



Holy Cross Care Centre

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Dr. Kevin Taft, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition

March 12, 2007

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty-two seniors in Calgary are currently being relocated from the Holy Cross centre long-term care facility due to inadequate care and fire code violations.

This incident indicates that the facilities that care for our most vulnerable citizens do not appear to have improved since the Auditor General's scathing report into long-term care nearly two years ago. The province also refuses to implement legislated, province-wide standards for continuing care. My questions are to the Premier. Given that long-term care residents in the Holy Cross centre will be moved out over the next 30 days, how can the Premier reassure Albertans that the health and safety of the assisted living residents who will remain in the building are not also at risk?



Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have very good policies and procedures in place to protect those in care. With respect to assisted living it's an administrative matter, and I'll leave it to the minister of health to answer.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: has the Premier been able to determine how long the residents were at risk before the decision was made to move them?

Mr. Stelmach: There was a fair amount of work done by the minister of health, and he'll be able to answer that question.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been some ongoing monitoring of the situation at the long-term care centre at the Holy Cross in Calgary. There was an inspection, I'm advised, by the city of Calgary on the fire and safety codes issues, and a report was issued on that in December. I was made aware of the situation early in February, I believe. The Calgary regional health authority has been monitoring the situation relative to the long-term care beds in that particular facility and working with the fire and safety codes people to make sure that safety is not compromised for the residents. There has been a fire watch put in place, as I understand it, and the Calgary regional health authority has put in place their own personnel to make sure that both the safety issues and the care issues of the long-term care residents in that facility are taken care of. With respect to the assisted living, that is a private facility, but they still operate under the fire codes and safety codes, so the owners of the facility will have to answer to the city of Calgary's fire and safety with respect to making sure that safety is monitored on that side as well.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Auditor General's report on the quality of long-term care across the province indicated that clear standards of care were needed – and that was two years ago – why is this government continuing to delay on creating legislated province-wide standards of care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has invested a considerable amount of money in the care of our seniors and will continue to do that. I know that there were additional dollars that went into the ministry's budget to move us forward towards the recommendations that came forward from the long-term care committee. We're doing the best we can. Just by memory, I think there was at least \$70 million injected into it. But if further details are required, I can have the minister respond.

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Holy Cross Care Centre (continued)

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Mr. Dave Taylor, Hon. Member from Calgary-Currie

March 12, 2007



Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Given the old Holy Cross hospital site's ongoing list of problems and controversies since it was sold to private owners 10 years ago – toxic mould, asbestos abatement issues, fire code violations, and now the Calgary health region's conclusion that the long-term care facility fails to meet provincial standards of care – it's time to make sure that private providers of care are held accountable, and it's time to restore public confidence. Will the Premier commit to launching a public inquiry into the operations of the Holy Cross site?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, no. I have great confidence in the Calgary regional health authority that has a contract with the owners. First and foremost, it's safety and, of course, care of our seniors in that institution. If there is any further work to be done by the Calgary regional health authority or further help that they require from this government, we'll be there to help.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the potential province wide implications here, the ongoing problems at the Holy Cross site, the inherent vulnerability of the residents in care, and the province's duty of care to the residents, why won't the Premier do the right thing and investigate the situation?

Mr. Stelmach: The authority is responsible to the minister of health, and if the minister of health feels that either the Calgary regional health authority or someone in the process isn't doing their job, I'm sure that the minister will step in and ensure the safety of our seniors in that facility.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the health minister's admission just a moment ago that he knew of fire code violations in the Holy Cross building in early February and given that the residents of the assisted living facility there have recently been notified that their rents are increasing by about 40 per cent, what is the Premier doing to rectify one or the other matter?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the kinds of long-term care services that Alberta provides are outstanding. In fact, we spend a considerable amount of money in terms of the care, the amount of insured drugs, the kind of health services. Is there more to do, generally speaking, across the province for an aging population? Certainly. Those are going to be the kind of cost pressures that are going to be coming forward in the budget that will be presented in this House. We're trying to find people to fill all of the positions – dietary and housekeeping, not only nursing and physicians – to take care of our seniors. But I'm proud of the progress that has been accomplished and proud of the fact that we're going to move ahead in this area.

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Holy Cross Care Centre (continued)

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Ms. Bridget Pastoor, Hon. Member from Lethbridge-East

March 13, 2007

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This may sound like an echo, but it is not. The problems at the Holy Cross Manor illustrated the consequences of this government's decision to deregulate long-term care.



As the health minister pointed out yesterday, the assisted living residents are not technically under the jurisdiction of the Calgary health region. To the health minister: will the minister explain why these assisted living residents aren't receiving the same safety protection by the government as the long-term care residents living in the same building?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole area of assisted living is outside the scope of the health department, so the minister of seniors and community programs may want to supplement. In essence, the relationship between people in assisted living is a relationship where people have, as I understand it, contracted with the owner of a building like they might in any apartment building, but they've contracted for a living accommodation with some supplemental services. That is a private relationship between the people that have moved into that assisted living facility, renting space to live with supplementary services, which is quite different than long-term care, which falls into a health and accommodation facility.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Then in light of that, is this the position of this government: that residents housed on the floors that receive public funding should receive different levels of care than residents housed on the floors that are privately funded?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, when one builds a building, one may have a multitude of uses for the building. You might have a building where you could have normal apartments that anybody might rent, and then you might have another level. In fact, one of the key innovations in housing for seniors and others in this province and elsewhere is the whole idea of integrated aging in place so that you can move through the types of accommodation that you need and the support services you need. There are many seniors and others in this province who rent apartments or own their own homes and might need some assistance in terms of care coming in, and others live in facilities that have intensive care. There's absolutely no reason why that full continuum can't exist in the same building.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the answer has clearly indicated how complex this question is after deregulation. Will the minister commit to legislating clear standards for anyone in care to apply equally across this province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have standards of care, but it should be clear that just because a person is living in what might be called an assisted living facility doesn't mean they're in care.

An Hon. Member: You don't care.

Mr. Hancock: I care very deeply about Albertans, and one of the things that we want to do to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to stay healthy is to respect their individual desires and wishes and their ability to care for themselves. There's a full continuum of housing, and it's not for the government or anyone else to take away people's independence when they can have it.

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Holy Cross Care Centre

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Mr. Dave Taylor, Hon. Member from Calgary-Currie

March 20, 2007

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Canada/Alberta affordable housing program in October 2004 and January 2005 the owners of Holy Cross Manor in Calgary were granted over 3 million provincial tax dollars to build a total of 230 units of affordable housing.



Enterprise Universal Incorporated hasn't been paid out the full amount yet, and thank goodness for that because not only have they not produced a single unit ready for occupancy; they haven't even made a substantial beginning on the second project. The rules say that the deadline for completing these projects is 24 months from the time the money is granted. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who clearly didn't see this mess coming: why isn't the minister on top of this?

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that the ministry is on top, and we have continuing consultation with developers on their progress. We also have communications with those developers to see if there are any difficulties. At the present time that is what's been done.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the minister wasn't minding the store, and he wasn't staying on top of things, or else we wouldn't have gone two months beyond the completion deadline without the work even commencing. Or could the minister prove me wrong, perhaps, by sharing with this House, in the interests of transparency, the details of how this tight, ongoing process of dialogue works to produce results? I don't see any.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the Grey Nuns building project: part of it has been and is behind schedule. But I do want to say that the \$3.2 million that was committed, the 1950s building project for 100 seniors' units, is near completion. The second phase, or the second part of the application, which involves \$4.5 million: there has been no indication from the developer of him pulling out of the project, but I will say that we are having continuing dialogue with that developer.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't need excuses. Albertans need affordable homes. Everybody needs a home. Enterprise Universal now says that it does need more time and more money, or else it will pull the plug on the second project, 130 units of affordable housing for families and seniors, and give back the million and change the province has already advanced it. Doesn't the minister think it's about time to take them up on their offer, or is he planning to shovel even more tax dollars into this money pit?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the project that was applied for was a good project. There are criteria for those projects, and the criteria were adhered to by this developer.

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Holy Cross Care Centre

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Mr. Dave Taylor, Hon. Member from Calgary-Currie

March 21, 2007

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first concern is to get affordable housing built in a timely fashion. My second concern is this: when provincially funded affordable housing isn't built on time, as in the case of the Holy Cross centre, we get all our money back and give it to someone who can get the affordable housing built. We learned today that the government neglected to put into the contract with the Holy Cross a guarantee that if the project fails, we get all the money back that we're entitled to. To the Premier: can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring Enterprise Universal Inc. to pay back the money with interest if the project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's a very specific question to a specific agreement. We'll get back to the member with respect to that specific agreement, and we'll consult with the housing minister.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to that answer. At 5 per cent compounded, in two years the party in possession of \$1.137 million can rack up about \$120,000 in interest. That's a sizable chunk of coin, I would say, in any ordinary Albertan's books. It could pay for another affordable housing unit. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts? It's our money, after all. It doesn't belong to the contractor who fails to deliver.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the priorities, of course, that Albertans talked to me about during the leadership campaign. Of course, as the new government we moved immediately on this critical issue. We now have in possession a report, a report, quite frankly, that was done by an all-party committee, really a first of its kind. The minister now is reviewing the report. He will be presenting his recommendations to the cabinet policy committee, to caucus, and to this government, and we will act on it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, you don't need a task force to answer that question.

Interestingly, the amount of interest equals the \$120,000 that the company has already spent on demolition and design, which the government says it's not expecting to be returned. You know, I'm not very good at math; that's why I'm not the Finance critic. To the Premier: does one cancel out the other, or is the taxpayer now out \$240,000?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I guess that's why he was a radio announcer before he got here.

An Hon. Member: Low blow. Low blow.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I hear from across the way, "Low blow." They can snip and snipe away, make all kinds of obnoxious comments, and then in jest with a smile on my face – and all of a sudden look at how they're all getting upset. [interjections] Look at that. Whoa. Man.

Alberta Hansard, March 21, 2007 (p.261)



Holy Cross Care Centre

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Mr. Dave Taylor, Hon. Member from Calgary-Currie

March 22, 2007

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apropos of nothing yesterday in question period the Premier brought up my career in radio.

Perhaps like many other Albertans he misses me on the radio because now he can't get both sides of the story like he used to. I had one basic rule on my talk show, and it was this: answer my questions, and I'll leave you alone. I'm looking for the answer the Premier promised me yesterday. Can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring the owners of the Holy Cross centre to pay the province back with interest the affordable housing grant they were given if that project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will say that the hon. member sent me a message asking me to stay here for his question, so thank you for the message.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for staying.

Mr. Stelmach: You're welcome. What I was going to say is, of course, that this is a responsibility of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he'll answer the question.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there is a clause in the affordable housing program grant funding. The agreement is between the government of Canada, government of Alberta, and Enterprise Universal, such as you stated yesterday. Under the terms of the agreement . . .

The Speaker: We'll get to it, I'm sure, in the next one.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll have to get the hon. minister to table that so we can read it. I've got constituents left, right, and centre calling my office, and they want answers to all kinds of questions they've got about the Holy Cross, going back years. So I'll try again with another question, and I don't want to hear about the affordable housing task force. Its report, which the government continues not to release to the public, is irrelevant to this question. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that now. I'll have to investigate further and see what it applies to in all departments, what it means. Most certainly, we'll investigate and get back to the hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the recipient must return the grant or the unused portion of grant including interest.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking for that answer for a few days now. Again to the Premier, and I promise that if he doesn't make fun of my old career, I won't make fun of his although, I suppose, both can involve shovelling some manure. Will the Premier please make clear to this House, the taxpayers of Alberta, and the constituents of Calgary-Currie how much money his government is going to lose on the Holy Cross gambit if the Grey Nuns affordable housing project fails to go through and get built?

Mr. Stelmach: Very tempted to – no, I won't go that way although I am very proud of my heritage, Mr. Speaker. But specific to that, if the minister can answer in 15 seconds, fine. If not we'll get it to you.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, very clearly: none.

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