows. I can't imagine why anyone, even the hon. Member for Bonnyville, would not support such a simple amendment that injects accountability and efficacy into the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act.

The next amendment deals substantially with the makeup of the council, Mr. Chairman. The government proposes to establish this council. It would be interesting if I could just contrast this for a moment for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Parkallen, who seems to be paying attention tonight. We were debating in the House last night a foundation he purports to establish where he's reluctant to name any of the members of the foundation, reluctant to identify in legislation how many people would sit on the foundation, where the members would be drawn from, pretending it's sort of inconsistent. Well, it's

not inconsistent. It's in virtually every piece of legislation that establishes councils or foundations or tribunals. I'll point out for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Parkallen that the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act proposes in section 3 to establish the council by describing the people who would be appointed to it. So it's a consistent thing in all the Acts, and he might want to have another look at his Bill 15, the one he was trying to ram through the Legislature yesterday.

Anyway, the Premier, who apparently loves seniors as much as he loves rural Albertans – at least loves them at election time when it's time to harvest votes and then puts the boots to them afterwards – proposes to establish a council that "shall consist of not more than 20 members appointed [by cabinet] for terms not exceeding 3 years." Then they identify some of these people. There shall be one member from the Legislative Assembly, one member from the Alberta Hospital Association, one member from the Alberta Medical Association, one from a university in the province as defined in the Universities Act. That describes four of the 20 people appointed to this council and where they'll come from. "The Lieutenant Governor in Council," the cabinet, "shall designate one of the members as chairman" – chairperson, I would hope – "of the Council." What we're proposing to do here is be a lot more specific in describing who is appointed to this council, and we want to make sure, Mr. Chairman, that seniors are appointed to the council.

REV. ROBERTS: Hear, hear.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Member for Edmonton-Centre. That's not inconsistent, is it, that if we're going to establish a Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act, maybe there should be some seniors on the council? Would that be a good idea? Hon. Member for Bow Valley, I think you agree with me. I know you think there should be seniors on the seniors advisory council for Alberta, but it doesn't say so in the government Bill. There's nothing in here that assures that the Member from the Legislative Assembly who sits on council shall be a senior. The member himself is not yet a senior. He's got a few months to go; I wish him well. There's nothing here to indicate that the member appointed from . . . Well, the Member for Dunvegan's not a senior yet either, although he looks like he is. The Alberta Hospital Association appointee is not necessarily a senior, nor is the member from the Alberta Medical Association. There's nothing in here that indicates that any of the other 16 members appointed to this council should be people who are involved in the kind of programs, require the kind of benefits, and have made the kind of sacrifices that men and women in this province we call seniors have made.

What we want to do through this proposed amendment is inject accountability, inject responsibility, make sure this council represents the people it's supposed to represent. So we propose that in selecting members to the seniors advisory council cabinet shall

include at least 14 seniors who represent, or are active with groups representing, the interests of a cross-section of seniors from different geographic regions of Alberta.

Now, that's not inconsistent, hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, with the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. [interjection] Calgary-North Hill. I'm so used to using his highfalutin title, I forgot his more commonplace one. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act established a five-person commission, and it determined that at least there should be balance on that commission with respect to rural and urban representation, with respect to male/female representation. It's not a concept

completely foreign to this government. We want to inject that here by ensuring that at least 14 of the 20 are indeed seniors who represent or are active in groups representing seniors, but not just seniors: a cross section of seniors.

We're not talking about your average retired white middle-class seniors. We're talking about a broad range of seniors in the province of Alberta, and that would include aboriginal seniors, seniors who live with disabilities, seniors who live on fixed incomes well below the poverty line, making sure there's a gender balance there and making sure the representation is balanced in a provincial sense so it's not just dominated by seniors from a particular region in the province. I think that's a good, straightforward, simple to understand, and eminently supportable . . .

8:23

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear, hear.

MR. FOX: I'm glad somebody agrees with me.

The council, according to our . . . [interjection] Well, if the Member for Banff-Cochrane doesn't agree with me, I'd like him to stand up and tell me why. I'd like him to tell me why because I think this is a very good amendment here.

Further, it proposes that

In selecting members of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall . . . include representatives from those sectors providing services to seniors.

Now, that perhaps expands a little bit the notion included in the government Bill here: including members from the Alberta Hospital Association, Alberta Medical Association. But there are more interest groups or groups that are actively involved in providing services to seniors. We've got the health units, for example. We've got people who work with the Aids to Daily Living program. We've got a variety of health professionals who provide services for seniors and whose advice we ought to seek, whose input ought to be an integral part of the Seniors Advisory Council so the council can indeed be effective, not just a little bit of . . . There's another would-be senior from the back row waving at me, my friend from St. Paul. Not yet; you'll have to wait a little longer. We have to make sure that the input from these groups, these people who are active in providing services for seniors, is an integral part of the Seniors Advisory Council so this council can indeed do an effective job of lobbying government and making sure the people of Alberta know what the needs and aspirations of seniors in the province are.

Further, this proposed amendment says that we should ensure that the make-up of the Council also proportionately represents men, women, disabled persons, aboriginal people and visible minorities as reflected in Alberta's seniors population.

I guess that's putting a little bit more substance, a little bit more meat on the bones of the part of the amendment included in section 2(a) where we talk about 14 seniors being appointed to the commission.

It says further, in subsection (d), that the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall consider when appointing people to this council "the knowledge, background and expertise of each member being considered." Now, again I know that's difficult for a government that in the past has used almost exclusively one criterion, and that is a person's relative affiliation with the party in power. That has most often seemed to be the direct route to involvement in boards and councils and foundations in the province. That's not to say that the men and women appointed to these things are not capable; many of them are. But I think we want to ensure that people are appointed to this

council because of their interest and expertise, not because of their need to be repaid for some previous political favour.

Indeed, as a member representing an opposition riding, I know that for many of the loyal card-carrying Conservatives one of the most frustrating things about having a member of government in waiting rather than a member of government in office representing them is that they seem to be denied direct access to government largess. They don't have anyone lobbying for them to get appointed to all these government commissions, councils, and foundations. They resent it because they figure they're owed some sort of favour for past service. It's really quite amusing to see them express their frustration about that. We're trying to ensure through this amendment that people would be appointed to the commission only if they have something to offer, and we're basing that on expertise, background, and then making sure that overall the commission has adequate representation from around the province and through a variety of groups.

The section D in the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's proposed amendment deals with section 8 in the Bill with respect to the expiration of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act. The government Act suggests, "This Act should expire December 31, 1999 unless it is continued for a further period by the [cabinet]." So it means that cabinet could extend the life of this council without ever seeking legislative approval or without any process of accountability. So what we're proposing is that:

On or before June 30, 1996 . . .

That's five years hence; let's call it the five-year plan for the Seniors Advisory Council.

. . . the Council shall submit to the Minister a report containing recommendations on improvement of operations of the Council and any amendment to this Act that it deems advisable.

This is merely ensuring in the enabling legislation, the establishment Act, that the council has to report on the efficacy of its operations over a five-year period and gives them the opportunity to make specific recommendations to government about how the Act could be improved, how the process could be improved, how this council could in the future do even more for the seniors in the province of Alberta. You know, I think that's a reasonable sort of thing to do as well.

Again, I would like very much to hear if there are any government members who don't agree with each and every one of these amendments. Stand up and tell me why.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to the amendments that have been presented by the Leader of the Official Opposition, I do wish to make a few comments. The amendments address or pinpoint a number of points, one being the need for greater participation in terms of numbers of senior citizens. They talk in terms of enhancing participation, enhancing consultation. When I look at those particular amendments, as attached to the original Bill . . . The original Bill, of course, is very, very explicit in its intent for the Seniors Advisory Council to advise. I can refer specifically to some of the sections that the amendments apply to. For example, "to encourage public discussion and consultation on matters relating to senior citizens," "to make recommendations to the Government on grants," and so on and so forth. I could go down the list and down the list.

Reference was made in the amendments to having possibly 14 persons on that particular advisory council that would be senior citizens. Why stop at 14? Who better to advise on senior citizen programs than senior citizens themselves? When we talk, Mr. Chairman, on participation, on consultation, it has to be a two-way street. There has to be a willingness on the part of seniors to engage in that type of participation, in that type of debate, in that type of consultation, and there has to be a willingness on the part of government members to want to hear what people other than themselves are thinking, to want to hear what seniors out there are thinking, to get their advice, to get their consultation, to allow them to participate before these decisions are made. That's what I would assume a Seniors Advisory Council is all about.

I can go back to when this Act was first introduced in this House. It followed a number of recommendations made by this government, a number of recommendations made without consultation, without any debate, without even giving the opportunity for senior citizens to advise, to participate. If one were in that particular position of being asked now to be part of an advisory council, one would have to question what the intent is, what the sincerity is. We listened earlier on this afternoon to some of the comments. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who I've spoken about in the past as very favourable in her recommendations on the extended health care centres. It appears now she's taking some lessons from the Member for Barrhead, and she's saying that there are government members and then there are MLAs. She is one member shutting the doors even on opposition members to participate, shutting the door on anyone other than government members.

8:33

Mr. Chairman, it becomes very, very important, and I'm going to refer specifically to this documentation as I speak to the amendments as proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition. We talk in terms of areas where further consultation could have taken place and as to what the reaction of seniors would have been to these. Now, we look, for example, at a reference made to the extended health benefits program that will continue to provide dental and eyeglass coverage, but there is now, of course, a new limitation or a new fee schedule. The end result is going to be that it's going to cost seniors more dollars for those services than it has in the past. It makes it very clear that "effective July 1, 1991 most clients, including seniors, will cost-share benefits from the Aids to Daily Living program," and it spells out some of the items at a rate of 25 percent to a maximum of \$500 per family.

These are some of the areas we were talking about this afternoon when government members were saying, "What cutbacks?" They didn't seem to understand the cutbacks. Obviously, the material that has been distributed by the government hasn't been read by all members. I can talk in terms of "effective July 1, 1991 the Alberta Blue Cross Program will no longer cover most over-the-counter drug products."

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the Chair is having a little difficulty relating your remarks to the amendment before the committee.

MR. WICKMAN: My remarks, Mr. Chairman, are to the amendments. The amendments refer specifically to the need to enhance the consultation. In other words, the Leader of the

Opposition, in his amendments, has proposed what he feels is a stronger, more viable mechanism of consultation. Falling in line with that, I'm talking in terms of some of those areas that this type of consultation, this type of increased or enhanced consultation would take place and the importance of those amendments that have been presented, and I believe it's very, very clear from a parliamentary point of view as to how these comments fit in with those amendments, which are a page and a half long.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: And I'll continue down that list. Seniors, I'm sure, would have liked to have been advised by an advisory council or be allowed to participate by an advisory council, whether it be made up of 14 senior citizens minimum as proposed by the current amendments or made up by even more. They would like to have had the opportunity to advise or consult on the recommendation or the new plan for long-term care resident fees increasing by 8 to 10 percent.

Mr. Chairman, I can talk in terms of that same committee, that same consultation process wanting to advise on the expiring of the \$100 grant program: another cutback. "Camping Fees for seniors have been adjusted to better reflect value and services": another increase. "Continuing education courses for seniors [have] been discontinued": another decrease. Example after example where there is a need to have an advisory council that is strong, that has the ability to communicate, to participate, to play an active role before these types of decisions are made. And that, Mr. Chairman, is why the amendments that have been proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition and amendments that will be forthcoming by this particular caucus which will even add on to those amendments and make this particular Act even that much better need to be supported.

I can look, and I would ask seniors to advise, to participate in some of the programs that they talk in terms of not being changed. I would ask them to consult, to explain whether the government is saying under its own material that the enhanced home adaptation program of \$5,000 is still in place, the independent living program of \$4,000 is still in place, and the emergency medical alert program of \$700 is still in place, giving the impression that there's \$9,700 worth of grants in those areas in place when in reality that is not the case, Mr. Chairman, because it's a duplication; they're built within each other. I'm sure that an advisory committee would look at this type of brochure, and an advisory committee would say, "That's not the type of brochure we want to be sending out to other Albertans that are affected by these programs," because that type of brochure is very, very misleading. Seniors do not want to see other seniors misled with government information that is not reflecting in reality what has happened.

Mr. Chairman, the amendments that have been brought forward I think are a reasonably good attempt to enhance the consultation. I'm eager to see further debate on them, and I'm eager to see the additional amendments that will come forward from the very wise Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. On that particular note I'll conclude. That particular Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, she is a person that is qualified to be on a seniors advisory council.

MR. FOX: The only one in this Assembly.

MRS. HEWES: Well, thank you, Percy.

MR. WICKMAN: If not right now, in about five or six years.

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

REV. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to bolster the comments of the Member for Vegreville in support of the Leader of the Official Opposition's amendments here before us on this most important Bill, one that is long, long overdue, one that, as certain members of the government caucus know, has been an action or Bill that's been called for by various seniors groups for at least two or three years before this.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly, what it really speaks of is this word that I think really needs to be in much greater use and understanding: empowerment. What's really happening here is that we are wanting to empower seniors to be fully alive, to be fully themselves, to be fully a part of the democratic process and the life of this province. That kind of empowerment, if we take it seriously, means a lot of changes and means a lot of things, many things which are not included in this Bill for instance.

When I first put it together myself a year or so ago and presented it before the Premier decided it was such a good idea that he'd steal it from me and present it, I really wanted to take seriously the kind of paternalism that exists in terms of this Tory government towards seniors. They say: "Well, you know, we'll take care of you seniors," or "Don't you worry; we'll have great programs for you seniors," or "You less fortunate seniors, we'll take care of you as well." There's this attitude of paternalism, sort of: "Well, we'll take care of you. Be good senior citizens and vote for us and everything will be just fine." We get this rhetoric even today in terms of the programs and all the best that we're doing for seniors. What you have to wake up to is the new day which is a day where no one wants to be in that kind of paternalistic relationship. Particularly, seniors want to speak out with one voice about who they are and how they see life and how they see government policies, and they don't want to be shut up or put in any kind of relationship where their voice can be muzzled in any way. They want to speak out loudly and clearly for themselves, by themselves, and because of themselves.

In that way this Bill really fails in terms setting up the council itself. Again, it's so paternalistic, particularly section 3. The council members, the nub of the issue here. We're going to set up this council, and we're going to have 20 members on it. It says nothing about seniors being on it. That's just sort of assumed, but then it says: "Oh, by the way, we'll have to have some people who we really know can take care of you seniors, given that you're going to be on this council and it's going to be for you. We'll pick up four groups of people that we think the greatest sense of paternalism can emanate from, one of course being from our great assembled House, the Legislative Assembly. So we'll have an MLA on there to help you take care of yourselves. And then, since so many of you get into hospital or long-term care centres, I guess we'd better have somebody from the Alberta Hospital Association because they know how to take care of you too. So we'll have somebody designated from there. Then you all go to a doctor, and you all think doctors are wonderful, so we'll have someone from the Alberta Medical Association sort of hold your hand and take you through all the things we want you to do. Then someone, of course, from the university, all the academics who know from their ivory towers just what seniors need and what they're about and can best advise them from an academic perspective."

Well, what claptrap: to have a council set up for seniors, to empower seniors, to give them the voice, and to enable them to be fully who they are but not even mention them and say, "Oh,

by the way, we've got to make sure that your council has at least four of these who are experts in paternalism." Well, I think it's most offensive. If the Premier had at all taken seriously my version of the Bill when I introduced it last year, he would see that this is no way to proceed, not anything that I had thought of or would even think to put in here.

8:43

Now, it's gotten other groups upset; for instance, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. I mean, if anybody deals with seniors in a kind of hands-on, day-to-day way, whether it's in the home, in long-term care, in the hospital, or in the community, it's nurses. Nursing care – if you're talking about care givers being on here, nurses should be at the top of the list. Doctors come in, check the prescriptions, and leave again.

We have so few geriatricians in this province anyway because most doctors want to get into pediatrics and cardiac and stuff that's sort of glitzy and episodic kinds of treatments and illnesses. Doctors have to play a part, but if you're really going to take it seriously, nurses should be at the top list of the care givers. They're not even included here, and what a major omission that is.

I want to take the radical stand, which I see the Member for Bow Valley has disagreed with, and I think it to his great embarrassment. I want to take the radical stand that if we're going to have a council that's going to work for empowering seniors in this province, I think only seniors should be on it. [some applause] Thank you. I use the example of the women's advisory council. Who in their right mind would say, "By the way, in order to help women understand what it is to be women, we should have a few men on that council." I mean, that's ridiculous. Women need to speak from their own experience and will speak from their own experience on the women's advisory council, and only women are on that council. So why, when it comes to seniors, do we say, "Oh, by the way, we'll have seniors get together, but we'd better have some people who really know what it's about and really advise you," in this kind of paternalistic sense. If it doesn't make any sense in terms of the women's advisory council, why does it make any sense to have it in terms of the Seniors Advisory Council?

I bit the bullet. I said okay, if it's going to be a council of 20, let's at least ensure, as this amendment from the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition says, that at least 14 of the 20 need to be seniors, more than two-thirds of the council needs to be seniors, and that those seniors are not just a bunch of Tories, not just a bunch of political appointments but that government look seriously at the various regions of the province, the ethnic mix of the province, the demographic and sociological analysis of who seniors are in this province and accordingly have seniors that represent their interests, whether they are aboriginal seniors or from other visible minorities, are chronically disabled or deal with chronic disabilities, and how many should be women, men, and that 14 should reflect that kind of panoply of who seniors are in this province. If these 14 are all white, male seniors, that's inexcusable. This Bill does not say anything that would preclude that eventuality from happening. The Lieutenant Governor in Council could say, "Well, we're going to have 20 members, and 10 of them will be white, male former Conservative or current Conservative party members." Let's wake up to the '90s, wake up to the sense that people not only want to be empowered but want to be democratically represented and that various interests need to be raised in the discussion.

I see that when the Member for Three Hills spoke on this she said: oh, well, come on, we can't just have any group that comes

along wanting to have their voice or their representative on this council; when you start having one group, you'll have to have another group, and then every group who isn't on there will feel excluded. Well, that's a tough issue, but it's no excuse for not trying. It's no excuse for not saying, "Yeah, we have a significant number of aboriginal seniors or elders in this province, and they represent a significant group, and they need to have a voice on this council."

Or seniors who come from Asian cultures. A greater number are coming, having to learn English as a second language and finding their way in Alberta. In my constituency a lot of seniors are having a great deal of difficulty. It's fine if you're a young male Vietnamese immigrant; you can try to get ESL and get a job, but a great number of grandmothers and grandfathers are coming, living in walk-ups, not being able to access English or feeling very isolated, very lonely, and have a great number of unmet needs. If we were to say, as we do in our amendments, that visible minorities need to have their voice on here, it would help to address that need and that issue. So, Mr. Chairman, you can see just how much sense these amendments make.

If we really, truly are going to take the issue, the value of empowerment seriously, seniors themselves need to be making up that voice, and that equitable diversity of seniors among it needs to be adequately set forth in the Bill. If there are going to be a few care givers or professional people or those who have dedicated their lives to the advancement and improvement of the lives, of the status of seniors, such as nurses, then okay, let's provide for them, but let's not just say, "Well, some MLAs, some doctors, and the rest, and that will do it."

That's all I have to say for now. I think in third reading I'd like to address some wider issues about how I see this council in the context of at least two other groups representing the interests of seniors. It doesn't pertain to these amendments to section 3, but I will address those essential issues at third reading. But for tonight I know these arguments have been persuasive, and we expect the government to finally come onside.

Thank you.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Chairman, these amendments don't make any sense to me because they're actually things that are already part of the Bill and already happening. For instance, section 2 (a) and (b), suggesting that we not report only to the associate minister but other members of the government. Our council puts out an annual report every year with anywhere from 10 to 20 recommendations in it to all departments of the government. We also meet with different departments of the government at our meetings, and we invite people from different portfolios to meet with us.

It says that we should hold forums and seminars. We do hold forums and seminars. As a matter of fact, to name some: in 1990 we held some forums called Women and Aging, and we did put out a full public report on what happened at those seminars. So these people are saying that we're not doing what we're supposed to do. I take a bit of exception to the hon. member saying we're not accountable. We feel that we are accountable.

As far as the membership of the council is concerned, right now we have 14 members besides the chairman. They're saying they should all be seniors. I don't agree with that, and I don't necessarily agree that all the women's council should be women. I think that probably it would be a good idea to have a man or two on that council. That's the same as saying that the school board should be all made up of scholars because they're the people involved. That's not a fact. I mean, you have all kinds. We have a good cross section on our school board.

As far as seniors are concerned, first off, I'd have to ask the hon. member: who is a senior? Is there a certain time when you become a senior? Certain organizations call people that are over 55 seniors, and there are some in Edmonton that consider seniors over 55. By the way, of the 14 members that are on our council, five are over 70 years old. That's one-third of the council over 70 years old, and that includes the member from the Alberta Medical Association, who is still an active doctor. So I really don't see the people saying that we are not responsible in having seniors on our council. People that are over 60 years old: we have four members. Members of our council that are over 50 years old: there are five members. So you can see that all the members of the council are over 50 except one. That one particular member is over 40, and his position there is that he represents the taxpayer of Alberta. I don't think anyone here will question that the taxpayer of Alberta should not have a representative on that council.

As far as some of the other amendments are concerned – in C, "include representatives . . . providing services to seniors." We have on our council a nurse that works for a health unit in northern Alberta. We have another nurse that is part of the FCSS program. One of the requirements to be on the council is that you have to be actively involved in something that involves senior citizens. That is not written in the Act, but part of the request that we do when we send out for an appointment of members is that we request someone that is actively involved in programs for seniors.

8:53

Section 3(2)(c), "ensure that the make-up of the Council also proportionately represents men, women, disabled persons, aboriginal people": these organizations already have their own council, and we are prepared to meet with any one of them at their request. For people to say that the council doesn't listen to the people of Alberta is a falsehood. We have a request for over 100 public meetings in Alberta, and we've held approximately 25 of those at the present date. We do go out and meet with seniors. We tell them about what programs are available to them. We listen to their concerns, we note them, we write them down, and when we put out our annual report at the end of the year, those concerns are in it as recommendations to the government.

"Consider the knowledge, background and expertise of each member being considered." Well, as I said, we have nurses from health units, people from FCSS, doctors, people that have worked in all types of organizations that concern seniors.

In D, "on or before June 30, 1996," we're supposed to put out some recommendations. We do that every year; we put out a list of recommendations. "This Act expires on December 31, 2030": I think that's ridiculous. We need to have a look at every Act in this Legislature at least more often than every 40 years.

Mr. Chairman, I recommend that we defeat this amendment as being not necessary.

Thank you.

MR. FOX: Mr. Chairman, you know, listening to the current chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council, I would almost be convinced of his arguments if I didn't know better. I want to assure him that I know he does a good job. I know he works hard for the Seniors Advisory Council, and I'm sure that all of the men and women that are on that council, some of whom apparently are seniors, work very hard for the council. There's no doubt in anyone's mind about that.

What we want to do is make sure that in establishing the council by legislation, there are certain protections in there to make sure that this council involves seniors. You have to read the government Bill there, hon. Member for Bow Valley. The government Bill just says that there shall be 20 people on this council, one of whom is an MLA, one of whom's from the Alberta Medical Association, one of whom's from the Hospital Association, and one appointed from a university. There is no assurance in here that even one of them is going to be a senior, and that's unacceptable. We've got to ensure that there are seniors on the Seniors Advisory Council. That shouldn't be a difficult concept for Conservative politicians to grasp. It's not a difficult thing.

You know, in fact, looking at the way this is written, it is possible – admittedly unlikely, but it is possible – for all 20 of these members to be Conservative MLAs, because there could be a Conservative who belongs to the Alberta Medical Association. There could be a Conservative who has been a member of the Alberta Hospital Association. There might even be one of them that's gone to university. All 20 of the members could conceivably be Conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly. Now, I know that is absurd; I know it's not going to happen. But let's make sure that in establishing the council, we describe the parameters of membership a little more than we've done here. Our motion proposes that at least 14 of the 20 be bona fide seniors.

Now, I know that there are probably men and women on the council now. That's nice. That's really nice. But what we're doing in our amendment is guaranteeing that there be gender parity on this council, that men and women be equally represented, not just men and women, but men and women from different regions of the province, men and women from different backgrounds in the province, men and women from different minority groups, aboriginal groups, different income groups be represented on this council.

We want it to be guaranteed, and I want to assure the Member for Bow Valley that if we draw this up carefully at the outset, if we make sure that we're establishing a council that's well constituted, then the seniors in the province of Alberta can have confidence in that council and know that it's going to do a good job for them. Their perceptions won't be jaded. They won't figure: "Ah, another setup committee, another phony baloney council from the Conservative government. They're just going to appoint their cronies to it; they don't care about us." We don't want that perception to exist. We want this to be a good council, an effective council. We want it to be the kind of council envisioned by the Member for Edmonton-Centre when he proposed this Act in the first place. That's why the Leader of the Official Opposition is proposing these amendments, and I have not heard a good reason from anyone on the Conservative side of the House why we shouldn't accept these amendments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to intervene with a few comments this evening on the amendments to Bill 1, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. The importance to me for bringing forward these amendments is to ensure as much as possible that this isn't simply a Seniors Advisory Council but it's a seniors advocacy council, and I think that's a much different notion of what's envisioned here in terms

of a mandate and the makeup for the committee, to think of it as more of an advocacy council than it is an advisory council.

It's important, Mr. Chairman, that the seniors have an effective voice in this province; after all, we've only recently seen the impact on seniors of a government that doesn't have the ear to give to its advisory council, and I guess we're using these amendments as much as anything to reinforce the point of view that this government has got to ensure that they get a good, strong voice of a cross section of seniors from all over the province of Alberta. After all, senior citizens are being used by this government here in Alberta and by our government federally as the shock troops for dismantling our social safety net.

I mean, Mr. Chairman, it was Michael Wilson who decided that in order to begin dismantling the programs of benefit to senior citizens and the family allowance and so on in Canada – it wasn't the family allowance he attacked first. It was the old age security program that he attacked first, in the belief that he could convince seniors to accept a reduction in their standard of living, to accept a reduction in their transfers from the federal government, and thereby if he could use them to accept those changes, he would have established a precedent to move on to the next step of dismantling our Canadian social safety net.

This deliberate ploy by the federal Tories in the first term of office – when they tried to tackle the issue head on, they were met with a wave of protest from senior citizens across the country, and they were defeated in their initial attempt. But Mr. Wilson learned from his experience. He went back, redrafted his legislation, and decided that he'd start by tackling seniors who made over \$50,000 a year in terms of the claw-back, clawing back the benefit in a special tax so that it had the effect of undercutting, undermining the intended benefit of the old age security. Well, he got it through, and it served as the precedent for making cuts to the family allowance program.

Here in Alberta, Mr. Chairman, instead of sort of dismantling our health care system head on, the government has decided that if they can introduce user fees through the senior citizens' sector of our province and if they can get away with it, it'll serve as a precedent to introduce user fees to handicapped children's services, perhaps any number of other programs offered through the Department of Health or the Department of Family and Social Services.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

9:03

But it's the senior citizens that the government has made a conscious political attempt to use as the shock troops in terms of their strategy and campaign for dismantling Alberta's and Canada's social safety net. They do that in the belief that senior citizens, because of their vulnerability, because of their life experience, often because of their viewpoints towards money management in their personal lives, will be more likely to accept these changes meted out or heaped on them by the Alberta government. Well, fortunately for all of us in this province the seniors have not taken these cuts recently announced by the Alberta government lightly and have in fact begun to organize serious and widespread opposition. I say more power to them, because they are fighting a fight for all of us. They're fighting a fight for any group, any individual in this province who is vulnerable and who depends on our social safety net to keep up and to create a decent standard of living for them in this society, in this province.

The extent to which seniors are going to be successful will be the extent to which this government backs off from its secret agenda and its strategy of dismantling Alberta's social safety net. That is why, Mr. Chairman, we have to ensure that we put in place the structures that will provide an advocacy mandate for seniors in this province. Simply to have a hand-picked, self-selected from the government's point of view, self-protecting, self-serving group of individuals who will be amenable to the government's agenda will not do. It will simply not be acceptable. What the Leader of the Opposition is doing here this evening is putting forward some modest amendments to broaden the representation, to ensure that it is in fact seniors that serve on the council, to ensure that they reflect a broad makeup of the province as a whole, and furthermore that they have the independence of action so that they can freely express their recommendations to any member of cabinet, so that they can go to anybody in government that it would serve their advocacy role to inform, to lobby, and to advocate on behalf of seniors too.

I would say, Mr. Chairman, that these amendments are very important because it sets out the parameters, it sets out a message, it sets out a fundamental stance for the role that we expect and wish this council to serve for the people of Alberta, particularly for our seniors. I believe that these modest amendments put forward by the Leader of the Opposition are eminently practical, eminently helpful, eminently worth while, and eminently effective. That may be eminent reason for this government to decide not to support it, but certainly that comes from a concern on their part not for the seniors of the province but for their ability to control the agenda as it affects seniors of this province in years to come. I would hope that the government will reconsider. As is often the case with eminently worthwhile amendments and initiatives put forward by the Official Opposition, they sooner or later become government policy. It would simply be my wish that in this case they would become policy sooner rather than later and that the government would go along and adopt these amendments tonight.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question on the amendments as proposed by the hon. Member for Vegreville on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Opposition?

[Motion on amendments A, B, C, and D lost]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Next we have a government amendment.

Excuse me, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. There is a well-established precedent that to facilitate progress in the committee, we deal with government amendments, when they are before us, first.

MRS. HEWES: Why wasn't it dealt with before? Mr. Chairman, could you answer why it wasn't dealt with before the amendment from the opposition? Mine was in first.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: As I understand it, the opposition amendment was introduced this evening.

MR. FOX: It was on the floor last night.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Great.

My apologies, hon. member. I had the wrong documentation here. Yes. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. [interjections] A senior's amendment for seniors: why not? Most appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to make a few comments before I present the amendments. I do want to say that this council has been operating for some years, and I think we should congratulate the council for what they've done in the past. They have considerable achievements to their credit, as the Member for Bow Valley has indicated. I have his report of the recommendations of 1990, and it's impressive the kinds of seminars and training sessions that have been held and the recommendations. I want to commend him and the members of the council.

Mr. Chairman, I have no real disagreement with the council's activities and performance, but I do have some criticism of the government's absence of response to them. I would have liked to see an itemized status report from the government as to what they intend to do with those recommendations, and of course I am deeply concerned that it doesn't appear that the council was asked to comment back last December when the government was examining potentials for saving funds by reducing certain programs to seniors, whether or not they could be sustained or tolerated. It seems to me that since the council was there, it was incumbent on the government at that point to ask the council for their thoughts and to review that particular document for the government. I think had they done so, we might have been in a very different situation today.

I would hope, Mr. Chairman, at the outset that the council will take on a far more aggressive advocacy role for Alberta seniors. I've been disappointed in this, particularly related to seniors accessing health care. This is one of the issues that comes to many of us in our constituency offices, and I'd like to see the council address itself as soon as possible to the long waiting lists that are seriously affecting seniors' ability for independence. Waiting lists related to hip and knee replacements, cardiovascular surgery, and cataract surgery are all of great concern to many seniors in our communities.

Mr. Chairman, before us is the Bill. My suggestion is that if it needs to be done, it needs to be done right, and I think there are some things that we can do here tonight to improve it. The major objective on my part is that we create an independent council, one that can operate at arm's length from government, one that has clout, and one that is going to be listened to.

The experience of this last couple of months since the budget has come down has been a devastating one for seniors, and hopefully a council of this kind, if it is listened to, if it does have clout, would eliminate that kind of experience forever. However, there are two sides, of course, as my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud has suggested. One is that the council must advise. The other is that the government has to listen and be reactive and proactive in doing the council's bidding.

9:13

Mr. Chairman, the consultation that didn't happen with seniors was insulting to them and unforgivable. I find that seniors are very loyal and patriotic people to their government. They want to respond in a positive way. They have been very vigorous and active in planning and organizing and managing their own activities for many decades now in our communities. Every town and village and city in the province has seniors' organizations looking after each other, encouraging and maintaining

independence. It's a very, very different kind of participation than we had a few decades ago.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre, I think it was, mentioned the deindexing and what happened to the federal government when they attempted to do that. It was very clear that gray power is effective. By threatening with their votes, they were able to force the government to immediately withdraw its plans. The family allowance people were not able to muster that same kind of clout and so were unsuccessful. However, eventually Mr. Wilson found a way to get around the seniors.

Mr. Chairman, we need to make some changes in this. We need to make changes so that we can guarantee and ensure that seniors have their say in it. Most seniors have organized their lives around their incomes, fixed incomes, and when changes are made that affect these incomes, the consequences can be very grave, whether we're talking about the changes that were made here this spring or the GST or changes in inflation. The other consequences to their health care I think are going to be very, very serious. I don't believe these measures will save money at all. I think they will cost this government and the taxpayers of Alberta money. They will certainly not add to the quality of life of our seniors in Alberta, and when I see what the government's doing, I question if they have really learned anything.

I cannot understand a government or a Premier who consults with the Chamber of Commerce of Calgary about potential changes but didn't consult with the seniors themselves. We have to ask ourselves: how are the decisions made? How does the government know what can be tolerated or sustained? Was the council ever really consulted on these? I think one has to answer that no, it wasn't consulted. So, Mr. Chairman, what we need to do is build a mechanism into this legislation that will ensure that the experience of seniors is what's going to be heard by the government.

My amendments, Mr. Chairman, will address that. In the first amendment – and these have been circulated to members – section 3(1) strikes out the word "members" and replaces it with "senior citizens." Now, Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Centre has spoken to this. Seniors have now demonstrated conclusively, unequivocally throughout our province that they are more than competent to manage their own affairs. Where better to look for people to advise our government? I find it totally unnecessary to suggest that any member of this council should be other than a senior citizen. We have access to many seniors who have a great deal of time as well as the experience, the skills, the knowledge to put into this activity. I see no reason whatsoever not to use all seniors. So the first amendment addresses that fact and would change it so that all personnel on the council would be seniors. They would, of course, represent different fields of practice. What we're looking for here is balance.

In addition, to section 3(2) we're proposing to Members of the Legislative Assembly to add after (d) three further subsections. The first one is that there be a representative of a provincial multicultural association. As our province has changed, Mr. Chairman, and as our new Canadian populations have aged, their needs emerge as being primary in many of our communities, and I believe it would be important that they be represented on such a council. Now, I know the Member for Bow Valley has talked about the representation. I appreciate that. I think there's a real effort made to provide a balanced representation. But I believe citizens of the province need to be assured that that's built into the legislation and that they are going to be sure from the outset that the representation will in fact be balanced and will be broad.

The second subamendment is that someone, one of the members, be a senior from a provincial native association. We have all struggled with our consciences after the Meech Lake debacle over the absence of recognition and acknowledgment of aboriginal needs. There is no question that Canadians now feel a deep sense of shame and want to redress this. Mr. Chairman, if we are about to enshrine in legislation a Seniors Advisory Council, let's be sure that this particular part of our population – who have many needs; in some cases, the needs of the isolated in our communities – is addressed by this council so they can properly advise cabinet and the various ministers of the government and the various associations and organizations throughout the province.

Finally, in section B, Mr. Chairman, sub (g): that there be a provincial antipoverty association represented on the council as well. I regret to say that the large percentage of seniors who are poor are women. Poverty, of course, is feminine, but the female elderly have experienced particular kinds of difficulties as to having a sustained income that is adequate. I think they need to be represented formally on the council so that their voice and their experience in life can be heard and can contribute to the decisions the council will make and the recommendations that they will make to government.

Mr. Chairman, the last section is on research. All too frequently we create organizations and programs and do not build in the research component from the outset. I recognize that the council now considers research to be an important part of its activities, but I believe we need to enshrine it, legitimize it in the legislation so that it will have its proper kind of support. This has been asked for by other seniors' organizations. It isn't as though we have made this one up out of whole cloth; it has been discussed and suggested by a number of organizations.

9:23

Mr. Chairman, I've been privileged to work over the years with the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired and a number of other active organizations. Certainly most of them have been in the city of Edmonton, but some are outside of the city. I have tested these amendments out with them. I have discussed the legislation that's proposed by the government. They are pleased and tell me that they are pleased that the government is finally going to put this Act into legislation, but they would like to see the amendments as I have read them into *Hansard* today. I think they need your active consideration, and I see no reason why all members would not support them.

Just one final comment. The experience since the budget has been a very difficult one for all members of this House, I'm sure, and certainly it's been difficult for seniors who have had to use up a tremendous amount of their precious energy in trying to convince government members that they are making a serious mistake. What we would like to see and what I believe should be done is that the government should take the high road here, reinstate the cuts they've made, go back to seniors' organizations, who are thoughtful, thrifty people who want to work with government, sit down at the table with them and negotiate what if anything can be sustained and tolerated by groups. Other than that, what we are doing is trying to attempt to balance the budget, to save funds on the backs of people who are very vulnerable and who do not have the same kind of power as other groups in our community.

Just one final word of caution, Mr. Chairman. I think the federal government realized, to its peril, that they were not in a position to deindex the seniors' pensions. They found out with a great deal of discomfort that seniors were not about to tolerate

that. The same kind of impasse is approaching in the province of Alberta. I would hope that the government has the wisdom and the prudence and the sensitivity to reconsider its very, I think, difficult decisions made in the absence of proper consultation. I hope they have the courage to reconsider those decisions before seniors finally have to use up all of their precious energies in fighting what they consider to be unnecessary and improper kinds of budget decisions made without their consultation and consideration.

Mr. Chairman, I will move the amendments as they are printed and have been circulated.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wish to make a few brief comments to further emphasize the remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar as she introduced these amendments. Going through them one at a time, the first amendment that deals with replacing the terminology "members" with "senior citizens" of course implies that that council would then become a council of senior citizens. In other words, it would ensure that the input that was being provided was being provided by senior citizens who are best in a position to advise on matters that do affect them.

The Member for Bow Valley in his comments earlier made reference to not seeing that as being a necessity, and made reference to, for example, the council on the status of women, that maybe it would be a good idea to have one or two men on there. Well, that reflects a certain mentality that I simply don't agree with. We can go down the list. Imagine the outcry if some member over there were to propose that we in fact were going to put one or two members of the male segment of the population on that particular council. If I was over on that side, I certainly wouldn't want to be the one proposing that particular move.

I can look at all types of bodies. When the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities was initiated by the Premier, it was made very, very clear at that particular time that the majority of persons you wanted on there – and I believe it should have been all, but at least the majority ensured that there was majority representation – would be those persons that would be affected by decisions made the Premier's council, those being persons with disabilities. Now, the argument was used that there were also to be some persons without disabilities on there to represent those that could not speak out for themselves, those who might have learning disabilities, those who simply were not able to advocate for themselves. Nevertheless, it was ensured that the vast majority of those members were persons that would be affected by the decision-making process of that body.

When the makeup came forward in this particular Legislative Assembly as to the makeup of the Multicultural Commission, if I recall correctly, the minister responsible for multiculturalism was very, very clear, very explicit that the representation had to be from various ethnocultural communities that could best reflect the decision-making process of that body.

The reference was made earlier, Mr. Chairman: what about school trustees? Maybe school trustees should be restricted as to their criteria to be a member. Yes, I believe there has to be a restriction for school trustees. There should be. For one to be a competent school trustee, one should have a vested interest, and that vested interest, of course, is to be a parent or have been a parent with a child or children that are utilizing or have utilized the school system. The same goes on and on and on.

There are restrictions in almost any type of decision-making process to ensure the proper input. To run as a member of a municipal council, one has to live within that council to ensure that decisions made by that council are of interest to that individual. This particular aspect of the amendment I believe is a given. I believe it enhances the comments that were made earlier by the Member for Bow Valley. It ensures that the representation that he spoke of would be there.

The second part of the amendment, Mr. Chairman, representation which would of course consist of seniors but would be specific to three different groups to ensure representation of the diversity within Alberta, is a given.

And the third: I believe the third is the most meaningful to seniors at this particular time, and that is: "support for research on issues relating to senior citizens." If sufficient research was being done, if a mechanism was there to ensure that the research could be done, provision was there, support was there, government members would have realized before they jumped into what they jumped into that there was a need to do research. Part of that research, of course, is consultation and such, and I would venture to say that many of the decisions that were made prior to the budget would not have been made.

To conclude on this amendment, I just want to sum it up by emphasizing one point. I would hope that as government members consider these three amendments and as they consider, then, Bill 1, Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act with these amendments included, prior to the passage of that Bill, prior to Royal Assent being given, government would have the courage to stand up and announce to seniors: "We're going to undo the damage that we've created, to allow things to start on the proper foot. Once we have that Bill in place, once we have that Seniors Advisory Council formally in place with the 20 senior citizens, we will then start looking at the various programs and ensuring that they are of the greatest benefit to senior citizens within the province of Alberta." For this to be meaningful, for this to be truly meaningful to senior citizens, I maintain that government has to show the initiative, the courage to admit that mistakes have been made, to undo those mistakes, and go back to square A and do things properly, Mr. Chairman.

9:33

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question on the amendments?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion on amendments A, B, and C lost]

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hearing the call for the question on Bill 1 as amended.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 1 as amended agreed to]

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported.

[Motion carried]

Bill 4 Social Work Profession Act

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have certain amendments before the committee that have been distributed. They are quite a number in nature.

Prior to recognizing the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, I would just like to point out that the committee adjourned while considering amendments put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I would like to take note that it would be the Chair's intention, unless otherwise wished by the mover, that we would vote on A to F as one package, and G separately.

MRS. HEWES: A to F, but G separately?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's satisfactory.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That makes things more clear.

Returning to my remarks, which were interrupted about two months ago, I guess, by adjournment, we were talking about the need for the social worker professional association to have control over title, and that is, in fact, the nature of the amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Glenmore . . .

MRS. MIROSH: Calgary.

MS M. LAING: Sorry; Calgary-Glenmore.

. . . has held that the social workers' association cannot have control over the title "social worker" because many other people do, in her words, "social work." I have to take exception to that position, as I did in my opening comments to this amendment. I would just simply state that one of the difficulties we have is that we do not have a definition of what social work is. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, in fact, will be moving an amendment so that we have a definition of what it is that social workers do. So I think that will clarify this discussion. However, back to this amendment.

Part of the problem is that there isn't a clear understanding, I believe, by the person bringing forward this Bill of what it is to be a professional or a person belonging to a profession who can claim title to that profession. A profession and the right to call oneself by the name of that profession involves a number of things, including a field of education, a level of expertise, standards of competency and of ethical behaviour. We could say, as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has said, that many people do social work, but she misses the understanding of what a social worker as a professional person is. Many people would do parts of what other professional people do, but that does not give them the right to call themselves by that profession. I would suggest that police personnel, that ministers, that teachers may in fact do part of what social workers do. They may in fact talk to people about alternatives, how they feel about things, but social work is much more than that.

It involves case planning. It involves evaluation. It involves standards of ethical and competent behaviour. Indeed, many of

the people doing this work may in fact be competent and ethical, but how can we be sure that their practice is that? More importantly, what of those who present themselves as social workers but are only blessed with good intentions and very little skill? What if, out of their good intention, they do harm? How do we know, or would we know? How do they know? And how do they deal with the trust and the authority that is placed in them by those who come to them as clients? Are they cognizant of how vulnerable people who see them as having a competency that they may not have are to harm being done out of good intentions but lack of skill, lack of understanding, lack of knowledge?

That's what a profession is about. It's about knowledge. It is about skill. It is about competency, and it is about ethics. We would hope that professional social workers have good intentions, common sense, and skill, as many other people, the member would hold, who practise social work have; that they have these things but they are consciously and professionally concerned about not doing harm, about evaluating the impact of their interventions.

In reality, at the present time and then continued by this Bill, anyone can claim the status of social worker. Generally, the public does not understand that that can be a self-chosen designation and has no professional status, indicates no level of expertise and no level of competency or knowledge. So they, in the name of an authority that they have chosen for themselves, may mislead those who would come to them for help and may in fact cause harm.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore has spoken of nursing. People who have not received training in nursing do not call themselves nurses in the way that untrained people now fill social worker positions. Caring for a family with illness does not make one a nurse, although we would say that they have been providing health care. A standard of training is required if one is to call himself or herself a nurse, and rightfully so. The public understands a nurse, someone who calls herself or himself a nurse, as someone who has training in nursing, professional training. The term "registered nurse" has fallen into disuse because all nurses are trained and, for the most part, registered and cannot call themselves nurses if they are untrained. Similarly, you may teach children at home, as my mother did, but that does not give you the right to call yourself a teacher. We need an Act in this instance that recognizes training as part of what constitutes a profession and the right of the use of that title by the profession itself.

9:43

There is a further problem with a failure to require registration of those who would call themselves social workers, and it has to do with the role of the profession in ensuring that its members provide competent and ethical practice. As this Bill is written, a registered social worker could be disciplined by its professional organization, the social workers' association, be suspended or stripped of their registration and yet continue to practise social work and call themselves social workers in an unchanged way. So the capacity to ensure standards of practice and conduct and therefore protect the public from incompetent practice and unethical conduct by social workers is limited and in fact is nonexistent.

This is in part the reason that in many people's minds the profession of social work is so much underrated, held in disrepute, and wrongly blamed for incompetency, because people who are untrained and incompetent call themselves social workers and nothing can be done. In addition, if we require

that all people who call themselves and fill social worker positions have to be registered as social workers and come under the jurisdiction of the profession, we could then demand that their employees would not set up workplaces that put in jeopardy competency of practice. That's something that I as a psychologist certainly appreciated, because I knew that ultimately I answered to my profession for competent practice and ethical behaviour and that I could not be taken astray from that course. It would also then allow the profession rather than employers the right to discipline those who have failed to give competent practice and to act in an ethical way. So this may, in fact, save employers some of the hassle of dealing with incompetency and unethical behaviour.

For those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I believe it is absolutely essential that we support this amendment.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to support the amendments proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

It's always a difficult task when you're dealing with professions and occupations to draw the line between the competing interests. However, I think that with respect to the decision to use the term "registered social worker" rather than simply the term "social worker," the line was drawn improperly in this legislation. By not granting exclusive use of the title "social worker," the Bill prevents the association from including all social worker practitioners as members. In order to be most effective as an association, the association must have the jurisdiction extend to all persons practising social work in order that it can deal with problems such as incompetent and unethical practice and so that it can be able to deal effectively with the discipline concerns of the association with respect to the practice of social work.

The Act loses much of its effectiveness by not extending its scope to all social workers in the province. It permits a person to represent himself as a social worker without any recourse by the association. There's no requirement to meet any standards, and such persons, if they chose not to seek registration under the Act, are beyond the jurisdiction of the association to deal with. Indeed, even if they should be found by the association as members of the association to have committed some misconduct, once they choose not to be governed by the statute any longer, they would still be beyond the scope of the legislation and be able to carry on practice, notwithstanding the judgment of the profession with respect to their incompetence or misconduct.

[Mr. Moore in the Chair]

The Bill is designed around a concept which was adopted and promoted by the Council on Professions and Occupations in the June 1990 policy statement which was tabled in this Legislature, Principles and Policies Governing Professional Legislation in Alberta. In that document, at page 4, the distinction is drawn between two different types of systems: the exclusive scope of practice type of system, and the so-called right to title system. It's necessary to understand and appreciate the difference between these two types of systems in order to understand and appreciate what this legislation in fact accomplishes.

What is necessary is an exclusive scope of practice type of system in my submission, Mr. Chairman, and I believe that's

what the amendment is intended to accomplish here. An exclusive scope of practice system is a system where the legislation in question prohibits all persons except those registered under the professional legislation from engaging in the particular type of professional practice. This is the type of system that is used with respect to most professions. For example, the exclusive type of practice system is applied in Alberta to professions such as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, architects, engineers, accountants, optometrists, psychologists, and a host of others.

The other type of system is called a right to title. The two systems should not be confused. Under right to title systems the registered practitioners are granted the exclusive use of the specified title. They in effect get a copyright on a name, but the difficulty with the copyright is that here the copyright on the name extends only to a person who's registered under the statute rather than to all social workers. Practitioners, of course, who are not registered can't use the specific title "registered social worker," and they can't represent themselves either expressly or by implication as being a registered member of this particular association. However, they are free to engage freely and extensively in practice within entirely and completely the same field so long as they don't represent themselves as being registered in the profession. In my submission, what we have here is a problem with respect to the concepts and the principles, and what the Assembly should approve is terminology which involves this concept of exclusive scope of practice.

What the Bill establishes is really only a right to title, and that a limited right to title, with respect to the use of the term "registered social worker." The social workers' profession, if it's to be a truly self-governing profession, must have the appropriate type of statutory framework. In my submission, Mr. Chairman, the appropriate type of statutory framework should include an exclusive scope of practice provision so the social workers' association can regulate the entry standards and pass judgment on them and can regulate the standard of competence and the rules of professional conduct which must characterize those who wish to maintain and obtain membership in good standing in the association in the field of social work generally and not simply in the limited field defined by the Act.

9:53

By not at least granting the title over social work to the social workers' association, the Bill prevents the association from ensuring that all persons practising social work are members of the association and are subject to its overriding jurisdiction under the statute. As I said before, in order to be effective in governing the affairs of social workers, it's imperative that all persons practising social work be included as members of that association. Otherwise, it's an open invitation to unethical and incompetent practitioners who simply either opt out of the association, having gotten themselves into difficulties with it, or, better still, never come under the jurisdiction of the association by never bothering to join it. There's no incentive, no necessity, no need for them to do so, so I expect that that indeed will be the difficulty. The persons who are ethical and competent and meet the proper types of standards – and I'll be addressing that later when we get to the Bill proper – will not be the ones that there is difficulty with. The ones that we will have difficulty with are the ones that will not be regulated by the statute, and that indeed, in my submission, is unfortunate.

Mr. Chairman, in the circumstances here I would like also to address – well, perhaps I won't at this time. I gather we're going to be voting on section 61(3). Of course, I note that the

amendment proposed by the sponsor of the Bill is to delete that section, and I wholeheartedly agree with that. I think that kind of a provision, the type of provision that would enable the government to enact or repeal regulations – in other words, to establish the rules governing the association – is repugnant. It's repugnant to the concept of a self-governing profession. I compliment the government on having introduced an amendment to repeal it, which will coincide with the amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Those are my submissions with respect to the amendments that are presently under discussion.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll be voting, on this amendment by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on sections A, B, C, D, E, and F. Then we will vote on section G separately.

[Motion on amendments A, B, C, D, E, and F lost]

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We now move to section G.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, I would like to support G, section 61(3) to be struck out. It would be consistent with all professions since none of the professions do care to have this section in their Act.

[Motion on amendment G carried]

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Chairman, I would like to continue the discussion on the Social Work Profession Act and the amendments that were circulated in the House on May 13, 1991. The Bill is amended as follows.

A, section 11(4)(d) is amended by adding "or diploma" after "degree" wherever it occurs. B, section 12(1)(a) is amended by adding "or diploma" after "degree" wherever it occurs. D, section 64 is amended by striking out "a member of" and substituting "registered as a registered social worker by."

The reason for these amendments, Mr. Chairman, is that the new legislation would allow continuation and to recognize individuals with the bachelor of social worker degree. There's also provision to permit the University Co-ordinating Council, the UCC, to recognize other training. The proposed amendments to sections 11 and 12 will indicate more clearly that the University Co-ordinating Council may approve diplomas in social work as well as degrees in social work. This is an important amendment as we have diploma programs established in our community colleges throughout Alberta. As currently drafted, the Act would grandfather all members of the Alberta Association of Social Workers as registered members including students, associations, and so on. This was not the intent of the legislation, and at the request of the association we propose to limit grandfathering to those individuals who are registered as active members of the association.

Thank you.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Chairman, I have some concerns about this amendment. I raise them in the context of the present complexity of the issues being dealt with by social workers,

particularly those employed by the government of Alberta. I'm thinking here particularly of issues around violence in the family. My experience in that area has indicated that highly trained and highly skilled people with an in-depth understanding of social work issues need to be working in this area. I am deeply concerned that by bringing in this amendment, we may in fact have people who are untrained and unskilled and unable to deal with the complexity of issues that now face social workers either as government employees or in private practice.

So I raise this and have to say that I oppose it. I think it's at a time when we see an increasing pressure in nursing, say, for a PhD. There has been some pressure by the Psychologists' Association to require an entry level PhD. So we have recognition by other professions that issues are becoming more complex and difficult to deal with, and I have to question the reverse trend in these amendments. I would, then, say that these amendments cause me grave concern.

MR. CHIVERS: Mr. Chairman, I rise also to oppose these amendments with respect to a diploma being a sufficient entry requirement for the profession of registered social worker. As I said earlier, it's always difficult when you're dealing with professions and occupations to balance the host of competing interests that have to be balanced, to balance them properly and fairly. When you're dealing with entry standards, bear in mind that the entry standards traditionally for social workers have been the university degree, the undergraduate degree. It seems to me an unwise choice to be reducing these standards at this point in time. Indeed, I think it's an improper balancing of the interests that are at stake here. Entry standards have to be, of course, justifiable in the public interests as being necessary for the practising of the profession competently, and it seems to me that in the public interest it is not wise to be reducing the standards as this legislation does.

At the same time, I also acknowledge that the entry standards should not be set so high as to be unrealistic, because that of course has the opposite effect. Rather than protecting the public, it deprives the public of access to the services of sufficient numbers of professional persons. I think what we have to bear in mind here is that the interests to be protected include not only the interests of the profession itself. Of course, the profession has an interest that needs to be protected in terms of maintaining the highest possible standards. We must consider that interest. We must also consider the interests of the members of the association, who also wish to see the standards of the association being set in a realistic manner. We must also consider the interests of the clients that are being served by a social worker and the interests of the general public. I think that when we balance all of those interests in this context, it is a serious mistake to permit the entry requirement to be reduced to the diploma level.

It also seems to me that this once again is an indirect reflection on the authority of the association with respect to its self-governance. To impose unrealistically low standards, it seems to me, is to reflect on the validity of the professional association in the first place. It seems to me to be most unwise and unfair to the association, its members, and the public to impose such low standards in these circumstances, and therefore oppose those amendments.

10:03

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, I have a great deal of sympathy for the intent of this amendment. I have a lot of respect for those individuals who teach in our junior colleges and who are

graduates of the social work training. I find that they perform an excellent function in many of the agencies and organizations in our communities and in government as well, but I do believe to suggest that someone with a two-year diploma in fact should be in a position to be a registered social worker, with all of the responsibilities that that implies, would not be a prudent move to make at this time. In fact, I find that it would weaken the Bill further, and I don't believe that I can support it under those circumstances.

I think we have to think about three dimensions to this problem, Mr. Chairman. The first one is the profession itself. I believe that in writing legislation we have some obligation to ensure that the standards in the profession are maintained. Of course, the other two dimensions are those who are diploma holders who would be expected to practise within the context of . . . Somebody whistles. Is everybody hearing that, or is it just me? Those who practise might in fact find themselves in a position where they are expected to perform at a level for which their competence or their training has not prepared them. I think this could be very difficult; in fact, could be dangerous. [There was a whistling in the Chamber]

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you hearing it again?

MRS. HEWES: No, I didn't hear it that time.

The third dimension, Mr. Chairman, is the consumer. I believe that we have in this House a real responsibility to ensure the protection of the consumer, particularly when we think about a profession that is dealing with the lives of people, often people who are very troubled and are perhaps not at the time in a position to be able to discriminate from whence they are getting their counseling and support.

So, Mr. Chairman, while I sympathize and show my admiration for those who undertake the training and acquire a diploma and want to see them practising in our communities, I do not believe that they belong in this Bill.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question has been called on the government amendment to Bill 4. Section C has already been voted in the previous amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have another amendment to Bill 4.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. CHIVERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. The amendment's been circulated, and I won't bother reading it. What it is is a definition of social work. I point out that the Act doesn't include a definition of the practice of social work, and a definition of the scope of the practice of social work is a critical ingredient of the legislation.

A definition of the meaning of the phrase "practice of social work" is absolutely crucial to the legislation if the legislation is to function on any meaningful level. For example, without a definition of the meaning of the practice of social work, it's impossible for a discipline committee to make a finding that there has been unskilled practice of social work, which is the standard against which members of the association can be disciplined. So if you don't have a definition against which you can measure exactly what it is that people are being disciplined

for, I don't see how you can effectively apply that standard of discipline.

Perhaps even more importantly, the discipline committees are required to assert jurisdiction to make findings of unskilled practice of social work, but absent the definition of the practice of social work and there's no yardstick against which they can measure the conduct of the member accused of unskilled practice of social work, nor can they measure his standard of performance against any yardstick.

Most importantly, the absence of the definition of the practice of social work means that the public and, in particular, consumers of the services of social workers have no yardstick against which they can measure the skill or lack of skill of the practitioner in the practice of social work. If unskilled practice of social work is to be grounds for discipline, then it's absolutely imperative from the standpoint of the association itself, from the standpoint of the members of the association, from the standpoint of the discipline committee, from the standpoint of the council, and from the standpoint of the public that there be a definition as to the meaning of practice of social work. Failure of the statute to include a definition as to what is encompassed within the practice of social work can lead to no other result than confusion and unfairness in the association, in the operation of the discipline committee, in the operation of the council, in terms of the treatment of the members, and for the public generally.

I urge the Assembly to adopt the amendment.

10:13

MRS. HEWES: Just briefly, Mr. Chairman, I believe this is an excellent amendment. It's something that is missing from the Bill, and I'm pleased to support it.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also speak in support of this amendment. Other professions have definitions as to what the practice of psychology is, for instance. It is a protection for the public so that the public knows what it is that they can expect from a person that is called a social worker. It does away with the confusion that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore has presented us with when she says that police personnel do social work, members of the clergy do social work, teachers do social work. When one has a definition of the practice of social work, we then have a clearer understanding of the practice of social work as a profession, and that means that people know what they can expect from persons that

call themselves social workers. I think it not only helps the profession in devising and applying standards, but it also helps and protects the public, so I fully support this amendment.

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment lost]

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question has been called on the Bill itself.

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The sections of Bill 4 as amended agreed to]

MRS. MIROSH: I move, Mr. Chairman, that the Bill be reported as amended.

[Motion carried]

MR. STEWART: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MR. MOORE: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills and reports the following: Bills 1 and 4 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Having heard the report of the hon. Member for Lacombe, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 10:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]

