

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Hon. members, would you now please remain standing as I invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to sing our national anthem, and to all here, please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce today Dan Lidgett. He's a resident of Edmonton, formerly of Wetaskiwin. He's a volunteer with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and the PARTY program, prevent alcohol- and risk-related trauma in youth. Dan is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to wave and acknowledge the Assembly as we give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of students from Woodhaven junior high. There are 90 students here today. They're accompanied by Jayme Foster, Ray Shapko, Deb Schellenberger and parents Kelli Holden, Darren Stumbur, Sherry Mitchell, Mrs. Tina Gibson, Marilyn Freund, Karen Headrick and educational assistant Dana Stewart. I would ask that the House give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and that they would please stand.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 26 enthusiastic grade 6 students from Earl Buxton elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Val Ritter, and by parent helpers Mrs. Kalra and Mrs. Rawat. They're here to observe and learn with keen interest about government and the Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you have guests today?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 24 bright and energetic grade 6 students from Patricia Heights elementary school who are attending our School at the Leg. program for a week. Today they decided to come and watch us during part of question period and observe their MLA and everyone here working hard on their behalf. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Beverly Oldford. I would like to ask them all now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this esteemed Assembly.

The Speaker: The students should also know that it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung's birthday today.

This is also the 17th anniversary of the election to this House of four distinguished members of this House. On March 20, 1989, these four individuals were elected to this parliament for the first time: the hon. the Premier, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and the hon. Minister of Government Services.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my constituents: Gail Ells and Florence Ingham. Florence works with the Alberta Dental Association, and Gail is a copyright assistant for Athabasca University. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly six citizens from a group focused on the industrial heartland expansion in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties. They are Mike Sudayko, Joan Sudayko, Maureen Chichak, Laura Martin, and Diane Gorgichuk. Please stand, and we'll give you the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, although I don't see the group of wonderful professionals that joined me this afternoon, they may in fact be in a different part of the Legislature. They will be here today at some point. They are resident physicians, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, known as PARA.

There are some 1,200 residents in Alberta. They perform a valued service in all of our hospitals and care institutions for health. They recently concluded a collective agreement with the government of Alberta. They are here today to meet MLAs, to ask questions, to represent issues of the student body both as it applies to their education and to the work that they're doing. Today at lunchtime they gave me excellent ideas on the subject of physician recruitment. If any members are in the audience on either side of the House, I wish they would please stand, and we could acknowledge their presence with pleasure.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Health Services for Rural Albertans

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as electricity deregulation

hurt people across rural Alberta, this government's health care deregulation is about to do the same. Even the government's hand-picked chairman of the Peace Country health authority has gone public with his concerns that the third way will draw health care professionals away from rural Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister possibly respond to the chairman of the Peace Country health authority when he says, and I quote, there's a shortage of orthopaedic surgeons, and if 10 of them are operating in the private sector, that's 10 less for the public system across Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, throughout the policy framework we have a number of initiatives designed to improve and strengthen the public health care system. Under the policy that relates to choice and access we have identified very clearly that any effort to accept an access proposal must only be done when there's an assurance that the public health care capacity will be maintained and will be strengthened. Although the hon. member has referenced a chair that is valued and has raised concerns about rural Alberta, we fully intend, if any access proposal is accepted, to make sure that it does so only in the context of making sure that there's adequate provision of services throughout Alberta and that the public system stays strong.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the minister has said that if all else fails, she could order doctors to go to rural communities for, quote, brief periods, how are rural Albertans supposed to receive consistent, high-quality care if doctors are only in the community for brief periods?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have never at any time stated that I would order doctors to do anything. We indicated in the context of accepting an access proposal that we could require doctors to provide services in other places, but it would be a proposal where there would have to be mutual agreement from the physicians in question, the health authority, and it would have to be evaluated by Health and Wellness no doubt in the context of a process that included specific issues as raised by the nurses, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the AMA, and others. So looking at what might conclude a successful access proposal, we would evaluate on the basis of all these things and ask them to provide us with some type of proposal that would be innovative and make sure that in rural Alberta we were filling those spaces that had to be filled.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this minister finally admit the obvious, that the third way is going to make it harder to attract doctors to rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that makes a number of assumptions about a policy that is one of 10 in our book that talks about choice and access. The intention of our policy framework is to increase access. Increasing access is fundamental to the success of the policy – it's done through a number of measures – and ensuring that we move towards as much sustainability as possible not only in the larger urban authorities but in rural Alberta as well. You should be pleased to know that when we visited parts of rural Alberta, many of them are embracing with some enthusiasm some of the options that

they believe will ultimately increase the number of physicians that will work in our system.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are now just 11 days left in this government's rush-job consultations on the third way. Earlier this month the Minister of Health and Wellness made much of her consultations in Bonnyville and St. Paul. The fact is that these so-called consultations were little more than closed door, private meetings. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how many members of the public in total were involved in the consultations in Bonnyville and St. Paul?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to table that information. In Calgary we met with several on Saturday that were much expanded groups and various numbers, but we can table that exact information. The media were present at the conclusion and were able to talk to a number of the presenters. But as I've told this House before, in these consultations many people want private meetings, want to share private information. That does not prevent them in any way from sharing any of their information with the public. We've invited them all to have a proposal available for the media. Should they not wish to share it during the consultation with me, they can share it following. I believe that in Calgary we had about eight people from the media.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: does this minister believe that this kind of consultation, that left out the general public and much of the medical community in St. Paul, can really be considered complete?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this government has had a very strong track record of consulting with Albertans. If you looked at the consultations on health from the Mazankowski report, A Framework for Reform, to the type of information we've been making available in various forms through policies, our Getting on with Better Health Care, that was released last summer, a document that various individuals have followed up on and given us response to, several types of information that have gone either through the public arena or through MLAs for consulting, we have got a lot of information out there. This particular policy framework is available in all the libraries. We've had responses to it. We've had about 2,800 written and phone responses. We've had numerous consultations. I can table those results to date. Probably tomorrow would be the best time for those results to date, and I'll continue to provide them.

I'd like to just make one comment, Mr. Speaker, to conclude. Can I just say that the people that have consulted with me have been anything but cynical about the process. They very much appreciated that we have had a dialogue.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why didn't this minister just do the right thing and host a public town hall meeting in St. Paul and Bonnyville? Why didn't you do it?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have been providing those stakeholders,

first and foremost, the opportunity. We wanted to make sure that the various municipal leaders who are responsible for preventive social services through family and community supports, that the seniors groups that might not otherwise have a chance get their voices heard, that the health care providers have an opportunity, the regional health boards. The community health councils have an invitation to come and bring forward their information. First and foremost, we were dealing with stakeholders who are part of the provision of health care services and those people that support health care systems in all of the regions. Those were the ones that we were targeting in each of the regions that we have met with thus far.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Lottery Grant to Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity

Mr. Tougas: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, \$18,760 can buy you a lot of luxury furniture, as the members of the Alpha Gamma Delta fraternity house have found out. That's how much they received from the community initiatives program, a lottery-funded initiative which was intended for projects that, quote, are of benefit to the general public, unquote. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us how \$1,400 sofas, \$1,500 worth of leather bar stools, and a \$600 ottoman for a frat house could be considered of benefit to the general public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alpha Gamma Delta is a registered not-for-profit association. The application that they made was fully in order. They met all the criteria for that application and for that grant.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: since CIP guidelines allow a maximum of \$10,000 in nonmatching funds and initially that's all Alpha Gamma Delta asked for, why did they receive more than \$18,000?

Mr. Graydon: There are provisions that on some occasions the matching component can be waived, and that was done in this case. This is not the first and only case where the matching component has been waived. They had raised funds during the year, but they had already committed those funds to I believe juvenile diabetes. Instead of taking money back from that program, that was allowed.

Mr. Tougas: Will the minister investigate this grant to find out why it went through so quickly and why so many rules were violated?

Mr. Graydon: No.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Private Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A private health insurance scheme is already promoting faster service for heart bypass, prostate, cataract, and joint replacement surgeries. Acure Health Insurance website states that "medical access insurance will take you out of the line and arrange to expedite your diagnosis and treatment in the [U.S.], or in Canada when services are available." Acure and dozens of other private investors are already drooling over the third way. They can hardly wait. My first question is to the

Premier. Will the Premier tell all Albertans what Acure already knows, that the third way will allow wealthy people to get lifesaving surgery before low- and middle-income Albertans?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, this company offers insurance for people that wish to avail themselves of medical services that exist elsewhere, out of the province. Right now, as the hon. member knows, it is prohibited under the Canada Health Act to offer a similar service in Canada. That's what we're wrestling with right now, and that's what the public consultation process is all about. But it's been happening for years and years that people who can't get access to medical services to alleviate pain and suffering here will go to the United States or to the United Kingdom or to India or to other jurisdictions that offer the alternative to obtain medical relief.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the public of Alberta wants to know what the government has in mind and they're tired of the smoke and mirrors of this government, will the Premier now tell the people of Alberta whether or not under the third way people will be able to jump the queue for lifesaving surgeries such as a heart bypass?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond in detail. I don't know, because I'm not a physician, of the urgency and the urgent nature of the bypass operations to which the hon. member refers, but I can tell you that if he has a heart attack right now, an ambulance will be called, he will be taken to the hospital, and he will be treated under the publicly funded system.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier continuing to refuse a direct question; that is, whether or not under the third way, his government's proposed policy, people will be able to get ahead of the line by paying more for surgeries like bypass surgery, cataract surgery, prostate surgery, and a long list of other surgeries?

Mr. Klein: I don't know about cataracts, Mr. Speaker, because cataract surgeries – and I don't know if the hon. member has had a cataract surgery by a private clinic.

Mr. Mason: No. I can see you clearly.

Mr. Klein: He wears glasses, Mr. Speaker, so I don't know how clearly he can see.

Mr. Speaker, this is hard to define because the urgency of a particular procedure has to be defined by a physician, who's in the best position to know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Marlborough Elementary School

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents in my constituency were shocked to learn that their community school needs were again being shuffled aside and ignored. These honest and hard-working Alberta families are being confronted . . . [interjections] This is a very important issue, hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, these honest and hard-working Alberta families are being confronted with the ongoing reality of five to 10-year-old students being bused 40 minutes away, sometimes to different

schools than other siblings, just to go to school. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Since the school was closed to students last Wednesday, what has the minister or his department done to ensure that renovations or repairs to the Marlborough elementary school are being done immediately?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I did contact officials with the Calgary public board. They apprised me of what occurred on Thursday night when 400 parents met, and they told me that they had a very good meeting. They presented what the facts of the case were, and the facts simply are that about seven or eight years ago, I think it was, a major renovation was done to 30 per cent of the roof there. They brought in some steel reinforcements, some steel cladding, as they call it. That alleviated part of the problem, and things seemed to be okay. Then very recently they found out that there might be other concerns, so they did the preventative thing: they closed the school down. They've made arrangements for all the children to be bused to neighbouring schools while they sort out what the problems exactly are and engage a contractor to look more deeply into this. We need to respect their decision for having done this very, very efficiently.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Minister of Education: will the minister undertake to have a meaningful discussion with parents at Marlborough school and discuss the future of the school as soon as possible?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on the future of the school per se. That would be up to the Calgary public board to comment on. I think that a very meaningful consultation occurred last Thursday between locally elected officials and other administrators with Calgary public and the 400 parents. I might just add that, as a result of all of that, the Calgary public board worked very, very hard with their officials to move all of the furniture, to move all of the desks, to move all of the school books, the computers, and everything else over this past weekend so that the two receiving schools, Mayland and Greenview, as I recall, were ready to receive the first busload of students from Marlborough as early as I think this morning. That's the truth of the matter. So they've done a pretty good job of looking after that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that the department of infrastructure was aware of this issue of the structural integrity of this building since September, why hasn't his department done anything to ensure a safe working and learning environment for the staff and the students at Marlborough elementary school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What occurred back in actually late October, early November is that we received a notification from the Calgary public school board that there was a leak in the roof. Subsequently what happened is that we gave the Calgary public school district a \$25,000 grant to do an engineering study to determine, quite simply, if the school was safe or not. To this point in time we have not seen the study despite repeated attempts to gain the contents of that study back to us.

An interesting point on this as well, Mr. Speaker, is that the roof

is actually made of a thing called Stramit board, which is a different type of roof, and it subsequently has not turned out that well. This is the only school in Calgary that has that type of roof. Therefore, we're anticipating a speedy, speedy cure to this particular issue once we get the engineering report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Major Projects in the Industrial Heartland

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many concerned residents of the industrial heartland in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties have come forth with serious concerns about the unbalanced development in their area. They're concerned about the air they breathe, the water they drink, their rural way of life, and agriculture. Hundreds of people in the region believe that this government has failed to do its job in planning and consulting on heavy oil upgraders added to massive industrial sites already present, and now they're demanding answers. My first question to the Premier: can the Premier explain why this government continues to approve major developments without a provincial land-use plan to guide the process and balance the interests of industry with those of landowners, agriculture, and the environment?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the Liberals held a news conference this morning to reflect the concerns of Sturgeon county residents about a proposed – I underline “proposed” – plan for an oil upgrader in their region. It's my understanding that the companies or company involved has yet to seek regulatory approval for construction of the oil upgrader. Further, this is a matter that has to be adjudicated by the county as well as by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. I understand as well that the project will have to undergo an environmental impact assessment. I'll have the hon. minister respond in more detail to that.

The Speaker: Perhaps we can get to that as a supplementary.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: given the large number of Albertans who claim that they have not been fairly and appropriately consulted, can the minister inform the Legislature as to what evidence he has that a meaningful public consultation has occurred?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I too will have the Minister of Environment respond because both of our departments are involved in this.

With all of these projects that have come forward, first off, the counties involved have done quite extensive work on zoning those lands for heavy industrial use. That was some of the first long-term planning kind of work done by those counties, specifically identifying that area for large, heavy industrial use. The last project to come through went through a very extensive environmental impact assessment. It's gone through the Energy and Utilities Board. It goes through all of those kinds of requirements to ensure that the impacts of land, air, and water are preserved so that the safety and security of the people in the area are secured.

2:00

The Speaker: I suspect that the next one is to the Minister of Environment, but that's guessing. The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry that I'm so predictable.

To the Minister of Environment: given the serious cumulative

environmental impact already in the industrial heartland area and three more heavy oil upgraders proposed, will he commit in the interests of public and environmental health to a cumulative environmental impact assessment before development decisions?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to all Albertans that, first of all, we have a very, very public consultation process when it comes to perhaps the strictest of EIAs that we do in this province. I might also say that for the approval that was carried out in 2003 by BA Energy, in fact there were five steps that were taken for public consultation in terms of preconsultation, during the process, during the approval, as well as the terms of reference. In all of those situations, such as the important things that the member has talked about in terms of balance of the air, water, and integrated land management, the public had an opportunity to present. Not only that, but I could give you the example of the Fort Air Partnership, that Alberta Environment works closely with, which is in part 5 of the five-step process. Something we continue to commit to is working with all of the stakeholders because there is nothing more important than the air and the water and the integrated land that you speak of. Getting that balance right and the cumulative impact of getting that balance right is exactly what Alberta Environment is committing to and is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Highway 19

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 19 is located between Nisku on highway 2 and the town of Devon in my constituency. It is approximately 10 kilometres long and serves as an extremely busy truck bypass around Edmonton to western and northern Alberta. It is also a commuter route for thousands of residents of the town of Devon and surrounding area who work in Edmonton, Nisku, or the international airport. This roadway is overdue for twinning. Unfortunately, two residents of Devon were killed in separate accidents in the last two weeks. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. In order to improve the safety and efficiency of this roadway, when can we expect it to be twinned?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I certainly take great condolences with the hon. member on the passing of two of his constituents.

We are presently in the process of finishing off the functional plan for that particular twinning of the road. We're in the process of acquiring the right-of-way, which has not fully been done yet, to ensure that that road is twinned.

I will say one thing to the hon. member, and that is that the Anthony Henday is going to be finished this fall, and that will allow a straight access from highway 2 right through to highway 16. So one of the things that we're hoping will occur is that truck traffic will utilize the Anthony Henday to go from highway 2 to highway 16 as opposed to highway 19. Unfortunately, that doesn't completely answer the question, but the functional plan is being done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. How can we get this moved up in priority?

Dr. Oberg: Well, one of the big issues, Mr. Speaker, has nothing to do with money. It has nothing to do with time. It has nothing to do

with the priority list. Quite simply, what it has to deal with is how to accumulate the land that is needed for this, and there are numerous, numerous landholders along highway 19. There are roughly, as the hon. member mentioned, 10 kilometres of road that have various different landholders. We're currently in the process of negotiating this land and attempting to get the right-of-way so that we can twin it, but that at times can be quite an arduous process.

Mr. Rogers: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: due to the urgency will he consider expropriation if necessary to acquire these rights-of-way?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, expropriation is actually very much a final step. It's a last attempt in order to get the land. We would much sooner attempt to deal with the landowners through good negotiation, through coming to an agreement, so that everyone walks away with a win-win scenario. There are some very difficult lands, as the hon. member knows, along that route – for example, part of a church – and the whole idea of expropriating some of these things is going to be very, very difficult. We would much sooner have an amicable settlement to this. We would much sooner have an amicable settlement when it comes to the negotiation, so we are going to negotiate. The expropriation process is certainly, certainly a last step, a last-ditch effort.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Medical Residents' Debt Load

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I asked the Minister of Advanced Education why medical residents, who are still students, are required to begin paying back their student loans, and he, describing it as a very good question, admitted, "That is an issue that we do need to work on." Well, like the tuition policy, there is something else from the minister's department that isn't ready yet. To the minister: with the average student debt load of residents at \$112,000 and rising with differential tuition, will he at least accredit the residency program for interest relief, like Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and Quebec have done?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think that's a very good suggestion. We're working through a number of good suggestions with respect to student loans, student finance, student affordability policy. We will continue to work until we get the best answer, not the most immediate answer. That's what we're trying to do: deal with the issue of student finance and affordability of education in a comprehensive way. I believe that not only the individuals who the hon. member just raised but all students will look forward to a good and comprehensive result.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister aware that servicing that debt with interest that no other postgraduate student is required to pay takes up to half a medical resident's take-home pay?

Mr. Mason: Their average debt is more than you've raised for your leadership race.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: I'm not sure quite how the leader of the third party

would know how much. Perhaps this is evidence of the quality of his research.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very important issue, and it's not one that we deal with lightly. In fact, I've got a lot of sympathy. We're putting a lot of effort into how we deal appropriately with the financing of students, with the affordability policy, and how we ensure that students do get an interest break when they're not earning at a level necessary to pay back their loans. Hopefully, by the time we get through this process and come out with an affordability policy, we'll have a whole new structure which will make sure that every student knows that finances will not be a barrier to getting an education, that they'll be able to graduate with an appropriate level of debt, and they will have an appropriate way to pay it back out of the income that they can expect to receive from employment in their area or their profession.

I know that it's frustrating for people to wait for processes to happen. I know that this particular organization has been very, very patient and very, very helpful in the process, and there will be a new affordability policy in place soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the health minister: is it just a coincidence, or did the minister plan to make differential tuition and crippling debt add up to a powerful incentive for doctors to want to moonlight in private, commercialized medicine?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member attributes motives to me which are not worthy.

I would like to say that we have had a very thorough review today, an opportunity that was unparalleled, with the student residents who came in and spoke to me for over an hour, talking about a number of their issues, including tuition, including the kinds of aspirations they have to serve Albertans, to provide the best care possible. I have been impressed by their due diligence. Though I've already introduced them, Mr. Speaker, at some point I'd beg your indulgence to do that again to be able to highlight that this government values their students, values the residents. Some of the initiatives that I think will be evident in this year's budget will support that contention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Child Pornography Investigation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the actions of a brave woman in Edmonton who overheard a disturbing conversation between two children and reported it to the authorities and thanks to the authorities in Edmonton, the Attorney General of the United States was able to announce the takedown of a large, highly organized international child porn ring. This child porn ring swapped pictures and live video of children being sexually abused and raped. The U.S. Attorney General stated that these images that were sent around the world are the worst imaginable form of child pornography. My first two questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What involvement did police in Alberta have in this investigation?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to publicly acknowledge the outstanding work that the Edmonton

Police Service did in this investigation as well as the outstanding investigative work of Detective Randy Wickens.

The origins of this particular case actually came to light last May, in 2005, when an arrest was made here in the city of Edmonton. Upon investigation the investigators realized the tentacles of this investigation and the far-reaching effects it had throughout the world. These investigators are on the front line. They are trained and highly skilled in investigations regarding this type of technical experience that they need. So last week's announcement in Chicago was really a benefit to all of us throughout the law enforcement community, across Canada as well as around the world, and the fact that there are no boundaries to this type of technical advance.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what is this government doing to stop those who would use the Internet to attack one of the most vulnerable segments of our society, our children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to ensuring the safety of all Albertans, whether they're on our highways, in our homes, or online. Last year we announced that \$1.7 million would be provided to an ICE unit, an integrated child exploitation unit: an integrated team of officers from the RCMP, from the Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service, the Medicine Hat and Lethbridge police services as well working together with 21 officers throughout the province as one team in different locations, with two hubs, Calgary and Edmonton. Information is being shared from our police services, amongst each other, with each other, again focusing on the safety of our children in the province and focusing on the future effects of these types of investigations. This province is committed and will continue to be committed to fighting this type of crime in the future.

Mrs. Jablonski: My last question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell me what his department is doing to ensure that the people who commit these heinous crimes are being prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite right. Child exploitation is a sickening crime, and here in Alberta we recognized that something special needed to be done. In February of 2003 we assigned a special prosecutor to deal with this form of crime. His name is Steve Bilodeau, and he was front and centre in Chicago last week. Mr. Bilodeau was able to work with the police in this case to arrange for search warrants, precharge legal advice, undercover police investigation techniques, and the like in order to ensure that there was this successful bust throughout North America and the world.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we have 91 outstanding child pornography cases before the courts here in Alberta. The good news is that Mr. Bilodeau and his team have over a 90 per cent success rate in prosecution of those crimes. I'm also pleased to say that, like the Solicitor General, we intend to enhance our service in this area, and later this year we hope to be able to announce that additional prosecutorial resources will be applied.

Thank you.

Sustainability of Caribou Population

Mr. Bonko: If the Alberta government is serious about protecting

caribou and talked about keeping caribou on the landscape, what we really need is a landscape that can keep the caribou, period. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. After three failed attempts for a land-use framework, when will the government develop a land-use strategy?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very, very hard on putting down the criteria for a land-use framework. It was announced in the Speech from the Throne 2005 and was further added onto this Speech from the Throne in 2006. In between that year what we have done is we've set up a sustainable resource environmental management office under Sustainable Resource Development that includes the co-operation of seven departments across this government that are concerned about a provincial land-use framework and that deal with land use on a day-to-day basis. We will continue to go out and consult with Albertans this spring, and this fall we'll have a round-table that will deal with discussions from the valued discussions that we have this spring that will come up with recommendations on a provincial land-use strategy for the next 50 years in this province.

Mr. Bonko: How can this government justify a wolf cull, which is really a last-ditch effort that kills one species to save another, all because of a lack of government policy?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that is quite the opposite. We do have a policy for dealing with threatened species in this province, and the caribou has been designated as a threatened species in this province. It's about management. When you have a natural predator that is going out and eating the young caribou that will be born this spring, you have to manage that. Sustainable Resource Development has had a very, very good history in balancing and making sure that proper management of the resource is taking place so that the wildlife that are threatened can definitely be preserved for the future. It's part of our recovery plan, and we're staying with that recovery plan. For him to say that there is absolutely no plan is absolutely wrong.

Mr. Bonko: My last question, to the Minister of Community Development then: what collaboration is this ministry undergoing with other government ministries to ensure that the caribou do have a permanent home on Alberta's landscape?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, that I'm aware of, there are no caribou within our provincial parks. To the extent that there are, we do cooperate with the minister responsible for Environment and the minister responsible for sustainable resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Tuition Fees for Postsecondary Education

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province has the lowest percentage of students from our high schools going on to postsecondary education, and this province also has some of the highest tuition fees. The government claims that it wants to make postsecondary education both affordable and accessible to more young Albertans. At the same time, Alberta's postsecondary institutions do need a funding formula that encourages significant enrolment growth and improvements in teaching and learning conditions. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Will the minister categorically rule out the inflation plus 3.5

per cent formula for tuition increase policy recommended by the Alberta university presidents, because doing so will further worsen affordability of public postsecondary education in this province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a Legislature which has been consumed by the discussion of how you appropriately consult, the suggestion that one should rule out ideas that are brought forward in a consultation process before the process has been finished would seem to be out of bounds. What we have is A Learning Alberta process, which started last year. We now have a subcommittee in which both universities and students as well as all sorts of other players within the postsecondary system are participating to talk about an affordability policy and in that context to talk about how tuition fits into it. In that context, I hope they're discussing a wide range of alternatives. So, no, I can't rule out one alternative that someone has put forward as part of that process, but I can say this. It is a proposal that the four presidents put on the table for discussion purposes, and it appears to have had the effect of enlivening the discussion. That's a wonderful thing.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if the minister actually believes in improving not impeding affordability, why doesn't he adopt the tuition fee policy recommended by the coalition of Alberta university students that would set tuition at 1999-2000 levels and thereafter increase tuition at the CPI minus 1 per cent rate?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, that just shows how fortunate it is that we do not have a government that deals with things on a one-off basis. If you implemented piece by piece a policy like that, what would happen is you would then deal with the whole question that was in the preamble to this member's question, and that is: how do you make sure that there's access for every Albertan who wants to get an education? How do you make sure that there are spaces? How do you allocate the resources to make sure that you have access, quality, and affordability?

It's not about one piece, about rolling tuition back. It's not about rolling tuition back to 1999 levels or 1995 levels or anything else. It's about the whole package. So that suggestion along with the suggestion from the university presidents need to be on the table and need to be discussed in the whole context of the complete affordability policy and a tuition policy and in the context of how we make sure that there's access for every Albertan who wants to learn.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has been at it for almost a year now. Given that the minister has failed either to endorse the CAUS proposal or to categorically reject the university presidents' proposal, what exactly is his position on developing a tuition fee policy to achieve affordability and a funding formula to achieve accessibility?

Mr. Hancock: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that hon. member would be the first one to cry foul if I hired a whole group of people or invited a whole group of people in to discuss a policy and then put my preferences on the table before their preferences had been fully discussed. I'm not going to do it now. He wouldn't agree with it in any other context of consultation. What we have is a large committee of people right across the postsecondary system looking at broad issues of tuition and affordability, how finances can be removed as a barrier to any student getting an education, and we're going to look

at the broad context of that. Certainly, I have some viewpoints as to what I think ought to be done, but I'm interested in informing myself and government with the full breadth of knowledge and interest from not only students . . .

Dr. Pannu: Talk is cheap.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member is saying, "Talk is cheap," so he should quit talking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the North American free trade agreement panel ruled that the United States improperly assessed countervailing duties on softwood lumber imports from Canada. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Does this ruling end the softwood lumber dispute?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the NAFTA panel ruled that Canadian lumber is not subsidized, and it's something that we knew right along. Now, will the ruling end the dispute? No. The United States government has till April to decide whether they're going to appeal. They have more or less indicated that they will appeal, and the appeal process will take at least another several months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplementary question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Does this decision mean relief for Alberta's softwood lumber producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The hon. minister that answered the first question noted that the NAFTA decision is good news for Canada, and of course in Alberta it would be good news for us, hoping that the panel and the government accepts that decision. Our government and the industry have worked very, very hard to make sure that the trade panel based its decisions on accurate information about forestry practices in Alberta, and we will continue to work hard, as we have in the previous years, including consultation with Alberta's forestry industry, to make sure that we move this dispute forward so that it will provide the kind of relief that the Alberta industry wants and the Alberta industry thinks that they expect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Fort McMurray Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is starving our golden goose, Fort McMurray. The mayor and councillors are doing their best to accommodate the increased demand on services by borrowing to their limit and going as far as humanely possible, to the point of permitting a work camp to be set up in the heart of the city. Fort McMurray is caught in the vice of an economic boom and a government-forced infrastructure depression. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Given that Fort McMurray is the economic

driver of this province, why has your government abandoned the citizens of Fort Mac?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing – nothing – could be further from the truth. I've got to tell you that Fort McMurray, the Wood Buffalo area, has a very aggressive MLA, who brings all of their concerns to this building and to our caucus and, differently than some, looks to working on a solution for the long term.

Mr. Speaker, although I will be the first to say the great amount of economic activity that Fort McMurray brings to this province, there is also a very significant commitment from this government to that region as recent as an announcement of the beginning of the twinning of the highway to Fort McMurray, the work that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is doing with that municipality on achieving their concerns around water and water treatment.

Mr. Speaker, the Fort McMurray story is a wonderful Alberta story. We are proud of what's happening there, and we're going to do everything that we can to work with that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that Fort Mac's waste treatment plant, hospital, schools, and recreation complex can't keep up with the rapid growth, will this minister provide financial relief in the form of grants rather than forcing the municipality further into debt through having to pay back interest-free loans?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are processes to deal with all of the things that the hon. member has brought forward. As I indicated in my earlier answer, the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working very closely with that municipality, the minister of infrastructure is working very closely with that municipality, the Minister of Energy is working very closely with all of the players in that municipality, and again – I will repeat one more time – they have a very capable, very competent MLA, that brings those concerns to us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My third and final question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Will the minister push her government to release not only the land but provide subsidized funding for the sewers and roads necessary to support affordable housing in Fort McMurray?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to this issue because we do have land, as you know, that's available to the community of Fort McMurray. Right now we have a request for proposal, a second one going out to the community. It will be complete here within about the next 20 to 30 days, and a part of that is deep infrastructure needs. But I have found that with the first proposal that we did with parcel D, it is the developer that's coming forward as part of the initiative when they do put in a number of alternatives that they have available, and one of those is for the deep infrastructure needs. So that is something that is coming from the proponents for the lands.

Having said that, I know that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation may want to comment on the infrastructure needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ethics and Accuracy in Research

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It can be argued that our high standard of living is due to the scientific and emerging research of the past. For us to continue to advance as a society, it's imperative that research results be reliable and trustworthy. I understand that two federal agencies, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, have uncovered problems associated with the accuracy of research and use of funding dollars that they receive in Canada. My question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What steps are being taken in Alberta to ensure that research in Alberta is protected from unethical or inaccurate research?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, let me say from the first part that it is unfortunate when the activities of a few can do so much damage to the reputation of so many great minds and great researchers not only in Alberta but across Canada. With this story we did a review of all of the research activities that have been happening in this province, and we have not found any evidence of any research funding from the province or our related entities, such as the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, that have been involved in any of these particular transactions.

Mr. Speaker, the one researcher from the U of A that was publicly mentioned in this particular article was dealt with actually in 2003. The University of Alberta dealt very quickly and appropriately with that particular individual.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My one and only supplemental to the same minister: in cases where unethical behaviour has been found, what recourse is available?

2:30

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, there are really two elements of accountability that are in place when you look at a research grant in particular. The first would be, of course, the scientific process whereby applications have to go through a peer review process to make sure that they meet the standards and the objectives that are necessary before proceeding with research, and that's all vetted through people that understand the directions of the research, to make sure that that all makes sense.

The second element, of course, would have to do with the expenditure of money. To that degree, we sign grant agreements with the universities, which put into place the accountability mechanisms for monitoring the funds that are expended. In the event there would be any indiscretion, the matter there would be between the university and the researcher, and we would immediately ask the university for our funds to be returned to us, and they would then be expected to deal with the matter of the indiscretion at their level, which they have in the past always shown the willingness to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we had 80 questions and answers in a 50-minute question period.

In a few seconds from now I'm going to ask if the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can revert to Introduction of Guests, but prior to that our historical vignette of the day.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Three major plebiscites, one on electrification and two concerning daylight savings time, were voted on province-wide

in conjunction with provincial general elections in 1948, 1967, and 1971. On August 17, 1948, the plebiscite subject was electrification, and 139,991 Albertans, or 50.017 per cent, voted yes to, "Are you in favour of the generation and distribution of electricity being continued by the power companies?" and 139,840, or 49.973 per cent, of the people of Alberta voted yes to the question, "Are you in favour of the generation and distribution of electricity being made a publicly owned utility administered by the Alberta Government Power Commission?"

On May 27, 1967, 236,555 Albertans, or 48.75 per cent of the citizens, voted for the question, "Do you favour province-wide daylight savings time?" and 248,680, or 51.25 per cent, voted against the question. The question, "Do you favour province-wide daylight savings time?" was again asked on August 31, 1971, and 386,846, or 61.4 per cent, of Albertans voted yes, and 242,431, or 38.53 per cent, voted against.

As a separate vote a province-wide liquor plebiscite was conducted on October 30, 1957, on the question, "Do you approve additional types of outlets for the sale of beer, wine, and spiritous liquor subject to a local vote?" and 171,786, or 63.9 per cent, voted in favour, and 96,961, or 36.1 per cent, voted against. The same plebiscite also asked the question, "Should mixed drinking be allowed in beer parlours in Edmonton and Calgary and the surrounding areas?" and 99,150, or 78.5 per cent, voted in favour of mixed drinking, while 27,203, or 21.5 per cent, voted against.

Since 1971 no province-wide plebiscites have been held in Alberta.

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What an honour today to introduce the people you're most likely to meet first if you attend a clinical or teaching hospital, and those are the attending resident physicians, who are completing between two and seven years of their practicum in order to become fully qualified as professional doctors. Members of PARA, the Professional Association of Residents, are with us today in the Legislature. They are spending time today meeting with a variety of MLAs and planning with MLAs and staff to host a reception later. They are remarkably bright, and thank God they're the ones that are coming up to look after us as we age. They were very astute in raising issues today about their tuition and also the kinds of things that we should be considerate of in hoping to attract more residents and physicians to Alberta. I would invite them to please rise and all Members of this Legislative Assembly to celebrate such remarkable potential in these individuals.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Youth Forums

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Young Albertans are a vital part of our province and a human resource that we must protect and listen to as a government. Recently I discussed the Youth Secretariat, the youth networks, the Youth Advisory Panel, and the work that these groups do for our province. This afternoon I would like to share a little bit about Alberta youth forums.

Youth forums supported by Children's Services are geared towards empowerment and engagement of youth and are youth driven and organized. Through these forums youth are brought

together for a day or for a weekend and through these gatherings are able to discuss issues that affect all youth of Alberta.

During these youth events many topics are discussed. The usage and prevention of drugs and alcohol and tobacco addictions are also commonly debated. Some forums have discussed the issues of sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, as well as tattoos and piercing, racism, drinking and driving, violence in the family, and the homeless. The individuals who participate in these gatherings, through sharing their concerns and ideas for solutions, are helping to improve youth policies not just for the youth of their communities but for all of this province.

Mr. Speaker, 33 youth forums have been scheduled for 2005 to June 2006, ranging from large communities to small towns like Slave Lake and settlements like Buffalo Lake Métis settlement. These youth forums are a great way to identify key challenges facing youth and allow us to work with our youth to build on existing initiatives that affect them.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Association for Community Living

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the 50th anniversary of the Alberta Association for Community Living, and I will later table five copies of their just released book *Hear My Voice*.

Mr. Speaker, I challenge everyone in this House and those watching this telecast to read that book and not shed one tear. It is a story in their own words of people with developmental disabilities who were in institutionalized care; in other words, they were in the system. They tell of their survival and how the spirit can triumph with a little help. They were the vulnerable, they were the neglected, and they were the forgotten. It tells of how they regained their dignity, self-worth, and became contributing members of society by the very fact of their existence. Good legislation and hard-working families helped turn that around.

I draw the parallel to the vulnerable in our continuing care system. We know of the loss of dignity, self-worth, and lack of respectful treatment, the lack of accountability, and outdated standards, and even those standards have no mechanism for enforcement.

We fear human beings being perceived as without value in our overly commercial world. We hear Romeo Dallaire, Stephen Lewis, Jean Vanier, Bill Clinton, and Jimmy Carter speak from the global perspective of the need to overlay commercialism with humanity, so we are not alone on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Skating Championships in Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary is home to the world's greatest hockey team. The stars that the ice in the city of Calgary has become accustomed to are those of the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League. However, recently in Calgary sports fans have been and will be exposed to stars of a much different nature. The likes of Flames like Iginla and Kiprusoff have been replaced with other skating stars, such as Cindy Klassen and Jeffrey Buttle.

2:40

At this time I'd like to formally recognize the city of Calgary for hosting this past weekend's World Allround Speed Skating Championships as it also prepares to host the 2006 World Figure Skating Championships. The attendance at the Allround Speed Skating Championships at the Olympic Oval was outstanding last weekend as the skating stars showcased their fast-paced sport at its best to sold-out crowds.

Canadian star Cindy Klassen picked up right where she left off after the recent Olympic Games in Torino. Klassen swept all four of her races this weekend, completely blowing out the competition. Her performance was highlighted by posting near record times in the women's 1,500-metre and 5,000-metre races. In dramatic style she saved the best for last, though, as she posted a personal best in the women's 500 metre to win the event.

Up-and-coming male star Denny Morrison decided to make a name for himself as well. At only 20 years old Morrison set a Canadian men's record and nearly missed the world record in the 1,500-metre event, surpassing all expectations.

The past championships are definite indications that the future of Canadian sport is extremely bright. The upcoming week will be no different. There is no doubt that it will be an amazing figure skating competition as well, as all the top figure skaters from around the world have gathered in Calgary this week to take a shot at the world skating title.

The province should be proud of the city of Calgary for earning the right to host these events. Calgary has always done a tremendous job of displaying all that it has to offer to those who travel to our province for occasions such as these.

I'd like to wish all the competitors the best of luck throughout this week's championships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed Team Thomas World Junior Curling Champions

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and thank the members of the Alberta 2005 Centennial History Society and 34 authors who collaborated to produce a two-volume book titled *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed*. The book, a project supported by the centennial legacies program, was initiated in 1989 and had its launch at Grande Prairie Regional College on Friday, March 17. Society president and co-author Dr. Jaroslav Petryshyn was joined at the launch by three other authors, editor-in-chief Dr. Michael Payne, Brian Calliou, and Patricia Myers, all contributors, to unveil this remarkable history covering 12,000 years in Alberta. The book will be presented to all libraries, schools, and postsecondary institutions in the province. Truly, a lasting legacy of our centennial celebrations.

I would be remiss if I stood here and had an opportunity and did not tell you and all of my colleagues that Grande Prairie is now the home of the world junior curling champions. The Charley Thomas rink, Mr. Speaker, from Grande Prairie, brought home the gold. Again, the city of Grande Prairie, the province of Alberta, and Canada are proud of their accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: With the World Figure Skating Championships going on in Calgary and the world curling championships, the chair has to ask the question: why are we here today?

Multiple Sclerosis Society

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to attend a Multiple Sclerosis of Alberta information evening, and for that I would like to thank my old high school friend Joan Ozirny for the invitation. At this information session one of the problems was the problem of raising awareness of MS. I want to take this moment to do my little part in raising awareness amongst my colleagues here today of the MS Society and the work they do on behalf of the people who suffer through this illness.

The Alberta division is located in Edmonton and was founded in 1981. The division is made up of 17 chapters, which provide services to people affected with MS and living within the boundaries. One of these chapters is in Lloydminster, Mr. Speaker.

Multiple sclerosis, or MS, is a disease of the central nervous system that affects 1 in 300 people. In Alberta approximately 10,000 are living with MS. MS is the most common neurological disease in Canada affecting young adults. It is usually diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40 but can occur in children or adults. Women are twice as likely to develop MS as men. Alberta has one of the highest rates of occurrence of MS anywhere in the world.

Symptoms may include vision problems, numbness or tingling sensation, loss of balance, extreme fatigue, short-term memory or cognitive difficulties, even paralysis. As yet there is no cure for MS, but drug therapy can reduce the frequency and severity of the MS attacks, allowing many people with MS to live normal or near normal lives.

Fundraising is another issue facing this society. The Alberta division and chapters organize and sponsor a number of fundraising events. However, four stand out as attracting the largest number of participants: the Super Cities Walk for MS, the Rona MS Bike Tour, the readathon program, and the carnation campaign. Together these annual events raise over 3 and a half million dollars for MS research and client services in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, their motto is: don't talk about us without us. I want to commend all the volunteers and members of the MS Society as they work to find a cure, raise awareness, and work to enable people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Public Health Care

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-tiered medicine will not work as promised here in Alberta. The government are creating more problems than they are solving with the introduction of the third way. There is another way to the third way: a bold new government that believes in one health care system for everyone, not the two-tiered, Americanized system proposed by this tired old government. Public health care is sustainable; the Progressive Conservative government is not.

Canadians spend less than 10 per cent of their GDP on health care while Americans spend 15 per cent. Private health care is more expensive than public health care. We will not save money, and in fact costs to individual Albertans and employers will increase significantly through the purchase of private health insurance. We need to remind those who demand a private, parallel system that Canada's publicly funded, single-payer health care system provides businesses here with a competitive advantage over American companies who must pay the high costs of private health insurance for their employees.

How many times have we heard this government claim that health care spending is out of control? Instead of the 10 per cent annual increase in spending that's claimed by this government, health care spending increases in real dollars since 1992 have been very modest, averaging only 1.6 per cent a year between 1992 and 2004. The government uses misleading numbers, not controlled for population growth or inflation, from a few high-growth years that followed deep cuts to make its spending figures artificially high.

This government is out of control, not health care spending. We used to have faith in our public health care system. Now we feel insecurity because the government continues to distort the truth.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we should never forget that universal access to comparable levels of publicly funded health care services,

regardless of the ability to pay, is a fundamental element of Alberta's health care system. Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 93(2):

- (1) the petition of Royal Trust Corporation of Canada for the Burns Memorial Trust Amendment Act, 2006,
- (2) the petition of Thomas Wispinski on behalf of the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation for the Mary Immaculate Hospital of Mundare Act,
- (3) the petition of Edmonton Community Foundation for the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006, and
- (4) the petition of Calgary Olympic Development Association for the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2006.

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two documents on behalf of the leader of the NDP opposition. The first is a letter from Dr. John Wodak, of Sherwood Park. He calls the government's third-way experiment ill-defined and suggests that the venture be postponed for several years.

I'm also tabling an ad by Acure Health Corporation that was faxed to my constituency. It is promoting private health insurance for insured services. The insurance is underwritten by Western Financial Group, of which Mr. Jim Dinning is chairman of the board.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you have a tabling? Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling six copies of letters from Karen Caine, Shauna Vanderheide, T. Beyer, Roberta Wells, M. Beyer, and Kristine Hagen regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycares.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings on health care. The first is from Richard Clarke, asking for sustainable universal medical insurance for all Albertans; then from Michele Brown, commenting on her concerns with having doctors work in both systems; from Susan Williams, against having the government's third way; from Pat Anderson, with concerns about using a private insurance company, Aon, to design our health system; from P. Stein, again commenting on the capacity shortage of specialists and family doctors practising in Alberta, particularly rural.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, and I have the appropriate copies. The first is from a constituent. The constituent is saying that he wishes to express his feelings about the incident in the Legislative Assembly involving the page earlier this month: "We expect our leaders to set an example. We have a right to demand that they respect their political opponents and respect ideas with which they do not agree."

My second tabling, with the appropriate number of copies, is letters regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters are from Robbin Bowman, Kelly Ireland, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative Limited, Gail Clarke, Mellissa Kraft, and Denise Fenton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of six of the many letters we have received from concerned parents voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I am tabling today are from Tina Yanitski, Nicole Kerfont, Pamela Hollander, Jane Potenher-Neal, Carol Hanson, and Pam Kerrigan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would like to table five copies of the book *Hear My Voice*, which I referred to earlier. It's personal stories of persons with developmental disabilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise here today and table six letters from concerned Albertans regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare in our province. The letters I am tabling today are from Lori Folk, Pearl Frederick, Wendy, Christine Roguski, Andrea Hylak, and Maria Esperanza.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today with a number of tablings, the first being a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Rutherford, Sterling Rideout. He indicates that he read the government's health policy framework with interest but, unfortunately, found it full of "ambiguity, vagueness, platitudes and repetition." Having read the Alberta Liberal vision for the health of Albertans, he found the proposals "to the point, specific, informative, easy to understand."

Also, the requisite number of copies from Reg Roberts, who e-mailed the Alberta Connects website, had a response from the Minister of Health and Wellness. This is his response to that response, indicating that it doesn't match up with his experiences with the private health care system.

The Speaker: Do you have them all?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. R. Miller: I have more tablings, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, let's hurry up. We're two minutes now into this.

Mr. R. Miller: I'm trying to hurry, Mr. Speaker.

I also have six further letters regarding the provincial government's participation in the national daycare program. These are

from Earl Naddin,* Coreen Rieland, Denise Cote, Ms Iwaskow, Irene Jackson, and Kim Ganne.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Mr. Stuart Palace, who believes that the four teenagers alleged to have murdered a passenger on an ETS bus should have been denied bail.

The second tabling is from Marlene and Don Schwartz, also constituents of mine. This is a copy of their letter to the Premier, asking him to advise the Treasury Board to increase funding to persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, programs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got one document to table. It's a letter from Mary and Ed Gamble. The Gambles are strongly opposed to the Premier's third-way agenda in health care. Among many reasons that they give here for their opposition is that third-way health care in Alberta is about to make many Albertans second-class citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table six letters and appropriate copies regarding the provincial government's plan for the future of daycare. The letters I'm tabling today are from the Terra Association, Megan Shandro, N. Keith, Angie Wiebe, Kim Pender, Janelle Schultz.

Thank you.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment: pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2005 annual report.

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 last week on Thursday, March 16, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

[Motion carried]

Opted-out Physicians

Q1. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

What is the total number of physicians who have opted out of the Alberta health care insurance plan for each of the 2001 to 2005 fiscal years and from April 1, 2005, to February 22, 2006?

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close debate.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll look forward to getting the answers to that question.
Thank you.

[Written Question 1 carried]

Wild Rose Foundation Grants

Q3. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 how many grants awarded by the Wild Rose Foundation were subsequently investigated due to inadequate assurance that grant funds were used as intended?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development I'm pleased to respond and indicate that he, on behalf of government, is prepared to accept Written Question 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate or call the question.

[Written Question 3 carried]

3:00 Acheson Acclaim Sour Gas Blowout

Q4. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.
What was the total cost incurred by the government for its response to the Acheson Acclaim sour gas blowout that occurred on December 12, 2004, broken down by department?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're quite able and willing to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 4.

Mr. Taylor: Call the question.

[Written Question 4 carried]

Royalty Payments

Q5. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.
What is the exact dollar amount paid to each group or individual by the Ministry of Energy pertaining to its latest royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written

Question 5, we're not prepared to accept this question on the basis that the department is continuously reviewing royalties. In respect to individuals or groups it's primarily an internal review that we do, so it's just employees and staff. We also accumulate all kinds of reports that are done by various groups, both industry and other associations throughout the world, but those aren't individual amounts that we pay.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would think that with all those many, many, many reports and calculations gathering dust in the basement of the Ministry of Energy, the minister could lay his hands on, you know, a few exact amounts and share them with the House. So I'm rising to express my disappointment but not my surprise.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 5 lost]

Medical School Spaces

Q6. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2009-2010 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's medical schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of those questions which is very difficult to determine whether you should accept it or reject it because it asks for information which is not necessarily readily available. However, I'm going to recommend that the House accept the question, but I want to put a bit of a context around that.

Since the fall of 2000 there have been substantial increases in funded first-year physician seats in each of the two Alberta medical schools, 26 at the University of Alberta and 31 at the University of Calgary. The first graduates of those programs are now in residency training. That brings the spaces currently to 100 at the University of Calgary and 127 at the University of Alberta.

Now, the hon. member and the House will probably know that what we do each year with respect to growth in access places at postsecondary institutions is request each of the institutions to put forward their proposals for access growth. We then fund new spaces through the access growth fund, which we hope to rename the enrolment planning envelope so as to reduce any confusion between that and the access to the future fund. We also then talk with other departments. For example, with respect to health professions we would be sitting down and have been sitting down with the ministry of health to talk about where the greatest area of need is and how we can allocate resources appropriately. So the probable answer to the question, not to jump ahead of the game, is that that growth will be worked out in consultation with the postsecondary institutions involved and with the ministry of health and other stakeholders. The exact numbers will not be available until final budget dollars in each of those years are allocated.

I didn't want anyone to be under any illusions that by accepting this question or by rejecting the question, if that's what we recommend, we were trying to get around the information. It's really one of those situations where, while you have growth plans and you have growth aspirations, the question asks how many places will be in

place, and that answer is never certain until the funding dollars are actually appropriated to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have the hon. minister on my side on this one. I'll press my luck and call the question.

[Written Question 6 carried]

Nursing Program Spaces

Q7. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2009-2010 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's nursing programs, broken down by institution and type of program?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to suggest that the House accept this question on the same basis as they did the last one, on the understanding that there has been considerable growth in the capacity. Between 1999 and 2005, for example, increased enrolment capacity in nursing programs across Alberta is anticipated to result in 3,177 student seats across all years of programming in registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, and registered psychiatric nurse education programs in 2009-2010. It will translate into approximately 525 new RN bachelor graduates, 188 new RN diploma graduates, 67 new RN masters and PhD graduates, 285 new LPN graduates.

However, as I indicated before, while we plan growth, while we anticipate growth, while we work with the department of health in terms of where we need new health care professionals and we work with each of the institutions in terms of how they can expand capacity, we're working in a number of areas to ensure that access to enrolment growth is available not just in urban centres but distributed across the province and distributed into rural areas where appropriate. New programs are being proposed. For example, Grande Prairie college is hoping to offer an RN program in co-operation with the University of Alberta. Both Grande Prairie and Northern Lakes colleges have proposals with respect to, for example, cohorts of education for RNs and LPNs in High Level. So there are many things happening and many proposals in place, some of which will actually be the subject of funding in the budget, I hope, in a couple of days.

With respect to exact places that are going to happen down the road, all I can actually report are the ones that we've got funded and put in place, and then we'll have to speculate on the others, knowing that as enrolment growth funds become available, both health profession and occupation programs and other programs are allocated to institutions across the province.

[Written Question 7 carried]

Physician Recruitment

Q8. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted. How many physicians have been recruited to work in Alberta municipalities with populations equal to or less than 15,000 residents for the fiscal years 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, and April 1, 2005, to February 23, 2006?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government will accept this written question with an amendment. The hon. member was notified before 10 this morning of such an amendment. We would propose that the question be amended by striking out "How many physicians have been recruited to work in" and substituting "What was the percentage increase in the number of physicians working in."

The Speaker: On the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not keen on this amendment because it disguises the information that I was looking for. I wanted to see what the numbers were that had actually been recruited because it makes a difference to us if there was one, or 10, or 50, and a percentage increase doesn't give us that kind of specificity. You could say that it increased by 100 per cent over the previous year because you had zero and now you have one. It really doesn't give us any kind of an indication of what's going on in those areas. I would have preferred to have had the information that I had requested originally, but it appears that I'm not going to get it.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Shall I now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate, or just call the question?

Ms Blakeman: Question.

[Written Question 8 as amended carried]

3:10 Health Resource Centre Joint Replacements

Q9. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted. How many of the patients who had qualified to be put on the list for surgery in the Alberta hip and knee replacement project were unable to have their surgery completed at the Health Resource Centre in Calgary due to other health issues that these patients had that could not be treated by this particular private clinic during the fiscal year 2004-2005?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 9.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate?

[Written Question 9 carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given last Thursday, March 16, it is my pleasure to now move

that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1 through 19.

[Motion carried]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M1. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all submissions received by the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee between May 26, 2005, and February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 1 I will respond on behalf of the hon. Premier by saying that this particular motion will need to be rejected, and I'd like to basically provide a little bit of insight as to why. Number one, the information about the review that is requested here is in fact subject to our internal review process, and as such it's not able to be released. Secondly, I should probably mention that the interviews that were conducted were verbal, and they were as such conducted either in person or by telephone. Thirdly, the parties who were interviewed in this particular internal review did so with the expectation that their comments would not be publicly disseminated. So on that basis we are unable to respond in the affirmative, and we'll have to reject MR 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is sort of the idea of consultation behind closed doors again. I would remind the minister that this is taxpayers' money. I know that they see the Public Affairs Bureau as basically their little institution to run and put their spin on things, but I would remind them that it's not the Conservative Party, that this is actually taxpayers' money. These people are supposedly public servants paid for by the taxpayers of Alberta, and they have a lot of power. We've learned this over the years.

If there was to be a review, I would think we'd want an open public review. I see the member back there – I hope he gets into the debate. An open public review: obviously, they don't want to do this. Again, the reputation that this group has is just basically an arm of government, the spin doctors. That's totally inappropriate in a society where the taxpayers are picking up the bill. It now is basically a propaganda arm run directly out of the Premier's office. I was hoping that this review would say that that's what's happening because that's what all of us believe.

I can't understand, when we're dealing with something that's paid for by taxpayers' money in the public regime, that we can't have this information. Mr. Speaker, this makes absolutely no sense to me at all. I could understand it if it was the Conservative Party paying for this, even though they treat it as sort of their propaganda wing. We really would like to know who's saying what behind closed doors. Are we just going to continue in the same way? I hope the member from Calgary – I forget the name of the last debate – I'd certainly like to hear from that member in this particular debate. Maybe we'll get time in the second question that he can stand up and do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M2. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all minutes of the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee meetings from May 26, 2005, to February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 2, which effectively requests the provision of certain minutes from certain meetings, I need to inform all members present that there were no minutes kept at those particular meetings, so it would be impossible to provide something that does not exist. On that basis, I would indicate that we will have to reject this Motion for a Return 2.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I find it, to say the least, unusual, unbelievable that we'd have these meetings, and there would not be minutes of what was going on in the meetings. I mean, what kind of way to run the ship is that? Again, it's this whole idea of closed meetings, taxpayers' money, and the public not consulted, the public not supposed to know, not even people in the Legislature supposed to know what's going on.

Doesn't this talk about 100 years of democracy, the way this Public Affairs Bureau works, Mr. Speaker? I think that the government should be totally ashamed about this, totally ashamed that a Public Affairs Bureau is working out of the Premier's office as a propaganda spin for the government, and you say to the people in the Legislative Assembly here today and through us to the people of Alberta that we have no rights – we have no rights – to know what's going on. This is the government's take on it.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't surprise me. I can't say that I'm shocked. I'm appalled but not shocked because I expected this.

Mr. Hancock: Not shocked and appalled?

Mr. Martin: Well, the hon. House leader should be shocked and appalled that this is happening, Mr. Speaker.

I can't believe that this Public Affairs Bureau – while I may not have liked the Public Affairs Bureau before, I think it's just under this government, under this Premier, since it came under the Premier's purview, under his direction. Surely the government must see something wrong with this. If they don't, then maybe we do have a four-year dictatorship here in the province. Hopefully, the next time we celebrate 100 years of democracy, we can at least have a Legislature that has purview over some of this information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

Health Resource Centre and Network Health Inc.

M3. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, including e-mails, contracts, proposals, briefing notes, or memoranda, prepared for or by the government and/or the Calgary health region pertaining to the Health Resource Centre or Network Health Inc. between January 1, 2002, and February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 3. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Therefore, request for this information must be made under provision of the FOIP Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member to close the debate.

3:20

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, here we have a government and a minister that says that they want to consult with Albertans. They're moving ahead with the so-called third way, and the minister says, "We can consult, and we want everybody to know what's going on." One of the advocates for privatization is this particular group in Calgary moving ahead, pushing ahead, yet the minister says, "Well, it's their business review." Well, this is a very important part of the information that we should have and the people of Alberta should have because this is a group that's pushing ahead with privatization. What influence do they have with government?

Again, if the minister talks about the consultation process, that they're open, transparent. Well, we're not. This is information that the people of Alberta should have. I'm not naive enough to think that they're going to do this but, again, it's just typical, Mr. Speaker, absolutely typical of the way this government operates, behind closed doors.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee

M4. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report of the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau Review Committee announced on May 26, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion 4 I will indicate on behalf of government that we are going to be rejecting this particular motion, and I'd like to briefly explain the rationale for that conclusion. Within government management periodically reviews the structure and resourcing of departments to ensure that they are organized in a manner that would allow them to carry out their mandates as effectively as possible. These, in fact, are internal, management-type responsibilities, and they are not therefore deemed appropriate for public review. They are internal.

Now, the Public Affairs Bureau review process was no different than many other processes. In fact, the particular recommendations of an advisory committee that does get obtained for consideration by management in its review of the Public Affairs Bureau organizations were provided for internal purposes only. On that basis, Mr. Speaker, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 4.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate repeating myself, but here we go again. Here's a government agency, paid for by the taxpayers. The minister is right about one thing. He says that it's no

different from other reviews; it's an internal review. It seems like they think that the taxpayers' money is just for their use. Here we have a very powerful part of the government, the Public Affairs Bureau. Here we are in the Legislature of Alberta, the elected representatives, asking for information about a government department and being refused by the government, saying, "It's just for internal review, and it's no different from other reviews."

That's the problem, Mr. Speaker, to the deputy House leader. That's the problem. That's the way this government operates: behind closed doors. We're well aware of that, but this is something that should change. Surely this government should see the irony of this. Here is a Public Affairs Bureau that's probably the most important – directly out of the Premier's office, paid for by the taxpayers – and they think that it's their own internal right to control this information. We as legislators here have no rights. I mean, democracy. Yeah, real democracy in Alberta, Alberta style.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

CO₂ Injection

M5. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, briefing notes, backgrounders, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for storage purposes.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Environment I'd like to state that we would like to move an amendment to this motion. We certainly accept the intent of this motion. Copies have been distributed to everybody. We would accept an amendment saying, "copies of all studies, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for storage purposes." That does amend it by striking out "briefing notes" and "backgrounders."

Both briefing notes and backgrounders for the most part are provided very much on a confidential basis, internal for discussion for the minister's purposes. They also would potentially contain information that would be very proprietary to any individual company that would be involved, and that would be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

So we'd move to accept it on an amended basis.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to look at some of the information in regard to the decisions being made in regard to CO₂ injection. However, I do take exception to the amendment in some very important ways, not the least of which being the fact that backgrounders and briefing notes are, in fact, very useful in understanding the direction of the policy being undertaken in this particular issue and then all other issues as well. There are lots of statistical analyses and data sets out there, but what I think Albertans would like to know and need to know about this major undertaking of CO₂ injection and storage is which ones are actually being considered by the minister, what recommendations are being made, and how those recommendations are actually deliberated or considered.

I feel a dark shadow passing over the Legislature here in regard to this motion because it reminds me of Bill 20. Bill 20 looks to categorically exempt briefing notes and ministerial backgrounders from any FOIP requests, and conceivably any information could be CCed to the minister and then become exempt from FOIP. So by putting that stamp of being a briefing note or something that is confidential to ministerial jurisdiction only will, as I say, put a censor across, perhaps, vast tracts of information that are relevant to the proceedings of good government here in this Legislature. I have a serious problem with that. For the minister to indicate that such information will also not be provided to the Assembly directly is completely counter to the rhetoric and talk around here about transparency, openness, and accountability. So I have difficulty. In fact, I will not support the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder do you want to close the debate or should we call the question?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I don't preclude the anticipation with which I'm looking for this information that I've asked for. You know, on this whole CO₂ injection process we need to have further clarification, and I've had some very illuminating discussions with members here in the House. I guess my biggest concern is to make sure we are differentiating between injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil and CO₂ for storage so that it does not contribute to the greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. I would like to see clarification between those two things because they are, in fact, two very different things. I hope that we all are edified and educated on this subject so that we don't spread confusion on this matter and think that we're perhaps helping the atmosphere by injecting just for the sake of extracting oil.

So I close the debate.

[Motion for a Return 5 as amended carried]

3:30 CO₂ Injection

M6. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, briefing notes, backgrounders, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy and/or the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is very much like Motion for a Return 5. It does take a very significant difference, though, as the hon. member mentioned. This is more for the extraction of oil rather than for storage purposes, and they are different purposes.

We'd like to move an amendment to this one as well, Motion for a Return 6, by striking out "briefing notes, backgrounders." Therefore, the amended motion would read

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies, feasibility studies, or environmental assessments prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy and/or the Ministry of Environment from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze the injection of CO₂ for the extraction of oil.

For the same reasons previously said, we are happy to give the information. You get lots of material that comes to the minister.

Much of it is for your own internal purpose and need for when you're examining various possibilities. Some of it's very proprietary. Much of it's proprietary to individual companies as they're coming forward and making some recommendations. So it's for that reason that we're striking out "briefing notes, backgrounders," but we're happy to comply with the basic request of this motion as amended.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has an amendment. That's what we're on now if people want to participate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister's openness in presenting at least some of the information relevant to this. Once again my very same argument applies to this amendment, and I just want to reiterate, I guess, the crossroads that we could be at here in regard to excluding information from public purview.

I do realize that there is some sensitivity in briefing notes. You know, I do have my own briefing notes that I use every day here, but when it comes down to making an actual policy and the direction of that policy, I believe that at least sometimes we do need to have that direction. There's a vast galaxy of information out there on any given subject, but if we know where the minister is drawing his or her conclusions from, it makes a very large difference as to what sorts of plans and information we can have to work with.

Again, it's this whole issue of Bill 20. I'm very concerned about Bill 20 in regard to being able to just put that ministerial briefing note stamp on any pile of information, and suddenly it disappears from public view. So I do with all due respect speak in rejection of this amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you want to conclude the debate, or should I call the question?

Mr. Eggen: I'll just very briefly, yes. I'm looking forward to seeing this information. As you can see, I'm looking both from the Energy and the Environment side in regard to CO₂ injection, and I hope that each of us here in the House doesn't mix up storage with injection for taking the oil out. In fact, the New Democrats support very much using CO₂ as opposed to water for injection to extract more oil from the ground, but we just don't want it to be framed in the illusion that this is somehow long-term storage of CO₂ that would protect us from the effects of greenhouse gases.

I will close the debate on this one and thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 6 as amended carried]

Third-way Health Initiative

M7. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including legal opinions, briefing notes, backgrounders, or memoranda, prepared by or for the Ministry of Health from January 1, 2003, to February 22, 2006, that analyze whether the government's third-way initiative violates either existing provincial legislation or the Canada Health Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon.

Minister of Health and Wellness I need to indicate to all members that government's response to this particular request will be to reject it, and I'd like to briefly explain why on behalf of that same minister. The reason, really, is because the records that are being requested here are likely to fall within the exception that is outlined in section 27 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, otherwise known as FOIP. The department's practice is not to disclose records that are protected by solicitor-client privilege, or legal privilege. So, on that basis, we find it necessary to reject this particular MR.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: I'm absolutely shocked that this got rejected, Mr. Speaker. This I think goes to the heart of it. Now the minister is doing the Privacy Commissioner's job for him before it even goes there. This is absolutely key because this has to do with the so-called third-way initiative. We're trying to figure out here, because of the vagueness of what the government is talking about, whether this initiative, the so-called third way, violates either existing provincial legislation or the Canada Health Act. This is absolutely crucial for us to know what we're dealing with here. If it does violate the Canada Health Act – and we believe on this side that it does to some degree – that could end up costing the taxpayers millions of dollars if this government bullheadedly moves ahead in this particular way with the health care privatization.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, we'd want to know this information that could end up, as I say, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars. Again, typical of this government: if we can find a loophole, we don't want to give the information; behind closed doors. It's just typical of what we've learned to expect, and we'll keep asking the questions. Maybe someday there'll be a miracle, and they'll actually answer something that was worth while.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

Health and Wellness Consultations

M8. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the results, data, and analysis of all public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires undertaken by or on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness from January 1, 2004, to February 22, 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness I will indicate that government is not able to support this motion, and as such we will have to reject it. I'd like to briefly offer an explanation as to why that is the case. Mr. Speaker, as you and all members here would know, when the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business or personal information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party and/or to individuals prior to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Therefore, a request for this information must be made under provisions of that act, and as such we find ourselves in a position of having to reject this particular request.

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What patent nonsense. This has nothing to do with getting written permission from third parties. We're talking about public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires paid for by the taxpayers of Alberta. That's what we're asking about. Where's the third party in that?

This is money, again, paid by the taxpayers of Alberta. They're doing these focus groups. They told us that. They're doing opinion polls. We're bringing in what is supposed to be a major initiative sometime later on in the session, and here again this government is saying that we as legislators don't have the right to know this business. To say that this is third party, that they can't do this without, you know, getting permission from the third party – from what? The opinion poll? I'm sure that the government could release opinion polls that they paid for. They can talk about the focus groups and all the rest of it. Again, it's the taxpayers paying for this, Mr. Speaker.

You know, to me it's just unbelievable that this government can sit there, and for the most important initiative that we're going to be dealing with in the next number of years, we can't get this information. Yet they're going to come, they say, with legislation later on.

Again, tie the two together. I'm sure the Public Affairs Bureau is behind this. I'm sure that this group that we can't get information on is also tied into this particular polling and all the rest of it. But, again, we'll keep trying. Closed-door government, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

Grizzly Bear Population Data

M9. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, briefing notes, backgrounders, or memoranda regarding grizzly bear populations in Alberta prepared by or for the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development from January 1, 2004, to February 22, 2006.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I would like to indicate that we will be rejecting this motion for a return, but on March 3 of this year the Department of SRD released the information regarding the grizzly bear recovery program and other information regarding the provincial grizzly bear population. This information is publicly available on the Sustainable Resource Development website. With respect to the other materials, the briefing notes and memoranda, we've had a number of discussions already on that issue, and we don't need to further that debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, this particular motion, which I drafted before that information was released, is somewhat less urgent save for the fact that it's curious to see how poorly the decision was executed to in fact suspend the hunt for the next three years. It wasn't a smooth process by any means, and it took several individuals and the press to quite frankly stick their necks out to actually have this move forward. What we would like to know and I'm sure the public would like to know is: what was wrong with the study that was being withheld for so long in regard to the grizzly bear population, and why were there so many differing opinions there?

I think that there was, Mr. Speaker, a great deal of spin and misinformation being put forward by the SRD department in regard

to the actual number of grizzly bears. It was clear that they knew that their estimates were seriously less than the actual population out there. I had heard that between highway 16 and highway 1, in fact, there could be as few as a hundred bears as opposed to the 500 or 600 or 700 bears being put forward by SRD for several seasons. You know, there's a whole mix here that gets in the way of true ecological decision-making in terms of sustaining this population, and the politics of the hunt got involved there. Certainly, a very, very powerful lobby of the Energy and forestry departments was getting involved and interfering with this.

So, finally, I do applaud the minister for making the decision to suspend the hunt for three years. I'm just hoping that we will realize that the numbers are in a crisis state, that the grizzly bear is a threatened species, that the grizzly bear, in fact, is an indicator of a larger problem of unsustainable development of the eastern slopes and that we look to preserving meaningful tracts of land for future generations, which would be for the benefit of not just the grizzly bears but for the whole ecosystem and for our children and grandchildren.

I do want to say once again, though, that I do appreciate the hon. minister suspending the hunt for the next three years. I know that the grizzly bears are currently still hibernating, but I would like to suggest and nominate that the hon. minister is the first one out there to break the good news to the grizzly bear population when they do wake up and be there to tell them that they won't be at the short end of a gun coming this fall.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

Land Sales Systems

M10. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the agenda and minutes of the February 20, 2004, meeting involving the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo referenced on page 30 of the October 2005 Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion 10 I'm recommending that it be rejected. That is because, as referenced in the Auditor General's report, the February 20, 2004, meeting between the minister of seniors and the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was an informal meeting that did not have a written agenda or minutes, so these documents simply do not exist. I'd also like to add that on July 15, 2005, my department released almost 500 pages of land appraisals, land sales agreements, correspondence, and other records to the opposition under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This clearly shows that we do release information when it's appropriate under this act, but in this case the release of these documents under FOIP is inappropriate. Those same reasons apply to this motion because the documents simply do not exist.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to conclude the debate.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. That may well be the case, but something happened, Mr. Speaker. I would just remind the minister that the Auditor General found very serious failings in the way we dealt with

the Fort McMurray land deal. In the 2000 Confederation Heights deal, 73 free acres, the price was lower than the appraised value. I mean, that cost the taxpayers a lot of money. It caused housing prices to certainly skyrocket in Fort McMurray. Then we found with Timberlea all the untendered parts of the bids going, you know, for much less than the tendered parts right by each other. We found financing terms.

All these things the Auditor General talked about. We've been trying to find out: why did that happen, Mr. Speaker? Why did that happen? We have not got an answer yet. The Auditor General doesn't have the answer. All we know is that there are problems, big problems again, that cost the taxpayers a lot of extra money and certainly didn't help the land prices in Fort McMurray. We know what has happened there.

Again it's transparency. We're told by this government that they always look into things. They would never have any problems at all in this government, never any things that were wrong. They would never have a Gomery. They would never have anything like this because I think the Premier said that he would be hung. Well, I mean, something went desperately wrong here, Mr. Speaker, and we still don't have the answers. We know the answers that the taxpayers got and we know what some of the people in Fort McMurray got. Why did it happen? We still don't know. We'll wait, then, for the next question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

3:50 Land Sales Systems

M11. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the memo from the deputy minister to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports referenced on page 30 of the October 2005 Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this particular case the same answers can't come back from the minister because there was a copy of the memo, and it is alluded to by the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 11 I am recommending that it be rejected, and that's because the memo identified in the motion has already been requested under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. After a thorough review it was determined that it would be inappropriate to provide this memo to the opposition because the request would breach sections 17, 21, and 24 of the FOIP Act. Specifically, releasing this information would be an unreasonable invasion of a third party's personal privacy. The same reasons why this request was denied apply here as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's interesting. This is not an informal conversation, that the minister used last time. This was a memo, and she's talking about a third party. Well, it was

a memo from the deputy minister – the last time I looked, they were paid by the taxpayers of Alberta – to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Who's the third party here? I mean, this is the top deputy minister to the minister.

Again I would remind members of the Assembly that this is a very serious situation in terms of how this went awry, and surely it's part of the job of the opposition but, more than that, of the people in the Legislative Assembly to try to find out when taxpayers' money is wasted – in this case it was – why it was wasted, why certain people that were close to the government seem to have an inside track. This information could be very valuable so it never happens again. I know that it didn't happen in this minister's time, but if we don't learn from the past, we're doomed to repeat the same mistakes again.

So again I'm not surprised but disappointed that we'll probably never get to the thing. We'll never have a public inquiry in this province ever to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

Audit of Securities Commission

M12. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the final report submitted by the accounting firm KPMG to the Alberta Securities Commission, ASC, auditing ASC employee computer systems.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I need to indicate that this particular Motion for a Return 12 will need to be rejected. The reason for that is as follows. First of all, the Alberta Securities Commission Board did in fact retain the KPMG firm to perform an audit on the ASC's e-mail system, that being the Alberta Securities Commission. I'm advised that the KPMG report in question is, in fact, an internal and confidential document of the Alberta Securities Commission. As such, it is necessary for government to reject this Motion for a Return 12.

I should just conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that the hon. Minister of Finance actually addressed this matter here in question period over a year ago – as I recall, it was April 21 – and perhaps on other occasions as well. So there is some previous record with respect to this particular issue.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we thought that the hon. Minister of Finance had addressed the issue in question period in a manner that we found a satisfactory answering to our questions, I'm sure we wouldn't have gone ahead with this motion for a return. What can I say except that I'm disappointed and once again not surprised? Although I do note the note of regret in the Deputy Government House Leader's voice every time he says that he's going to have to reject one of these things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

M13. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund ethical investment policy.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again on behalf of the hon. Minister

of Finance, who oversees this particular area, I need to indicate that government will be rejecting this particular motion. The motion for a return, as we can all read, refers to an ethical investment policy, inferring that there is, in fact, some stand-alone ethical policy in existence. In fact, there is no separate ethical investment policy that I'm aware of. Investments are made on the basis of what their risk and return components are. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I need to indicate that that's the answer, and we'll have to reject this particular motion for those reasons.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to conclude the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am of course absolutely unsurprised by the response, and with that in mind I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document called Ethical Guidelines for the Government Pension Fund – Global, put out by the Finance department, the Ministry of Finance, of the government of Norway.

The Speaker: Perhaps you could do that tomorrow during the Routine.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

Student Loan Relief Program

M14. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, budgetary analyses, submissions, proposals, memos, and other correspondence, related to the decision to increase the minimum debt level required for eligibility for the Alberta student loan relief program from \$5,000 to \$7,140 per annum.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to indicate that I'm prepared to accept this motion. I recommend acceptance of the motion, although before the hon. member opposite gets too excited, I would want to make sure that people were aware that it's not likely to end up in a whole truckload of documents coming over. The hon. member will know or should know that the rationale for moving to \$7,140 is that the federal government finally, after 10 years, increased their lending limits to \$7,140. Provincial lending kicks in after the federal lending, so that's essentially where the increase in the lending limit comes from and the increase in the debt load comes from.

So it's not rocket science. It's not as a result of a huge amount of analysis. It's really as a result of the collaborative process of the loan system across the country. In fact, one of the reasons why the debt load increased as well is that we don't forgive federal debt. We encourage the federal government to get involved in a program where they could forgive some of the debt that they put out.

We essentially have two ways of dealing with student debt. The first is for a first-time student borrowing money to have a student loan relief program so that the first amount of money that we would give a first-time student borrowing would be a grant rather than a loan. Then the second is a student relief benefit, which pays down their debt on their behalf after they graduate and consolidate their debt.

The problem we have, of course, is that we only give relief on

provincially advanced debt, not federally advanced debt, and the new level, the \$7,140, is a federal amount. Under the student loan program across the country we advance federal monies first and then advance provincial monies on top of that.

4:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the comments of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and thank him on a couple of levels: number one, for agreeing to support this motion for a return and, number two, for promising that there won't be a truckload of documents forthcoming. Any time that we can get the answers we're seeking, that give us a fuller and more complete understanding of issues around student debt load and student assistance program matters and affordability, you know, without having to clear-cut another chunk of Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia to fell the trees to produce the paper to do that I think is a good day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 14 carried]

Campus Alberta Quality Council

M15. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, reports, proposals, presentations, and correspondence, related to the design, mandate, and implementation of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, including any correspondence between the Ministry of Advanced Education, formerly Learning, and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, AUCC, or other accreditation organizations.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with the hon. member's desire not to clear-cut Clayoquot or any other place in order to get documents, I have to recommend that this particular motion be rejected.

Mr. Speaker, the Campus Alberta Quality Council is a very important agency, a quality assurance agency that makes recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education on applications from postsecondary institutions seeking to offer new degree programs in Alberta. Other than degrees in divinity all degree programs offered in Alberta, including degrees offered by nonresident institutions, must be approved by the minister after such a recommendation.

This motion for a return is very similar to Motion for a Return 50 in the last session of this Legislature. It was also moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Again, the concern is similar, that the motion is very broad, asks for a wide range of documents, most of which are available to the member by going to the Campus Alberta Quality Council's website. Any information that is not available on the website he could certainly ask for. There are no secrets here. I'd be happy to provide him with appropriate information.

Some of the information that's being requested simply just does not exist. On the question of correspondence between the department and AUCC about the design, mandate, and implementation of the council, there's no such official correspondence of which I am aware after questioning. This was also already indicated to the hon. member in the response to Motion for a Return 50 in the last session.

In short, Mr. Speaker, most of the information the hon. member

wants is available on the website at www.caqc.gov.ab.ca. Most of the rest of the information he's seeking doesn't exist. But if there's some specific information he wants about the set-up, operation, investigation, analysis with respect to the Alberta quality council, I'd be happy to deal with his questions and invite him to either send me the request for the information or arrange to sit down with myself and, if I can, invite the members of the quality council.

There's nothing secret about the quality council. They're doing great work for Albertans. They were set up to achieve a quality standard. They're working with us to achieve standards of assessment, standards of quality across the country so that education in Alberta can be seen for its value to any institution around the world. It's appropriate for every Albertan to take a look at the quality council and the good work that it's doing. I'd be happy to zero in on whatever information might be applicable, but this question is too broad to be answered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll close the debate very quickly simply by making a point, and I will take the minister up on his offer. The Campus Alberta Quality Council is set up and does seek to set high standards for excellence in postsecondary education within the province of Alberta. Of course, the problem with the Campus Alberta Quality Council, as we speak today, is that it confines its activities to the province of Alberta. The last time I looked, although we may be a distinct society, we are still a member of Confederation. We cannot operate in isolation. That's why it is instructive to know what work has been undertaken or, furthermore, what work is being undertaken or will be undertaken in the future. I realize that I'm going a little off the scope of the motion, as broad as the minister thinks it already is at this point, to determine any kind of communication that is or should be going on between the Campus Alberta Quality Council and the AUCC, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that right now, because we do not have a national accreditation facility for postsecondary institutions and the programs that they offer in this country, the AUCC falls almost by default into a role very similar to that. In order to get easy transition and transference from a baccalaureate degree in this province to a graduate studies program at an institution in another province, it helps a whole lot to have AUCC recognition because that tells the graduate school at the other university in whatever province that, in fact, the baccalaureate degree that the student has meets certain standards and is recognized by the AUCC.

I see that the minister is shaking his head. We've had this discussion before. We'll have this discussion again. Until such time as the Campus Alberta Quality Council, perhaps, is the campus Canada quality council, I think there's benefit in communicating with the AUCC and making sure that the quality council's mandate and standards line up with the AUCC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

Health and Wellness Travel Expenses

M16. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a detailed breakdown of all expenses incurred by the Minister of Health and Wellness, her staff, and/or designate on trips during the 2004-2005 fiscal year, including but not limited to travel, accommodation, meals,

receptions, and hosting as well as incidental and miscellaneous expenses.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to just quickly reference Motion for a Return 16. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I would like to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Motion for a Return 16.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent.
Question.

[Motion for a Return 16 carried]

Private Nonemergency Health Insurance

M17. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all cost-benefit analyses for the implementation of private insurance for nonemergency health services.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness I need to indicate that the government will be rejecting this Motion for a Return 17. Briefly, here is why. The information may contain pending policy and/or budgetary information – perhaps forthcoming budgetary information; we'll see – that could interfere with the decision-making process at Alberta Health and Wellness. As such, that ministry may need to consider these records prior to any such broad dissemination. Finally, Alberta Health and Wellness has in fact received a similar FOIP request on these records. For those particular reasons the government will indicate that it is unable to support this motion for a return and will be rejecting it.

4:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm disappointed to hear that because the information that has been requested here is of keen interest to Albertans to help understand why the government is making certain decisions. If the issue for the government is the timing of the particular request, I invite the minister to provide that information following the budget debate if, in fact, that is what is causing her concern at this time. I'm certainly willing to honour the confidentiality of the budget until it's released. If that is what her primary holdback concern is, please release it after that time.

This is another example, Mr. Speaker, of the frustration that we in the opposition experience in trying to get information. As you've pointed out on a number of occasions, it's question period, not answer period. We don't get answers during that opportunity. We send letters. We don't get information that way. We ask in written questions and motions for returns. We often are turned down there. We do FOIP requests and are met with enormous expenses that are in the tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to try and meet some of these requests. So, yes, we are going to continue to try every possible avenue that is available to us to pry information out of this government because they certainly don't provide it without having every legal means brought upon them to provide that information. I'm not surprised. This is typical of the government, particularly around their plans for privatizing health care, that they will not tell us from whence this is coming and who's talking to

them and what the studies are that they've done. Disappointed, but on we go.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Meetings with Private Health Care Representatives

M18. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 a list of all groups and individuals representing either specific private health care related companies or any association, group, or organization representing the interests of the private health care industry who have met with the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, the assistant deputy ministers of Health and Wellness, or any Alberta standing policy committee.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The purpose of this is obvious, Mr. Speaker. Since we don't have a lobbyist registry, we are unable to find out who has had the ear of the Premier and of the Minister of Health and Wellness to be able to influence them in the decisions that they make. This is an attempt on our part to elicit exactly who has had access to them so that the rest of the public can find out who's been able to influence them when members of the public have not.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion for a Return 18 falls within the purview of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, and I will respond on her behalf by indicating that the government will need to reject this motion for a return. Here, briefly, are some of the reasons why. First of all, the information requested may in fact contain personal and very private information. When the public body is considering giving access to a record that may contain third-party business information, the public body must provide written notice to the third party prior to such disclosure, which is in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, FOIP. This information is not readily available and would require an inordinate amount of departmental resources to research and compile. Accessing this information under FOIP would allow government to consider an appropriate fee for this request if applicable.

So for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, a request for this particular information would be better made and, I would submit, must be made under the provisions of the FOIP Act. As such, the government will need to reject this particular MR.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we need a lobbyist registry in this province. We had an all-party committee that looked at it and certainly recommended that that happen because this is the process that's met. We've had a group of people who've been able to meet with the Premier, with the Minister of Health and Wellness, influence them, and the rest of the people, the citizens of the province of Alberta, have no idea who those people are. Using the excuse that this is somehow private does not cut it in this province when there's been access to be able to influence government policy. All we asked for was a listing of those people. We

didn't ask for what was in the meeting or what the policies were that were recommended.

Mr. Taylor: Or how much the orange juice cost.

Ms Blakeman: Or, indeed, how much the orange juice cost.

But this is why there's such a problem here. It's antidemocratic. This is part of what is going to bring this government down, if I may be allowed to say so, Mr. Speaker. It's that absolute disregard for openness and transparency. What is the need to have secrecy here? If those individuals are meeting to influence this government on government policy, then their names should be public. Maybe what they're actually discussing behind closed doors may not be, but who is getting access to the government is of utmost importance, and it should be made public. That's why this kind of arrogance is going to contribute to bringing this government down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 18 lost]

Alberta Securities Commission

M19. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report completed by BearingPoint Canada regarding employee complaints at the Alberta Securities Commission that allege senior management engaged in favouritism and fostered an oppressive work environment.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance with respect to Motion for a Return 19 and to indicate on her behalf and on behalf of government that there are reasons to reject this particular motion for a return.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission Board retained BearingPoint Canada as their management consultant in order to conduct an organizational assessment of the Alberta Securities Commission management. The BearingPoint Canada report is an internal and confidential report of the Alberta Securities Commission.

Furthermore, I believe that the Minister of Finance did speak to the issues at hand with respect to the Alberta Securities Commission on May 9, 2005, on April 26, 2005, on April 7, 2005, on April 5, 2005, on April 4, 2005, on March 23, 2005, and perhaps on other occasions as well and has advised me that her advice is that government will have to reject this particular motion for a return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow. That was quite a list you put together, quite a list, in fact, of all the times that the Minister of Finance has spoken to this issue. It must have taken some research dollars and resources and time. Needless to say – but I'll say it anyway – if the Official Opposition had been satisfied with those answers, this motion for a return would not be appearing on the Order Paper today.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

The Speaker: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 4:20

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two people who have been following the progress of the MLA task force with great interest: Robert Warden and Laura Gibos. I would ask them to rise and be recognized by this House.

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

Bill 205

Continuing Care Standards Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would firstly like to thank my caucus colleague from Edmonton-Manning for so generously giving me his bill draw number, 205. The issue of protection for those in care has been of great interest to him for many years.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I delivered my maiden speech on May 8, '05. I had no idea at that time how prophetic it would be, and I am paraphrasing. I spoke of the need for provincial, standardized care for the vulnerable in long-term care. I spoke of staff shortages or, in the case of assisted living or designated living, having to pay extra costs for those services because what they were entitled to was so minimal. I said that I prayed that none of us or more so our parents would experience the indignity of only being a commodity on a bottom line. I said that we can as a collective Assembly do better, and we must. We owe it to this House and to the people to govern fairly, openly, honestly, and to be accountable. I've finished at this point paraphrasing.

We must do better than to have class-action lawsuits as a form of accountability. The Auditor General's report of May 2005 into long-term care in Alberta was scathing in its findings. The standards were outdated, and even those were not being adhered to. However, there were new standards being contemplated but only in draft form. In response to the Auditor General's report a task force was established by the ministries of Seniors and Community Supports and Health and Wellness. The task force's mandate was to discuss these draft standards with the stakeholders. I thank the Premier for hearing me when I suggested that because of my experience as a front-line caregiver in long-term care I would be of benefit to that task force. My appointment did set a precedent for opposition members to be involved.

Mr. Speaker, believe me, everyone connected with that task force, MLAs and staff, worked flat out, but the hardest part was the emotional stories, that could leave you mentally and emotionally exhausted. Early into the process it became very clear that in addition to discussion on the draft standards, it was going to take on a different dimension and a life of its own, and as a result the process was opened to more of the general public. People started to share their pain and frustrations of having no one to talk to about complaints on the care of their family members. Complaints were shuffled around until often the person died and the family understandably gave up.

There was talk of perceived neglect and abuse. There were investigations, but only recommendations were forthcoming, and that did nothing to relieve the frustrations of the families. There

appeared to be no one ultimately responsible. It became clear to me – and the task force’s document *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* echoes that – there is a need for provincial standards for all of those in care regardless of where they live or who delivers the care. They must be clear, measurable, resident-focused standards with strict guidelines for enforcement.

This bill is intended to create a position for a thoroughly independent officer, legislated and responsible to this House. The officer would monitor Alberta’s continuing care facilities to ensure that they all comply with provincial standards; receive, review, and investigate complaints while protecting the confidentiality of whistleblowers; conduct inquiries and investigations where appropriate; report annually to the Legislature. They would have the power to enter continuing care premises, collect information, and order action on the licences, grants, and contracts of continuing care facilities. It would be the final stop for accountability, for protection for all of those in continuing care.

This should not be another big bureaucracy, nor should it have the chance to turn into a growth industry. Small is good, accountable, and as a rule it is more efficient. With the increasing privatization of housing and care delivery in continuing care, this commissioner’s office, in my opinion, is imperative. Regulations will not cut it. I believe the key is the independent aspect of this commissioner. This office must do more than just review the processes. These investigations have been happening for a long time, and clearly they have failed.

The most important mandate, the main point, is that this office would have the authority of enforcement in the case of noncompliance with the standards. This office would keep the standards current and make them available to the public. There are presently the Health Facilities Review Committee and the Protection for Persons in Care Act, both of which do a credible job in investigating, but they do not have the power, the teeth if you will, to enforce these recommendations. Enforcement and accountability is what was asked for. Accountability and enforcement of the standards: the Auditor General identified this, as did the task force and the public.

More staff with increased training was identified as the greatest need, and I believe that without exception families, residences, staff, administration, and private owners spoke up for extra staff. What we heard was that the staff did the best they could, but neglect was happening and even premature deaths. The neglect was not intentional, but does that make it okay? I think not.

Housing and health care are each under a separate ministry. They truly are interconnected and depend on each other, which is another reason, in my mind, to have an overall commissioner who understands and is involved with the standards for both.

I believe this is a very important bill and will make very important rules that will protect those we are responsible for. I know that the public and anyone who had been, has been, or is presently involved in continuing care is watching this very closely.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that history will record that something was done under my watch. As a member of this House I was fortunate to be a part of the task force. The co-chairs and I wrote reports, and they have been incorporated into the *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* document. The work will not be finished until we can be assured that there are legislated provincial standards with accountability and enforcement.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for

Lethbridge-East for introducing this bill. I’d like to thank her for her tireless work on behalf of our seniors, her genuine compassion for our seniors. Her efforts to improve on the quality of continuing care in our province should be commended.

I agree with this bill’s general premise that we should have some mechanism in place to ensure that standards are adhered to and that there is accountability for the care our seniors receive in continuing care facilities across the province. Bill 205 includes four short sections, about half a page on continuing care standards, and 10 pages of descriptions of duties, powers, and responsibilities of the commissioner or advocate for seniors.

Last year the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards was established in response to the Auditor General’s report on the government of Alberta’s seniors core services and programs. The task force was made up of the hon. members for Calgary-Foothills, Lethbridge-East, and myself. In light of the topic of this legislation I’d like to take a few minutes here to discuss some of the experiences that we had serving as co-chairs of the task force, the task force recommendations, and the government’s subsequent response.

During the public consultation stage of the process the three of us along with a couple of very helpful and dedicated individuals from the departments of Health and Wellness and Seniors and Community Supports – and I’ll name them: Gayle Almond and Carmen Grabusic; they were very helpful – travelled across the province to meet with stakeholders and members of the public to examine ways to improve upon health service and accommodation standards in Alberta’s continuing care facilities.

Albertans from communities spanning the entire province shared their insights, experiences, and knowledge with the task force. These meetings along with hundreds of phone calls, letters, e-mails, and written briefs and completed discussion guides covered a great deal of ground. We heard numerous personal stories that reinforced that this is a very sensitive and emotional topic for many Albertans. We gained a greater understanding of how Albertans and many stakeholders perceive the current system. We were told time and time again that overall the system is quite sound. Albertans are generally pleased with the facilities and the level of care received by individuals in continuing care. However, we were told that the current system is not always perfect, and we were provided with a great deal of constructive advice on how best to enhance and improve upon it.

4:30

After the initial consultation process the task force compiled the comments and advice it received and incorporated it into a list of draft recommendations. The task force released the draft report to the public and provided Albertans with the opportunity to respond to the recommendations. This first draft going to the public happened in September of last year. Following this second stage of consultation the task force issued its final report, *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care*. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East did not participate in this part of the process, opting instead to write a complementary report of her own. Mr. Speaker, our *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care* report made several recommendations pertaining to the standards in continuing care facilities.

So to put this whole discussion into perspective, I’ll outline some of the recommendations. There are 12 main themes in the report and a total of 45 recommendations. I won’t go through all of them, but I’ll just mention a few of them. These recommendations included establishing provincial standards pertaining to meal services in supportive living facilities; establishing “a clear concerns resolution process”; reviewing

the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of the Health Facilities Review Committee, Protection of Persons in Care [Act], and the Provincial Ombudsman in receiving and resolving concerns or complaints from within the continuing care system.

This would actually completely cover the hon. member's request for a commissioner to look after these issues.

We recommended to "undertake a review and update of all continuing care health service and accommodation related legislation." We recommended to "assess options for monitoring compliance" and review "existing mechanisms, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee." The report specifically recommended that the inspection of facilities be carried out "by one organization" and that "enforcement should remain with the Ministry responsible for the funding." So there would be no need for an additional level of bureaucracy to deal with these issues.

The report also included recommendations pertaining to the enforcement of training, education, and support standards and offered examples of potential enforcement measures – such as levying fines, revoking licences, or appointing an administrator – to be used only as a last resort if operators fail to meet standards and the issue is not resolved.

Recommendations were also made regarding the licensing of nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals as well as licensing all supportive living facilities. The task force also recommended in its final report that the government "enable supportive living and long-term care facilities that provide publicly funded health care services to access and complete an accreditation process."

In addition, the report recommended that Alberta Seniors and Community Supports and Alberta Health and Wellness pursue a process in conjunction with stakeholders "to rate supportive living and long-term care facilities and make these ratings publicly available." This should be another way to expose any facilities that do not meet standards or are not accountable.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see from my brief recap of but a few highlights, the report covered a lot of ground. Some of the recommendations to improve standards in continuing care facilities can be employed now, while others will have to be phased in over some time.

Last month the government formally responded to the report, accepting it in principle and announcing the initial strategies to respond and to implement its recommendations. The government has committed to implementing the standards recommended in the report this year and has also pledged to act on recommendations concerning new monitoring, reporting, enforcement, and concerns resolution processes. Once these new standards are implemented, there should be little or no need for the suggested commissioner's position. I would like to give the new standards a chance to work before we add another layer of enforcement for something that may not even be needed.

Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the intent behind this legislation and agree that additional steps must be taken to review and implement continuing care standards, I have a few concerns with Bill 205. There are two basic themes in this bill. One is establishing a commissioner to enforce standards, and the other is the setting up of the standards for the care and accommodations. First of all, as I've already mentioned, the government of Alberta is already committed and began acting on the second purpose of this bill, which is reviewing and implementing these standards. As far as the establishment of a commissioner on continuing care, proposed in this legislation, I believe that this may not necessarily be the best course of action at this point in time. The government will be reviewing the compliance and enforcement processes governing continuing care facilities this year, and this legislation would be premature or may

not be necessary at all when the current process is fully implemented.

While I support the intent of this bill, I believe that the specifics in the bill are not necessarily the right solution that we need. So I'll not be supporting this bill, but I am pleased that this issue is being debated, and I look forward to hearing what other members have to say on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few comments about the particular bill in front of us and say that, clearly, we agree with the spirit of the bill. We've called for something similar, as I'm sure the member is well aware. Certainly, we need – we call it a seniors' advocate; you can call it whatever you want. One of the things that we suggested is that it should be an officer of the Legislature, the same as some of our other officers. I think that the hon. member would probably agree with that. I believe that unless we have this person that has some clout and some authority, we're going to continue to have problems in long-term care.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, we can certainly support the spirit of this bill, but I want to say in respect that there are some problems with the text itself. I guess the most important thing is that the bill will not help seniors this year. It may not help seniors next year or the next. We know that some seniors – it's still coming forward – are in crisis situations, so time is of the essence, somewhat, with the people that we're dealing with.

What bothers me a bit about this bill is that it will establish another set of reviews and committees. Mr. Speaker, surely the creation of the office of independent commissioner or, as we call it, seniors' advocate, whose sole task is to guard the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens, is overdue. However – and this is the catch – we must ensure that establishing this office does not result in more delays and red tape when addressing real and pressing issues. For example, section 3(1) of the proposed bill establishes that "within 6 months of the coming into force of this Act, the Government must review, in conjunction with the Commissioner, the standards of care prescribed for long-term care facilities and supportive living settings." Another review.

With all due respect, I think we do not need another review. We've had the Auditor General's. We've had the MLA task force on continuing care. We in the New Democratic Party had public hearings and have released reports. This is all just in the last year. So we've had a number of reviews. We believe that we do not need another review. We need new standards and actual implementation of them.

Of course, this means more money for updating facilities and equipment, but more than that it means more health care professionals and a commitment for sustained funding to support them. Mr. Speaker, I think we have the evidence, and I'll come to that. There are things we need to do. Certainly, we will support a commissioner, seniors' advocate, whatever name they want. Contrary to the previous speaker I do believe that we need this person to have this power to deal with some of these situations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, regarding this review, section 3(4) stipulates that

prior to implementation, standards of care developed under this section must be

- (a) approved . . . by the Commissioner, and
- (b) made available to the public.

Well, again we question whether we need another review. We think

that there are things that could be done right away. It seems to at least address the problems of lack of accountability and transparency that have plagued this government, and this is a good step in that it appears to seek the input and approval of the public, especially the people who stand to be affected by new care standards.

I think that we have to lay it out, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member might clarify how the new standards of care will be made public and to what end. Will feedback be invited? If so, will it in fact be considered before implementation proceeds? What mechanism will be in place to ensure that the public is indeed consulted? Does it have the intent of making findings or determinations public?

4:40

Yet another worry that I have in terms of the bill's delay is that the proposed bill requires serious consideration. Section 20 provides for a process of appeals and delays in compliance. According to Parliamentary Counsel, whose expertise was sought in trying to make heads or tails of this section, these provisions mirror those set forth in section 74(1) of the FOIP Act, allowing for such appeals. Now, we just had a discussion about FOIP and some of the problems that we're facing, so our objection rests on the fact that if you have additional delays while waiting to access information, while this is inconvenient, it may have serious repercussions. In this case, you're dealing with cases of abuse, neglect, or death, needing immediate attention, so I think we have to relook at that particular part of the bill, Mr. Speaker. Again I would stress that certainly I'm glad that the member has brought forward this idea that we do need a commissioner, senior's advocate, whatever name that we want.

I think there are some things, though, that I would like to see done right away rather than having a six-month consultation period. Let's get the seniors' advocate, the commissioner that the member is talking about. I think she and I could agree that we need to change the legislation. We suggest in our report that that should have been done this spring because the legislation, according to many advocates that I've talked to, Mr. Speaker, does not lay out what it should in terms of standards and all the rest of it. So we need to go right back here and change the legislation, but that can be done while we have a seniors' advocate.

We need to set up a patient's bill of rights. That could be done right away, and that would certainly help the commissioner, as the member is talking about.

Something we need to do right away because it's happening is put an immediate stop to redesignating auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes as assistive living facilities. It's interesting to me that we can have the same people there one day in long-term care, and the next day it's assistive living. Well, right now there are no standards. They say that they're coming.

Another thing that I would suggest we do right away as we set up the commissioner's office that the member is talking about is require all new long-term care beds to be delivered either through the public or the voluntary, nonprofit sector. If there are some good private ones, we can grandfather them. In the meantime, some of them shouldn't be grandfathered. They should be thrown out, as we know. We require all new long-term beds to be in private rooms in order to respect personal privacy and, where feasible, upgrade existing facilities to private rooms only. Mr. Speaker, we could do this right away, I believe, without a study.

Whistle-blowing protection for front-line staff. We see a lot of the problems going on.

The other part of it, very quickly, Mr. Speaker, because I know a number of people want to speak on this, is the 2003 hikes in long-term care fees. They were unconscionable at that time, and it's still a hardship for many families. We should certainly reverse these

fees. I think we can do that in this rich province for the people that have contributed all the years to the future of this province. Also, we could set up an open, transparent process to clearly identify the types of services provided in long-term care settings to which extra charges can be applied. You know, let's get a handle on the money that people are having to fork out from their pockets.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point that I want to make – and we certainly are not going to vote against it because we think the bill is important to bring forward. An officer of the Legislature: I hope we're agreeing on that. As I say, we call it a seniors' advocate, the people do. We need that immediately. Let's get on with some of these other serious matters now rather than waiting for another study because I think we've had enough studies. We believe that we know what we have to do, and I think that the member on the opposite side would probably agree with most of the things I'm saying. That's the only question I have, you know, if we have another commission six months back and forward.

Let's just get on with this. Let's get on with changing the legislation. Let's bring the standards in. Let's reverse some of the fees. Let's do all of these things and do them immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My thanks to the previous speaker for his excellent suggestions, I think many of which we share here in the Liberal opposition. I am very glad to see this bill actually get to the floor because I think I've been associated with an idea, this idea or one very similar to it, since prior to the 2001 election.

It was initially prepared by my colleague who was then MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Then a version of it was brought forward by my colleague who was then the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I prepared a version of it and had a bill draw that was stratospheric, so the bill didn't even make it to first reading. I know that last year, in 2005, the same member did have a bill forward, but the number was too high, and it didn't make it to the floor. I'm delighted that it's made it to the floor now.

What I would like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is just to detail some of the expectations and the reasons why we were looking for a bill that would actually establish standards. What's important about standards is that you know what they are and everybody knows what they are and that you all operate by them – that's the point – but also that the standards are monitored and, finally, that they are enforced. We have had some variations on this theme, but unfortunately when it came right down to it, very few of them actually had standards in place that were shared by all. Two, it wasn't monitored in any kind of a systemic way. Three, it certainly wasn't enforced by anything that had teeth. So those are underlying the work that we are attempting to do here.

I think, in fact, that was reflected by the work that was done by the travelling MLA committee but also by the Auditor General. As members in the Assembly are aware, I've sat on the Public Accounts Committee for many years and had in fact raised a number of these same issues during my time as the Official Opposition critic for seniors. I was very relieved to see the Auditor General's report because it did in fact validate what residents, their families, their friends, advocacy groups in the community like the Elder Advocates association, and what opposition critics from both of the parties had been saying for many years. It had fallen on very deaf ears on the government side, but it seemed that once the Auditor General came out with his report, then the government was willing to listen. It did

validate everything that all the rest of us had been saying for many, many, many years.

I talked earlier about the standards being effective only if we have the compliance monitored and enforced. I think that what we have in Bill 205 as proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East does address exactly that. It does address the problems that were identified by the Auditor General's report from May of 2005 and by the MLA task force, that released its report in September of 2005. Both of these did identify that current systems to monitor compliance with standards were absolutely inadequate and ineffective.

Key findings that the Continuing Care Standards Act addresses are that standards for the provision of nursing and personal care and housing services in long-term care facilities are not current at all. For example, 30 per cent of the facilities that the Auditor General investigated did not meet basic standards of care, and that appears on page 15 of the special report that he issued. On that same page he notes that standards are needed for services delivered in assisted living and other supported living facilities.

4:50

Here the opposition differs very much with the direction that the government is going around redesignating people, and this was touched on very briefly by my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We're basically, with a swish of a pen and a wave of a hand, reclassifying people from one day being recipients of care – and part of that is assumed to be medical care – in a long-term care facility, and the next day they are individuals who do not qualify for medical care and are now someone living in an assisted-care facility. And do you know what? They never even got out of bed. That's what this government is able to accomplish. So that's part of what we're trying to address with this bill.

We've got their systems to monitor compliance with standards for both long-term care facilities and the lodges that are not adequate. I had spoken about that earlier, and again that's mirrored in the Auditor General's report on page 15. Just continuing with that, the Department does not have an adequate system to monitor long-term care facilities' compliance with Basic Standards. The Department relies on the Authorities, the Health Facilities Review Committee (HFRC) and the Protection for Persons in Care Office (PPIC) to monitor whether the facilities comply with Basic Standards . . . Further, HFRC and PPIC do not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and do not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance.

Absolutely toothless. During a number of the Auditor General's facility visits he noted that "31% of the Basic Standards relating to care were not met."

I cannot underline enough my frustration with the Protection for Persons in Care Act. Every time we have to refer someone to that process, what we get is some very well-meaning but incredibly apologetic staff member who very sadly reports back to us that, basically, the Protection for Persons in Care Act is an educational tool, which is very cold comfort when that is all that is available to you as a resident or as an advocate for a resident or a guardian or a trustee for a resident who is trying to get some action taken. They're trying to get some recognition that standards have not been met, that it has not been monitored, and that it has most definitively not been enforced. Very frustrating.

So the mechanisms that the government has had in place and keeps touting as the solution to all of this have absolutely failed us. It's important to note here that it didn't just fail all of us here in this Assembly: well fed, well paid, and completely able to move about through our lives. This failed vulnerable people. That is what is most unforgivable about what has happened to this point in time.

The Health Facilities Review Committee has no authority to enforce the compliance. Equally toothless. I know there are good people involved with that, but it's equally useless, frankly. I'm sorry for such harsh words, but I think they have to be used when we're talking about vulnerable people.

The protection of persons in care, as I said, does not conduct compliance or regulatory reviews in long-term care facilities for basic standards, for policies, for procedures, or for legislation. Where they investigate reports of abuse involving adults receiving publicly funded care from whatever kind of facility they're in, the protection of persons in care

investigates approximately 90% of abuse complaints [and they use] contracted investigators who have backgrounds in health professions and law enforcement. In some cases, referrals are made directly to police authorities or professional associations or colleges.

That has been a very frustrating process indeed and certainly needs help.

My colleague the Member for Lethbridge-East was a member of the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards and has given me some notes about what the task force heard and what she tried to incorporate into her bill as a result: that standards should be measurable, that they should provide for consistent reporting and define a minimal acceptable quality of care and quality of life.

It's really important what we do with that minimal level of care because, of course, what ends up being what everybody shoots for is the minimum but not anything above that. The lessons we've learned from the AG and other places and, again, reflected in what the committee heard: that the standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced and that these standards need to be updated and reviewed routinely. They do get out of fashion and out of effectiveness, and they do need to be reviewed. That also holds for legislation and policies around these standards that also need to be reviewed and updated.

I know there are others that wish to speak. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be able to rise to speak to Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this act forward, and I think she should be commended for her concern and for her passion for seniors.

With this in mind I must say, though, that there are presently mechanisms in place to monitor care and treatment for everyone, including seniors, and I believe it would be best to continue with current mechanisms which monitor the quality of health care for all citizens of Alberta and not just one group. There really are a number of mechanisms in place to hold health authorities, health professionals, and other care providers, such as nursing home operators, accountable for the quality of care they provide. These mechanisms include not only the review and monitoring of the facility but also measures such as requiring the preparation of regional business plans and annual reports, having contracts in place with service providers so that expectations are clear, monitoring performance through approved performance measures, establishing standards which are currently being updated, encouraging best practices, and licensing and accrediting of individuals and organizations by expert organizations.

There are currently other bodies in place in addition to the aforementioned who help monitor quality of care and treatment, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection

of persons in care office. It's been said that these groups have no teeth, but this is not necessarily the case. Recommendations during routine reviews are met and followed through with. With regard to complaints these are investigated thoroughly, and recommendations must be met. I might add that if there is any opposition or reluctance to positively or satisfactorily adhere to recommendations, the minister of health has the authority to force the facility to upgrade or to rectify the particular situation.

The Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection of persons in care office work for all groups and all demographics, not just the needs of one particular group. Perhaps the needs of one group should not supersede the needs of the whole, and for this reason I will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 205, Continuing Care Standards Act. Seniors have worked so hard all their lives to build this province, and we owe them a lot. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The long-term care centre system is facing a crisis. We've seen casualties. We've seen deaths. Albertans put their lives and the lives of their loved ones in the hands of providers of long-term care. The government by law is charged with providing direction and sufficient funding to these facilities, yet there are no minimum standards of care in this province. Do we have to fall on the deaf ears of this present government or of present government officials who earn tons of money? I heard that one of the big guns in the department is earning \$638,000.

We expect a little bit more for our vulnerable people. The ugly truth about government neglect: the Auditor General's report, which we have all seen, has clearly indicated that 30 per cent of facilities under review did not meet basic care standards. It came through loud and very clear. We need province-wide standards, and we need solid plans. Our loved ones or maybe – maybe – we will have to go there one day. We should not forget this.

5:00

I receive numerous complaints from my constituents, and we definitely need a proper commissioner's office to listen to those complaints and enforce them. We need a commissioner's office that could report to this House and take further action. We must create a continuing care commissioner's office that is responsible to this House to ensure that provincial standards of care are monitored. If we read the Auditor General's report, he clearly mentioned that if we don't monitor something, we can't get a good result.

People from ethnic groups are invisible in these facilities. I want to know from the government: why is that? Why do not many people from the ethnic community go in there? If they want something special, I think that we should consider that very seriously. I want to know from the government if any of the task force or any of the government officials have ever thought of talking to or listening to the ethnic community. I mean, they are part of this province. They pay the same tax as everybody, including myself.

Now I would like to talk about the accountability in this Bill 205. Our goal is to put a continuing care commissioner in place to ensure that facilities provide residents with high-quality care. Facilities, both public and private, must be accountable for the care and service they provide. This Bill 205 grants a continuing care commissioner a unique power: to monitor compliance with standards and issue orders to ensure compliance.

Mr. Speaker, the families and residents across the province have voiced frustration about the lack of accountability that exists in the continuing care system. There is a lack of transparency and accountability in this system. Even when recommendations are issued to a facility, they are not obligated to carry them out. Often this leaves families with the burden of fighting it out with the facility.

Now I want to talk about the Allen Gray facility, which is in my riding. We have seen cases at the Allen Gray where the family members have been banned from visiting relatives for voicing concerns. I know of one woman, whose father was a resident of the Allen Gray, who was denied access to him by this facility even though she had power of attorney and should have full access to him. Why was she denied visitation rights to her own father? Is it because she had criticized the care her father was receiving? We live in a free country, and people should feel free to question this system. For the people in that facility, Mr. Speaker, some people who complain about the system get punishment, and some people who praise the officials sometimes get rewards. There are 16 suites, and some people pay a little bit more, and the people who are yes-men get those suites.

I have received a report from the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. According to this report, it shows that this Allen Gray long-term care centre is a paradise. I mean, I don't know who I should believe. Should I believe those about 20 people who wrote me letters, phoned me regularly? They have lots of concerns. I don't know. I think the hon. member should know whom I should blame.

Anyway, the report is here, and I haven't gone through it yet. I just want to remind the hon. member that the facility no doubt – I mean, building-wise it's fantastic, overlooking a lake. But when the complaints were coming, nobody complained about the building of the facility. They were complaining about the care standards inside. I know he talked to 40 people, but I talked to many people. I mean, I disagree with that. But the decision is up to the government, up to the task force, so they should look at it again. I'm still receiving numerous calls and complaints about that facility.

Another thing. The office that we are talking about that this bill establishes would be a safe place for the staff and families to bring complaints without having to fear repercussions. I just mentioned the Allen Gray facility in my riding. Some people are so worried that they don't speak out. They are worried that if they speak out, maybe an official inside there will give them punishment, so they are not in a position to speak out. Maybe when delegates or the task force visit the facilities, if they visit there with the authorities, they will talk totally differently. So just to make a note of that.

Just about two or three months ago, Mr. Speaker, I asked the authorities through FOIP to give me a copy of the contract between the Capital health authority versus Allen Gray, which is now called Gray House Guild. They sent me this copy. It's about 130, 140 pages. I was asking for the latest financial statement of Allen Gray, and they sent me the financial statement from 1998 to 2000. I'm asking the member: is that fair? I want to know how much they are earning and what powers they have. Why is the minister not taking action against those facilities? They know that. I wrote the letters to the minister. I talked to the CEO, and I talked to the people there, and the people talked to the minister. They keep on contacting the minister. From this document I found out that the minister doesn't have the power to take action against those facilities.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister of seniors.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Continuing Care Standards Act. I'd like to commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for her commitment to Albertans living in continuing care. We all know of her passion, especially during session in the Legislature, when we've heard that many times as she speaks to continuing care. That compassion and commitment we all share, though, as well. It's to improve the quality of life for our seniors and other vulnerable Albertans living in our continuing care facilities.

I know that I let the House know previously, Mr. Speaker, that I would be reviewing the legislation in detail. I want to assure you that I have done that on several occasions and had an opportunity to speak to the member briefly about my thoughts in regard to Bill 205. I've been in the same situation as the member opposite: I've brought forward several private members' bills previously. I am aware of the importance of second reading because second reading focuses totally on the principle of the bill. I am supportive of some of the principles of Bill 205 but not all of them. I do support that updated standards be implemented, but the dilemma that I find I am in, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm not supportive of all the steps that have been put forward in the process, you know, to the whole situation of the standards and with continuing care.

5:10

I also recognize that the bill cannot be amended in second reading. It can only be amended at Committee of the Whole, which is the next step. Mr. Speaker – and I've learned this through putting through private members' bills – in order for it to get to Committee of the Whole, we must be supportive of second reading and, as you would say, not just the principle at second reading but every word, actually, that's in the bill at second reading before you get to Committee of the Whole. Having said that, I regret that I do not support all of the principles that are here in this bill. It's helped me recognize as a new minister, as well, for the past year that we need to communicate far better when these types of bills come forward because we're looking for the collective good at the end of the day with the right intent in the spirit of the bill and that we didn't have the opportunity to do that in the way that we could have.

Mr. Speaker, there is, as I've said, definitely value in enhancing the standards that are currently in place, and we are working hard to do that. If someone is at risk of neglect or abuse, that should be fully investigated, and you know that we do that now. The act is called the Continuing Care Standards Act, and really I view it as actually being more about a continuing care commissioner. Especially because the accommodation side of the standards, as we had discussed before, hon. member, fits in this ministry and the care standards with the Minister of Health and Wellness and for the reason, as I said, about it being mainly about the commissioner more than the actual accommodation/standards area, I'm unable to support Bill 205 because I know this to be reality: that creating a position such as this will duplicate many of the efforts that are already in place.

Creating a commissioner would also overlap planned changes that we heard in earlier debate are to come this year in response to the MLA task force on continuing care report. You know, Mr. Speaker, the idea of an independent advocate to address seniors' issues is a good idea. It's an idea that's been discussed before. It's an idea that has a lot of merit. In fact, we've recently had a formal presentation by a number of seniors' groups to the majority of our colleagues about establishing such a position. The desire of these seniors' groups was to have a seniors' advocate to address all issues related to seniors aged 55 and over.

I regret that Bill 205 identifies a commissioner that would not be

inclusive of all seniors' issues, as was put forward to me, but has a very narrow scope of only examining concerns in continuing care. I do remain open to the concept and the idea of moving forward with a seniors' advocate, but if such a position were created, my view is that the role would look at seniors' issues more broadly than the position that's described in Bill 205 and not be confined strictly to continuing care. Having said that, the greater concern I have with Bill 205 is that I believe that, in effect, it confuses not only roles and responsibilities but lines of communication and accountability on a very important issue which we all care about, which is the safety and well-being of seniors and others living in continuing care.

Clearly, in light of the Auditor General's report and the findings of the MLA task force there is much improvement needed in this area, Mr. Speaker. However, my colleague the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and I are working to address these concerns, and we have worked quickly. As the minister responsible for seniors' issues I support a more holistic approach to monitoring standards in our continuing care facilities. Rather than dealing with complaints or concerns one at a time, my ministry is developing a comprehensive strategy to address a number of processes that will respond directly to the concerns that the member has outlined in her bill. I have heard those concerns and am looking to address those. The strategy will include how to handle facility licensing, reporting, monitoring, enforcement of standards, the introduction of a new concerns resolution process.

The bill notes that the commissioner's duties would include monitoring compliance with continuing care standards. What is unclear is whether that means the commissioner would be responsible for all of the routine monitoring and enforcement across the province. I did try to bring clarity to that as I was reviewing the bill. As I said, I've read it several times. If that is the bill's intent, then this would be a significant administrative function, especially when you consider that there are more than 14,400 long-term care beds in the province, nearly 2,000 designated living spaces, not to mention the 9,000 lodge units across the province.

This would also be a challenge when you consider the other duties identified in the bill for the commissioner, especially the one that states, "To receive, review and investigate complaints regarding the health, safety or well-being of persons receiving continuing care in long-term care facilities or supportive living settings." My concern with this provision, hon. member, is that we already have both legislation and a process in place to address this function right now. I'm referring to the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which you know provides safeguards against the abuse of adults in government-funded care facilities. Protection for persons in care helps to ensure that abuse is reported, all complaints are investigated fully, and recommendations can be made to help prevent abuse from occurring in the future. If criminal activity is suspected, then protection for persons in care notifies the police immediately, which our guests here today would be fully aware of. If a continuing care commissioner were introduced as outlined in Bill 205, there would appear to be significant overlap, I believe, between the commissioner's duties and those of protection for persons in care.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, a legislative review of the Protection for Persons in Care Act has been completed, and my colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill is reviewing options for legislative amendments to be introduced during a future sitting of the Assembly.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, much of this legislation, although I know it to be really well intended, will duplicate other established legislative processes and other work already under way in regard to continuing care standards. For that reason, I cannot support Bill 205 here at second reading.

As you know, the Minister of Health and Wellness is responsible for health care standards, as I said earlier. Well, I am responsible for the accommodation standards. Together we are working to improve our continuing care system, and we're doing that not only with an investment of new funding but with the compassion and care that I know the member is looking for here today as well because we know that that's needed, too, to make the necessary changes to improve the system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 205, and I must very much commend the Member for Lethbridge-East for the fine work done on this bill, which is the priority bill for a private member's bill for the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition. I had that draw, and I was very pleased to see that the Member for Lethbridge-East could take this forward because this has been an issue of primary importance for me as the Member for Edmonton-Manning, primary importance for many, many Albertans, to see that the situation would somehow get fixed.

I was very displeased just a minute ago to hear the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports seem to indicate that she would not support this going through to the next level of debate and begin to talk about not dealing with this issue. This is something that came up very, very much during the last election. That was almost a year and a half ago now. It came up after to us. Many members have raised this in the House. The Auditor General's report put an exclamation mark behind the problems that we have in this area and the very real need that there has to be some sort of ability to enforce compliance, to ensure that standards are properly in place and properly enforced.

5:20

I find it very, very difficult that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka would say over and over again that the system is quite sound is what he heard in the committee that travelled around this province. Well, I attended one of those meetings in Calgary, and almost every person that reported in that meeting was appalled. Some of the stories were so horrific, almost, that I couldn't believe how bad the government has bungled its administration in this area and its responsibilities in this area. There's a huge need to achieve excellence in continuing care, especially as our demographic moves forward, especially as greater proportions of the population are part of this.

There are real inadequacies in the current system. The Auditor General was clear in his report that "standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced." One of the other names that we proposed earlier was inspector general to give force to the name of this position. The commissioner for continuing care is more comprehensive, I suppose, but we need something here that would in reality begin to ensure that there is somebody there that is independent, that could enforce compliance, that could pull a licence – pull a licence – to ensure that some of the abuses that we've seen, some of the abuses just through negligence that we've seen that have hurt so many families and have hurt the reputation of Alberta in this area, that that sort of independent power that would report to the Legislature, not report to the department, would be in place.

A continuing care commissioner addresses the exact problems that were identified by the Auditor General in May 2005 and the MLA task force in September of 2005. The Auditor General inspected long-term care facilities to obtain evidence about the quality of care and services provided throughout Alberta. Both the Auditor General

and the MLA task force identified that systems to monitor compliance and standards are inadequate and ineffective.

For example, page 15: standards for the provision of nursing and personal care in housing services and long-term care facilities are not current. Thirty per cent of facilities don't meet basic standards of care. The Member for Edmonton-Centre already emphasized that particular point. Standards are needed for services delivered in assisted living and other supportive living facilities. Page 15 of the Auditor General's report: systems to monitor compliance with standards for both long-term care facilities and lodges are not adequate. It goes on and on.

The Department does not have an adequate system to monitor long-term care facilities' compliance with Basic Standards. The Department relies on the Authorities, the Health Facilities Review Committee . . . and the Protection for Persons in Care Office . . . to monitor whether the facilities comply with Basic Standards.

In reality, these are all toothless. The HFRC and PPIC, the Health Facilities Review Committee and the protection for persons in care office, "do not inspect facilities for compliance with the Basic Standards and do not have enforcement mechanisms to ensure that facilities rectify non-compliance." As they said, "During our facility visits, we found that 31% of the Basic Standards relating to care were not met."

The HFRC has no authority to enforce compliance. There are no sanctions specified in the Health Facilities Review Committee Act. Facilities or regional health authorities have failed to implement recommendations following an investigation by the committee.

The protection for persons in care was established to prevent abuse of adults living in publicly funded facilities by requiring that abuse be reported and investigated . . . PPIC investigates reports of abuse involving adults receiving publicly funded care services from hospitals, long-term care facilities, seniors lodges, shelters and group homes. PPIC investigates approximately 90% of abuse complaints using contracted investigators who have backgrounds in health professions and law enforcement. In some cases, referrals are made directly to police authorities or professional associations or colleges.

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PPIC completes investigations based on complaints of abuse from residents, family, facility staff or others in a number of settings, including long-term care facilities. PPIC provides only limited assurance of compliance . . . PPIC does not conduct compliance or regulatory reviews in long-term care facilities for the Basic Standards, policies, procedures or legislation.

The task force did a lot of work last summer. I think it was good to see an opposition member on that task force and a very qualified one at that, the Member for Lethbridge-East. You know, that committee said that "standards will only be effective if compliance is monitored and enforced." Again we come to the need for being monitored and for being enforced, the need for an office that has some independent authority. The standards need to be updated and reviewed routinely. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned that we have to move quickly. I think, actually, that the legislation that the Member for Lethbridge-East has put forward here does provide something that would probably get this going much quicker than anything else we have seen to date.

The committee went on that "legislation and policies around standards need to be reviewed and updated." Well, it seems to be obvious.

"The public would like inspections to be carried out by an organization that is at arms-length from government, RHAs and operators," and that seems to be a key recommendation that the government looks to be going back on.

“It is the role of government to monitor and enforce standards and that the RHAs need to be held accountable for the quality of care, including contracted health services,” and the only way to do that would be through some independent authority. One that reports to this Legislature, as I’ve said before, is what we really need in this, and this bill addresses that clearly.

“The public is not confident that providers are being held accountable, and are especially concerned with private providers. As a result, the public would like detailed operational standards that are easily measurable.”

Recommendation 26 of the MLA task force:

Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Seniors and Community Supports should collaboratively assess options for monitoring compliance with the health service and accommodation standards, including reviewing the roles, responsibilities and effectiveness of

existing mechanisms, such as the Health Facilities Review Committee.

Well, I mean, how we’re going to be relying on that as the way out here is almost beyond me. It is just almost impossible.

Well, I’ll move to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:29 p.m.]

