

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 22, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen. Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to present to the Assembly a petition signed by 219 Albertans from Edmonton, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Devon, and Bon Accord. These petitions are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition. It is signed by 233 citizens of Alberta from the communities of Leduc, St. Albert, Fort Saskatchewan, Bon Accord, and of course Edmonton. These citizens are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct pleasure to table with the Assembly today the hard work of two seniors in the Edmonton-Calder constituency. This is just part of their work. There are some 234 signatures from their friends, acquaintances, and new acquaintances in and around the city, some of them from as far away as St. Albert and Sherwood Park. They do collectively urge "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I, too, would like to present a petition signed by 186 individuals from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Gibbons. They are urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would present a petition signed by 238 citizens of Edmonton and Sherwood Park urging "the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining the public health care system."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with another 500 signatures on it; close to 6,000 signatures have already been tabled. The individuals whose signatures are on today's petition are from Edmonton, St. Albert, St. Vincent, St. Paul, Hilda, Pincher Creek, Calgary, and Hinton. The petitioners are requesting this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to request that the petition standing in my name from March 20, 2000, regarding the nonsupport for private health care be read and received by the Assembly.

THE CLERK:

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

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday denouncing private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the petition which I presented to this Assembly yesterday urging the government to stop its pursuit of privatizing our health care system now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I do ask that the petition I tabled yesterday in this House urging the government to stop privatizing health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday urging this government to stop privatizing health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I request that the petition I presented on March 21 regarding government promotion of private health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition from 225 Albertans that I presented to the Assembly on Tuesday, March 21 requesting that the promotion of private health care be stopped be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I presented yesterday to the Assembly signed by 302 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of an article by Joel Christie, who has a PhD in health care planning from the University of Alberta. The article appears in the current issue of the publication entitled *Profile*, Alberta's knowledge-based business magazine. The article titled Health Care Crossroads examines the growth of the publicly funded system and its constant need for change and concludes that:

Carefully extending private delivery beyond the private practices of physicians will enable us to build our health care to the next level without losing what we have gained and learned over the last 30 years of publicly funded health care delivery . . . Private delivery of appropriate health services would help alleviate the current line-ups, improve access to treatment within clinically appropriate timeframes and improve accountability. All at no extra cost to the person receiving medically necessary services.

1:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have four tablings this afternoon. First of all, a letter to the registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons from the Hon. Allan Rock. This is in response to his concern about the college getting on with providing guidelines for the operation of private surgical clinics. In one paragraph that I would just like to quote he indicates:

I am writing separately to Health Minister Jonson to encourage him to fill the legislative vacuum which currently exists and which could have been addressed by Bill 37.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Mental Health Patient Advocate for the year ended December 31, 1999.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee for the period ended March 31, 1999.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Public Health Appeal Board for the year ended December 31, 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today the responses to questions raised during International and Intergovernmental Relations estimates on Tuesday, February 29. They're directed to Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-Norwood, and Edmonton-Ellerslie. I note that in case they haven't received them in their office.

Thank you.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on behalf of the Minister of Environment I'd like to table a letter from the minister to Duncan Ellison of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association in recognition of World Day for Water, which is today. The Canadian wastewater association represents the municipal and wastewater sectors in Canada, which work to protect and preserve our water resources through safe water treatment and efficient use.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of four letters today. These are letters to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, the Member for Dunvegan, the Member for Peace River, and the Member for Rocky Mountain House. In these letters I am providing an opportunity to all of them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreeable time. I am looking forward to them accepting the offer.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I have the appropriate number of copies to the hon. Associate Minister of Forestry, the hon. Minister of Economic Development, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South asking them to debate Bill 11 publicly.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a resolution passed at the national convention of the Liberal Party of Canada. It states:

Be it resolved that the Liberal Party of Canada urge the federal government to express its opposition to any provincial legislation (including Alberta's Bill 11) extending private-for-profit health care delivery.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, with your permission. The first are excerpts from Bovar Inc.'s 1999 annual report, which shows that revenue-sharing from the net income of the Premier's special waste management facility in the year 1999 was zero. This is a rate of return of .00535 percent, I'm sure not as high as the profit expected from these private hospitals.

The second tabling that I have is an analysis by Brad Severin of BDO Dunwoody of the dividend tax credit as set out under section 21 of the Provincial Treasurer's 11 percent flat tax bill. What this shows is that Albertans who have dividend income of approximately \$24,000 will now have to pay over \$100 in income tax under the Treasurer's scheme, but if he'd just left things alone, if he'd just left well enough alone, that income would be tax free.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, what I have are the appropriate number of copies from myself to the Member for Calgary-Currie, the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and the Member for Red Deer-North inviting them to meet with me at a mutually agreeable time and place to discuss the merits of Bill 11.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I wish to table five copies of letters that are going out to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the Member for Calgary-Fort, the Member for Calgary-North Hill, and of course my favourite and longtime friend and acquaintance, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. They are in fact invitations to debate the merits of Bill 11 in their constituency at a mutually agreed upon time.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of an invitation letter to four members on the government benches: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the hon. Member for Leduc, the hon. Member for Little Bow, and the hon. Member for Wainwright. It's an opportunity to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at mutually agreed time at a place of their choosing.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three tablings today. The first is a letter I sent to the MLAs for the constituencies of Calgary-Egmont, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Lesser Slave Lake, and West Yellowhead. This letter provides an opportunity for them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreed time and at a place of their choosing.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter to the minister responsible for tourism from the general manager and chief operating officer of Alberta's number one tourist attraction. In this letter he outlines that

Alberta Tourism has undergone a major reorganization in the past three years to establish a fair and balanced approach to provincial tourism marketing. . . . Sadly, this Destination Awareness Campaign for the Americas achieves precisely the opposite.

My third tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is a media release from the Spiritus group, a grassroots Catholic organization in Alberta advocating and mobilizing on issues that impact faith and life.

Thank you very much.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. They are letters to the Minister of Health and Wellness, the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness, and the members for Calgary-Cross and Calgary-Montrose requesting that they agree to a debate to talk about the merits of Bill 11. As the government and its members always say that there is not enough information out there for people to be able to make a decision, this provides ample opportunity to do it in your ridings.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters to table this afternoon. They are letters providing the following members an opportunity to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me at a mutually agreeable time and a place of their choosing. The hon. members are the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, and the hon. Member for Highwood.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have copies of four letters that I'm sending to the members for Calgary-Foothills, Stony Plain, Redwater, and Lac La Biche-St. Paul asking them to take the opportunity to publicly debate in their ridings the merits of Bill 11.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, with permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters to the hon. members for Calgary-Nose Creek, Strathmore-Brooks, Calgary-McCall, and Calgary-East asking them to debate the merits of Bill 11 in their constituencies at a mutually agreeable and convenient time.

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies when I get them of a note to the Liberal caucus House leader, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer, inviting all members of the Liberal caucus to debate Bill 11 in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that they are very reluctant. We offered them three hours of television debate; now they only want one hour. What have they got to fear?

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Premier, but we'd also like to get out from under the dome. Therefore, I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of an invitation to the hon. members for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, Banff-Cochrane, Airdrie-Rocky View, and Grande Prairie-Wapiti inviting them to debate the merits of Bill 11 with me in their constituency at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got four tablings today. The first one is a set of some letters representing correspondence between John Newton, who's my constituent, and he introduces himself as an average Albertan, nonpartisan infoseeker, professional musician, award-winning teacher, City of Edmonton Salute to Excellence '98-99, BA honours sociology, and new father. The letters express frustration and are a clear example of how this government manipulates statistics regarding health care and the difficulties inherent in being an informed member of what is supposedly a democracy.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is the position paper on health care privatization in Alberta, and this is the position paper of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses.

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter that I wrote today to the hon. Official Opposition House Leader, a letter in which I express serious concerns with his refusal to agree to "amend the House Leader's Agreement, which sets out the structure for the televised portion of the Second Reading of Bill 11."

MR. KLEIN: Way to go, Raj. They're afraid.

DR. PANNU: I think you're right, Mr. Premier, this time around.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter that I wrote to Robert Clark, the Ethics Commissioner, in which I express with respect my profound disagreement with his decision not to conduct an investigation into my complaint regarding the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I have the distinct honour of inviting two hon. members to debate Bill 11: the Member for Sherwood Park, and I'm particularly looking forward to debating the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud,

getting back to my old stomping grounds. I'm sure both of them would be willing to discuss Bill 11 in a public forum, any time, any place.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have appropriate copies of letters from four Albertans very, very concerned about Bill 11: Ailwin Boulet, Keith Purdy, Cecelia Hund-Reid, and Norman Matthew.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to table copies of five letters. These letters are addressed to the members for Grande Prairie-Smoky, Livingstone-Macleod, Medicine Hat, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and Vegreville-Viking asking them to arrange a mutually agreeable time to debate the merits of Bill 11.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to recognize the Member for Lethbridge-West. We've already had our debate in Lethbridge.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I have two tablings. Firstly, a copy of my letter to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona of even a date.

Secondly, given that the Premier has now discovered that this place is a refuge instead of a disease, the dome of course, I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of an invitation to the members for Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, Calgary-West, and the minister of intergovernmental affairs to participate in a discussion so people in Calgary and Drumheller will also be able to find out what Bill 11 is all about.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And finally, my letter to the Premier challenging him to a debate on Bill 11 out from under the dome.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, that was exciting. We're now at 3 minutes to 2, and I'd like to point out to all hon. members that everyone who participated in Tabling Returns and Reports today, other than the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations and the hon. Minister of Children's Services, violated the rules of this House.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. members would like to know the model for tabling, I will now read one to you. Hon. members, I would like to table an agreement made by the House leader of the government of Alberta, the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Leader of the Alberta New Democratic opposition, and the independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs dated March 20, 2000, relating to the debate on second reading of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 92 students from Neil M. Ross community school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Bagdan, Mr. Sharun, Mrs. Crockett, Miss Lafranchise, Miss Siobhan Whelehan, and Mrs. Hazelwood, and also some parents and assistants who have come with them: Mrs. Komarnicki, Mr. Gamble, and Mr. Stasynec. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have another introduction too, a person who is in the members' gallery. His name is Roger MacKinnon. He is a University of Alberta student who is here today doing some research and interviews for his bioethics class. He came with his fellow student Luke Miller, who had to return to class. I would ask Roger to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

DR. TAYLOR: I'm pleased to rise today, Mr. Speaker, and introduce two people from my constituency. I don't often get them up from Medicine Hat, so I'm pleased they are here. They are here for the Alberta chamber meetings. One is Kent Smith, who's president of the local chamber, and Dana Cooper, who's the CEO of the chamber. They publish this excellent magazine, *Profile*, and I'd encourage all members to read it, particularly the comments on health care. I'd ask those guests to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

2:00

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly individuals that are seated in the members' gallery and who represent the beginning today of the return of *Wednesday's Child*, an exciting series that has assisted in adoption of children in Alberta. With us today are Marg Pullishy, the producer; Anne Scully, manager of adoption services; and Nadia Zubach, the *Wednesday's Child* matching and media recruitment co-ordinator. As they rise, please join me and give them a warm welcome today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce a very special group of young students from the Vanier community school. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Fogarty, Mrs. Sorensen, and Mrs. Wittig. They're also with another great group of parents. I would have them rise now, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine that's visiting the Legislature today who resides in Stettler, Alberta. This gentleman is one of my favourite ministers of the cloth. I would ask the Reverend Don Axford, seated in the members' gallery, to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce a former colleague from Keyano College in my city of Fort McMurray. She presently is the program chair at the NAIT school of business. Shirley Carroll is truly a dynamic and energetic young lady who lives up to our city slogan, *Nous Avons l'Énergie*.

I'd like to ask Shirley to rise and receive the warm welcome of our legislators here today.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a bright young man from Edmonton-McClung, Fraser Betkowski. Fraser is a downhill skier, he's a golfer, and most importantly he's the son of the Leader of the Official Opposition. With your permission I would ask Fraser to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a student from St. Thomas Aquinas high school in Spruce Grove. Her name is Patricia Schirmacher. She is doing a job shadow project today. I would ask you all to please give her a warm welcome.

Thanks.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly today a very well-known constituent of mine, Charlene Hay, who is the co-ordinator for Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. I have known Charlene for at least 15 years. She is seated in the public gallery. I will now request her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

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

Wednesday's Child

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All children want and need and deserve a family. In fact, loving, stable relationships are essential to a child's healthy development.

Since 1981 Children's Services has been finding adoptive homes for children through the *Wednesday's Child* television series. The series consists of one-minute video profiles of special-needs children in government's care, children who are seeking adoptive families. It's the only program of its kind in Canada, and its success rate is remarkable. Since its inception 70 percent of the children featured have found adoptive homes.

Another season of the *Wednesday's Child* series begins today, and I encourage all Albertans to watch. The one-minute profiles air on CFRN TV in Edmonton, CFCN TV in Calgary three times each Wednesday: during 11 a.m. and noon, at about 12:58 p.m., and during 3 to 4 p.m. This series is an outstanding example of the benefits to children when government, the private sector, the community, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, the parents who choose to give of themselves work on behalf of the children.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our partners: CTV, which provides free air time on CFRN TV in Edmonton and CFCN TV in Calgary; the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, which provides the funds required for filming and promotes special-needs adoption by displaying posters in Wendy's restaurants in Alberta; and the Adoption Council of Canada, which provides a toll-free response

line for prospective families. To all of you my sincere thanks and appreciation. Together we are ensuring that more children in Alberta are provided with loving and caring families.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Wednesday's Child* is certainly one useful and commendable mechanism to provide for the adoption of Alberta's children. This is but one initiative, however, required to address the thousands of children in our child welfare system who are awaiting a permanent home.

High-profile campaigns like *Wednesday's Child* help to inform the public of the plight of these children. It is, however, the frontline staff who struggle on a day-to-day basis to seek out safe and nurturing environments for children that must also be recognized. Their efforts must be recognized, respected, and valued to a greater degree than has been this government's practice.

The developmental needs of such children must also not be ignored, like their literacy rates, academic achievement, and social interaction. Opportunities must also be created for these children to experience hope and love until in fact they find a permanent home.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Members, a few minutes ago during Tabling Returns and Reports I tabled a document which is a House leader's agreement. I wish to advise the House that at the conclusion of question period today it would be my intent to rise and read into the record the contents of this agreement and recognize the Government House Leader, who will then proceed to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly for the implementation of this agreement.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's only when you get out from under the dome amongst your constituents that you understand that there is another reality. Not my words but those of the Premier. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier now get out from under the dome, follow his own advice, come out and debate with me in front of Albertans and answer their questions on Bill 11?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank God that we're all going to get out from under the dome on Thursday and have a break. I don't know about the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition. She seems to be suffering from dome disease. I know that I am. But I'll be refreshed and rejuvenated and ready to come back and ready to engage her in a debate in the Legislature on Bill 11.

I would throw the leader of the Liberal opposition's words back at her. A press release dated November 15, 1999, says, "MacBeth has challenged the Premier to a debate in the Legislature on contracting out public health care to the private sector". You know, Mr. Speaker, they raised the question yesterday. How can you trust the leader of the Liberal opposition when she says one thing a few months ago and is saying another thing today? How can they trust her when last week she challenged me to a TV debate, but in 1992 she refused to debate me during the leadership campaign for the Progressive Conservatives, saying: I'm not going to participate; a debate merely polarizes two sides? My goodness.

2:10

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there've been a lot of changes.

He's now over there, and I'm now over here, and he's afraid to debate me on Bill 11. Why won't he do it?

MR. KLEIN: I'm not afraid to debate at all. As a matter of fact, the Liberals now appear to be afraid to debate. I understand from the hon. Government House Leader, Mr. Speaker, that they were offered nine hours of debate. No. They only want three. What are they afraid of?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: What are you talking about?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, nobody knows what the Premier is talking about.

Why is he so afraid to get out and talk to Albertans and hear their questions on Bill 11? Is it because he's afraid they're going to tell him to withdraw his legislation?

MR. KLEIN: I'm not afraid at all. I'm out and about all the time. I like to talk to Albertans about all issues. I like to talk to Albertans about agriculture issues. I like to talk to Albertans about energy issues. I like to talk to Albertans about the environment, about justice, about the federal government, about elected Senators. I like to talk to Albertans about their attitude toward Ottawa and Mr. Rock and the hypocrisy of Mr. Rock. So I get out and about.

As a matter of fact, I was in Calgary last week, where I spoke to – what? – about 1,250 Albertans about health care, went out and on . . . [interjections] No. There were a lot of Liberals there. And thank God. They paid about \$375 to come and hear me speak, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Bill 11 is nothing more than a scheme to use taxpayers' dollars to subsidize private hospitals and to force Albertans on the waiting lists to pay for enhanced services, creating a huge windfall for private hospital owners. Now we're learning just how huge that windfall is going to be. A price comparison of surgical procedures – this is real data. A price comparison of surgical procedures in the U.S. and Canadian hospitals was published in the April '98 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and it shows that the median cost of a total knee replacement in a U.S. hospital is nearly \$27,000 compared to \$11,000 for a similar procedure in a Canadian hospital. Interesting data. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that enhanced services within Bill 11 really means that private hospitals will be performing knee replacements at more than twice the cost of the service in the public sector?

MR. KLEIN: No, it doesn't mean that at all, Mr. Speaker. I think it's absolutely and totally – well, I don't think; I know – irrelevant to even be talking about the American system in any comparisons, because we aren't talking about that at all. We're talking about protecting the publicly funded health care system as we know it today and abiding by the principles of the Canada Health Act. That's what we're talking about.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that knee replacements are more than twice the cost in private hospitals, what profit margins has the Premier promised private hospital operators in Alberta when this bill goes through? Is it 20 percent, 30 percent, 40 percent? What's the private option that's going to be paid for by the taxpayers?

MR. KLEIN: The only promise that is guaranteed in the bill relative to payment, Mr. Speaker, is that all any Albertan will need is their Alberta health care card. Nothing more. Nothing less.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why would the Premier be pushing a bill that opens the door to \$27,000 private knee replacements subsidized by Alberta taxpayers when he could simply increase the capacity in the public hospitals and pay a mere \$11,000 for the same procedure?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member should know all about private clinics. I would ask Albertans: how can they trust this hon. member when she allowed 35 or more private clinics to operate under her watch when she was minister of health and allowed some of them to illegally charge facility fees? Right. How can they trust an hon. member who allowed that to happen?

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11 is all about bringing in two-tiered medicine and promoting private hospitals or, as the Premier likes to call them, approved surgical facilities. This is a second study the Premier might want to look at. A 1998 study by DeCoster and others entitled *Waiting Times for Surgery in Manitoba* demonstrated that patients in the public health care system had to wait 14 to 23 weeks for cataract surgeries if they went to a surgeon who practiced in both the public and the private hospital sector. On the other hand, patients who went to surgeons operating solely in the public system in Manitoba had waits of only 7 to 10 weeks, half the wait. To quote the summary of the report, "Patients awaiting public sector surgery would wait up to 13 weeks longer if their surgeon also operated privately." My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier so desperately trying to push Bill 11 and establish a two-tiered system that will see waiting times for surgery double for the majority of Albertans who will always have to rely on the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. minister of health supplement, but I am going to comment on one statement in her preamble, because this speaks to the malicious, vicious kind of misinformation that the Liberals are spreading, and that is reference to two-tiered American style health care. This bill specifically prohibits that from happening. They know it, and they're afraid to get out there and tell the truth. They're either afraid or unwilling to tell the truth. That statement about two-tiered health care is the kind of malicious information that they are spreading. It's wrong, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

MR. JONSON: If I might just supplement, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would respectfully suggest to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that she is confusing her references to the United States with ours when she should be comparing her references to the policy that she has enunciated with respect to private health care, and that is that doctors should completely opt out of the health care system in this province and charge on their own. She also is on record saying that a private hospital should be completely outside the public health care system, and I assume unregulated. Then you really get the true two-tiered system, which then I agree: if they're comparing their own policy, they should compare it to the United States. But that is not what Bill 11 is about.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, I think is very important here. With respect to Manitoba, which was the reference point, they do have private surgical facilities operating in Manitoba. I understand that they're fairly well received. I do not see the federal minister or the Leader of the Opposition here condemning them.

More importantly, in Ontario they have a private facilities act, a

piece of legislation which, as I recall – I think there was a Premier in Ontario by the name of Peterson, and it was passed under his jurisdiction. They have the legislation. The Prime Minister is not asking for that legislation to be repealed. I really think there should be some consistency in the way the Liberals portray this whole situation.

2:20

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the minister of health is talking about. This is about waiting lists in Manitoba. You know, a Canadian province.

In pushing Bill 11, where is the Premier's evidence that contracting out to the private hospitals or approved surgical facilities, as he likes to call them, will reduce waiting lists? Albertans need to know.

MR. KLEIN: Well, yes, and they need to know from the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, Mr. Speaker. Why should Albertans trust her when she says now that the private sector will destroy health care, but in 1998 she said that the private sector could set up in this province. If it can find its place, it should get in there: that's a direct quote right from her mouth on CHED on Dave Rutherford's show. How can they trust her when she says one thing today and a totally different thing two years ago?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, just in case Albertans missed that, that's the Premier refusing to answer on the evidence because he doesn't have any.

Given that the great majority of Albertans do not want Bill 11, Mr. Speaker, and given that the Premier hasn't shown one shred of real evidence to support his move to private hospitals, why doesn't he simply do the right thing and pull the bill?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the hon. member's statement that Albertans don't want this bill, that's not quite true. I have five letters. One from a farmer:

I would like to congratulate you and your Conservative Party on the way you've financially managed the province and for your vision of Alberta for the future in regards to Health Care.

Here's another letter.

I am an emeritus professor of surgery at the University of Calgary and I would like to let you know that I fully support your actions with Bill 11. I admire your courage in once again taking on the battle with the socialists and trade unions – and the Federal Government.

Here's a letter from a Mr. Tabler, and he says:

I would have to say that if anyone in Alberta, and indeed in Canada, is to have the balls – the guts – the courage – whatever you want to call it – to lead Alberta and Canada into new thinking about the delivery of health care, it is you, Mr. Premier.

Another letter from a lawyer in Calgary, a QC. He says:

I am shocked, appalled and upset at the abuse to which you are being subjected by the doctors' union, the nurses' union, C.U.P.E., A.U.P.E. and others over Bill 11. The criticism is unfair, outrageous, dishonest, untruthful and disingenuous, and the people involved know it full well.

I'm sure he's including the Liberals in that as well.

Just a small note of encouragement.

I'm with you all the way, don't be discouraged by all the nay-sayers out there. I think the majority of Albertans still believe in what you and your people are doing. Keep your chin up and smile.

Well, I'm doing that.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, those documents will be tabled?

MR. KLEIN: Yes, they will.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party does have the floor.

Security at Constituency Meeting

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are democratically and peacefully voicing their strong opposition to Bill 11. Some of these Albertans attended a carefully orchestrated meeting yesterday evening. The meeting was organized by the Minister of Justice in his capacity as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. My questions are to the Premier. I don't ask them lightly. Why is the government so afraid of public reaction to Bill 11 that it asked two Legislature Building security personnel dressed in plain clothes to be on duty at the Edmonton-Whitemud meeting?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, he's asking me a question that certainly pertains to a forum or a meeting that was arranged by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to address some concerns around Bill 11. I don't know any of the details surrounding that meeting. I know that the question is germane to the meeting itself, and the only person who can properly answer that question is the hon. minister. Now, I don't know if you would allow that, Mr. Speaker, but if you will, I would have the hon. minister respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the security personnel are employees of the Department of Justice and were asked by my office staff in an abundance of caution, not at my request but in an abundance of caution, because I have in fact had forms of threats, not relating at all to Bill 11 but relating to some people who are dissatisfied with certain things in terms of the care they perceive they've received, items which I can't discuss and names that I can't disclose. We have had threats in the office relating to that, and I have had security personnel at a number of meetings including a January 13 meeting that I had in my constituency and prior meetings. My office staff, I presume, will continue to arrange for security personnel to attend those meetings for as long as they believe there may be any threat.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my second question to the Premier: what evidence does the government have that Albertans are doing anything other than expressing their peaceful opposition to Bill 11 that would warrant the stationing of security personnel at a Conservative MLA's meeting?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I will have the hon. minister respond to that question, but I can tell you that as the Minister of Justice in particular and to some degree as the Attorney General this hon. minister deals with some cases involving some very unsavoury characters.

MR. HANCOCK: Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I could just supplement to say that I'm extremely disappointed to see a news release that's been issued by the New Democrat opposition. I had occasion, as you well know, to speak with the hon. member this morning. He didn't raise this question with me, didn't take the opportunity to ask whether there was a need for security personnel to be attending a meeting, did not in any way give me any forewarning of this issue.

I could have explained to him quite reasonably the attendance of security personnel at this meeting, at the last meeting I held, and on

other occasions when I've been out in a circumstance where we thought there might be the presence of a person who had made a threat. I could have explained that to him, and there wouldn't have been any need for these sorts of histrionics.

The meeting I had in Edmonton-Whitemud last night, Mr. Speaker, was a very peaceful meeting. I think the *Journal* accurately reported it as a very polite meeting. We had a very good discussion. There were no problems at that meeting, and we didn't anticipate any problems from the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, who I invited to attend that meeting. The threat came from someone who is not a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud but we reasonably believed might attend the meeting.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, the minister himself has recognized that there was no security threat, so I ask the Premier: why are your government resources being used to monitor ordinary Albertans who were only exercising their democratic right to oppose Bill 11 at a public meeting? That's the issue.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think I've made it perfectly clear that the attendance of security personnel at that meeting had absolutely nothing to do with the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, whom I invited by a personal circular to all residents of Edmonton-Whitemud letting them know that the meeting would be there. It was a peaceful meeting. It was intended to be a peaceful meeting. The attendance of security personnel had nothing to do with the discussion on Bill 11.

I'll reiterate again, because the member obviously couldn't listen the first or second times: security personnel were there solely because my office was concerned about certain threatening phone calls and threats that we've received in the office related to an unrelated matter, which he well knows because I've said it twice already. I cannot disclose the content of it because it might lead to the identification of the individual who made the threats. It has nothing to do with the debate on Bill 11. If he can't accept my word for it, I think it might be a question of privilege that would be raised later on.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair is deeply disturbed by this last series of questions. There has to be some honour in this place among all of us. I have had the privilege of being in here for going on 21 years, and I do know that from time to time Members of the Legislative Assembly do receive threats upon their person or persons in their family. This is not an uncommon occurrence. This happens.

2:30

Systems have been put in place for the protection of individuals. Certain ministers of the Crown are more likely to receive abusive calls and actual physical threats upon them because of their ministerial portfolio. Not in the least of them is the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General. It's a requirement, in fact, for the safeguarding of a democracy that the appropriate security measures are put in place.

From time to time, members of this Assembly who are private members have the need to seek security assistance. There are members in this Assembly now who visited with the Speaker and asked for and received such security provisions and security arrangements. This is not uncommon. What is uncommon and of disturbance to me today is that this matter would be raised in this Assembly in this manner. An hon. member . . . [interjections] Please. Please.

We did have an opportunity, as was correctly pointed out by the hon. Government House Leader, to meet with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona at 11 o'clock this morning. This was ample provision to discuss such a matter not only between the two of you but among other individuals including the Opposition House Leader, which might have helped clarify this matter.

I'm really sorry this type of questioning occurred in this Assembly today. [interjections] Please. Let us move on.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Gasoline Prices

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Provincial Treasurer. The federal government, the federal Liberals recently announced that they will spend \$750,000 worth of hard-earned taxpayer money to study pricing practices of the oil and gas industry. Essentially all of this money is going to figure out why the price of gasoline we pay at the pumps is so high. Another study but no action. I certainly hope that Alberta will not follow suit and launch a study. To the Provincial Treasurer: what can this gas pricing study done by the Conference Board of Canada possibly achieve? Can we hope for a reduction of gas prices on the federal side?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, as far as the province of Alberta being implicated in that, that amount of money that's going into doing a study on why gas prices are going up, whether it is \$750,000 or \$600,000 – I think I can answer it, and it won't cost of dime. Simply, the demand for crude based on the supply that's available drives the price up, and as the supply increases, the price goes down.

Now, some time ago there was an agreement signed between OPEC and non-OPEC nations related to a reduction of something like 5 million barrels a day in production, and naturally when that supply begins to drop, price is going to go up. As a matter of fact, today, Mr. Speaker, because that agreement that was signed indicated that those production reductions would hold until March of 2000 – and as you know, this is the time which we are in now. Given the anticipation of those production reductions and production starting to rise again, the market already seems to be anticipating that. We were looking at a west Texas price at noon today of \$27.60. That's a drop of about 20 percent in the price going back over the last couple of weeks.

The province of Alberta will not be investing any money in such a study as is being done. We know why these prices go up, we know why they come down, and we know that we are also prepared for that rise and fall.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Treasurer tell me how our farmers will be impacted by these high fuel costs and whether or not there are programs in place or programs anticipated to help them deal with these current high prices as they plan for spring seeding? [interjection]

MR. DAY: I will give the facts on that, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that there are a couple of programs in place right now directly related to fuel for farmers. The fuel benefit, first of all, allows for the fact that farmers are exempt from the 9 cent per litre provincial tax, the lowest tax in the country, and there is also a fuel benefit that reduces the price of diesel by another 6 cents. Those programs cost between \$110 million and \$115 million.

Further to that, our minister of agriculture has been working very closely with producers, because there have been rising costs facing

our agriculture producers. The federal government, of course, has not seen fit to give any assistance to Alberta farmers on this particular area. So not just an increase in the farm disaster program but in fact a new approach: farm assistance 2000 is in place to address a variety of these costs, including the high cost of fuel. Part of that is involved in an acreage payment of \$4.29 per acre to farmers, and that is going to go a significant distance to making that available in time for spring planting. We care about our farmers in this province, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the Provincial Treasurer. As I'm meeting with farmers in the Stettler area on Saturday morning, could you please tell me so I can tell them: what is the direct proportion of Alberta tax versus federal tax, and is there tax on tax?

MR. DAY: Well, that's a key point, Mr. Speaker. The member can feel free to share some things with the constituents with whom she'll be meeting.

On the federal side – and this should be very carefully noted. Of course every province has a tax per litre on gasoline, and ours is 9 cents in this province. It's the lowest in Canada. The fact of the matter is that the federal government has a 10 cent excise tax on every single litre, and unbeknownst to most Canadians, part of that tax was put in place several years ago as a deficit elimination tax.

Now, a number of provinces have achieved surplus positions over the last few years because of provincial policies. The federal government has skimmed the excess away from the provinces and has walked around bragging about a surplus, yet they continue to tax every Canadian a deficit elimination tax when thanks to the work of the provinces the federal deficit has been eliminated. Not only do they do that, but after all the taxes are in place, they add the GST on top. [interjections]

I know the Liberals are getting excited when I talk about this, but the fact is that Canadians need to remember that every time you put gasoline in your car, you pay the GST on top of all the other taxes. As the price of gas goes up, you pay more. The federal government gets richer; you as a taxpayer get poorer every time you fill that tank.

I'll just close with this thought, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals here in the province sent the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* down to the Liberal convention this weekend. Now, he could have talked to his friends about the federal government not helping our farmers. He could have talked to his friends about the federal government interfering in health care. He could have talked to his friends about the GST on tax. Did he do any of that? No. Do you know what he said was the compelling issue on the minds of Albertans? He went down there, and he whined about the federal Access to Information Act. Those people are out of touch, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spiritus, a Catholic organization that has representatives from the Catholic Women's League, the Knights of Columbus, and the Catholic school trustees has raised important questions about Bill 11. My questions today are to the Premier. Why is this government promoting Bill 11, which fosters further division and mistrust within the community and where the goal of some could very well become the selling of a product rather than the reaching out to those who are suffering?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, Bill 11 is there to protect the publicly funded health care system and to put some fences and rules and regulations around contracting out.

I would remind this hon. member, if he doesn't already know, that Caritas is an example. Caritas contracts to the Capital regional health authority, and it's a very good arrangement.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with the Spiritus concern with equality, I would like to ask the Premier: why is the government pushing Bill 11, that maximizes the opportunity for certain people's personal and financial gain, and seems oblivious to patient care, employee remuneration, and the efficient use of public resources?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member has not read the bill. I'll read it to him and see which parts he disagrees with. Does he disagree with this statement? "Whereas Albertans cherish Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system." Does he disagree with that statement?

Does he disagree with this statement?

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the preservation of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility, portability and public administration, as described in the Canada Health Act . . . as the foundation of the health system [here] in Alberta.

Does he oppose that? If he does, stand up and say so now, because it's in the bill and it will become law.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to the pursuit of excellence in the health system in Alberta through the efficient delivery of quality publicly funded services based on high standards, best practices and effective patient outcomes.

Does he oppose that? Does he oppose that principle? If he does, stand up and say so. And it goes on and on and on.

They are out there opposing these principles that Albertans hold dear. Hold dear. They are out there opposing the principles that Albertans hold dear, the principles of a publicly funded system. They're out there opposing it.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with Spiritus' concern with the responsible use of resources, I would like to ask the Premier why Bill 11 ignores their concerns that limited public funds are being used to pay private operators for bricks and mortar, which will cost taxpayers more in the long run.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the bill also says – and I would think they would support this provision in the bill – that the RHAs contemplating contracting out must demonstrate cost efficiencies. It must be demonstrated that waiting lists are going to be shortened. There are plenty of checks and balances, and I'm sure that the group to which the hon. member alludes would agree with those principles.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Education Property Tax

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 26 of this year this government announced a reduction in the provincial education property tax mill rate and an overall reduction of the amount of money collected by \$46.7 million for the 2000-2001 year. At the same time, the province announced that increases in both residential and nonresidential properties would be capped at 5

percent and that individual municipal requisition increases would be limited to 2.3 percent over last year. My question to the Municipal Affairs minister is: why were these specific measures adopted in this province?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, this government believes and is committed to the principles that all Alberta children are entitled to the same education no matter where they live in this province. All Albertans benefit from a highly educated and skilled population, and therefore the method of funding education must be fair and must be equitable. We have responded to suggestions that there may be a better way of funding education. We're trying to seek that out and have commissioned an MLA committee to review the current system of funding. Whether through, indeed, the general revenue or through the property tax, are there other ways? Are there other creative ways? We're certainly open to any funding options that may be available, and we'll continue to explore any suggestions that may be brought forward by anyone in this province.

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can you tell this Legislative Assembly what the current status of the MLA committee reviewing the education property taxes is today?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes. My understanding is that the committee recently met with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, on March 9. They met with the School Boards Association on March 13, and they will be meeting with the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties later on this coming week to discuss recent measures, to discuss any potentials that may be coming forward as to dealing with the new process of funding education. Over the next few months the committee will be developing options, and we'll be presenting those options for public consultation throughout the year.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister: can you tell us what is currently being done to address concerns of communities such as Edmonton that capping and averaging of requisitions results in an unfair and unacceptable taxation system?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It should be pointed out that in 1999 Edmontonians benefited from the capping program on residential properties in the amount of \$5.7 million. One must consider this in light of the \$5.5 million increase in Edmonton's education requisition this year. Even with this year's increase Edmonton is paying \$27 million less than they paid in 1994 as far as the education portion of the property taxes is concerned.

This year, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton's two school boards will receive about \$26 million more in funding from the Alberta school foundation fund than is collected from the citizens of Edmonton. In other words, Edmonton's two school boards will receive \$26 million in property tax funding from other Alberta municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that Edmonton has been and remains a net benefactor from the taxation system that exists today. I know that the members of the MLA committee reviewing this issue as well as myself and my colleagues remain open to any suggestions that the city may have or that any other citizens of this province may have to continue to develop the fairest and most equitable funding mechanism that we can have for Alberta students regardless of where they live, regardless of what part of Alberta they reside in.

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

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. If the private health bill is supposed to protect public health care, why is a health ombudsman not included in the legislation so Albertans have somewhere to go when the private system breaks down?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to repeat and emphasize for the hon. member that the legislation has nothing to do with a, quote, private health care system. It refers to contracting to a regional health authority through a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system in this province. Therefore, the question is rather irrelevant, I think.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister: why are there no details or commitments in the bill that private clinics will be subject to investigation by the Health Facilities Review Committee or the provincial Ombudsman?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's first of all reference the provincial Ombudsman. Some time ago, I believe it was 1998, we established an overall dispute or conflict or complaint resolution mechanism for the operation of our regional health authorities. This step-by-step process does provide that concerns that are raised, be they with a laboratory service which might be private or be they with the hospitals, which are public – there would be a step-by-step process whereby complaints could be filed and disputes resolved. In that overall policy statement there is, as I said, a step-by-step process whereby if it is a matter of doctor performance or that type of issue, then that would be referred to the College of Physicians and Surgeons. If it is an issue with respect to alleged unfair treatment of patients within the system, that would end up ultimately, if not resolved at the local level, in the Ombudsman's office. So we are utilizing the office of the Ombudsman in an appropriate way within the structure of our overall health care system, and Bill 11 does nothing to change that overall approach.

MR. GIBBONS: If the private hospital bill is supposed to protect public health care, why are there no details or mechanisms to clarify how the deinsuring or the de-enlisting will occur to the new private health system?

2:50

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, once again, Mr. Speaker, we do need to repeat – and I guess it is shown that certain people do need to have things repeated and repeated to them; occasionally they understand – that there is not any private hospitals act or any private hospitals contemplated in this particular piece of legislation. As I've indicated to the Assembly and to the hon. member, we do have in the system currently a number of processes for resolving disputes and dealing with issues within our overall health care system.

The member referenced the Health Facilities Review Committee process. This committee, which I think is very useful, very helpful, very good for the system, visits health facilities all across the province, and they would visit private nursing homes as well as public nursing homes. I'm sure you're aware of that. We also have the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which deals with individual concerns, Mr. Speaker, and they today visit the private nursing homes and the public facilities. Those would still stay in place with the passage of Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have heard many times lately in this Legislature, surgeries are done today in private surgical clinics providing that the patient stays less than 12 hours. As we all know, every individual reacts differently to anesthetic agents. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what happens today when a patient coming out of anesthesia has an adverse effect requiring more than 12 hours of care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we do have, yes, clinics in the province which provide medical services, in some cases surgical services, provided that the overall expertise applied to that area of treatment indicates that recovery from the treatment will be well within the 12-hour limit; that is, less than 12 hours. But in a system where there are thousands and thousands of people treated throughout the year, yes, there could be the possibility of some unforeseen reaction to the anesthetic. The provision, of course, that also has to be kept in mind is that the people who give anesthetic have to be well qualified through the overall medical training and accreditation process. I only know of one case in the past three years where there has been an adverse reaction, but in all cases, should that unfortunate event occur, the clear protocol for clinics is to get that person to a hospital, to an emergency room, as quickly as possible by ambulance to be properly treated.

MR. BRODA: Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the surgeon who did the surgery on the patient and a nurse who works in recovery continue to care for that patient past the 12-hour time limit?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there may be instances in the clinics where a patient requires more than 12 hours' recovery time, but the guidelines and expectations are quite clear, and that is that the professional staff, doctors and nurses, would stay with the patient, would care for the patient until they are ready to go home, quite frankly. As I indicated earlier, if there is any complication, they are there and they'll make sure that that patient gets the proper additional care should that be required.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: if surgery is done at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, does the patient stay until 3 a.m., and does the facility remain open until 3 a.m. so that the patient can recover?

MR. JONSON: It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that it is generally common practice with respect to day surgical clinics that surgery is scheduled starting quite early in the morning, perhaps 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. The target that is established is that a person having day surgery should be able to be discharged by 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but if there are circumstances which require that a surgery be scheduled later, I would like to just emphasize again that the professionals, the doctors and the nurses and the support staff, would of course monitor and care for that patient until they are in a condition to be released and go home.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's private hospital bill – well, sometimes it's camouflaged as the private surgical clinic bill, but really it's Bill 11 – has led to a firestorm of opposition throughout Alberta.

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

MRS. SOETAERT: A firestorm, obviously. Doctors, nurses, seniors, small businesspeople, teachers, and over 29,000 Albertans have signed petitions against the Premier's private hospital scheme. They want to preserve medicare in the public interest, not promote the Premier's special-interest backers. Bill 11 is headed for the ditch, because Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore on health care. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can Albertans trust the Premier, trust the minister, trust this government on Bill 11 when there is not one shred of evidence – not one shred of evidence – that the purchase of surgical services from private providers will reduce costs or waiting lists for surgeries?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to indicate – and I won't go on at length about this – that it has been reported in this Assembly that with respect to the provision of eye surgery in Calgary through contracts with surgical clinics, the Calgary regional health authority has been able to provide more of those types of operations under the funding of the regional health authority, so there is no additional charge. They are able to provide more than they did before with the same amount of moneys, and the quality of the service has been very good. I could go on to mention some other examples. I could move over to Manitoba if she wishes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Will the minister admit that there is no evidence that shows that the introduction of private hospitals will reduce costs per day, costs per case, and total hospital costs while improving the quality of care and health outcomes? There is no proof, Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I've just given one example. Perhaps if she doesn't like Alberta, we can move over to Manitoba, where the government of Manitoba, a previous government, mind you, has seen fit to contract, incidentally without any legislation being in place, with private surgical clinics. My indication, having read material on that particular situation, is that they are finding that the specialized clinics providing surgical services take the load off their very, very busy hospitals, the quality is being maintained, and the cost is basically the same.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question to the minister: why doesn't the minister just admit that Bill 11 opens the door to two-tiered American medicine by allowing special-interest backers to charge Albertans for enhanced medical services? That's the truth.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I categorically oppose or deny that that is the case with respect to Bill 11. I really wonder why the hon. member across the way really cares, because their policy, the statement of their leader indicates that doctors should be able to opt out completely and practise outside the public health care system. Also, there are references indicating that anybody wanting to set up a private hospital should be completely out of the health care system, and they would have their nice little private system. That's what's so ironic about this and how inconsistent the opposition is in this whole matter.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the time for question period has now left us this day.

3:00

head: Statement by the Speaker

Television Broadcast of Bill 11 Debate

THE SPEAKER: I did indicate at the beginning of question period

that I would be rising at the conclusion of question period and reading into the record a letter that was agreed to today and then would be recognizing the Government House Leader, and it's now my intent to do that. In the past few minutes all members should have received a copy of this letter as well. Essentially, it is a letter from the Government House Leader to the House leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the ND opposition and as well a letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I want this in the record.

As per our discussions, I would confirm our agreement that the debate on Second Reading of Bill 11, Health Care Protection Act, be televised on ACCESS television from 8 to 11 p.m. the first day of its introduction for Second Reading. The Government House Leader guarantees at least one week's notice to the Assembly prior to the calling of Bill 11 for Second Reading.

The elements of our agreement are as follows:

1. All parties will use reasonable efforts in good faith to give effect to this agreement.
2. This Agreement embodies an understanding between the Government, the Official Opposition, the New Democrat Opposition and Independent MLA Paul within the Legislative Assembly and as such is not intended to be legally enforceable.
3. The debate will proceed as follows:

	Maximum
Honourable Premier	30 minutes
Leader of the Official Opposition	30 minutes
Minister of Health and Wellness	20 minutes
Opposition Health Critic	20 minutes
Leader of ND Opposition	20 minutes
PC member	20 minutes
Liberal member	20 minutes
PC member	20 minutes

With the rest of the debate proceeding in accordance with the usual practices of the Assembly.

4. It is further agreed that during the 3 hours of television coverage of the 2nd Reading debate, all Points of Order and any other procedural items will be brought to the attention of the Speaker in the form of a note to the Chair and that the Chair may deal with those items following question period the following day.
5. It is agreed that each House Leader will prevail upon their respective caucus for full cooperation in maintaining decorum of the house, with no interruption of speakers recognized by the Speaker.
6. It is further agreed that during the 3 hours of television coverage of the 2nd Reading debate, if a disagreement about the mechanics of this agreement should arise, the Speaker shall be the sole interpreter of this agreement and shall rule forthwith how the Assembly is to proceed.
7. The Speaker be requested, through Members Services Committee and the Legislative Assembly offices to finalize arrangement for the provision of television coverage as agreed.

In the document for the House are the signatures of the hon. House leader of the government of Alberta, the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the leader of the opposition New Democrats, and the independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. It's acknowledged and was agreed to in a meeting with me, and in my enthusiasm my signature there says March 23. Of course, it should have said March 22, 2000.

I'd simply like to add several other items to this agreement as per the discussions that occurred between myself and the three House leaders. In essence, the control of this feed out of this Assembly of course rests only with the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. There will be no commentary attached to the three hours of television coverage and there will be no editing, this request being made by the

Speaker to Access television. The contract will be signed between the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta and Access to give effect to this agreement. The costs will be paid for by the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta for this particular event, and the costs may very well be in the neighbourhood of \$5,000. That's for the three hours of coverage.

I would only add one additional thing. In invoking this and in looking at this, I want all members to know that a discussion was held with respect to heckling, interjections, interruptions, and the three leaders assured me that in fact all of their members would honour an agreement that will see no heckling, no interjections, and no disrespectful connotations and language. The chair responded that should such an event occur, the chair would simply, very briefly, rise and invite the hon. member identified who would fall under the category of interjections, hecklings, or disruptive behaviour to leave the Assembly. This would be done once, and it would be done on provincewide television. We will conduct ourselves in the highest degree of integrity.

Now, further to this discussion that was held this morning, it was also agreed among the four that at this point the chair should recognize the Government House Leader, who will now proceed to make an announcement and ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to give approval to this.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege on behalf of all three House leaders, I believe, to ask for unanimous consent of the House that these rules as provided in the House leader agreement and as extrapolated upon by yourself be adopted as rules of the House instead of the Standing Orders for the period specified in the letter, to the extent that they supersede the Standing Orders. I can advise the House in so asking that Bill 11 would be called for second reading at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, April 4.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: Let me just say to the four hon. people who participated in the writing of this agreement: congratulations; well done. It's a good example of what can happen.

Now, today during question period we also had another event. There was an interjection from the chair. I now want to call on the hon. leader of the third party.

Point of Order Member's Apology

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of privilege to apologize without any equivocation to the Government House Leader, to all my colleagues in the Assembly, and to you for the questions that were raised which seemed to question the integrity of the Minister of Justice. I must say – and I want to iterate this quite clearly – that I hold the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of this province in the highest regard. In my dealings with him as Government House Leader and in my dealings with him as a colleague I have nothing but respect for him. So if in my questions I have erred, I apologize to him personally and apologize to the House for not realizing that the security threats, as the minister said, were a fact.

I did not learn, Mr. Speaker, about the presence of the security personnel at last night's meeting until 15 minutes past noon today; 12:15 was the first time I knew about it. Being alone I had a very busy time before I walked into the House at 1:30. It didn't even cross my mind to call the minister to ask whether or not the presence of the security guards were caused by security threats. Now that I've

learned about it, I'm sorry I raised those questions, and I apologize again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, let us move on to Recognitions in 30 seconds from now. Then I'll come back to the various points of order.

3:10

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, March 19, the Canadian Multicultural Educational Foundation sponsored their annual Harmony brunch in commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The Harmony brunch is a community celebration of reaffirmation of equality and a celebration of harmony and diversity among us all. This year the guest speaker was Senator Douglas Roche, who addressed the issues facing our Canadian immigration department and its policies and their implementation.

My government colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and I, who have attended many of these brunches along with others, which to express our appreciation to the organizers of this function, which is an awareness raising occasion for the elimination of racial discrimination.

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

Edmonton-Gold Bar Bill 11 Forum

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize every person who came to the debate on Bill 11 last week at The King's University College. Many of those who attended were against the bill, and some were there in favour of it. Regardless of their stance on the issue I recognize each and every one of them for taking the time to exercise their democratic right to be heard. I especially want to recognize those people from my constituency, Edmonton-Gold Bar, who attended the meeting and made their voices heard.

All of these people, either for or against the bill, should not be casually dismissed by those in power as left-wing nuts. The people at this meeting were nothing of the sort. They are concerned and hardworking Albertans, young and old, from every walk of life. I recognize all of them for coming out to the debate, especially in a province where their government is so quick to brand them as left-wing nuts because they are interested and concerned about something as important as protecting our public health care system. I believe the Premier and those who so casually dismiss these people as left-wing nuts owe them an apology.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

World Day for Water

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, you and the other members have in front of you a glass of clean, refreshing Alberta water. We are fortunate in Alberta to have an abundance of this precious natural resource, and therefore I am very pleased to rise in the House today to draw the attention of the Legislature and Albertans to World Day for Water.

Water is enormously important to our health and our quality of life. Clean and abundant water supplies have long been recognized as one of the major determinants of good health. Today the overall quality of our drinking water in Alberta is high, and the incidence of water-borne diseases is among the lowest in the world. Keeping Alberta's water resources clean for both human consumption and recreational use remains a priority of our government and Albertans in general. Sadly, many people around the world do not have access to clean water, and the impact on their health is very serious. For this reason, the United Nations has selected the theme Water for the 21st Century in order to focus on the challenges for water resources for the next century.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Water & Wastewater Association has identified March 22, 2000, as the World Day for Water celebration and to this end has asked that we as Albertans and, indeed, members of this Legislature reflect upon the importance of clean and abundant water in our lives and the importance of wise management of this valuable resource.

Thank you.

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

Managers of Volunteer Resources in Lethbridge

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Managers of Volunteer Resources in Lethbridge. This is a group of managers of the different volunteer associations that provide service through volunteer activity in the city of Lethbridge. On March 9 they had a function in the evening, which the Member for Lethbridge-West and I had invitations to attend, where they recognized their volunteers. Maria Craft and her association took that opportunity to provide an evening of recognition to the people who volunteer in our community and make Lethbridge the kind of community it is. So to Managers of Volunteer Resources I say thank you for everything you've done and thank you for recognizing the volunteers in our community.

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

Eating Disorders

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are chronic debilitating illnesses that affect more than 30,000 Albertans. They interfere with an individual's ability to function in everyday life. Ten percent of those with eating disorders die within one year of the original diagnosis. For those who have been ill for 10 to 20 years, the mortality rate reaches 20 percent, approximately half by suicide and half by psychological collapse.

Eating disorders impact entire families. The illnesses impact all ages, even those as young as age 8. Early intervention has been shown to reduce the intensity of the illness and the mortality rate. Health promotion and prevention efforts are critical to reducing the prevalence of eating disorders. In fact, the establishment of a provincial eating disorder program is one of the recommendations of the children's mental health initiative action plan, which was developed by the Mental Health Board and supported by government.

This is why I was pleased when the Minister of Health and Wellness announced last week \$4 million in funding to support a co-ordinated provincial program for Albertans at risk or who are suffering from these dreadful diseases and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's with great pleasure that I'm able to recognize formally the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, also known as NAARR.

NAARR's mission is to eliminate racial discrimination, to encourage children, youth, and adults to respect people of all colours, races, and creeds. To this end they facilitate public forums, workshops, and conferences, invite high-profile speakers, and host a series of initiatives around the March 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 21 marks the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, when scores of peaceful demonstrators against apartheid were wounded or killed.

At this time I'd like to commend the hard work of NAARR's co-ordinator, Charlene Hay, whom I introduced earlier to this Legislature. Charlene is very committed to the goal of ending racism, as is her husband Gordon, both of whom, I'm very honoured to say, are former graduate students of mine. In the spirit of raising awareness and changing attitudes, I recognize and praise Charlene and Gordon Hay and the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Women's College Basketball Championship

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, March 18, the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association hosted the national women's basketball championship at Mount Royal College, and the home team won. Mount Royal College Cougars won their first gold medal championship in a contest that went down to the wire with a final score of 61 to 58 over the College Montmorency Nomades. Paula Walker drained the final free throw of her collegiate career. A victory won on the free throw line was augmented by her own sister's success of scoring 21 points. Annie, Paula's sister, was recognized as the tournament's most valuable player.

In addition to this success, the Cougars will be hosting the national championship again in both 2001 and 2002. On Monday of this week the Minister of Learning and I met with the board, faculty, and students of Mount Royal College, and you can appreciate that the energy in that meeting was quite upbeat following the victory of the team.

Athletically, Mount Royal College is considered a leader in Canadian collegiate athletics, having recently been named the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association's overall sports supremacy champions for the first 25 years. My congratulations to the coach, Donovan Martin, the staff, the team, the faculty, and the college for this tremendous national championship.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just quickly, my authority would be *Beauchesne* 417. I think it was the first or second exchange between the opposition leader and the Premier. The Premier in his answer talked about the agreement that was in fact the subject of a tabling earlier, and then you read out the text of the agreement. He said something to the effect that the Liberals passed up a chance to have nine hours of televised debate to take three hours. I just want to make this observation briefly.

I practised law long enough to do lots of negotiation, and it's usually not tremendously helpful for parties to go back into a negotiation and pick out something somebody said because that's in the context of offers and counteroffers. The point is: it resolved itself in an agreement that everybody signed.

But now that the Premier has gone there, I have to say, so that we're clear, that the offer of nine hours, as best I can recall and subject to confirmation or contrary advice from the Government House Leader, was on the basis that we would not have people able to speak for their block of time but that we would have perhaps everybody in this Assembly speaking for six minutes or eight minutes or something like that. That was the proposal. That would not have allowed, in my view, the kind of full development of analysis of the bill. It would be very different than what we get in the normal second reading debate. So I simply wanted to make it clear.

3:20

I also wanted to make a request that if we're going to have good-faith negotiations to try and make this place work well, it works best if people respect the fact that there's a give-and-take to negotiations. People take positions, and they adjust and compromise those positions. To the extent that people come in and start trying to use elements of a negotiation, it tends to undermine the process and make people less forthcoming.

That's the observation I wanted to make in a point of order. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously there's not really a point of order but a point of clarification.

While I would concur to some degree with the concept that's raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader, that one normally wants to have the opportunity to have discussions about the parameters of the House business with some degree of understanding that those discussions are between the parties, clearly this issue came up today as a result of cute tricks again being suffered on the House by the opposition in tabling invitations to debate. In that context it's quite understandable that the hon. Premier would refer back to the concept that had been offered of a nine-hour debate, three days of three hours.

Yes, the Opposition House Leader, for clarity, is quite correct that that would have resulted in a need to truncate the normal time for debate for certain members of the House if all members of the House were to be allowed to be heard, televised across the province on Access TV for the full second reading debate on Bill 11. However, that was offered as an option for discussion, obviously – because televising debates in this House is the parameter of the House, of course – and because it was felt that this is an important bill and that it was important that all Albertans have a chance and that all members actually have a chance to be heard on television.

The member is quite right. For other than the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the health minister, the opposition critic, and the ND House leader it would have resulted in a truncated period of time for each of the private members. For that reason, as he's indicated, they felt that that wouldn't allow them to develop their appropriate analysis. I'm of the view that there's not really a lot important to be said that can't be said in five or six good minutes. If the opposition doesn't agree with that, that's their prerogative. Obviously, without agreement on that, we couldn't bring it to that point.

I think this was an unusual situation where the opposition was raising particularly pointed concepts about debate, about debate

being heard by all Albertans. In that context it was quite appropriate for the Premier to make the remark that he did relating to the offer of televised debate in the Legislature, which, of course, as the Opposition House Leader has said on occasion and has been quoted in this House as saying and is on record in *Hansard* as saying, is the most appropriate debating forum that we have – I've obviously paraphrased the words – and as the Leader of the Opposition was quoted today as well as having said on earlier occasions, challenging the Premier to debate in the House.

Clearly, the point is not a point of order. It's a point of clarification. I take his point with respect to our discussions. I think this was an unusual situation, quite an appropriate one for the comment to be made.

THE SPEAKER: I would view that as a point of clarification. I think both hon. members have had a chance to provide the background that was not afforded to them prior to their asking for unanimous request to the agreement. I think it was a useful exchange, useful for the benefit of all members.

The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I rose on a point of order with respect to inappropriate comments. I would use Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," and the citation in *Beauchesne* which refers to the concept that one should not provoke debate. I raise it in the same manner that I raised it on a previous occasion when a member of the House rose and referred to a bill that's before this House as the private hospitals bill. The bill has a name. It's called the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. It's Bill 11.

Regardless of what type of spin or permutation the opposition might want to put on their questions, I think it's only appropriate, when they're using something which they're alleging to be the actual name of a bill, that they should be called to order if they do not use the actual name of the bill, because they're misleading Albertans by suggesting that there's a bill before the House called the private hospitals bill. There is not. There is the Health Care Protection Act. They may put whatever connotations they want on the content of that act while they're debating it, but it's improper, inappropriate, and certainly begs debate if in referring to the bill in the House they refer to it as the private hospitals bill.

MR. DICKSON: You know, it's fascinating to me that a little opposition of 16 people could be accused of massaging public opinion. We don't have the benefit of that \$8 million Public Affairs Bureau.

On that point, Mr. Speaker, I'd just make this observation. It was Professor Peter Lown of the Alberta Law Reform Institute, who chaired the panel of eminent persons, whatever it was called, who said that an accredited surgical facility – and it's basically the same beast in the old Bill 38, version 1, version 2 as we see in the current Bill 11 – is in effect a private hospital. He could see through that. The reference was clearly to Bill 11. I think we're entitled to use the adjectives we choose as long as we mention the bill title.

I don't think any Albertans were confused by the reference, and in fact it was the government's own study that pointed out the semantical game that's being played by refusing to call an accredited surgical facility a private hospital.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you both very much, hon. gentlemen. The

reality is that a bill does have a name. A bill does have a title. One can use a synonym or an adjective to describe it, and all that ever does is lead to provocations and a whole series of other things. In other words, it leads to a debate in the question period. Of course, the purpose of question period is not to have a debate. The purpose of question period is to raise a question.

I do believe there is some merit to the point raised by the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this and would like to advise all members of the House that I really wonder what this question period is going to be like as of April 4, when second reading is given to Bill 11. If one looks at the traditions in anticipation of what's on the Order Paper for that particular day, perhaps the environment in here will be quite different. So we can think about that and how we're going to deal with all that and read the rules.

This is not a lecture. This is just a suggestion or advice. Bill 11 does have a name, as all hon. members have names, and all hon. members are referred to that way. We don't denigrate the names of their constituencies or other individuals or anybody else. It's kind of an honourable thing.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure now to move that written questions which appear on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 9.

[Motion carried]

3:30

Women's Shelters

Q9. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

How many women were turned away from all Alberta women's shelters in the fiscal year 1998-1999?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to table my response to Written Question 9 and a copy of the Women's Shelter Information System '98-99 statistical report.

Family violence is a horrific social issue that devastates families. Its harm is deeply felt and often long lasting. The effects of family violence upon children are particularly distressing. Statistics show that a child who witnesses abuse at home or is the victim of abuse is more likely to become an abusive adult. The cycle of abuse is perpetuated. We must do everything possible to prevent family violence from occurring and to break that cycle. We must clearly demonstrate that family violence will not be tolerated in our homes, our communities, or in our province. It is simply unacceptable.

Children's Services works to help and support children and families in abusive situations in a number of ways. For example, Children's Services provides funding to women's shelters. In Alberta there are 19 women's shelters, eight rural family violence prevention centres, and two second-stage housing programs. Women's shelters play a key role. Shelters provide temporary accommodation to victims who are fleeing an abusive home. If these facilities are full, we will work with our colleagues in Human Resources and Employment to find emergency accommodation for these family members. Sometimes victims choose to stay with family or friends instead, or they may choose to wait until accommodation is available at a shelter.

It is extremely important to remember that no one needs to return to an abusive situation. Alternative arrangements are always possible. When you examine the number of women who were turned away by a shelter, in other words not admitted to the shelter, because it was full, it's important to note that accommodation was found for them elsewhere. Again, I must emphasize that no one needs to return to an abusive situation.

Another way in which we're working to help victims of family violence is through the Protection against Family Violence Act, which became law last year. Through this law victims of family violence can obtain an emergency protection order, which is available 24 hours daily through police. An emergency protection order provides immediate protection and can enable victims to remain in the home, requiring the abuser to temporarily leave and find accommodation elsewhere. This measure is important for several reasons. First, it enables victims to remain in their communities and maintain their ties to schools, neighbours, and support systems. As well, staying in their own homes minimizes disruption to the lives of their children and provides for greater stability, security, and continuity.

This legislation is also important because it provides short-term and long-term protection. An emergency protection order available through police 24 hours daily provides immediate short-term protection. Long-term protection is provided through a Queen's Bench protection order, which can remain in effect for up to one year.

Another measure provided by the act is a warrant of entry. If someone is not allowed to see a family member and believes that that individual may be a victim of family violence, that family member can call police. Police can ask for a warrant of entry, which allows them to go into a family member's home and make sure that individual is safe. If the family member wants to leave or needs assistance, police can help. The Protection against Family Violence Act has provided us yet another tool for helping children and families.

Children's Services funding for women's shelters in fact has increased since 1997 by nearly \$2 million. This year, a total of \$11 million has been allocated, and approximately 95 percent of this funding is going directly to the shelters.

Education and prevention are also key components of our work in reducing the incidence of family violence in Alberta. Through 18 child and family services authorities located throughout the province, prevention and education initiatives continue. The office of the prevention of family violence is also offering training materials and opportunities for people to learn more about this most horrific kind of example of societal issues.

With all these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and the help and support of our community we will ensure that children and families in abusive situations obtain the assistance they need to deal with family violence and build a better life.

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to conclude the debate, did I hear the hon. Minister of Children's Services correctly? Did the hon. minister say that she had tabled a response?

MS EVANS: I also tabled copies of a report that was supplementary to it. It was, Mr. Speaker, the 1998-99 statistics from the women's shelters, that were released last fall, that in fact addressed the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, this is a fine constitutional point. Did the hon. minister table the response to the question?

MS EVANS: Oh, yes, I did.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, hon. minister, I have to tell you that that was inappropriate because the House still has not dealt with the question. But that's okay. We'll get through this.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to conclude the debate.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly thank the hon. minister for providing us with the data. We'll get a copy of that tabling right away.

[Written Question 9 carried]

THE SPEAKER: Now it's most appropriate, hon. minister, to table the response.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I would move and table the response as provided.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you so much.

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's now my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 11, Motion for a Return 12, and Motion for a Return 23.

[Motion carried]

School Property Tax

M11. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of projections of provincial revenues collected from the school property tax for the fiscal years 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03 by residential/farm property, nonresidential, and linear assessment classes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 11. Alberta Municipal Affairs collects assessment data for school requisitioning purposes according to the requirements of the School Act and the Municipal Government Act. Section 158(1.3) of the School Act requires that there be one tax rate for residential and farmland properties and one tax rate for nonresidential properties, as defined in section 297(1) of the Municipal Government Act. Section 297(1) of the Municipal Government Act includes linear assessment in its definition of nonresidential assessment class.

Beginning in the 1999 tax year the School Act no longer allows a separate education tax for linear or property assessment. Consequently, education property tax revenue projection data are only available in residential, farmland, and nonresidential assessment classes. Further, Alberta Learning's total education revenue projections are available for public review in its three-year business plan.

Therefore, the amended Motion for a Return 11 would read as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of projections of provincial revenues collected from the

school property tax for the fiscal years 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03 by residential/farm property and nonresidential assessment classes.

If Motion for a Return 11 is accepted as amended, the following options are available. I can provide the immediate tabling information, or we can table it 30 days from the motion for a return. But I can table it today if that is accepted.

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Opposition House Leader with respect to this matter, we do have a policy with respect to amendments and notification of questioners with respect to the amendments. This is something that hon. members have been following with a great deal of diligence in recent years.

Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, you must have a copy of this amendment for everyone, and I take it there was no conveyance of this amendment to the hon. originator of the question.

MR. GIBBONS: No.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: Okay. So we've got another procedural – there is a policy.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, do you want to raise a point further to this or just point out the policy?

MR. DICKSON: Sir, you anticipated precisely what I was going to raise.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

If I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, this concludes the debate. But we have a procedural – it's not a significant procedural problem, but it is a courtesy procedure that we have here. Can you shake your head one way or the other, that you think it may or may not be okay, before I call it? You don't have to say anything. I'm not going to put you on the spot.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I have an opportunity to resolve the conundrum here. Given that I've erred in terms of the procedure, I being the House leader have to take responsibility for it. We'll ask the hon. minister to reject the question. He's already indicated that he has the information, and he's offered to table the information tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to conclude the debate.

MR. GIBBONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'll be pleased to accept the information tomorrow. I understand what he was saying, that he has the amendment, and I'll accept that.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Education Tax Review Committee

M12. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports and studies prepared by or for the education tax review committee between January 1, 1998, and February 17, 2000.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: First of all, I'd apologize for the procedural error, and we will try and right that tomorrow, if that is acceptable.

Regarding Motion for a Return 12. Madam Speaker, on researching this request, my officials advise that this material has been the subject of two freedom of information requests. In fact, much of the information that the Member for Edmonton-Manning is seeking is available in these past FOIP requests. I'm pleased to make the information gathered by Municipal Affairs in response to those requests available for review by the hon. member, and this material can be viewed by contacting the freedom of information co-ordinator for Alberta Municipal Affairs, who would be pleased to schedule an appointment.

In addition, my staff has also advised that a third FOIP request for this information is currently under way, and I'd be pleased to commit to the hon. member that this information would also be available for viewing by appointment once it's been released to the applicant.

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I'll provide the member with a copy of the committee's interim report, which is a culmination of the reports and studies prepared by the committee during its initial review. This report is also available for all Albertans to review on our Municipal Affairs web site at www.gov.ab.ca/ma/corp/educationcomm.htm.

Madam Speaker, as much of the information the hon. member is seeking through this motion is available for public viewing, the government rejects Motion 12.

MR. GIBBONS: I'm hearing two things: it's been rejected on behalf of a tabling or a submission, but I am able to look at it and peruse it. This particular copy I'm talking about is this one right here that I FOIPed last year and got 13 severed pages. I FOIPed again. I know I've FOIPed a third time, and it's in process right now, but the motion was put in a number of months ago. If I'm understanding this correctly, I am going to be receiving something.

The provincial government has an obligation to actually fulfill and not just for perusing but to actually have this information out so that we can research it, do our study, and we can answer questions for those in Alberta that call us instead of calling the government. It is a very important item. It's a very important document. I believe that three MLAs are working on it diligently, and even if it did start a year ago March, there was no review actually submitted from that. I also want to mention that this review committee has gone out and hired people to do things, and we wouldn't mind having a report on that.

So I will sit down, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Education Property Tax

M23. Mr. Gibbons moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports and studies prepared by or for the MLA Education Property Tax Committee between March 1, 1999, and March 8, 2000, on the provincial education property tax.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Madam Speaker, as previously noted in my response to Motion for a Return 12, much of the information that has been requested is subject to the past few FOIP requests, and the one that's currently under way is available. Once again I'm prepared to make information from the past few FOIP requests and the one pending available for public viewing by appointment through the FOIP co-ordinator of my department.

Therefore, the government rejects Motion for a Return 23.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to close debate.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to mention that the reason we need this is because of a number of letters we've sent back and forth, and this is doing my diligent job for the citizens of Alberta. It must be important enough information that we see on the Order Paper, under Motions Other than Government Motions, Motion 518 from the Member for Medicine Hat. It reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore alternative means of funding education other than through municipal property taxes and to begin discussions with municipal governments to develop new cost-sharing formulas that could be implemented after the provincial government removes requisitions for school taxes.

Madam Speaker, I believe that the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, as he spoke at a committee meeting the other night in room 512 with AUMA, is looking for a structural answer. I do believe that the hon. minister probably is, too, because he spoke quite enlighteningly at that particular meeting.

You know, for the interest of Albertans and the minister, he must be concerned enough that his whole management staff were listening to the AUMA presentation the other evening in room 512. For the record, that was on March 12 at 6 p.m. The AUMA gave a great presentation. I think they're concerned enough that in their latest newsletter they do have quite an issue on that particular item.

We want to emphasize that this committee has been in place since March of 1999. The first report came out in September 1999, but at that particular time all we noticed was a little bit of tinkering and capping. Instead of freezing the tax at a particular level, we should be coming out, I would suggest, with a much speedier answer on this one, considering that we're reading in the paper now how the city of Edmonton, the mayor of Edmonton, who'd never speak against this government, is coming out. Actually, yesterday on the radio I heard that he said that this government has a tiger by the tail with the health bill. Well, they're going to have a lion by the tail with this education tax.

You know, all Albertans are asking for is some answers. Like I mentioned before, there have been people hired by the committee to consult on this, and we'd like to be able to read, share, and help develop something for the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 23 lost]

3:50

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

head: Second Reading

Bill 206

School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and bring forward Bill 206, which will amend the School Act to include a student code of conduct.

Specifically, Madam Speaker, Bill 206 adds to section 44 of the School Act, which defines the powers and the responsibilities of school boards. I say that it adds to that section because the school boards already have some powers and responsibilities in making sure that there is obedience in school, but this will add to the school boards' ability to come up with, and hopefully involve everyone in making, a code of conduct for each individual school.

Bill 206 will require each school board to solicit input from the relevant stakeholders that are involved in the school. That means the students as well as the staff, being teachers and principals and the administrative staff as well, if they wish, and parent councils in creating a code of conduct for their individual school.

Madam Speaker, after this extensive consultation process, each school would be required to have their code of conduct also put in writing. This code would set minimum standards of behaviour and the consequences for violating them. In essence, the code is a written agreement amongst educational stakeholders in the community about what is acceptable in our schools and what is not.

Madam Speaker, when the rules of the school are clear to everyone, then students can focus on learning and teachers can focus on teaching. Presently the rules that have been set in schools are in some cases unclear and also inconsistently enforced. Just recently we have heard a number of reports of incidents, but one of the most prime examples was a week or two ago with the greater St. Albert Catholic school board's actions or their inactions in dealing with a student sexual assault case. The board was really unsure on how to proceed in that case, and in the end far too much time was spent in making a decision. The decision also left many students and teachers and parents confused about the rules of the school, and it disrupted the entire proceedings of the school for a good length of time. That's not the best use of students' time, and it's not the best use of teachers' time.

As I have stated, a code of conduct is a tool that can be used by our schools, and it certainly could have been a tool that the St. Albert Catholic board could have used to set levels of acceptable behaviour and the sanctions that students will expect if they violate it. The code of conduct is a tool that schools can use to act quickly when the school environment is disrupted and to rectify the situation. But, Madam Speaker, the code of conduct that I am proposing also takes into account that students are not commodities that can be thrown away when they become a problem. Included in this bill are alternative penalty options that allow disruptive students to pursue their studies and also get any counseling they need to help them with their problems.

As well as dealing with serious problems by including the relevant stakeholders in the community, we will ensure that the values and unique circumstances of each community in Alberta are represented in the code. Madam Speaker, what I'm talking about are communities taking control of their schools.

I first ran across this statement about communities taking control of their schools from a retired staff sergeant who now resides in my community. In talking one day, he let me know how he ran his detachments in small towns. He said: I've often instructed my staff to take control of their community. What that means is not to run roughshod over the community and its people but to work with the community, to understand it and work within the law to enforce what you must do in that community in the name of protecting society, to help the community understand what will and will not be tolerated, to have his officers reach out into that community to accomplish the goals of the community right from young people up to senior citizens so that continuity and progress are made in educating everyone, so that in the name of safety, in the name of security, and in the respect of one another we can make and maintain a better community.

Bill 206 will help every school in Alberta maintain a learning atmosphere which is safe and conducive to the learning process and free from unnecessary disruption. As well, the code of conduct will communicate to parents and the community that unacceptable behaviour by students will not be tolerated. Madam Speaker, this takes us back to the key question that needs to be asked. Are our schools safe? By and large the answer is yes. Schools in Alberta are

safe. They are also caring places and are places for students to learn, yet where the problem lies is in the severity of danger and the pressure our students face. This is why there is great timeliness in introducing this bill into the House.

Recent occurrences of school violence—for example, just recently in Toronto, Ontario, three people, two of them students, were wounded in a gunfight in a local high school. In the United States between 1993 and early 1999 there were 186 school shooting deaths. In Surrey, British Columbia, earlier this month a 14-year-old student jumped off a bridge over the Fraser River. In his suicide note he said that he could not tolerate being relentlessly picked on. He was tormented at school and called a geek, four-eyes, and a fag. In Mount Morris, Michigan, a six-year-old boy walked into an elementary school and shot and killed another six year old with whom he had just had an earlier quarrel. Madam Speaker, right in my own constituency just this last week a headline in the local newspaper read: knife found on student at school. The incident was looked after, but it was rather disturbing to everyone in the community.

So, Madam Speaker, what does this tell us? This tells us that we must go back to the key questions on what is needed and what are the things that should be asked. We're seeing more and more in the news and on television, as I've just recounted, that our communities have an increase in the severity of school violence, problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse by students, and criminal acts committed by students.

In pointing out some of the occurrences of school violence, I did not mention the one that we're all so very well aware of. We all know of the tragic events that occurred in the W.R. Myers school in Taber that took the life of one student and injured another. This event that ended a vibrant young man's life so unfortunately also showed Albertans that these acts of extreme violence are not isolated just to American schools, but they are prevalent here at home as well.

4:00

Madam Speaker, what I do know is that although we may not be able to predict when violence breaks out or occurs, we can take and should take preventative actions. This means that we can first promote positive behaviour in our students and make it clear that we will not tolerate negative behaviour like bullying, harassment, or peer pressure, which sow the seeds of extreme violence. This is where a code of conduct could be an effective tool.

There is also data from across Canada that illustrates this increased school violence, as I had indicated earlier, and a 1995 study sponsored by the Solicitor General of Canada showed that Ontario schools reported an increase in school violence of 150 percent from 1989 to 1991. So it is appropriate that, as we have just heard in the last few days, the Ontario government is looking at a crackdown on student misconduct and is putting together a provincial code of conduct that they want all schools to abide by.

It's also well known in our own province that the ATA reported that in 1992, 50 percent of teachers had experienced some form of physical or emotional abuse. Of that number, 18 percent said that their schools had no policy to deal with abuse, and 62 percent did not know if their schools did have a policy. These statistics are just a few examples of why a code of conduct is needed, and when the rules are clearly defined, schools can act in an appropriate manner if they are broken.

Madam Speaker, a code of conduct is also needed to give schools the ability to act swiftly and with certainty against school disruption. A code of conduct will allow boards to get involved in making sure that the rules are set by an individual school, because they need to

be clearly defined, and the actions they could take of a preventative nature could also clearly be defined.

With a clear code of conduct, situations can be resolved immediately and not linger on. A clear message can be sent to all students that they can have faith in not only their own decisions but the decisions that were put together by the principals, staff, teachers, and their parents, which will protect them, keep them in a safe environment, and will not let them down. Students go to school to learn and to grow and should not be subject to the kind of disorder that occurs in many schools.

The code of conduct proposed in Bill 206 will make sure that students who perpetrate sexual assaults will get the help they need to have a chance to rehabilitate themselves and become responsible citizens.

What I'm proposing, Madam Speaker, is a balanced approach to school discipline and student responsibility. A code of conduct stabilizes the school environment, removes students unwilling to follow the rules, and promotes responsible behaviour. I think if there's one thing that needs to be perpetuated throughout our schools, right from elementary up to high school, it's that for every rule that's broken, you have to accept responsibility for doing that. Responsible behaviour will go a long way to ensuring that in Alberta each student will have a quality education free from disruptions which hinder and interfere with the educational process.

Yet on the other side of the balance are the problem students. When they're a problem in a school, the question always arises: do they not also deserve an education? If they don't want an education, it's our responsibility to try and make them see the light and get a good education. However, if they continue to violate rules created by the community, they must pay the consequences. We're not talking in the school code of conduct about the breaking of the laws of our land, because we have a system in place to handle that. What we're talking about is making sure there are appropriate rules in place within our community and within the school community. When someone violates the rules and they must pay the consequences, we must do everything we can to find a place for these kids.

This balanced approach to student responsibility and discipline will draw much of its strength from the consultation process that will drive this code of conduct. Essentially, it is important for students to view the document as legitimate. With input from students on what they deem as acceptable behaviour and acceptable punishment, they would be more inclined to respect and follow the code of conduct. This would create a spirit of co-operation in pursuing quality education and effective discipline. We must remember that students are intelligent, thoughtful, and capable of determining what is right and what is wrong.

Through consultation a code of conduct can empower students in their pursuit of education because it eliminates unwanted distractions. The code can also be a reflection of the values of the student and be something they can look to as theirs. In other words, there's ownership in this. It's something they helped create, and possibly they will be more inclined to support it. In the end, what will be created is a document all stakeholders will have a vested interest in and will be able to communicate to the community in a unique way.

Madam Speaker, communities need to take back their schools for the benefit of everyone. With the strength of the community behind them and following the code of conduct within the bill, school boards can rest assured that they won't have to make difficult decisions, as I pointed out earlier, as in the situation in St. Albert.

I've got to say that many school boards across the province have said to me in my consultations: "We already have a code of conduct. Will we have to do something more? Will we have to do something that is mandated by the province?" My answer to that has been no,

that you can come up with your own code of conduct. If you have one in place that's working effectively, working very well at this point in time, that's great. Keep it, use it, put it in written form so that everyone understands it, make it work, and make it continue to work for those schools. For those that don't, this would be a good exercise for all schools to go through. Maybe as students go through grade by grade and learn that a code of conduct will help make their school a better place and a safer place, they will grow up to extend that experience into their daily life, so not only did they take control of their school, but they also learned to grow up and take control of their community and be responsible individuals in society.

With that, I'd like to thank all my colleagues for listening to my comments today, and I urge them to please support this bill for the betterment of our students and our school communities. Thank you.

4:10

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and make comments on Bill 206, School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000. I guess when I first saw the bill, my first question was: how many school boards in the province don't have a code of conduct policy in place? It's a question I would ask the mover of the bill maybe to address at a later time. In preparing the bill, I'm certain that that information was gathered, so I would be curious as to how many boards don't have a code of conduct. I ask the question because I know that a code of conduct policy has been the subject of at least one of the Alberta School Boards Association's publications. It has also been a subject of publications by the Alberta Teachers' Association, and there have been a wide variety of community groups involved in making sure there are code of conduct standards in our schools. So I would like to know from the member's research just exactly how many boards are going to be affected by this legislation.

I guess one of the other reactions I had to it, Madam Speaker, is that it lists and will list now in the act a laundry list of abhorrent behaviours – physical violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, vandalism, the use of a firearm, the possession of a narcotic, the possession of alcohol or tobacco – and it stands in such sharp contrast to what was tabled yesterday in the Legislature by the Minister of Learning.

Yesterday the Minister of Learning tabled a document entitled *Safe, Secure & Caring Schools in Alberta*, which had been sponsored in part by his department but involved a wide range of groups in the province in putting it together. As you page through that document, there's very much an accent on the positive and a desire to talk in terms of positive actions that can be taken to create a safe and a caring and a secure school environment. It ranges far beyond a listing of the kinds of actions that we see in Bill 206.

One part of that document that I noted with particular care was a section that was devoted to: how do you create a caring and a safe and a secure school environment? They listed the characteristics. They started off, of course, with caring. How do we have schools where youngsters feel that they are cared for, that they're respected? They had a number of really good, positive suggestions: that we spend some time in schools celebrating students' success, that there be a systematic celebration of students' success in schools, that there be an opportunity provided in schools for all students to exercise leadership skills, and that there be attempts to build team and school spirit. Again, a number of suggestions as to how that environment can be made more caring and students can feel that they are part of it.

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to study under Paul Gump at an American university. Paul had written a book called *Big School, Small School*, and although that book is very dated now, it had some information that has relevance to this very problem. One of the things that Gump and his associates found was that the size of school makes a difference in student behaviour. For instance, in small high schools students are forced to take part in more activities. That is, they have to exercise leadership if there's going to be a yearbook; they have to be part of it. If there's going to be a basketball team, they have to be part of it. So there's pressure on small schools for students to become involved, and that same pressure doesn't exist in large high schools.

In large high schools the people that are on the basketball team, the people that are involved in student council are really the stars, and it's very, very possible for students to survive in one of our large high schools and to be quite anonymous. A number of those high schools, I know for a fact, have taken actions to make sure that they re-create in those large high schools the advantages of some of the small schools. By having students be registered in houses, they are identified with a smaller group within the building, or they're identified with teams or identified with teaching teams. Again, taking actions to make sure that students cannot be left to feel anonymous, that they know someone, that they know teachers, that they know other students and that those students are supportive of them. The requirement in the book that part of a safe, secure environment is one where students feel cared for is an important one.

Another of their listings was that a safe and a caring school makes sure that commonly held values and beliefs are made public; for instance, the very notion of civility, that we treat and talk to each other in a civil manner. As long as they're in the building or on the school grounds, that's the kind of behaviour that is expected of them: that they will treat each other civilly, that they'll treat each with dignity and respect.

Some of the values that cause young people trouble are the very values that we promote. We promote, for instance, loyalty. We indicate that loyalty is a good thing. When loyalty is applied in a peer situation, that can lead to difficulties. By making public the values and the beliefs that the school supports or that should be supported in a caring school, I think it helps students better understand the kinds of value dilemmas they may find themselves in and be better prepared to meet them when they arise.

They called for respect for democratic values, rights, and responsibilities. We do this in a number of situations in schools, but it has to be done systematically. As Canadians we're all guaranteed under the Charter of Rights the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the freedom of thought, the freedom of belief, and the freedom of association. Those freedoms are precious, but they are bestowed on all citizens of this country, and schools and students have to make those freedoms evident. They have to make sure that students know what their rights are and what is expected of them in terms of their treatment of other individuals.

The member previous mentioned the respect for law and order, and there are a number of really good things going on in a number of high schools. The officer-in-the-school program, which I'm familiar with in this city, I think is one of those programs that contributes to a safe and a caring school. When officers are housed in the school, they get to know the students. They're part of that student culture, and they can help youngsters as they work through some of the difficulties they face in growing up in our society, those teenage years.

I would be surprised if there are many schools in this province, at the junior high school level at least, that don't have some sort of school handbook that students have helped compile, with the help of

teachers and parents, which sets out fairly carefully the code of conduct and rules and regulations that govern what's expected in terms of behaviour in the school. Again, I think it's a positive move in terms of making the school environment secure.

One of the important aspects of a safe school, which I think has been mentioned, is that there are clear and consistent behavioural expectations; that is, making sure that students know the consequences of their behaviour, that if they engage in certain kinds of activity, the consequences are firmly established. I think when that is done in conjunction with students, with their parents, community leaders, teachers, principals, and administrative personnel, it has much better acceptance and doesn't lead to inappropriate behaviour on the part of students but also on the part of people supervising those students. This particular bill focuses on student conduct, but there's also an expectation in a number of those handbooks that I spoke of for staff and administrative behaviour, the kinds of things students should be able to expect when they're being dealt with by those in authority.

4:20

An important part of a caring and secure and safe school is respect for individual differences, and those differences of course are more acute in some settings than others. In Mill Woods we have two high schools that deal with a very large multicultural population. To the credit of both of those high schools, they have exercised a continued effort to make sure that students that enter the doors of those buildings are fully apprised of our obligation to others and are made aware of the impact of racial discrimination and the consequences of racial discrimination.

They have an ongoing set of annual activities. They had a special celebration of the UN declaration of human rights, the 50th anniversary of that declaration. When you go to the ceremonies and to the educational kinds of activities they stage to promote racial harmony in those schools, you can't help but come away impressed. The most impressive part about it for me is always that it's student driven, that students are the ones who are trying to make certain that they and their colleagues are fully aware of the consequences of discrimination. They do a good job, I think, in terms of education and try to help make people who do discriminate understand the source of their actions, why they behave in that way. I think they do a really good job in helping people understand that we have to respect individual differences, not only respect individual differences but celebrate those differences.

A safe and secure school will have effective anger management strategies in place, and we've seen that in terms of peer mediation. We have teams of students who help resolve conflicts amongst students. There will be a whole range of strategies that are employed by teachers and supported by students, from time-outs in classrooms when anger becomes a problem to the involvement, which is part of this bill, at a different level with counseling and counseling activities.

One of the most important aspects of a safe, secure, and caring school is the setting in which that school finds itself and the conclusion that those kinds of schools are best created when they're involved with the community, when there are a wide variety of community members and parents who are involved with the school and helping to make it a better place, when the efforts of the school are supported. In fact, in many cases there's leadership from outside the school in terms of making it a good place for students to come to feel good about themselves and to feel good about the kinds of learning activities and extracurricular activities they're going to be engaged in.

Part of the problem in terms of creating safe and secure schools I

think comes from the very way we organize learning in the province. It's curious that we send high school students and junior high school students out of our communities at the very time when you would hope that there would be community pressure on those youngsters to meet social norms. We put them in buses or let them drive cars and send them across the city, where they can be completely anonymous, where there's no obligation to community members. It's a bit of an anomaly when we do that and keep close to us, of course for other reasons, very good reasons, the youngest children, probably the children that you could send away from the community without fearing that they were going to get into difficulties or not act responsibly. In part, I think, we bring some of the problems on ourselves just in the way that we organize learning instruction in the province.

I've looked at Bill 206 and have talked about it briefly with some of my colleagues. We're going to support the bill, but as I said at the outset, I guess I would have felt much more comfortable had this been part of a positive recommendation that the School Act would require school boards to have a policy on supporting safe, secure, and caring schools. That certainly would have been my preference.

I do thank the member for bringing it forward. It's a problem, has been a problem for a long time. It's been addressed by a number of groups and parents and Albertans in a variety of ways. Although we hear the horror stories – and some of them are extremely tragic – our schools are very, very safe places for our students when you consider the number of schools that we have in this province, over 1,800. If you consider the number of students that are involved in those buildings, we really do have an environment across the province where, for the most part, people can send their children and young adults off to school feeling secure that they're going to be cared for and that they won't come to a bad end.

With those comments I'd conclude. I would be interested if the member who proposed Bill 206 does have information on the number of boards who don't have policies on school conduct in place and could share that with me.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and enter into the debate on Bill 206. I would like to start by congratulating my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for sponsoring this timely bill.

Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying that in Alberta the vast majority of kids are responsible and caring young members of society. It is easy to forget how good our kids actually are when we are bombarded by news of violence occurring in schools committed by young people. I want to make it clear that the majority of the violence is occurring in the U.S. and not in Canada. School violence is much more prevalent south of the border. I think that probably 99 percent of kids in this province have minimal or no problems with respect for the rules, but it is that 1 percent of kids we must deal with because they have a devastating consequence on the other 99 percent. It is with this understanding that I want to proceed.

4:30

The code of conduct that the hon. member is proposing will go a long way to ensure that Alberta schools are safe. It's about promoting respect and civility and community rights and responsibilities, and that means that students can go to school and receive a high-quality education without the threat of violence. I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. member's comments that creating a code of

conduct and a safe school works best when they are generated not only by school staff but also by students, parents, and representatives from the community. Madam Speaker, this way a true consensus can be developed about what everyone wants their school to be like and the rules everyone is willing to uphold to make this happen. This also makes all members of the community stakeholders in their schools and in the futures of the students in them.

Madam Speaker, I believe that violence amongst youth is placing a lot of pressure on schools, students, parents, and the community at large. Although I do not think there is a general lawlessness amongst our young people, there are many things that need to be done to improve the state of the school environment and to promote good behaviour. School violence – and not just when it erupts into a criminal act – is the single most disruptive factor in the school environment. This includes things like bullying, harassment, taunting, or excessive peer pressure, and my colleague was correct in stating that these acts sow the seeds for future violent outbursts.

Statistics from a 1997 study by the National Crime Prevention Council of Canada show that bullying on the playground occurs once every seven minutes and in the classroom once every 25 minutes. According to the council, bullying is an early behaviour that can contribute to the development of antisocial behaviour patterns, which in turn are causing violence and aggressiveness in our society. As well, school violence, on top of creating an environment of fear, diverts energy and resources from instruction and the learning process. Too often those not interested in learning get the attention of school staff to the detriment of students genuinely there to learn.

I think what the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod wants to see from his code of conduct is a promotion of respect amongst students for each other and for the rules of the school. Respect is a small word with a huge impact that is getting lost in society today. As a member of the Task Force on Children at Risk I share the vision of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and hope that all members will join me to support that vision. But, Madam Speaker, we as a government must also show our respect for students by ensuring that every jurisdiction has good facilities and resources, access to the latest technologies and to every opportunity to succeed. I think we are then showing our respect. This is illustrated in programs like the Alberta initiative for school improvement, which creates a community-based partnership for school improvement.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Each school jurisdiction consults with parents, teachers, school administrators, and others on ways to improve schools and identify school needs. Jurisdictions then develop programs in consultation with the school community to best meet the needs of the students. It is important to put the decision-making powers in the hands of the young people. Children need to have a voice and be able to participate on issues that affect them. Who best understands school issues but those parents, students, and teachers who are there every day?

Our commitment to our students was also illustrated in the provincial budget, where our government earmarked \$4.6 billion for education for 2000-2001. This includes \$160 million to renovate and build new schools. In fact, spending on education will increase by \$776 million over the next three years. These government commitments are the foundation on which schools can build a safe and stable and productive learning environment. Yet there is also an onus on students and school staff to do their part in creating a safe and stable learning environment, and this is where a code of conduct can be implemented. Institutionalizing a code of conduct demonstrates a commitment to violence prevention and helps students and teachers feel safe. When the code clearly explains school rules and sanctions for violence, everyone knows what is expected from them and what to expect from their schools.

A big problem with the current codes of conduct or policies on school discipline is that there is no consistency in their application. Students and for that matter teachers are not clear on what the rules are and how to deal with someone who breaks them. Madam Speaker, there is sometimes a contradiction between school policies and school practices. We know that every school in Alberta has a comprehensive set of policies dealing with violence and other offences, but enforcement of those policies may be uneven. This can lead to a situation where teachers do not feel supported in imposing discipline, where students do not feel protected by the policies, and those students prone to disruptive behaviours do not think that they will be punished.

I know that the school environment is, by and large, a safe and caring place for young people to develop and further their education. Schools are places where students are surrounded by their peers and educated by hardworking and very caring teachers. Yet problems do arise in this environment, and when they do, rules need to be clear, concise, and action needs to be taken swiftly.

Madam Speaker, I am drawn, like my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, to the events that occurred in the greater St. Albert Catholic school division. This school division had a code of conduct for its students, but that code had holes in it. There is no way that the two students involved, the attacker and the victim, should have been in the same school. In the end the school board did rectify the situation, but far, far too much time had passed. The emotional pain experienced by the victim could have been far lessened if the appropriate course of action had been followed in the first place. Both students should have been allowed to get on with their lives but in different schools. So there is obviously a problem with the current way of doing things if situations like that can happen.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to see that Bill 206 takes into account the need of all young people to be educated. It would do society no good if students like the one who committed the sexual assault are simply marginalized. I'm aware that some students simply cannot function in the regular school environment. They may be too disruptive or have broken too many rules to be allowed in the classroom. These are the students that need alternative methods of education and counseling. It is through this education and counseling that some students can turn around their disruptive ways and behaviours. Many of the so-called problem students suffer from low self-esteem and engage in self-destructive behaviour as a call for help. If these students can be reached, we should make every effort to do so.

Madam Speaker, this is a way of making schools safer. First we must establish clear, concise rules for everyone in the school. Then if the students choose to break those rules, they may be dealt with quickly so that the learning environment has as little disruption as possible, but we must not disregard those students who need help.

What it boils down to is keeping our schools safe for Alberta students. We want to do everything we can to prevent violence, because once it occurs, we cannot fix the damage. A student code of conduct may not ensure that outbursts of violence like what occurred in Taber never happen again, but what it will do is work to stop the roots of violence, things like bullying, harassment, or excessive peer pressure. A code of conduct will make a clear statement to students that those things are unacceptable in Alberta schools. Madam Speaker, a code will also give schools the ability to swiftly rectify any disruptive situation that may occur in our schools, ensuring that those disruptions are kept to a minimum and do not escalate in frequency and severity.

I will finish by again commending my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for putting forth much-needed legislation in Alberta. I also commend him for promoting safety in the schools

through a balanced look at school discipline and student responsibility.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. 4:40

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak, as usual, to both sides of the bill. First, I'd like to fully understand the need for it, particularly in light of a publication that the hon. Minister of Learning tabled yesterday in the Legislature. It makes some fascinating reading. For one who has two children that are just going out of the public school system into the postsecondary school system, it makes very interesting reading.

I'm also a past Cub master of some years with, most recently, nine years of coaching hockey and 11 years of outdoor soccer as coach and 10 years of indoor soccer. Although I do not have directly related education experience in the proper sense, I have some experience in guiding young people, particularly in areas where violence is very, very close to what you do in sport. You want to minimize that. With that experience I look at this particular bill and say *en Francais, bien sûr*. I mean: of course. Why would you not have a code of conduct?

Well, I took the trouble to speak to two principals, one elementary and one high school. They said: "Well, of course we have policies and the guiding principles, but we don't always have it written. We don't have it written out that thou shall do this and this is the line." Quite frankly, from my experience being a parent and a leader of children, oftentimes the same occurrence under a different set of circumstances is punishable by a totally different means. Whether the child had the intent to do something or had some forethought has to be taken into consideration. The other instance, of course, is: what is the current situation? What is the effect on that child? If you're not about to have any effect whatever, then save the trouble of embarrassing yourself and the child, because all you're doing is pushing that child farther and farther and farther away from the authority figure and from understanding that the boundaries are there to be exercised with a certain amount of caution.

Now, I have to commend the member opposite for bringing the bill forward, in any event, because it does give one the opportunity to think about these things and to speak of them, but I'm not too sure that legislation is in order. The member himself went through part of his speech to explain that we already have a perfectly good criminal law system. He explained that that was not the intent of this bill and then went on to say that the bill is needed. Well, a bill is a law. A bill does have the force of law, and quite frankly I'm not too sure how this set of principles or written policies would not and could not be construed as same.

If one wishes to set boundaries, those boundaries should be set fairly firmly, and it should be clearly recognized when those boundaries are crossed. To set it down in this hard fashion leaves this member a little less than impressed with the method that this bill intends to lay out. The publication *Supporting Safe, Secure & Caring Schools in Alberta*, filed just yesterday in the Legislature, is by far a better approach. It cares. It takes into consideration an individual child and what is fundamentally best for the child in the school setting. It clearly recognizes that a child misbehaving affects the entire class or the entire school and has to be in some manner dealt with.

It has been this father's experience that example in actions and reactions to events is the best teacher of children and certainly in assisting a child in recognizing the need for boundaries. If you've ever as a parent had 10 or 15 children in the backyard and thrown a

ball or a toy or whatever it happens to be, instantly a game ensues. You'll note, if you're observant, that rules are applied. They change, yes. They may amount to that you can't touch this fence and you can't do that and you have to jump twice to get here and there, all of those sorts of things in children's games. Those are boundaries that are set, and they recognize that. If there is to be any kind of guideline or support structure, I suggest to you that if it's not contained in the volume that I described earlier, it certainly is outlined and does seem to give the impression that it has at least been considered.

Now, in this member's experience, assisting that child in finding their way and channeling that energy to a better purpose is a much, much better way of dealing with a problem or with a problem child. This member's experience is that if you have cast the rules so stiff and so hard, it becomes a debate as to whether it crossed the line or not, totally disregarding the circumstances of the child and/or the institution that has written the rules. I am a little leery in supporting this legislation, but I don't see any malice of intent at all, and I expect that when it gets to the board level and down to the school level, the appropriate choices will be made, as they invariably have been made in most instances in this province to date.

In closing, it is clear that these kinds of boundaries, if you will, and the consequences for crossing those boundaries have been laid out from the first time there was a school and a pupil in the province of Alberta. I'm not too sure that recording it would be absolutely the right thing to do. In any event, until some other debate sways me to the opinion that this bill should not be supported, I suspect that I shall be supporting the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon to express my support for Bill 206, which amends the School Act to include a community-based written code of student conduct for each school in our province. My colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is to be commended for bringing forward this important amendment to the School Act.

The code of conduct will set out expected and acceptable standards of conduct for students and the consequences that will be incurred for failing to live up to these standards. Each code will prohibit activities such as physical violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse, vandalism, and the use or possession of a dangerous weapon, narcotic, alcohol, or tobacco products. The prohibition will extend to activities in the school, on school grounds, or during school-sponsored activities.

The code proposed by Bill 206 will be more specific than the very general requirement set out in the current act, which only requires students to be diligent in their studies, attend school regularly and punctually, co-operate fully with school officials and school rules, account to their teachers for their conduct, and respect the rights of others. The existing legislation sets forth objectives involving student behaviour but is short on specifics. What Bill 206 will bring about, Madam Speaker, is a clearly laid out and specific code of conduct that every student will see, appreciate, and understand and that shows the consequences of their actions.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, each code will be community-based. It will not be prescribed by the provincial Department of Learning, the Alberta Teachers' Association, or any other provincial organization but will instead be based on input from parents, students, teachers, and principals that reflects local concerns and community needs.

4:50

Madam Speaker, the climate in our schools is changing. Over the past decade we have seen a marked increase in both incidence and varying types of disciplinary problems occurring in Alberta schools. Disciplinary problems have always existed in schools and have always presented challenges to teachers, parents, and school boards, but the nature of the disciplinary problems is changing. The levels and types of violence are increasing, particularly in large urban centres. Gangs are making their way into our schools, as are alcohol and street drugs. In fact, the Alberta School Boards Association has identified a number of trends which are emerging in our schools, including a greater number of incidents overall: possession of weapons, the existence of gangs, female involvement in violent acts and incidents, involvement of elementary students, and extortion. As a result, there is an increasing public awareness that safety in our schools is an issue and that further remedial actions are required.

A 1998 Angus Reid poll showed that two-thirds of Canadians believed that public schools in their own communities had become less safe over the preceding five-year period. Albertans who responded to the survey attributed school violence to a number of factors including parenting, disciplining practice of schools and teachers, a lower degree of respect, changing values of morality, peer pressure, and increased levels of violence in movies and in television programming.

Madam Speaker, schools have been finding that some of the traditional disciplinary methods are less effective than in the past. They're looking for more effective ways to promote a more orderly and safe environment for students, teachers, and the surrounding community. The penalty options envisaged by Bill 206 involve a broad range from the more traditional forms of discipline, such as expulsion or suspension of students committing serious offences, to more rehabilitative options such as counseling. In addition, the bill requires penalty options that would enable a student to continue pursuing his or her studies while serving a penalty.

Madam Speaker, I introduced a private member's bill in the 1998 spring session of this Legislature which addressed similar issues as identified by my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod. However, due to its position on the Order Paper, the bill never reached debate. The bill I proposed was similar to Bill 206 in that it dealt with the problems of school violence and substance abuse, and it proposed that in cases of suspected illegal activity such as physical violence involving sexual assault and harassment, misconduct, vandalism, and possession of weapons or narcotics, school principals would be required to contact the local police service and the school superintendent at the earliest opportunity.

The sponsor of Bill 206 and myself are hardly alone in our concern for disciplinary problems and their impact on our schools, students, families, and communities. Madam Speaker, the province of Ontario has also been examining school codes of conduct, and one of the Ontario schools that has been proactive in this respect is Sir Sanford Fleming Academy, which has instituted both a code of conduct and a school uniform policy. The response from students and parents at this high school has been very positive, and in particular they note the improvements in the school's learning environment. As a result, Ontario is considering the creation of a code of conduct in its provincial school legislation which would impose minimum standards for students' behaviour and set out the consequences for infractions of the code.

At this point I'd like to refer to – and I will table this document – a copy that has come off the Internet of some press releases dated March 21. It's regarding specific legislation that the Ontario government has announced that it will be bringing forward in the spring agenda. I just want to note a few excerpts from a columnist's

article regarding the code of conduct. If I could, Madam Speaker, point out:

Expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons onto school property, provide drugs or alcohol to others or who commit criminal assault.

Suspension the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers and for vandalism.

Teachers given power to impose detentions and suspensions.

Principals and vice-principals given right to expel students.

Expelled students to be sent to strict discipline programs.

Parents of students with attitude and behaviour problems given power to apply to have their children sent to strict discipline programs.

School property off-limits to all but teachers, students, parents and registered visitors between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Mandatory criminal-background checks for everyone teaching or working in schools.

School uniforms and dress codes to be established if supported by a majority of a school's parents.

Parents to be made financially responsible for property damage and other consequences of their children breaking the law.

Schools in the United States are also addressing the issues surrounding school discipline problems. The American situation, I would suggest, differs substantially from the Canadian position or indeed what we are experiencing in the province of Alberta with respect to the levels and the types of discipline problems, particularly violence. Nevertheless, it may be worth while to consider some of the approaches that they are adopting.

It's interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that three-quarters or more of all American schools in a recent survey reported having zero-tolerance policies for various student offences. Zero-tolerance policies were defined as policies that mandate predetermined serious consequences for specific disciplinary offences. About 90 percent of schools reported zero-tolerance policies for firearms and weapons other than firearms. Eighty-eight percent had policies of zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs. In addition, 79 percent had zero-tolerance policies for violent behaviour and tobacco use. Actions to address disciplinary problems take other forms in American schools, including increased reporting of serious incidents to law enforcement officials and the institution of school uniform policies.

Madam Speaker, the establishment of school codes of conduct will help to create a climate of responsibility and clear expectations for students, teachers, parents, and principals. Our schools and students would benefit from instituting these codes in our province. Bill 206 is not a panacea for all the circumstances involving unacceptable conduct in our schools. I would suggest that all of us acknowledge collectively as legislators, as parents, as students, as teachers, as administrators, and as school trustees that we share a duty and a responsibility to do everything we can to eliminate unacceptable conduct in our schools. Bill 206 is one cog within the total wheel of our collective responsibility. I would ask and urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 206.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not, to be honest, quite sure whether I support this bill or not. There are a number of reasons. We talked about the school uniform policy in here and the pros and cons of the school uniform policy. I'm not an advocate of that, simply because I think our kids have to have some independence along the way.

However, I will say that I happened to have had a group of young

people from St. Gerard school down at the Legislature for a week. I posed that question to them, and three of the kids said: yeah, school uniforms would be okay, but you know, not really. So three kids said: yeah, we would be okay with that. The rest of the class said: no way. Interestingly enough, the girls said: yeah, it wouldn't be a big deal. The boys said: no way. It was quite an interesting debate that they had in relation to this. A lot of it revolved around their ability to express themselves in what they wear, what they don't wear, what they choose to wear, if they have long hair, short hair, or, in my son's case, red hair, a good Liberal colour I might add. But it is their choice. That's part of the picture.

5:00

I want to also point out that I've been involved in my son's school since grade 1, and at the elementary school level, yeah, they had a policy for conduct. It wasn't as tough a policy as from grades 7 to 9. In fact, my son's school was one of the first schools involved in the Safe and Caring Schools program in Alberta. It was one of the schools that the district felt needed to be part of that. In fact – and I'll be very honest – I had contemplated whether or not I was going to send my son to that school. In discussion with many of the parents in the community that we live in, we all asked that question because we had heard that the particular school was particularly rough. So we thought: well, maybe we'll send our kids out of the community. Then my thought was: why would I do that? There's a school four blocks from home. The kids have lived in this community all their lives, grown up in this community, but I needed as a parent to see some change in the school.

The first time I entered that junior high school, there was a dimly lit hallway. There were no posters on the wall. There wasn't a trophy cabinet. There was nothing in the school that would say to me: gee, this is a delightful place to go. As a police officer my area of expertise was in something called crime prevention through environmental design, and that whole concept focused around using the built environment to construct a safe environment, if you will. I took all the principles and concepts that were involved in the acronym CPTED, and I thought: boy, a lot of work needs to be done at this school. I brought that up prior to my son going to that school.

The next year we had a principal change; we had Safe and Caring Schools. Through this program we have seen the level of achievement go up, we have seen fewer disciplinary problems in the school, and we have kids coming out for sports teams, some which never existed in that school, and now there's a full range of athletic opportunities, there's a full range of leadership opportunities, those kinds of things. I credit the parents of the community for participating and getting involved and saying: "You know, we don't want to lose our community school. We want our kids to be able to go here, and we want to feel good about it," those kinds of things.

We had a policy not only with the directive from the Safe and Caring Schools project, but we ensured that kids weren't allowed to smoke around the school – well, in the neighbourhood. The school got phone calls if they did. They were also encouraged to stay on the school grounds at lunchtime, not necessarily go off but encouraged to stick around. They had a policy of expulsion for weapons in the school. They had a policy of expulsions and suspensions for other issues such as drugs and alcohol and the use of those on the school grounds or around the school.

Also, in relation to cell phones and pagers we have a particular concern with what's called a dial-a-doper. In the police vocabulary, a dial-a-doper, the young person, is generally the courier, so you can call up, you can order your dope, and then you get a courier to run out and deliver it. So the kid has a pager on him. He gets paged by the dealer. He goes and picks up his dope and delivers it to some-

body else. Well, of course they use kids; right? They use kids because the penalty isn't as high. We decided we were going to take pagers and cellular phones away from kids in the school so that we can try and circumvent that particular issue.

So all sorts of things were happening in this particular school, and to date they're doing very well. They're doing well under the program. We've seen all sorts of things change. The achievement levels are going up. As a parent council we put together a specific strategy to deal with some of the issues on the student survey put out by the school board. In fact, we went one further. For the next year's survey we developed a questionnaire that would in fact not just ask the kids: do you feel safe in your school? And the kid would answer yes or no. We went one further and said: why don't you feel safe in your school? You have to have that information to develop a strategy to deal with it. So we were able to do a little bit of an analysis on that and put a strategy together as parents in the community, and it works for the kids.

Then my son moved on. Now he's in his first year of high school. The same type of thing. They have the same rules, only now they're even more strict.

I found it interesting, Madam Speaker, because I was, as you know, opposed to the youth smoking law in the Legislature, the private member's bill brought up. When I asked my son about it, he said: well, yeah, it should be against the law. So, you know, we had a little bit of a difference in our home. His reason for that is: well, it's not good for you, so why allow smoking? Yet he still wants red hair. So I say, "I don't like your red hair. Maybe you should get rid of it." So it's kind of an interesting dynamic when you're talking to kids and how these things play out.

MR. HANCOCK: Red hair won't kill him.

MS OLSEN: Well, you're right, hon. Justice minister. Red hair won't kill him. But do you want to know what it does to shirt collars and pillows?

Given that, I have seen through my son's school career a level of accountability from the parents, the principals, and the teachers in developing solid criteria. The school he's in now, again, as I say, has a specific policy: zero tolerance for weapons and drugs and alcohol, suspensions, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions. They've got a range of remedies, but in my view the number one issue should be dealing with the kids in a manner that's going to keep them involved in school, you know, having them disciplined in a manner that's going to help the child and not discourage the young person.

I've also seen a number of other schools turn around in this city. You know, as a police officer I had ample opportunity to be at any number of schools. I can tell you that 12 years ago at the high school my son goes to right now, I happened to be working as a special-duty constable at a school dance, and the biggest fight broke out at that school after the dance. It was a particularly violent fight. It wasn't just fists and those kinds of things. In essence, we had to call down a number of other police officers to come and help us out. But because of the turnaround of that school over the last 10 years, when it was time for school selection, I thought: well, is this where I want my son to go? When I searched out all the schools, it's a good school. It's turned full circle.

Part of it is that schools do that. They change. Their culture changes. Their programs change. The student population changes. The other part of it is that they adopt policies that they're very strict on. This particular school has focused on getting all kids through school and into some form of postsecondary education, which is a good goal. It doesn't necessarily have to be high academics but at

least getting those kids to a point where they can make it in a postsecondary school.

So I don't believe the sky is falling. Part of it is my personal experience, my personal experience as a parent and my experience as a police officer. We've always had drug and alcohol problems in schools. Always. We've always had violence in schools. We've always had a number of these gang issues in schools, boy, forever.

5:10

You know, I was a police officer. I started years and years ago, and we still have some of the same issues. If we looked on a continuum of some of these things or if we were to chart them on a graph, some of these issues would rise and fall. There would be a fluctuation. It's not always bad, and maybe one particular high-profile incident will lead to another. I certainly won't deny the fact that we're seeing more gang activity in schools. Absolutely. We are seeing that, and I think that's a particular focus, but not just for one school, for many schools that are in urban areas. It might not be necessary to deal with a rural school in the same manner. I think you have to let, in my view, the parties who are responsible for our kids make some decisions. You know, for the most part they do make good decisions.

I would comment on the issues that arose out of some sexual assaults and harassments at schools. I would suggest that if we all took the sexual harassment issue a little more to heart, then we would be teaching our kids a good lesson about harassment.

The issue of sexual assault. I believe that those issues were resolved, and I'm hoping the boards put policies in place to deal with these kids so the victims don't have to be revictimized by attending the same school.

There are other options, too, Madam Speaker. The community conferencing that occurs, I think, is something that is starting to occur more often in schools. Sometimes if you take a model like that and you take your victim and your offender and bring them together and you try to resolve the problem – that's exactly what's happening in the Department of Justice. They're promoting community conferencing or family group conferencing. It's an ideal model to help break down some of those issues, and maybe in some situations – I'm not saying all, by any stretch of the imagination – where there is an ability for the victim and the offender, especially in the schools, depending on the issue, maybe they will come together and maybe they will be able to resolve some of those issues.

Bullying is an issue in schools, again, where I think the restorative justice model works. We use it in some of the schools here. In fact, the police officers in the schools in Edmonton endeavor to use that model all the time or as often as they can because they've seen it work.

Let's not forget, Madam Speaker, that under 2 percent of all those youth are serious habitual offenders. So under 2 percent of every youth that commits a crime under the Criminal Code is considered a serious habitual offender. We're talking about a small group of people who are serious offenders. Those offenders are not likely to be in our schools, in fact. They're looking at alternative forms of education, or they're maybe at AYOC. There's a tremendous program that Alberta Justice has at AYOC. There are all sorts of options that are happening.

When I say that I have difficulties supporting this, I do believe that schools, boards, parents, and students are all endeavoring to manage violence in the schools. We've absolutely seen some issues we need to deal with. We don't want kids in the same school if they can't overcome their difficulties, especially in a case of sexual assault or date rape, if you will, those kinds of things. Those are power issues, and unless those are resolved between the victim and

offender, then you can't have them both in the same school. That's just common sense, and there shouldn't be a big fight over that.

But I do look at all the alternatives, not just for the criminal offences in schools that are committed but for many other offences. I guess I'm not buying into the sky-is-falling notion in the schools just yet. Yes, there are problems. Absolutely there are problems. Absolutely parents and teachers and boards are taking care of business. They should all be commended for the work they're doing. We've got tremendous programs by the government, and I will in fact say that this is an excellent program. The Safe and Caring Schools program has worked wonders. I've seen the changes in the schools that this has operated in. I've seen the changes in the kids.

I want to draw to your attention, though, just before I close – we talk about all of these things; we talk about violence, and we talk about drugs and alcohol – a Pollara poll that was just recently delivered on the weekend. In fact, I was present at the presentation, and it was a very good presentation. The number three issue that Canadians said would get worse before it got better was child poverty. Okay? That was the number three issue. In the priorities for Canadians, the number two priority was child poverty. Health care was number one in both those instances.

So when we're talking about all the issues identified in this Assembly, when we're talking about criminal offences, when we're talking about behaviours and attitudes of students and that kind of thing, we really need to focus on prevention. And do you know what? All of those programs out there that target zero to six, that target teen mums, that target mums who are pregnant for some prenatal care and introduce them into different programs, that's what's going to help in our schools, Madam Speaker. That's what's going to help. This bill is going to make into law and is going to have the effect of law, as my colleague from Edmonton-Calder said, something that's already happening. I wish we could redirect our focus on prevention, put more money into prevention.

Madam Speaker, I think crime prevention is not just target-hardening. It's not just putting bolts and locks on your doors and alarm systems in your homes. It's attacking child poverty. It's attacking youth issues, education, access to education, health, racism, those issues. They're all part of the big picture.

With that, I would cede the floor to somebody else. I really haven't made up my mind, to be honest, whether I'm going to support this or not. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and enter into the debate on Bill 206. I'll start off by applauding my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod for having the resolve to sponsor this timely bill. Bill 206 is the culmination of his hard work and consultation with Albertans, and he should be commended for it. Congratulations.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to say that I'm actually shocked and disappointed with a lot of the comments that I heard from the last member speaking, from Edmonton-Norwood. You know, I have well over a thousand police officers in the city of Calgary who would strongly disagree with a lot of the comments that she made today. I think it's very, very unfortunate that she feels, being a police officer, sitting in here, and making those kind of comments, that they don't need a code of conduct in schools. That's unbelievable, and I think that's very disappointing.

Madam Speaker, my comments today will deal with some of the issues and concerns my constituents and Albertans across the province have expressed to me. Recently I have had the opportunity

to hear what my constituents are saying about the state of education in Calgary and in Alberta as a whole. I've been going across the province and hearing from school boards, 60 out of 64 school boards, on the growth and density study that I'm doing for the Minister of Learning. Much has been done through my work on this committee, and it's been very good information that pertains directly to Bill 206.

5:20

Madam Speaker, what has been a constant throughout these discussions is the need for Alberta, both the government and the people, to embrace innovation and change in dealing with the educational issues. Whether I'm talking to the trustees or the chief superintendents, chief financial officers, or parents, we need to also get back to some basics in our changes. We as a society have put teaching values into our classroom rather than learning them in our homes and in our community. School jurisdictions today cannot fill in for family anymore in regards to teaching, if they don't have the tools to enforce responsible behaviour.

A good example is Ontario's code of conduct which has been introduced. It's very popular with parents and the public and school boards and teachers. I'd like to read a couple of the codes of conduct that they have in Ontario.

Expulsion automatic for students who bring weapons onto school property, provide drugs or alcohol to others or who commit criminal assault.

Suspension the minimum penalty for possessing drugs or alcohol, for threatening or swearing at teachers and for vandalism.

Teachers given power to impose detentions and suspensions.

Principals and vice-principals given right to expel students.

Expelled students to be sent to strict discipline programs.

Parents of students with attitude and behaviour problems given power to apply to have their children sent to strict discipline programs . . .

Parents to be made financially responsible for property damage and other consequences of their children breaking the law.

Very powerful statements made by the Ontario government.

Madam Speaker, as I have just described, the impetus is there for change in our schools. I would like to say that our government has never been afraid of change, especially when Albertans tell us we need to change. This is why I am supporting my colleague's proposed bill. The hon. member is not afraid to challenge the status quo when it is change for the better.

I want to make it clear, Madam Speaker, that Alberta has some of the best schools and students in Canada, if not in the entire globe. Our government has acknowledged the need to embrace science and focus on knowledge-based sectors in our economy. These knowledge-based sectors include industries vital to Alberta's continued prosperity, areas like oil and agriculture, which have adapted and grown as the global economy becomes more complex and integrated.

Madam Speaker, how does this fit with the bill proposed today to create a student code of conduct? I think that by implementing a code of conduct in Alberta's schools, student and school responsibilities are clearly laid out, hence creating a stable school environment, which is vital to the learning process. I agree with many of the comments made by my colleagues today, especially with respect to getting the problem students out of schools and into counseling and rehabilitation settings so that serious violent situations can be avoided at all costs.

This, Madam Speaker, is what my colleague is proposing. The zero tolerance buzzword is thrown around today in the school discipline and school violence debate. Zero tolerance for things like weapons or drug offences are needed as deterrents to keep our schools safe for all our children.

Madam Speaker, when you remove a student from school, you

can't forget about him or her as soon as they're out the door. Disruptive students often act out because of deeper emotional factors like a dysfunctional family unit or feelings of isolation and anger. These students need to be helped; otherwise, their cycle of destructive behaviour will never be broken.

I believe a code of conduct is a needed component in an overall discipline and early intervention strategy. It is an approach based on self-discipline, mutual respect, equity, and co-operation. It is fair to both students and educators.

I'll finish by again urging my colleagues to support this bill as the right strategy for keeping our schools safe and encouraging a stable and co-operative learning environment.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a real privilege to stand this afternoon and speak to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod's Bill 206. This basically puts in place an option so that schools can develop a code of conduct.

This in essence creates a lot of options for the schools. I notice that it's not being put in at a provincial level. It's being put in so that the communities can put in the kind of plan they want. This makes it very appropriate for parents to be able to then go to the school and decide whether or not that's the school they want to enroll their children in based on their willingness to participate in that code of conduct and determine whether or not they are going to look after their children, make sure their children interact with others, and protect their children from outside violence in a way that the parent sees as beneficial to their willingness and want to bring up their children. So this, in essence, provides us with that kind of an option.

I guess the question that we have is kind of determining the breadth: how much consultation, how much the parents will be brought into this? Will this be a way in the end of differentiating

between schools? It's going to be the kind of thing that we need to have set out so that as parents begin to put more and more emphasis on the environment that their children are being taught in, then they'll be able to, as I said, make that choice.

The other thing that I would like to just make a few comments on is the kind of process that would have to be put in place here to deal with enforcement. What are the options for parents to get clarification on issues, to deal with the kind of relationship between the students and the teachers? How are they going to be able to make sure that the code of conduct enforcement activities don't affect the way they are going to be able to interact with the teachers, with other students?

Madam Speaker, we've been following a case in southern Alberta where there's been a real disagreement created between the students and the teachers and subsequently, then, between the teachers and the principal, all based on the kind of conduct the students are being disciplined for. So I think that this bill, which will amend the School Act, in essence provides those schools with a chance to make sure that parents, teachers, students, and administrators all understand the ground rules when code of conduct issues are going to be brought up. This is the kind of thing that we don't want to have indiscriminately imposed on students.

I think this should be put in place, and I hope that as the schools and school boards undertake to put these code of conduct guidelines in place, the students play an important role in it. I think the kind of conduct that students are willing to impose on themselves is probably at least as stringent as we as parents or administrators in the school system would be willing to put on. So if the students are involved, it gives them a buy-in to it. It gives them a chance to develop and formulate the kinds of things that they are going to enforce on each other in terms of behaviour patterns.

You're looking at the clock. Does that mean that I should be sitting down? It's 5:30.

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