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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

David Swann, MD

M.L.A. CALGARY MOUNTAIN VIEW
LEADER, OFFICIAL OPPOSITION OF ALBERTA

Premier Ed Stelmach
307 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed,".

March 16, 2010

Dear ~~Premier Stelmach~~,

I am sure you recall our previous conversations and correspondence regarding civil debate in the Legislative Assembly. I appreciated these discussions, as they revealed our shared respect for this great democratic institution. As MLAs, we all share the responsibility to participate in the civil and informed debate that Albertans deserve in our Legislature.

This brings me to the conduct of members of your caucus during the debate last night on Motion 504, regarding the creation of an Anaphylaxis Policy for Schools. This conduct was witnessed not only by opposition MLAs, but by members of the public, including several children. As Motion 504 deals with a very serious issue – one of life and death, in fact – I was hoping that the debate would be respectful. However, this was not the case. I have been informed by a family who attended the debate that many members of the government caucus were occupying themselves during this debate with games on their blackberries, pictures on their laptops, and, in one case, a furniture catalogue. In addition, throughout the debate, many members of your caucus made disrespectful and disparaging remarks, at times drowning out opposition members during their time to speak. It was one of these remarks which compelled me to write this letter.

As I have mentioned, members of the public were present for the debate on Motion 504. A family whose children are affected by peanut allergies and were thus very invested in the outcome of Motion 504 has shared their disappointment with the tone of this debate. Not only are they now in the position of having to explain the actions of government MLAs to their children – who, though aged 6, 8, and 10 were acutely aware that the actions of your caucus members were inappropriate – but also have to deal with the repercussions of a particularly insensitive comment made by a member of your caucus regarding their family.

While I do not want to single out one member of your caucus, I do want to bring a particular comment made during the Motion 504 debate to your attention. At one point in the debate, a member of your caucus referred to the family in the Legislature Gallery as 'the peanut gallery.' As I am sure you can imagine, making a statement like this regarding children who are in the Legislature specifically because they suffer from life-threatening peanut allergies is remarkably insensitive.

I believe that the behaviour of the MLAs in your caucus is ultimately your responsibility. As you have previously argued, party leaders need to demonstrate through actions and words their commitment to, and respect for, democratic ideals. Simply put, with leadership comes the burden of discipline. I challenge you to live up to this statement and to ask your caucus to:

- 1) respect the importance of civil and informed debate in the Legislature. Please instruct your MLAs to pay attention when other members of the Legislative Assembly are speaking. I am sure this is not the first time that you have heard from members of the public who are disappointed to see government MLAs blatantly ignoring the proceedings of the house. Without paying attention to debate, how can the public be assured that government MLAs are making informed votes on motions such as Motion 504?
- 2) speak to your caucus about the disrespectful and thoughtless remarks made in earshot of the family in the gallery last night. While I do not want to single out the member, the MLA who made those remarks should be instructed to apologize to the family as well as to the Legislative Assembly.

It is my hope that you will take the earliest opportunity to take whatever disciplinary action you deem appropriate and to publicly condemn the behaviour of your colleague. I have attached the letter from Ana Wigger concerning this subject for your information.

Yours truly,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'David Swann' written in a cursive style. The signature on the right is another name, also in cursive, which appears to be 'Susan'.

Dr. David Swann
Leader of Alberta's Official Opposition

Encl.