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The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOURISM

Mr Farnan: I want to take this opportunity to commend the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation on its 1990 tourism publications. The flagship publication listing communities and attractions across the province and the ministry's facility guides on camping and accommodation are excellent, and I commend the production of these publications in six languages.

There is obviously a serious effort on the part of the ministry's staff, but their efforts will be to no avail unless this government gets serious about tourism. We have experienced a significant decline, especially in the number of American tourists to Canada, at a time when more and more Canadians are taking vacations south of the border.

Surely the Premier should realize that the present Minister of Tourism and Recreation has not been able to give this portfolio the attention it deserves. The minister's main concentration has been on selling lottery tickets and his exhaustive speaking engagements in the area of drugs. Tourism, which

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Hon Mr Wrye: As honourable members know, this is National Access Awareness Week, which focuses on achieving the full integration of disabled persons into the social and economic life of our country.

In recognition of this occasion, I would like to announce a provincial policy commitment and a series of related initiatives which will enhance the government's programs for providing accessible transportation to disabled persons.

I am pleased to announce today that the province is formally committing itself to the principle of a fully accessible public transportation. The government plans to achieve this long-term goal in an efficient, effective and fiscally responsible manner.

This has been done in co-operation with other provincial ministries and agencies, including the offices of the Minister without Portfolio responsible for disabled persons and the Minister without Portfolio responsible for senior citizens' affairs. Extensive consultation was also conducted with consumer groups, municipal and industry associations and service providers.

This commitment will mean a greater opportunity for disabled persons and seniors with mobility problems to participate in the full spectrum of community activities. It will also promote the dignity and independence of all individuals.

Specifically, I am pleased to inform the House that for the next four years the government will increase to a maximum of 90% from the current 75% its funding of special features that make conventional transit services more accessible to frail and ambulatory disabled persons.

This will mean an added incentive of about \$8.7 million to municipalities to equip their fleets with such features as kneeling buses that lower the front step, angled courtesy seating and improved public address systems. These improvements will make public transit services more convenient and user-friendly for nine of 10 disabled persons.

Earlier this spring, the government unveiled a program of rapid transit expansion in the greater Toronto area involving a \$5-billion investment through provincial, municipal and private sector financing.

The implementation of this program will present many opportunities for enhanced service to all current TTC subway and GO rail transit riders, including people with children in strollers, seniors and disabled persons.

In that regard, the government endorses the TTC report, "Choices for the Future." The report's recommendations include improvements to Wheel-Trans services, implementation of easier access features on conventional transit, accessibility to all new rapid transit stations and retrofitting 20 key existing stations. My ministry will work with the TTC to implement these recommendations.

1350

In addition to these improvements to TTC services, all of GO's new commuter rail stations will be accessible to persons with disabilities. I have asked my officials to develop a program and timetable for retrofitting key GO stations and report back to me this fall.

As members will know, the three-year-old accessible taxi demonstration project has been enormously successful, most especially in some of Ontario's small to medium-sized communities. Throughout the province, the number of individuals using accessible taxis is steadily rising. Just yesterday morning, I launched yet another such service in the city of London.

Today I am pleased to announce that we will be turning our accessible taxi initiative from a pilot project into an ongoing Ontario government program representing a new provincial commitment of more than \$1 million a year. This is a popular transportation option, as disabled persons use taxis eight times as often as the general population. Over the next couple of months, I will be announcing the introduction of accessible taxis to many more municipalities, adding to the more than 20 which already have these services.

The government is making a formal commitment to the efficient, effective and fiscally responsible achievement of fully accessible public transportation. These undertakings will have important implications for all parts of our province, and combined with the programs already in place, will move us significantly closer to our goal of a full range of transportation options for all Ontarians.

CLASS ACTIONS

Hon Mr Scott: A little less than a year ago, on 29 June 1989, I announced in the Legislature this government's intention to undertake class action reform.

Members will recall that a class action or a class proceeding is a special procedure that permits numerous individuals who have suffered a common wrong to seek redress in one lawsuit as a group, rather than in numerous lawsuits as individuals. It can be a valuable tool for litigants since it will provide an effective means to achieve compensation for widespread harm or injury while at the same time saving limited court time and resources.

Our society will unfortunately continue to see incidents of mass loss similar to the Mississauga train derailment, the Dalkon Shield case, mass environmental damage, defective products and other consumer losses. These are all examples of the kinds of claims that may be treated, I believe, more efficiently in a class proceeding.

On 29 June 1989, I set out in this House several principles of reform to which the government was committed. Around those principles, I formed a broadly representative advisory committee to make recommendations. That committee has produced a unanimous report which is being tabled today and on the basis of which I am pleased to introduce a bill entitled the Class Proceedings Act, 1990.

The act builds upon the important work of the Ontario Law Reform Commission, which completed an exhaustive review of this field in 1982 and published a report that has been hailed as an important contribution to scholarship in the class action area.

Although the report presented a powerful case for reform, none was forthcoming at that time.

This government did not feel it would be appropriate to prepare legislation affecting so many people without the advice of business, environmentalists, lawyers and consumers. It was for that reason that I established the Advisory Committee on Class Action Reform, whose membership included representatives of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Retail Council of Canada, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Environmental Law Association, Energy Probe, the Advocates' Society, the Canadian Bar Association of Ontario and the Insurance Bureau of Canada, representatives of which are in the gallery.

A word of thanks must go to the members of that advisory committee. They worked long and hard as volunteers on a complex subject and produced sound and, equally remarkable, unanimous advice for this government.

The highlights of the proposed procedure are as follows: The class proceeding will include a step in which a judge will screen potential class proceedings according to a specific test; members of the class who do not wish to participate in the class proceeding will have the opportunity to exclude themselves, or opt out, of the proceeding; the representative plaintiff will be required to ensure that the class members obtain notice of the proceeding; and once certified by the court, the proceeding would continue in a manner similar to other civil litigation, but with some significant differences, namely, that one judge will hear all the motions up to the trial and the court will have the ability to make aggregate judgements in cases where the only issue is the assessment of damages for many individuals.

Normal costs rules for litigation will apply, but lawyers and their clients will be permitted to engage in special fee arrangements for such proceedings, subject to the court having final control over all fees and disbursement agreements.

The bill's provisions ensure that plaintiffs and defendants are treated fairly and that the class proceeding makes a positive contribution to the resolution of civil disputes.

I am also pleased to announce the establishment of a class proceedings fund in the amount of

\$500,000, to be administered by its sole contributor, the Law Foundation of Ontario. This fund, which was part of the advisory committee's unanimous recommendations, will provide financial assistance and some cost security to those litigants who are prepared to undertake the class proceedings on behalf of themselves and others.

This bill, on balance, provides the detailed procedure that is needed to equip our courts to handle the potentially complex litigation that members of our society will undoubtedly face in the future. I hope that we can enact it quickly in order that the people of Ontario can finally benefit from this important access to justice, and I want to particularly thank the advisory committee for its assistance in this important and difficult work.

RESPONSES

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Allen: At last, at last; but how long have we had to wait? For years, questions in estimates, questions in the House: disabled transit, fully accessible, please. Finally, finally, we have a response, and we are delighted that the minister is going to be following the Choices document of the TTC and moving in on the subway stations and their accessibility in this city. We are delighted to see that at last there is going to be some action on fully accessible GO Transit.

We are delighted that the subsidies that have been proposed for municipal fully accessible disabled transit and public transit for the disabled are going to go up to 90%. That had been a really big sticking point, because municipality after municipality, small and large, has told us time and again, "The reason we can't get into this is it's absolutely impossible in terms of the financing involved in relationship to our tax base; we couldn't ever carry it."

So now they have done it and we are pleased to see it has happened, even though three years ago they might have done it when Freedom to Move is Life Itself was issued by the Ontario Advisory Council for Disabled Persons, or a year or two before that when the Trans-Action coalition had put forward a memorandum of agreement it wanted the minister to sign so that he would step in the disabled accessibility over a period of 20 or 30 years. No, nobody would sign it.

I do not know what has brought about the conversion. I presume it is the persuasiveness of the disabled community itself that has finally brought this government to its knees on this particular question. I give them full benefit and full praise for having lobbed their arguments so successfully and hit the minister so hard and so often that finally he has come across. I thank the minister very much on behalf of the disabled. We will just keep a watch on how quickly he moves on the whole process.

CLASS ACTIONS

Mr B. Rae: I want to respond to the statement by the Attorney General. This might have been a dramatically progressive idea in some parts of the world 20 years ago, but the Attorney General has by his own admission said that the United States has had this legislation for 20 years, that it has been the law in the province of Quebec for 10 years and that it took his government four years after 1985 before it even established a committee.

The reason that I raise it in this context is that if it takes this government eight years, or two governments eight years -- and increasingly it is becoming difficult to notice the difference between the blue and the red as these colours gradually elide and collide and merge into the purple hue of --

1400

An hon member: The Attorney General.

Mr B. Rae: -- the Attorney General. No, I did not say that.

The reason that I raise this delay in this way is that the Ontario Law Reform Commission very recently produced an important report with respect to class remedies and group remedies with respect to the environment. It dealt not only with the creation of a cause of action, but also directly with the question of steps that needed to be taken. I can say to the Attorney General that we all hope and expect that it will not take eight years for the government to respond to that.

The private member's bill which stands in the name of my colleague the member for Etobicoke-

Lakeshore talks about the need for an environmental bill of rights which will ensure that citizens -- who have, by and large, in their consciousness and their activity, been far ahead of governments -- have some effective rights, in order to enforce the law in a speedy, effective and efficient way with respect to environmental damage.

The Attorney General knows full well that until we create some new causes of action, this class action proposal does not go far enough. It only deals with existing torts and not with new ones that have to be created, so I say to the Attorney General that what he has done needed to be done 20 years ago, what needs to be done with respect to the environment needed to be done yesterday, and we expect him to get on with it before the end of this session.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mrs Marland: We too welcome the transportation initiatives. However, I would like to say that the government's record in keeping its transportation promises to persons with disabilities is extremely poor, and I feel obliged at this time to comment on the success of some of its 1987 election promises, since these may well fall into the same category.

The Liberal government has an extremely poor record with regard to fulfilling the needs of persons with disabilities. Access to public transportation is nothing short of inadequate in this province. The government made a number of promises during the 1987 provincial election campaign to improve access to public transportation, but unfortunately has not implemented them. I would like to comment on the progress of some of these two-and-a-half-year-old promises.

The government promised \$2.5 million annually over five years to provide lower transit fees for seniors and the disabled. To date, the government has not spent one cent on the implementation of this program.

To encourage smaller communities to provide special-needs transit services, \$14.3 million was committed over five years. Almost three years after the promise was made, no money has been spent towards the implementation of this initiative. The program is apparently still in the developmental stages.

The annual supplement of \$2.5 million promised and designed to improve access to public transit has also not been spent.

Last month, the Minister of Transportation announced a \$5-billion initiative to public transit in Toronto. It was disappointing that there was no mention made as to whether these new transit systems would be fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

It is also disappointing that the election promises made by the David Peterson government in 1987 to improve conventional transit are still in the developmental stages.

I call on the government to take immediate measures to ensure that public transit is fully accessible to persons with disabilities. It is time that this Liberal government realizes that accessible transportation is the only way for persons with disabilities to have equal access to employment, education and recreational activities.

When we look at this amount of \$8.7 million in today's announcement as an added incentive to municipalities, all I can say is that \$8.7 million over four years is not enough, especially coming from a government which has spent almost \$20 million in two years on a useless auto insurance bureaucracy.

Finally, I would like to say that it is fine for them to announce the improvements that will make all new GO Transit commuter stations accessible. The question is, what about the existing GO Transit stations which are not accessible?

CLASS ACTIONS

Mr Cureatz: In response to the Attorney General's announcement, as I indicated to him when he was out visiting my riding of Durham East, I do not always have this wonderful opportunity of speaking to some of the proposals that are coming forth from his ministry. I am interested, of course, so I am always listening to the Attorney General.

In 1982 the report of the Ontario Law Reform Commission made similar recommendations. That was from 1982 to 1985. Let's see, what party was in power then? Oh yes, the Conservatives. So that means the Conservatives did nothing in terms of this kind of legislation. Lo and behold, the Liberal administration takes over from 1985 to 1990. Now that is about five years, so over five years those people have not done anything about this. That just goes to show that they are twice as good at doing nothing as we were, if members follow that kind of rationale.

It makes me think in terms of why the Attorney General has brought this forward at this particular point in time with about two weeks left of the Legislature. Everybody is talking about an election. Could this just be a little dangling item so that the honourable Attorney General could hold forth a proposed piece of legislation which I doubt very much is going to pass through the assembly by the time we adjourn, with Orders and Notices as full as it is?

In any event, I do want to congratulate the Attorney General in terms of at least finally bringing forth the proposal. I think the recommendations will go a long way in satisfying a lot of those interest groups, those that all of us are familiar with in our particular riding offices, be it the environmental groups, the consumers' association, Energy Probe or the Advocates' Society.

I might conclude by saying my colleague the member for Carleton is concerned about the contingency fees, but that is about the only issue the member for Carleton and I have ever differed on.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PATRICIA STARR

Mr B. Rae: I have a question for the Premier. The news this morning is that some 71 charges under the Election Finances Act have been laid, 34 against Mrs Starr and 11 against campaign officials of a variety of campaigns, including those of the now Minister of Industry, Trade and Technology and the Minister without Portfolio responsible for women's issues.

Mrs Starr, in an interview which was published in the Globe and Mail on 7 June 1990, said that while she would not identify the person, a major senior figure in the Liberal cabinet back in 1985 was the person who told her the way to make contributions to a variety of campaigns. This is a very serious allegation that has been made by Mrs Starr, now made publicly. I wonder if the Premier could tell us what his own investigations and discussions with his cabinet colleagues have revealed with respect to this very serious allegation.

Hon Mr Peterson: As members know, there have been rumours coming out of the Commission on Election Finances for some time now about its action. I do not think it is appropriate for me to comment on charges that are now in the courts.

Mr B. Rae: This deals with the political responsibility of the Premier for the conduct of the members of his cabinet. He will know that just a short time ago he heard some allegations with respect to the conduct of the Minister of Culture and Communications, which conduct does not appear to have been illegal but was sufficient for the Premier to agree with her that it was a good idea for her to resign.

This is not a rumour. This is an interview which Mrs Starr has given to the Globe and Mail in which she has stated very clearly and categorically and emphatically that a senior member of the Premier's cabinet was involved in giving her advice with respect to what happened.

Hon Mr Scott: Name names.

Mr B. Rae: The Attorney General says, "Name names."

Hon Mr Scott: No, I am telling her to name names.

Mr B. Rae: I am asking the Premier very simply this: He has stated that he has the highest possible standards of conduct for the members of his cabinet. I want to ask him, since this interview became public knowledge, what has he done to ascertain the identity of the person who was giving Mrs Starr this kind of advice?

Hon Mr Peterson: Allegations are made and no names are supplied, and the member obviously is taking advantage of that to broad-brush the whole situation. He has the right to do that, but this is

before the courts and she will have the opportunity to present the facts as she sees them. Surely, that is the way our system works.

1410

Mr B. Rae: The Premier is responsible for the political conduct of the members of his cabinet. If he wants to narrow the brush, as he has put it, he is the one who is in a position to do that.

I want to ask the Premier very specifically, what discussions has he had with any members of his cabinet with respect to the very serious charges made by Mrs Starr with respect to the conduct of a member of his cabinet, and if he has had no discussions, why not?

Hon Mr Peterson: There are rumours around about you, about lots of other situations. Anybody can stand up and say that. I have absolutely no evidence of that, and if she has evidence of it, obviously she will present it in the courts.

[Later]

Mr B. Rae: On a point of order, Mr Chairman: I know that it is not normal to interrupt this proceeding at this point, but it is because of a point that was made to me by another member, the member for Dufferin-Peel, who stated to me that she felt I was referring to her and to her riding association in one of the questions that I asked today.

She assures me that her riding association is not subject to any charges under the Election Finances Act. If that is the case, I would like to correct the record and make it very clear that I was not in fact referring either to her or to her riding association, and I wanted to take the earliest opportunity to do that. I will correct Hansard accordingly.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr B. Rae: I would like to ask a question of the Premier about the state of Ontario's economy. In the last period of time, we have seen an incredible number of layoffs in the manufacturing heart of our province, in eastern Ontario, in southwestern Ontario, in northern Ontario. Indeed, there is not a part of the province that has not been touched by record layoffs in the last few months.

I would like to ask the Premier why it is that this government has failed to introduce any single measure which would deal with the effect of these layoffs, this unemployment, on the working men and women of this province.

Hon Mr Peterson: I think the Treasurer can help out my honourable friend with the state of the Ontario economy.

The Speaker: Referred to the Treasurer.

Hon R. F. Nixon: I think the honourable member is aware that however inadequate he may feel our legislation is, it is considered by impartial observers to be the most effective that is available in North America. There has been considerable review and discussion in this House about how it might be focused further, and I am sure that is going to be a subject of debate, both here and elsewhere in the democratic process. Perhaps I would wait for the honourable member's additional questions before I defend the economy.

Mr B. Rae: In eastern Ontario, more than 2,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost over the past year in nine eastern Ontario counties, excluding Ottawa-Carleton. In Cornwall, eight plants closed and 1,000 jobs have been lost over the past 12 months. In Renfrew, six companies closed and 391 jobs disappeared, with another 200 on the line.

Let me name him one specific reform which he himself promised the people of Ontario back in 1985. Why have we not see the legislation with respect to pension reform, ensuring that pensions would be indexed, protected against inflation, so that at least those workers who are laid off and forced to take early retirement will have some protection as they face the future?

Hon R. F. Nixon: The honourable member has recounted the thousands of jobs we are losing without giving the other side of the story. We pursued this matter earlier this week and he is aware that none of these jobs, even his own and even my own, are preserved in amber, but he would also

be aware that the economy is going to produce at least 50,000 new jobs during this year. It is interesting that during the first five months of this calendar year there have been 25,000 to 30,000 new jobs produced.

Mr Reville: Flipping hamburgers at a hamburger stand.

Hon R. F. Nixon: The honourable member is quick to say that these jobs are hamburger flippers or something like that, not that we as politicians have anything against people who flip hamburgers, but we also know that commitments have been made by Ford Motor Co for substantial additional capital with new jobs, that Toyota has announced additional hiring; so has Honda, so has Suzuki.

I feel that the honourable member is mesmerized by negative aspects of the news, when in fact our economy continues to grow. I wish it would continue to grow as fast as it did four years ago, or even three years ago, but the honourable members are aware that the economic growth in all jurisdictions in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is diminishing, but we are projecting solid and measurable growth this year, with net new jobs of at least 50,000.

Mr B. Rae: The Treasurer is really talking through his hat, because in May, seasonally adjusted employment dropped by 44,000 over one month -- that is a net figure -- and unemployment increased by 32,000. That is another net, real figure. Those are real figures and real numbers in May 1990.

Given that this is happening, and it is undeniable that it is happening right across the manufacturing economy of this province, again with respect to a very specific promise that the Liberal Party made to the people of this province, the Liberal Party said to workers who were going to be taking retirement, "If you've got a pension plan, we will ensure that at least it's indexed." That is what the Liberal Party promised them in 1985. Where is that promise today? Why has it reneged on that promise?

Hon R. F. Nixon: The honourable member, in talking about the employment statistics, has surely overlooked the fact that the unemployment rate in this province is by far the lowest of any provincial jurisdiction.

Mr D. S. Cooke: What about some of the regions of the province?

Hon R. F. Nixon: Comparisons are invidious. Having said that, let's look at Quebec, where the unemployment level is over 9%. I am very much impressed with their efforts to improve that, as, frankly, the honourable member should be applauding the efforts that this government has made to improve employment opportunities in this province.

We think they are effective and our employment levels, although they went up 0.8% year over year, are an indication that the economy is not growing as fast as it was but it is still positive.

CIVIL SERVICE

Mr Harris: I have a question for the Treasurer about taxes. I am sure the Treasurer will know that tax freedom day in Ontario this year will be 5 July. That is the first day when Ontarians, who now pay 51% of their incomes in taxes, can keep a dollar for themselves.

Ontarians now have by far the largest tax bill in Canada. Thanks to this Treasurer, the 10% tax advantage that Ontario had over Quebec in 1985 has been completely wiped out and we are now one of the most heavily taxed jurisdictions in North America. Given this tremendous tax load, can the Treasurer tell me how he can justify the escalating growth in government, especially in the public service, over the last five years?

Hon R. F. Nixon: Having a so-called tax relief day of 5 July does not fill me with a great deal of pleasure, but the honourable member will have to know that our fiscal policies are somewhat different from those of the government of Canada or even those of the government which he supported during the years when he was a cabinet minister. He may recall that he supported a deficit of over \$3 billion, and the federal government is supporting a deficit of over \$30 billion.

The honourable member will know that we do not have a deficit in this province and we are paying our bills. It may be one of the reasons why our tax day is as late as it is, because our policy is to pay for programs as they are established and as they mature.

Mr Harris: I do not know what that has to do with the escalating growth in the civil service.

Hon R. F. Nixon: I will get to that.

Mr Harris: The Treasurer talks about the debt. If we get to that, the total debt since the Treasurer has taken office has gone from \$30 billion to \$40 billion, a 33½% increase. I do not know if he is proud of that figure.

Dealing with the size of the bureaucracy, I have managed to come by an internal document which says that the Ministry of Natural Resources has a ratio of only three employees for every one supervisor. The average number of positions reporting to every supervisory position in the Ministry of Natural Resources, if the members can believe it, is 2.6. Does the Treasurer really believe it makes sense to have one management position for every 2.6 staff positions? In other words, 36% of the entire Ministry of Natural Resources is made up of management.

Hon R. F. Nixon: The honourable member must surely be aware, since he has become so interested in statistics, that there are fewer civil servants per capita in Ontario now -- that is, working for this government, not the federal government or any of the municipal governments -- than there were in 1975.

Interjections.

Hon R. F. Nixon: Mr Speaker, as a disinterested taxpayer, you at least would be interested to know that we have fewer civil servants per capita than any provincial jurisdiction in Canada or the federal government itself. I think we are working effectively and, just like the Treasurer, we are lean.

1420

Mr Harris: The Treasurer is not as lean as I recall him a few years ago. I want to tell members that.

A special Cresap consultant's report was commissioned by this government to review organizational problems in the Ministry of Natural Resources. That report that the government commissioned clearly said that this government's staff-to-management ratio does not make sense. As a matter of fact, the Treasurer pointed out that we have fewer civil servants per capita than in 1975. This report goes on to explain why that is so, because it praises my party's initiatives to reduce staff levels by 400 positions in that ministry in the early 1980s and to reorient resources to priority areas. The same report -- this is the government's report, which it commissioned -- goes on that this staffing ratio of management to staff "contributes to both the excessive staffing as well as the underservicing that exists." The consultant's report states, "Some functions remain overstaffed and the ministry is burdened by excessive overheads and administrative activity."

Rather than defend its tax-and-spend approach, why has the government not reorganized its own bloated bureaucracy, as recommended by its own consultant's report, to improve service, save money and make better use of the taxpayers' dollars?

Hon R. F. Nixon: I am prepared to agree with the honourable member that while we approach perfection, we are not perfect. However, I would say again that we have the lowest ratio of civil servants to population of any provincial jurisdiction in Canada and substantially lower than the government of Canada.

The honourable member is critical of the Ministry of Natural Resources. I believe he was the minister there for a period of time. Actually, we are very proud of what our accomplishments are in that regard. Frankly I, for one -- and I believe there are probably 94 others who would agree with me -- feel that the minister and that ministry are doing an excellent job in preserving our natural resources and working effectively for the good of the taxpayers of the province.

DIALYSIS UNIT

Mr Eves: My question is of the Minister of Health. The minister is no doubt aware of the problems with the delivery of patient care at the dialysis unit of Ottawa Civic Hospital. Because there are not enough nurses there to provide patient care, nurses in that unit have been forced to work back-to-back 12-hour shifts. Does the minister feel that this is an appropriate level of care to provide patients in the dialysis unit?

Hon Mrs Caplan: My critic opposite would know, and I think it is important that we realize, that the provision of dialysis services is a priority for the ministry. We announced a comprehensive plan.

However, the actual delivery of services is the responsibility of the hospital boards of trustees.

If the member has a particular situation which he is concerned about, the ministry is always prepared to investigate, but I can tell him that the Ottawa Civic Hospital is an excellent hospital with a fine reputation for delivering patient care. I have confidence in the chairman of that board, Hy Soloway, and in the administrator, Peter Carruthers, and I am sure they are providing appropriate patient care. However, if the member has concerns, I would be prepared to look into this matter.

Mr Eves: I am sure the minister will be aware that in March 1987, a professional responsibility complaint was filed by the Ontario Nurses' Association against Ottawa Civic Hospital for this very specific complaint. They reported on 15 April 1988 that a proper standard of care was not being achieved at the facility and that there were many problems with patient care in the dialysis unit. Their investigation also found that the problems had been recurring at Ottawa Civic in the dialysis unit for many years.

They have written to the minister on several occasions, 3 May 1989 and 28 November 1989, I believe it is. They are releasing their report in a press conference in Ottawa this afternoon because of the minister's lack of response to their concern and because a lot of the recommendations that their report included back in 1988 have still not been implemented by the hospital. How could the minister have known about this since March 1987 and not taken any direct steps to intervene, as the Minister of Health, to make sure these recommendations were being implemented?

Hon Mrs Caplan: I would remind the member opposite that the board of trustees of the hospitals of this province take their responsibilities very seriously. Under the Public Hospitals Act, they are both responsible and accountable for the delivery of patient care.

I can tell him that the ministry acknowledged the need for enhancement of dialysis services and approved the redevelopment in the Ottawa Civic Hospital of the area providing dialysis services. We are always there to respond appropriately to the needs. I believe that in this case it is important for the member to realize that the hospital is run and governed, appropriately, by a community board, which accepts its responsibilities very seriously and is accountable for the decisions that it and its staff undertake.

Mr Eves: I am more than aware of all those facts. I am sure the minister is also aware that as a last resort, when the hospital does not respond and implement the recommendations of a professional responsibility complaint launched by the ONA, its last resort is to appeal to the Minister of Health. It appealed to the minister asking for help on 3 May 1989. We are now at 12 June 1990.

Since 1987, there has been over 75% turnover in this unit at Ottawa Civic; eight nurses in this unit have recently left and gone to the dialysis unit at Ottawa General Hospital. Nurses at Ottawa Civic are spending their time picking up garbage. The minister has known about this since 1987. What is she going to do about the working conditions there?

Hon Mrs Caplan: The member opposite clearly does not understand how the health system in this province works. The hospitals are the employers. The ministry does not run the hospitals. The hospital boards take their responsibilities very seriously. If someone wants to request that the ministry intervene under the Public Hospitals Act, the ministry is always prepared to investigate, but for the member to suggest that the ministry runs the system is simply wrong.

Mr Eves: The government should accept its responsibilities.

The Speaker: Is the member for Parry Sound finished?

Mr Reville: The subject needs further airing in the House because the minister has tried to deliver a gratuitous lecture to my counterpart in the third party about how the health care system works. Let me remind the minister how the health care system works.

When a nurse has a professional responsibility complaint, there is a process through which that nurse goes. That process has occurred, and 11 recommendations in this report by an independent nursing assessment committee have been made. Those recommendations, the minister well knows because she has been told over and over again, have been ignored.

So, the minister should not tell us that the hospital board of trustees is governing the hospital appropriately in this connection. Patient care is at risk in those dialysis units. What is the minister

going to do about it?

Hon Mrs Caplan: If patient care is at risk, or if anyone suggests that patient care is at risk, the ministry is always prepared immediately to act to send in investigators to determine the situation.

I will say to the member opposite that the Ottawa Civic Hospital has a very fine reputation. The board takes its responsibilities very seriously. I know that the administration within the hospital as well is working very hard to ensure that the level of patient care is appropriate. I would say to the member opposite that the ministry only intervenes where there is evidence that patient care is at risk. I can assure him of our interest in this matter.

Mr Reville: I am relieved to hear of the minister's interest in the matter, but certainly the matter has been investigated. On 15 April 1988, the nursing assessment committee issued its 11 recommendations, which go directly to the question of patient care. Those recommendations have not been implemented. One nurse said, in exasperation: "What happens if a patient asks me for a glass of water? I won't have time to get a patient a glass of water."

What is the minister prepared to do to ensure that those 11 recommendations are implemented without any further delay?

Hon Mrs Caplan: I will say to the member opposite once again that the provisions of the Public Hospitals Act are clear, that the hospitals and the services they deliver are the responsibility of the boards of trustees, who take their responsibility very seriously. I want him to know that I have confidence in the boards of this province. However, if there is ever a question of concern for patients' safety, I am always prepared to investigate the matter.

1430

HOME RENEWAL PROGRAM FOR DISABLED PERSONS

Mrs Marland: My question is for the Minister of Housing. The 1990-91 estimates of the Ministry of Housing show that the Ontario home renewal program for disabled persons will not receive any funding for 1990-91. This program used to provide loans to home owners for housing modifications that increase accessibility for a disabled occupant. It was so successful that its funding was increased last year. It is hard to understand then why the government would scrap the program. Could the minister confirm that the Ontario home renewal program for disabled persons has been discontinued, and if so, why?

Hon Mr Sweeney: No, I cannot confirm that. It has not been discontinued. The fact that the budget has not been increased should not be interpreted that way. The honourable member will be aware of the fact that we do have a number of rehabilitation programs available to municipalities and that we are constantly choosing where we are going to put additional funds, but it has not been discontinued.

Mrs Marland: Disabled persons cannot take seriously a government that pats itself on the back at the beginning of National Access Awareness Week and yet has eliminated a program making housing more accessible to persons with disabilities. The fact is that the Ontario Human Rights Commission introduced new accommodation guidelines just last February to increase accessibility in a wide range of situations and services, including housing, but it seems the government of Ontario has no intention of following its own guidelines.

I wonder whether the minister could tell us why this government has not made a lasting commitment to fully integrate persons with disabilities into Ontario society.

Hon Mr Sweeney: I would beg to differ with the honourable member. She is well aware of the fact that my colleague the Minister of Transportation just made a significant announcement with respect to integration for the disabled. She is well aware of the fact that my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services has a range of programs to integrate disabled people into workplaces and into housing in this province. She is well aware of the fact that we have a continuing program of rehabilitation for the disabled. It is incorrect to say that the program has been discontinued. It has not been.

EMERGENCY TELEPHONE SERVICE

Mr Owen: I have a question for the Solicitor General. Many people across the province are familiar