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The Continuing Care Strategy Background Information

Like the Pharmaceutical policy, this strategy also put the heaviest load on seniors who are the sickest and frailest — those who have been medically assessed as requiring long-term (nursing home) care. They are adversely affected in two ways.

First, they are affected by the strategy's declaration that the number of long-term care beds will be frozen at the current level of 14,500 for several years. Not only does this fly in the face of Premier Klein's undertaking during the last provincial election to provide 600 new long-term care (LTC) beds, it makes no sense in light of the fact that Alberta currently has about 1,500 seniors assessed as urgently requiring LTC placement. About half of those 1,500 are actually waiting in acute care hospital beds that Minister Liepert, himself, concedes cost thousands of dollars a day compared to hundreds of dollars a day in a continuing care facility.

A second major blow for frail seniors was the strategy's revelation that the government intends to deregulate the accommodation charges in LTC facilities in order to open the LTC market to private, for profit operators. The accommodation charges in LTC facilities are currently the only rates set by government anywhere in the continuing care system.

When a senior is assessed as requiring LTC placement, it means that they have extremely high nursing and personal care needs. Typically, they need help getting out of bed, toileting, bathing, dressing, getting to the dining room, and eating when there. They require that care just as urgently as the heart attack victim may require bypass surgery. Accordingly, it is unconscionable that such individuals should be turned over to the tender mercies of the free market and charged market rates not only for the accommodation but also the care that they require.

All of this calls into question Premier Stelmach's statement in December 2006 that "the Third Way is D.O.A." The Third Way describes exactly what Minister Liepert intends for the continuing care system for Alberta Seniors.