

Begin attacks Lougheed government



A face only Pierre could love: Monique Begin sucks lemons at Thursday's forum.

by Neal Watson

The provinces are "destroying by ideology a system that is the best in the world," says Federal Health and Welfare Minister Monique Begin last Thursday.

Rallying sympathetic local groups to her cause, Begin was in town preparing to take on the Tory provincial government over the issue of extra-billing and user-fees.

Begin spoke at a forum, sponsored by the Edmonton South Federal Liberal Association, entitled "Preserving the Principles of Medicare."

Speakers representing everybody from the Edmonton Chapter of the Consumers Association of Canada (CAC) to the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired submitted briefs to the Minister and denounced the Lougheed government for its medicare policies.

Saying "health is not a market commodity," Begin attacked the Lougheed government and promised government action.

The Minister's key weapon in this fight is the introduction of the proposed new Canada Health Act. This act, scheduled to be introduced in the new session of Parliament, will impose penalties against provinces that extra-bill.

Details of those penalties are not yet available, but speculation is that the provinces will lose one dollar from Ottawa for every dollar collected from patients in extra-billing.

Extra-billing, Begin went on to say, would be a significant breach of the new act and was an attack on the fundamental principle of "universal accessibility" that she strongly supports.

When asked about the provinces charges that federal financing of medicare is deteriorating, Madame Begin said that, if anything, federal financing was increasing not decreasing.

She also rejected the idea that the cost of health care is increasing saying "I do not believe in skyrocketing costs."

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"Bookstore prices fair"

by Cheryl Parsons

The University of Alberta Bookstore has a \$70,000 surplus but it uses fair policies to determine textbook prices, according to the Associate VP of Facilities and Services, Al Rennie.

"We're not trying to supplement the University's expenses with bookstore profits. We're a break-even operation," said Rennie.

A break-even operation is one that is self-supporting and that pays all operational costs while not accumulating huge gains.

Profits are set aside in a reserve fund to offset future losses. "However, to prevent this fund from escalating to huge sums, the Board of Governors has set a profit ceiling of \$150,000," said Rennie. Should this reserve exceed the ceiling, a loss would have to be incurred, possibly through the lowering of prices.

Among the bookstore expenses are rent, an administrative charge to the University, the controller's office, and personnel. The bookstore has 40 full-time

employees and presently 8 part-time employees. \$7500 to \$8000 is spent on campus advertising. This comes in the forms of blotters, handbooks, and yearbooks. As well, indirect advertising such as sponsors and tickets are used.

The bookstore has a 20 per cent gross margin unlike 40 per cent for most bookstores.

"We can have a lower margin because our books are defined as text," explained Jim Malone, Manager of the bookstore. "Discounts are available, and texts are easier to return."

He also said the bookstore uses suggested list prices. Jansen's "The History of Art" sells for \$33.75 at the U of A bookstore. The bookstore is billed \$33.75 for each book, but given a 20 per cent discount they only pay \$27. The students pay \$33.75, a 20 per cent mark-up.

At nearby Century Books, "The History of Art" sells for \$40.50. Said Ron Erickson, owner of New Century, "there's a lot of guesswork involved. The publishers set the prices and they can change their minds midway through an order. Some publishers make up to two price changes a year."

"Book buyers are often misled by the US price on a book," Erickson added. "What they don't take into account is an exchange rate of up to 23 per cent."

According to Bill Quick, Assistant Manager of the bookstore, better judgement and choice of books on the part of professors could help cut text costs for the student.

"We'd like to put tighter controls on the books the professors order," he commented. "Students are often forced to buy more books, and as well, more expensive books than are necessary."

A shortage of books is a constant source of aggravation for students. Commented one History student, "I'm sure that line-ups during the first week of class wouldn't be nearly so bad if a person could count on their books still being their the next week."

Malone defends the ordering policy, saying that though the bookstore works closely with professors and faculty, they can only estimate the number of books needed.

"We have a warehouse of staggering proportions," he stated. "We can return books, but we certainly don't get everything back."

At the root of the problem is a lack of information about the bookstore operations. Most students have very little understanding about a facility that financially affects them heavily.

A Students' Union request to set up a joint committee to investigate policies and operations of the bookstore was turned down by the University.

Commented Students' Union President, Robert Greenhill, "they (the bookstore) are very autonomous and that seems wrong. Both faculty and students should have more input on formal matters."

He continued, "the University has been reluctant to let the Students' Union take part in their services. I don't understand this. By letting us see what they're doing we could say they're doing a good job."

photo Bill Inglee

Free Freddie...

...have a Heineken

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Keep water out

by Suzette C. Chan

The University is currently overseeing waterproofing projects designed to protect the basements of Rutherford South and the Butterdome.

Remedial work began in late October to prevent water from the planters outside the Butterdome from running down its south wall.

According to Senior Project Officer Blake Pratt, a clay plug put in by the contractors "wasn't doing its job", diverting water towards the building instead of to a kind of storm sewer or drop structure at the southwest end of the planter.

Pratt says that the University is instructing the contractor to remove the plug after digging out all the dirt covering it, and then install a concrete "trough" leading from the planter area to the drop structure.

The University and the contractor are sharing the cost of the project since "the contractor is picking up his mistake," and since the University is dictating the procedure.

Pratt would not speculate on the final cost of the repair work

because it will be calculated on a labour-materials basis.

He expects the project will be completed "before freeze-up."

Meanwhile, waterproofing work has just been completed on the basement walls of Rutherford South.

The project was part of a \$2.5 million dollar overhaul of Rutherford South and Cameron libraries.

University officials were worried that leakage would spoil a rare books collection which is to be moved from Cameron.

Ron Phillips, Director of Facilities and Services, says that the problem is simple: when the ground is saturated from heavy rain or melting snow, water seeps through the basement walls.

The dirt around the building was dug out, so that the walls could be cleaned. A protective shells was then built around the walls.

No specific figures for the cost of waterproofing were available, but Project Officer Michael Szyling estimates that renovations to the entire basement area of Rutherford South will make up 20 per cent of the total bill of the libraries project.

Watch for the Gateway Readership Survey results in Thursday's issue.