

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 20, 1995**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 95/03/20

**head: Government Bills and Orders**  
**head: Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain Bills and reports progress on the following: Bill 6 and Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by and documents tabled with the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. All in favour of the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

**head: Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

**head: Main Estimates 1995-96**

**Family and Social Services**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would the hon. minister like to make some opening remarks?

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to introduce some members of my staff that are here this evening. Deputy Minister Don Fleming, Duncan Campbell, and Frank Wilson are here tonight and will be joining us for the evening.

I would like to begin my review of the '95-96 estimates with some general overview comments followed by some specific information on various elements. When the welfare reforms were introduced in 1993, I had indicated that changing this program from a passive welfare system to an active program aimed at helping people take training in employment opportunities would allow us to transfer resources to high-needs areas in Alberta. The '95-96 budget has numerous examples of how the government has succeeded in this area.

As I have mentioned before, our welfare caseload has dropped from a high of 94,000 cases, which is about 180,000 individuals, in March of 1993 to just over 52,000 cases in February of 1995. Although welfare caseloads will continue to fall over the next three years due to enhanced employment and training initiatives,

no more cuts to welfare benefits are being proposed at this time, and the reduced supports for independence budget resulting from the lower caseload will enable the department to redirect almost \$100 million of funding to high-needs areas over the next two years.

I have already given you examples of where we will be meeting the needs of Albertans who are unable to look after themselves. I would now like to turn to some specific comments on the budget that is being proposed for '95-96. In reviewing various elements, I will not be commenting on any changes that are less than \$100,000. If you require that kind of detail, my officials will be reviewing *Hansard*, and I will table written answers at a later date. I will make that same commitment for any other questions that members may ask for which I don't provide any answers tonight or at the next committee review of this budget.

The original '94-95 budget is included in the budget documents. However, as much as possible I am going to keep my comments focused on comparing what we've actually spent in '94-95, which is the comparable forecast to what is proposed for spending in the '95-96 estimates.

Beginning on page 167, program 1, departmental support services, the budget has an increase of \$2.9 million over the '94-95 comparable forecast. This increase can be attributed to the department's taking on the extra responsibility for paying such things as payroll and accounts payable processing, Crown debt collections, insurance premium coverage, and telecommunications' costs, which used to be paid by Treasury and Public Works, Supply and Services. In addition, in '94-95 there were some onetime savings resulting from delays in the hiring and purchasing of services and supplies that are not expected to occur in '95-96. When looking at specific element references such as 1.0.1, the minister's office, 1.0.2, the standing policy committee on community services, and 1.0.3, the deputy minister's office, you will see that the spending in these areas will be held to '94-95 levels.

The next two elements – 1.0.4, assistant deputy minister, children's programs, and 1.0.5, assistant deputy minister, adults' programs – are new for '95-96 and reflect the department's streamlining of its program administration in two areas: children's programs and adults' programs. The \$368,000 increase in 1.0.5, assistant deputy minister, adults' programs, is part of the onetime savings that we have achieved in 1994 but is not expected to occur in '95-96.

The \$811,000 increase in reference 1.0.6, regional operations, reflects the department's transfer of its accounts payable function from a centralized headquarters operation to the completion of payment documents right at work sites across the province. Although this appears to cost the department more money in this element, the change to processing payments at the workplace actually results in a net reduction of 30 full-time equivalents and a saving of \$1 million elsewhere in the department budget. In addition, Albertans will receive better services more promptly from the frontline staff in various regions across the province.

Reference 1.0.7, personnel services, increased for three reasons. There is an additional \$239,000 being spent on the native bursary program, which now totals one-half million dollars, and the transfer of payroll processing costs to the department from Treasury and consolidation of the budget for staff relocation costs in program 1.

Reference 1.0.8, resource management services, has a net increase of \$624,000. This element reduced its manpower complement by 56 full-time equivalents through the decentralization of the accounts payable function. However, these savings were offset by the transfer of responsibilities from Treasury and

Public Works, Supply and Services for Crown debt collections, telecommunications, accounts payable systems, and insurance costs as well as some organizational realignment and onetime savings during 1994-95 that won't occur in '95-96.

The last element, 1.0.9, freedom of information, is new for '95-96 and reflects the anticipated cost for administration and hearing appeals on decisions regarding access to information.

I am now moving to program 2, income support to individuals and families, on page 169. First, some general comments about this budget before I comment on specific elements. The budget provides an additional \$5.8 million for increased health benefit costs and doubling of the work expenses benefit to \$300 from \$150. Five million dollars has been provided for the Canada/Alberta service centre demonstration project and the federal/provincial integrated youth centres. In addition, an increase of \$4.8 million has been provided for employment and training initiatives, bringing the total budget for helping people to move into jobs or training to over \$40 million.

Finally, an additional \$11.7 million has been added to the personal support services' budget to pay for up to 345 individuals who want to stay in their home communities or move from institutions. The whole area of personal support is already under review with Albertans, led by the Department of Health.

#### 8:10

I would now like to comment on the budget for specific elements in program 2. The first element, 2.1.1, program support, shows a \$1.9 million increase over '94-95 forecast spending. This increase is made up of one-half million dollars for the federal/provincial integrated youth centre pilot projects, and almost \$1 million from a reorganization of functions that used to be budgeted in program 1.

You will notice that 2.2.1, program delivery, in the supports for independence program has been reduced by almost \$3.2 million. This reflects reduced manpower requirements due to lower SFI caseloads and full-year savings resulting from the bargaining unit salary reductions. I want to point out that we are achieving our manpower reductions through a hiring freeze rather than layoffs, which allows us to redirect staff to other areas where they are needed. The reduction in reference 2.2.2, maintenance and recovery, mainly reflects the manpower costs resulting from full-year implementation of the 5 percent salary reduction.

The next four elements - 2.2.3, supplement to earnings; 2.2.4, employment and training support; 2.2.5, transitional support; and 2.2.6, assured support - are the elements that the welfare program benefits are paid from. You will note that there is a total benefit increase of \$7.3 million, which reflects the increase in drug costs, doubling of work-related expenses to \$300 per year, and payment for child care expenses as a result of changes to the day care policy for occasional child care.

The next element, 2.2.7, employment initiatives, shows an increase of \$4.5 million for the Canada/Alberta service centre demonstration projects and \$4.8 million to reflect our continuing emphasis on providing employment training and experience through the Alberta community employment program.

As I mentioned earlier, reference 2.2.8, personal support services, demonstrates our continued commitment to assist handicapped individuals who choose to stay in their home communities or move there from institutions. We are adding \$11.7 million to this high-needs area. As you know, the Alberta assured income plan for seniors, reference 2.3.3, was folded into the Alberta seniors' benefit program last year, and this budget estimate now reflects the total transfer of the budget to the program.

The final element in this program, 2.3.4, assured income for the severely handicapped, also reflects the department's principle of adding funding to meet the cost of high-needs areas. The \$8 million increase provides for increased medical costs, an additional 350 cases, for a total caseload of 16,700 in this particular program.

I am now moving to program 3, social support to individuals and families, which is found on page 171. The '95-96 estimates for this program contain more examples of this government's intention to fund programs for people in high-needs areas. Over \$13 million has been added to child welfare, \$10 million for early intervention initiatives and \$3 million for increased case costs and provision for additional cases should this occur. In the area of services to persons with disabilities the budget reflects the movement of clients from institutions to the community; however, these people receive much of their financial support from the personal support services budget in program 2. The only program with a significant budget reduction is day care, which reflects the continuation of the operating allowance rate reduction announced last year, improved fraud and error detection, and paying from other programs for children who don't require full-time care.

Getting down to specific elements, reference 3.1.1, program support, shows an additional \$800,000 increase resulting from the transfer of administration and program development functions which used to be budgeted in program 1. The \$1.6 million increase in program reference 3.2.1, program delivery, reflects a onetime expenditure of \$1 million on portable computer equipment to allow child welfare workers to spend more time in the field. Some \$500,000 of expenditures reflects anticipated costs to assist frontline operators in transition to a community delivery system. An additional \$100,000 relates to amortization charges for child welfare systems. Program reference 3.2.2, intake and investigations, reflects the full year's savings that will occur from the bargaining unit salary reductions. The almost \$2.2 million increase in 3.2.3, in-home family support, and the foster care element, reference 3.2.5, provide for a potential increase of 420 cases in the child welfare caseload. Program reference 3.2.6, community-based family support services, increases by \$10.5 million to provide for the \$10 million early intervention initiative for children and one-half million dollars to improve crisis intervention capabilities. The residential care element, which is 3.2.7, has not been adjusted downward to reflect the '94-95 expenditures in the event that there is some pressure on residential care during the implementation of the new community delivery model.

As noted earlier, the office of the commissioner, reference 3.3.1, provides for the development of the 17 new local authorities that will assume responsibility for the delivery of children's services. This is an initial budget allocation, but we expect to need to add more funding as the transition to the new delivery model evolves. We want to ensure the process is not hampered by a lack of funding; therefore, we are prepared to reallocate funds from other areas if necessary.

Moving to family support services, 3.4.1, program delivery, is no longer required for the delivery of family and community support services as the FCSS grant program was moved to Municipal Affairs last year. We carried some costs for this program for the past year to provide for a reasonable transition to the new program and to provide consultative services to the new organization.

Reference 3.4.2, day care programs, does reflect a significant reduction of \$10 million from the '94-95 forecast expenditures. As noted earlier, this reduction reflects \$4.4 million in savings that will occur with the reduced operating allowance rates. As

well \$3 million will be saved from the department's increased emphasis on fraud and error detection in subsidy programs. Finally, \$3.5 million will be saved by not providing day care funding for children who only require part-time care. Funding for these children is available from other programs such as supports for independence and handicapped children's services. As you know, the budget reflects what we think will happen during the next year; however, as we demonstrated this year, if our day care estimates prove to be low, we will reallocate funds again from other areas.

The decrease of \$470,000 in reference 3.4.3, shelters for homeless adults, is a combination of mortgage buyouts in '94-95 that won't occur in '95-96 and a correction in reporting of the budget for the women's emergency shelter in Edmonton. Funds for this shelter were reported in the prevention of family violence element last year.

**8:20**

The prevention of family violence, reference 3.4.5, requires some explanation. I first want to emphasize that there has been no reduction in funding available for women's shelters. The change from the '94-95 forecast to the '95-96 estimates reflects the onetime potential buyout cost of mortgages, and I tabled the plan today in the Assembly. The reduction of \$534,000 from the '94-95 budget estimate is a combination of the elimination of the community initiatives grant fund and the correction for the Edmonton women's emergency shelter, which is now budgeted in shelters for homeless adults.

Reference 3.5.2, handicapped children's services, shows an increase of \$1.5 million, which provides for potential price increases in the cost of financial support for parents with handicapped children. There is also a reallocation of \$300,000 from the integrated day care programs.

The \$1 million decrease in community-based individual services, reference 3.5.4, is the difference between the potential cost of buying out mortgages . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Finish your statement, hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. I only need a few more minutes.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just one.

MR. CARDINAL: Can I finish my statement?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can we have unanimous consent to allow the minister a few minutes to complete his remarks?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. I'll go a little faster. The \$1 million decrease in community-based individual services, reference 3.5.4, is the difference between the potential cost of buying out mortgages, which is estimated at \$2.4 million, in provision for a caseload increase of \$1.4 million as a result of moving handicapped clients from institutions and people moving into the program from handicapped children's services when they turn 18 years of age.

The budgets for institutional services, reference 3.5.5, and Michener Centre, reference 3.5.6, reflect the continued movement of handicapped individuals who want to move from institutions to living in their home communities.

Before reviewing specific budget details in the aboriginal affairs program, I would like to make some general comments regarding this important area of my ministry. Alberta has a large and vital aboriginal population which is moving quickly towards self-determination. Aboriginal communities throughout Alberta are demanding involvement in the direction, design, and delivery of government services. Let me say that aboriginal communities will be provided opportunities to participate in government processes and be responsible for the delivery of programs and services in a manner consistent with our overall provincial strategies. The federal government has begun a process of examining its program and service deliveries to aboriginal people. Our province must position itself to maintain its interest on behalf of all Albertans.

Moving to program 4, aboriginal affairs, this budget is increasing by almost \$1 million in anticipation of potential land claim settlements in the near future. The province's obligation under the Natural Resources Transfer Act will continue to be met in a manner which is fair and equitable to all parties. Continued progress in fulfilling the province's constitutional obligations will provide greater certainty for resource developers and economic opportunity for the involved First Nations.

You will note that the '95-96 budget for the federal/provincial/aboriginal relations division drops by \$136,000 from the '94-95 forecast as a result of payment of some onetime granting during the past year.

Only two years remain until the expiration of the Metis Settlements Transition Commission. It has been in place since November 1, 1990, and has allowed the advancement of self-sufficiency and local government autonomy for eight Metis settlements. Regarding specific budget details, program 5, Metis settlements accord, reflects some staff reductions and administrative efficiencies that have been implemented by the Metis Settlements Transition Commission. As we move towards the final stages of implementation of local government for the eight Metis settlements and the general council, developmental and organizational work will continue to ensure effective post-transitional relationships.

As I announced on February 21, the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families will no longer be funded by the Alberta government as of July 1, 1995. Program 6 reflects the partial year funding that will be required until July.

Program 7, children's advocacy, reflects the government's commitment to provide increased staffing in case workloads increase with the move to community delivery for children's services.

This concludes my comments on the budget details as contained in the 1995-96 Government Estimates. I will try and provide answers to at least some of the questions today, and if not, what I intend to do - I am, I believe, up again in the next week or so to do estimates, and at the opening of that, I will provide the balance of the answers.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your clarification of some items, and before I start, if I could, you mentioned first of all program 1 and the departmental support services. I just wanted to be clear on what you had said. I believe you said that the increase of \$3 million was caused by the department taking more responsibility for certain items that had previously been the responsibility of supply and

services. I just wanted to check that out, if you would let me know if I'm wrong there.

Under program 1, vote 1.0.2, the standing policy committee on community services with a \$72,000 budget, I would like to ask the minister: what is the status of this committee? We haven't heard anything from them for a long time. Will the minister table a list of all the groups who have made presentations to this committee and details as to what action the committee has taken on their behalf?

In vote 1.0.4, the children's programs, which you mentioned, Mr. Minister, the budget has decreased. You mentioned that was streamlining the department. I wonder if you could tell me if the streamlining also includes the moving out of any children's programs from that department, or is it strictly streamlining in the way you operate the department?

Vote 1.0.9, freedom of information, the estimate is \$600,000. As we know, it is a new requirement of the freedom of information legislation that each department establish an information officer, but I wonder if you could let me know how many people are working in the department and what kinds of preparations are being done. I'd also like to know what your plans are for the public and opposition MLAs and others to get information, and will the process be timely? We in opposition have noticed a sudden refusal by staff in the Department of Family and Social Services to answer our questions. Instead we get referred either to Bob Scott's office or told to put our request in writing. I would ask the minister if he has issued a new directive to his staff not to take phone calls from the Liberal office, and if so, we would appreciate being informed about the directive. As well, if that is so, I would ask the minister to reconsider because we're often seeking just general information and it can be handled simply and efficiently by the telephone. Having to put a request in writing makes a great deal of unnecessary work for a lot of people. I'm sure that the minister is aware of the importance of efficiency and effectiveness. So I would hope you would reconsider that.

### 8:30

Under program 2, income support to individuals and families, could the minister tell me what savings were made last year, since the net spending for '94-95 is \$107 million less than the gross estimate? Would the minister table the details of those savings, please?

Program 2.2.3, supplement to earnings, has been increased by \$13 million when compared to last year's forecast. The category of supports for independence is for people who are working and need help making ends meet. So I wonder: what are the caseload projections for this category, and how many people does the minister expect to assist this year? I'd also like to know: what is the average duration that a client requires the supplement, and if we could, what's the average top-up given to clients? Also, I would like to know how many are single parents and how many single parents get support with child care costs.

In program 2.2.4, employment and training support, the 1995 estimate is about \$159 million and some, and that's a reduction of \$24 million over last year's forecast spending of \$183 million. When you compare it to last year's gross estimate, it's a reduction of about \$104 million. This category of SFI is for people who are available and looking for work or are taking part in a training program or an education program or are waiting for unemployment insurance. I assume that the reduction reflects the 40 percent drop in caseload. I would like to know: what is the current caseload for this category? How many in this category

are single parents? What is the total number of children receiving assistance through this category?

In program 2.2.4, employment and training – that's the same department continued – what is the total number of clients last year who had their files closed before they found full-time work? How many were simply terminated before they were able to find work? I would also like to know how many new files opened under employment and training support have been on assistance before. How many of them were brand new people on assistance, and how many were coming back on from previous times? Have the staff been redeployed out of this area, given the 40 percent cut? If so, I wonder how many and to what other areas they have been moved. Will the minister consider reviewing the supports for independence benefit levels and take into consideration the cost of living since they have been cut so much?

In program 3, social support to individuals and families, 3.2.2, child welfare, intake and investigations, the 1995-96 estimate is \$7.85 million, and that's a cut of \$358,000 over last year's net forecast. I wonder why intake and investigations is being cut. Is this an indication that there will be less follow-up of complaints, or does the minister just expect that there will be fewer complaints of child abuse? I also would like to know how many investigators there are in child welfare and how many per region. Are you going to be laying off any investigators? Given the continuous problems and tragedies, it makes me nervous if you're going to be cutting child welfare, such a critical component of the child protection division, intake and investigation. I hope you're not going to be cutting it before the new system is in place.

As I understand it, the plan for a new child welfare system will take about three years to implement, and there's certainly going to have to be a lot of work with communities, with individuals, people on committees, before they're ready to take responsibility. I'd be very interested to know why intake and investigation is downsizing.

One of my concerns with the new community-based system of child welfare is that the department itself retain responsibility for the protection of children in Alberta. That has to happen even when the system is changed and moves towards the community. The responsibility has to be retained consistently during the transition period and after the transfer to communities in order to avoid tragedies. It simply has to be under government control.

Also, Mr. Minister, could you tell me where the \$50 million that you announced for the new child welfare program, \$25 million for land-based aboriginals and \$25 million for the rest of the province – I don't know where that shows up in here. I don't know if it's in 3.2.3, but if you could let me know where it shows up.

In child welfare, the in-home family support program, I would like to know what the status is of the in-home pilot project run by the former department employee. Has that operation expanded? Has there been an independent analysis of Mr. Tredger's operation to determine whether or not the program is working? Will you table any studies that there are on that project? Given that this pilot project has been operating for more than a year, I expect that some outcome evaluation and measurement has been carried out.

Program 3.2.4, adoptions. The '95-96 estimate shows an increase of \$27,000 over last year. I know you said, Mr. Minister, that you didn't want to talk about anything less than \$100,000, but I would like to ask you some questions about the status of the adoptions registrar's office given that the new open records legislation comes into effect on March 31. Are the regulations completed, and if they are, where are they? Are we able to access them? I've had quite a few calls from people about that.

I'd like to know to date how many adult adoptees have sent in a request for information in anticipation of March 31. Who are the agencies selected to operate the search agencies? Could we have a list of the agencies, the operators, and the credentials of each? What are the fee levels for searching? That's something else that the public is interested in.

Also, what sort of monitoring will the department be doing to ensure that Albertans are treated fairly and in confidence? I've had quite a number of calls. Many people, even though confidentiality was assured with the Bill, are concerned about it because it's such a touchy issue for many of them.

Program 3.2.6, community-based family support. You alluded to the \$10.47 million over last year's forecast. How does this budget break down? How many agencies contracted to provide services? Can we have a list of the agencies, the amount of funding they receive, the type of services they provide? I would appreciate that. Also, how many children and their families received support under this program last year?

I have a few questions on the business plan, Mr. Minister. Under Strategic Directions, Long-term Change, the plan claims that "the Department will remain in a direct delivery role when there is a clearly identified need to do so." I wonder what you define as "a clearly identified need?" Who determines this need, based on agreed upon terms with the professional and involved individuals? By "direct delivery" I assume that the minister is referring to social assistance, and it's important that the public know that the safety net is there for people that are in real trouble. So I'm assuming that you will have some sort of criteria worked out with the professionals.

**8:40**

Under Services to Persons with Disabilities you mention "cost-control objectives" in the plan. Could you tell me what you mean by that, and what they are?

The performance measures are vague, in my opinion, and in many cases could be dangerous. How can you state that the "percentage of children who stay free from injury or neglect following department intervention" is a satisfactory measure for a program outcome? What percentage is acceptable to the minister? Unless the goal is a hundred percent, it's unacceptable to set a level for a child's safety, because it sends the message that the department's prepared to accept some abuse of children.

As well, what percentage is the minister prepared to accept as suitable for the number of children who get "face-to-face contact with [a] social worker as required?" Why would you accept anything less than a hundred percent for a child involved with the department having personal contact with a social worker? That should simply be a given. I can't imagine that you would have children under the department's care and responsibility who had never had time with a good social worker. This goes back to my questions about the downsizing in the intake and investigation of child welfare. Why would you do that before you have the alternative community-based program in place?

These are my questions, Mr. Minister, and perhaps I will have an opportunity to speak again.

Thank you.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**MR. SEKULIC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to rise and speak to the estimates for the Department of Family and Social Services. I'll start off with one piece of good news, a good

news story. I had a constituent who came in to see me on Friday. His name is Robert, and he spoke of this and asked me to convey the message in the Legislature. It was a success story that he'd like to see duplicated. In fact, he's seen some of my colleagues from both sides of the floor. He's had some time to speak with the Minister of Justice, and he's also had some time to speak with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The area that this constituent of mine discussed pertains to vote 3.4.4, which is mediation and court services. Now, I do have a concern here. This individual spoke of success in this area and how well it worked, the program where we encourage a mediation process, trying to avert as much as we could from the courts and have individuals try to negotiate or mediate differences, and really what this speaks to is the benefits that accrued to the child.

I'm a little disappointed, discouraged to see that there's been a decrease in funding from the fiscal year '94-95 to the '95-96 year, and I'm sure the minister will be able to at some point get up and explain why it is that we have a decrease in funding there. I think so much can be done in that area to make lives better for so many of the children that are going through the difficulties of their parents breaking apart.

The analogy that I would draw there is similar to: government doesn't really create any jobs; it facilitates the development and then the businesses can create jobs in that environment they foster. Well, likewise government really doesn't or can't legislate healthy families, but they can facilitate the environment where families can be nourished and grow closer together, even in some instances where they're growing apart.

So that's one area that I do have as a concern, and I would like to see in fact an increase in funding to reflect the demand in that area and particularly the demand for this type of resolution, the mediation resolution. So I think we have an area where we've seen success in the past, and we should bolster it and promote it. That's the first comment that I'd like to make.

The second area that I'd like to go to is the area of standard benefits. Now, the minister's seen me on a number of occasions rise and speak to this area, because what I've been promoting all along is that those benefit levels which we've set have to be founded in some reality. Certainly if we believe in the market forces, well, here's somewhere where we have to look at market realities. When you go shopping for groceries, it costs a certain amount. When you go to buy clothes for your child, it costs a certain amount. That doesn't vary for us who may have higher income levels than those who are at lower income levels. So I would say that the standard benefits allowance which we have covers food, clothing including cloth and disposal diapers, household needs including furniture and appliances and household supplies, personal needs, installation and use of a telephone, laundry, transportation including school transportation, vehicle registration, insurance, fuel, repairs, maintenance, and residential moves within Alberta.

Now, having said all that, the standard allowance that's intended for one adult without any children is \$229 per month. For two adults without any children it's \$426 a month. I would say that at best you'd have to be an incredible budgeting person to be able to make ends meet with those amounts. So the only request I have here is that the amounts that are in the standard allowance, one, be broken down so that we can see how much is going into those different areas. If you were to add up all of these items which I just listed and which are in fact listed in the department's supports for independence material, then you would

find that in each case it exceeds, perhaps even doubles in some cases the amount of standard allowance permitted in one month.

Likewise when we go to the maximum shelter allowance. We see that the shelter allowance includes rent, payments on mortgages or agreements of sale, fuel and utilities, municipal taxes, homeowner's fire insurance, condominium fees, lot rentals for mobile homes and houses, a homeowner's maintenance allowance of \$19, and the shelter portion of room and board. Once again we see that a single individual that's on a supplement-to-earnings or employment-in-training support receives \$165 per month. Someone in transitional support receives \$250 a month, and someone in assured support receives \$300 a month. Now, my only concern in those amounts, once again, is that if we really do speak of marketplace and market forces, well, I'd suggest that some of those market forces may be working detrimentally against those individuals found on assistance. So we must take into account those realities, and somehow once again we should break them down, because those categories which I have listed, if you were to add all of them up, and if you were a single individual able to then find accommodation for \$165 or \$250, you'd be one of the few. In fact, you may be one of the only ones in Alberta. So I would suggest that we do have to look at that; we have to revise it. We have to justify those levels based on the realities that are out there.

The final area that I do want to go to is the area of performance measures which are found on pages 18 and 19 of – is it A Better Way II? That's still a debatable point. What I see in program outcomes or performance measures – we take a look based on the mission the department has. They've identified three key results areas:

1. Safety and Security of Children
2. Safety and Security of Disabled People
3. Client Self-Sufficiency

Now, you can't disagree with any of those. I mean this is ultimately a direction that we have to head in, and perhaps I would say that maybe there are not enough key result areas there. But when we go into the measurement, I really do have a problem. This document looks like many of the other pages associated with the other departments. It's really beyond vague. It's to the point of transparent or nonexistent.

#### 8:50

For example, let's just go through a few of these.

- Percentage of day care centres which meet the five most important government standards."

Well, I would suggest that if we have government standards, the compliance rate should be pretty high. What I'd like to see is a measured number of day care centres that are being closed. They can't continue to exist if they're not complying with government standards, because we're talking about children. We're talking about the well-being of children. Key result areas 1, 2, and 3 to some extent are all covered in that one area.

- Percentage of children who stay free from injury or neglect following department intervention.

I'd hate to think that there's any percentage that aren't free from injury. This is very disturbing, if there is.

Thirdly,

- Percentage of children in the custody of Child Welfare whose needs are being satisfactorily met in their placement.

Once again, these are givens. These must occur. If they don't, then once again, just like my first example, if there's noncompliance or there's not an operational level to the level of satisfaction set out by government, then we have to stop using those services of those individuals, those agencies that were

contracted through. There's got to be a zero tolerance for those things.

- Supports for Independence (welfare) caseload per 1,000 population.

Although I do think that's a good indicator, I don't think it's a benchmark or performance measure. In fact, I think it would relate more to the economic health of a province than it would to a department's efforts. Really, I don't think people in Alberta are on assistance because they want to be on assistance. I think people are on assistance – it could be a health issue; it could be a lack of opportunity in terms of employment given their skill base; or it could be a lack of seats in educational institutions. So once again I'd say that "caseload per 1,000 population" is much less a reflection of the department's efforts than it is in fact a reflection of the economic health of a province or a country.

Then we go on to

- Proportion of closed Supports for Independence cases that remain closed after 12 months.

Finally we're coming to an indicator which I would say is somewhat successful but once again more reflective of the economic health of the province than it is of the department.

- Percentage of agencies serving the disabled that meet government standards.

Once again, if there is a noncompliance with government's set out standards, the tolerance is zero. There's a zero tolerance. If they're going to provide services on behalf of the government or act as the government's agent in delivering services to the disabled, then certainly it's a zero tolerance for noncompliance.

We turn to program outputs. Once again this is an internal measure. It refers to actual goods and services that the department delivers, so I'm less concerned because that's an internal item now. I'm more concerned with how the department measures those services it's providing and how it measures the provision of those services as opposed to the internal workings.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will now take my place and permit one of my colleagues to speak to the estimates.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity this evening to pose some questions to the minister in regards to his department. First of all, I'd start off by complimenting the minister for his direct deposit initiative that he apprised the House of here recently. It was a considerable savings. It spoke of efficiency, and I would suggest it was a good idea.

I would suggest another idea to the minister, and I would like to see him explore it or convince me that it won't work: rather than the issuance of cheques, the issuance of a credit card. In today's world of technology I think very clearly and capably we can issue such a credit card that has a strict limit on it. I would suggest that a credit card has the benefit and the potential to also allay some concerns in the public's mind. There is no reason why that credit card could not be programmed for a specific amount of dollars to be drawn each week in the way of cash. Now, I suggest the credit card because we know, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister, that in fact we can't give out vouchers because that's an affront to human dignity. A credit card I think has potential to replace that. We know that it's been used in the United States of America. There are some shortcomings to it, but I think we can learn from their errors and mistakes. A credit card, in my view, although it's a misconception in the public's mind in many cases, wouldn't be accepted in bingo halls and perhaps in liquor stores and the likes. There's some potential to ensure that the dollars

that are directed so that the parents who ultimately receive those are of the highest need, a term which the minister often uses, and that would be the children, in my mind.

I'm going to deal with a couple of situations that I've encountered in the constituency, Mr. Chairman, in the last couple of months. I had a single woman enter my office about one month ago. She is unfortunately struggling with CFS, chronic fatigue syndrome, so she's not capable of working. She is a recipient of SFI. She brought her TD4 slip into my office, and her last year's payment was \$5,600. Now my question to the minister: does the minister think payment that is equal to about one-half of the defined Alberta level of poverty is a fair and reasonable subsistence allowance? But for the good graces of her sister I would suggest that this young lady could not continue to exist.

I would also ask the minister, when we look at the Leduc constituency – and I had brought the issue up last year when the move was being made from Leduc to Nisku, even though in the information that I provided the rental fees for office space for the department were less expensive in Leduc than the present situation they moved into. What we have done in this matter is forced recipients to make their way seven Ks to the office in Nisku, which is an industrial base, without any sort of public transportation. That's an added expense, unfortunately, that social services recipients really can't endure. In my own experience I've actually picked up recipients that were walking out to that particular office, in one case a mother with two young children. She had a concern that if she mailed her report cards, they would not arrive on time, so she wanted to ensure that she was not penalized and was walking out there with them. I think that puts that family in peril, which they should not have to encounter. I would offer the minister a suggestion here, and that is that we can have a remote report card box within the city of Leduc, and I would suggest that city hall would be very accommodating in that sense. I would ask the minister: is it against the department's policy to set up remote drop-off boxes for those report cards so people don't have to travel that extra distance to do it?

I have run into many times in my constituency office SFI recipients that are handicapped by the onetime-only damage deposit policy of the department. As I understand it, under the present policy you have to be in a situation of spousal abuse before you can actually receive another damage deposit. I would suggest that this policy leaves very much SFI recipients at the peril of an abusive spouse that keeps them locked into that situation. I would suggest that it also will leave the recipients at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords who know full well that the individuals are locked in and overstep their legal bounds in many cases. I would also suggest that it works in a detrimental fashion – and I would use New Sarepta as an example, where there is not a tremendous amount of employment – if someone has the desire to leave that community and move closer to a place of work. There's a detriment in that. So I would ask the minister why the department is so unyielding in their policy in that particular area. If it is a concern that the clients would mispend the damage deposit money, I would again offer the minister some Liberal suggestion here that he often asks for. That would be that if those situations arise and that is a concern, then the damage deposit could be paid directly to the landlord.

I would take the minister back to the statistics that we're dealing with as far as food banks are concerned and the minister has had brought to his attention many times in this House. We know that in Edmonton there has been a tremendous increase in the demand on the food banks; likewise in Calgary. In Calgary

our information is that the Legion has set up its own food bank to accommodate their members simply because there are so many people in that particular need. In Leduc the food bank demand has at least doubled in the last year. I commend that group for the admirable job they do in providing that service to the entire county, not simply the city of Leduc. I would ask the minister: what does he attribute this increase in the food bank demand to? I think it's an important question, and I have to hear him answer it. I haven't heard a firm answer on it. I would also ask the minister: how much longer and how much more does the minister feel that the generosity of the businesses and the caring of the citizens will be tested before their generosity and gracious volunteer efforts are burnt out? I suggest that we're coming very close to that particular point in time, Mr. Minister, and I would ask you: what is the minister's plan to deal with this when in fact the food bank volunteers and the businesses that support them and the caring citizens that support them end their support simply because they no longer have the time or the energy to do it?

**9:00**

I would also suggest to the minister that the top-up salary that recipients receive and are permitted to make over and above their social assistance allowance is not liberal enough, if I could use that term. I mean, that \$125 is a deterrent. I would suggest that if that particular top-up were expanded considerably for those SFI recipients who choose to go to work and be productive – and there are many – that if that salary was increased, those individuals would have the ability and be more apt to capture and embrace the productivity. I would suggest that in the long term that would be beneficial. So I would ask the minister if he'll give some consideration to increasing that top-up. One hundred and 25 dollars is a deterrent. It doesn't let those individuals capture the productivity that's required to break the cycle for them.

I would also ask the minister, when we're dealing with the facts and the reality – and we met recently with the Calgary city council. They informed us that they had to hire a security guard at city hall to ensure that the homeless in Calgary were not lingering and loitering in the city hall. To me, the message there was that there are more people living on the street than previously. It wasn't a problem up to this last year. I would ask the minister if in fact those little signs carry any significance when he's setting his policies.

In a closing comment I would ask the minister if he is aware that his department officials were asking the social workers to change their professional notes to protect the department and whether he would take some action to ensure that that did not occur again. I have been approached on that particular aspect, and I think the minister has had it dropped on his desk before. I'd ask the minister if he would permit that within his department.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my place.

**MR. N. TAYLOR:** Mr. Chairman, I will try to restrict my questions to the votes on native affairs, where he's responsible for native affairs, aboriginal affairs. I notice that every time it gets mentioned, it has a different name: aboriginal, First Nations, Indian, native.

What I'm generally concerned with is that maybe the minister could explain one issue. When I was checking the supplementary estimates, there is, I think, the capital investment program. Wait a minute; I might have lost it in here somewhere. Aboriginal affairs is down \$4.7 million, which I think is quite in order. Then we move over to program 4, and we have \$4.2 million, \$4.1 million. Then we go to Indian land claims, and there's a jump

there from \$1.6 million to \$2.6 million. I was wondering – and I know the minister touched on it – if he could itemize or come close to itemizing what land claims he feels will be settled this year that would cause it to jump a million dollars. Now, I know it is the minister's wish to settle as many of these land claims as possible, which is good, but that also leads to the next question, the Lubicon Lake settlement.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

I haven't felt that this government has moved as fast or as honestly, maybe, as they could in settling the Lubicon Cree problem, because I have suggested and other people have suggested that funds from the oil and gas royalties on the disputed land in the Lubicon area should be held in trust, deposited in an interest-bearing bank account. I think it would telegraph to the rest of the world that we are indeed interested in trying to settle it and, secondly, that the province isn't making money out of the fact that the federal government and the Lubicons have not reached an agreement. Otherwise, I think it would be quite easy to argue that maybe we are being less than diligent in encouraging our federal cousins to try to solve the Lubicon affair. I think the royalties and now lumber income, because there's quite a little stumpage rate coming in from that area, should go into a trust fund that will later be turned over to the Lubicons when they reach a settlement. I notice they've appointed Harold Millican, a well-known individual on both sides of this House and one who I think will do a good job of trying to unravel the knot up there and do his best. I think he's about as good as they could get, and I hope that works out. In the meantime, I think it would be a nice gesture if the government put their resource revenue into escrow.

Now, I notice in program 5 that the Metis settlements tribunal is going up from a gross expenditure of \$759,000 to apparently \$1.1 million. When I looked at the A Better Way book, you mentioned there that they were going to target to stay around \$0.7 million or \$0.8 million. My reason for questioning this a bit is that I'm not sure that the tribunal is structured properly. I'm not too sure that they're not tied too solidly to the minister's coattails and might be afraid to do what they should do. In general, I think that the minister might be frightening them a little bit. If I could find the item here – I think the minister filed in the House a couple of days ago a couple of letters. One from the president . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Nick, it's the braids, not the coattails.

9:10

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yes, they're tied to your braids. Okay. You said that, not me, by the way. If it appears in *Hansard*, I don't want to be accused of making the wrong kinds of remarks. It would be a politically incorrect remark. You're the one that brought the braids up; I just nodded.

You filed in the House the other day two letters. One was from the Fishing Lake settlement to the president of the Metis settlements, and there was a letter from the Metis settlement to you saying that he hadn't given the Liberals the question to ask about why the Premier had missed some meetings early in the morning. That didn't bother me particularly, but when I saw the Fishing Lake one, I was kind of curious as to whether the minister is threatening some of the Metis settlements and telling them they can't say anything. I don't ever recall talking to the Fishing Lake. I have talked to the Fishing Lake dissidents, not Parenteau, the president, yet he found it necessary to write a letter saying that, oh no, he hadn't talked to the Liberals; he's clean.

So it would sound to me, Mr. Chairman, that our hon. minister over there might be throwing his weight around a little bit when it comes to Metis settlements. I'd like him to cease and desist, because I think if he gets into that game, we're going to really bring it up in question period. I can tell him right now that there are at least four Metis settlements that have approached the opposition and want their case brought up because they're not being heard. Maybe they're not being heard because the minister is more busy threatening them not to talk to Liberals than he is trying to make sure he straightens it out. This is why I'd like to know if this Metis settlement tribunal is really worth it if indeed they're afraid to say anything. Maybe it should be structured in such a way that the minister doesn't have a solid hold on it.

Now, that leads to the next question. As we know, the natives are hopefully moving – and I will give this government and the minister credit for it. I think they're trying to move to self-government for our native cousins, our native friends. But even in nonnative societies we have found it necessary to appoint an Auditor General. There's no Tory, no Liberal, no NDP government so honest, so straightforward, and so clear thinking that they can afford not to have an Auditor General going through their books. Yet – yet – we appoint and we give out money under the Metis settlements accord and, further on somewhere else here, in general to native help. Later on there's a statutory expenditure on page 183. That is a fair amount of money. Now, I think and I've suggested in the past that the minister should be giving solid attention to possibly having an arm of the Auditor General that could be kicked into place because, after all, they are general taxpayers' moneys going out to the Metis settlements, the Metis accord, land claim settlements, and so on. There are lumps of cash going out.

I'm not suggesting that the Auditor General have the right to go marching in if the organization, whether settlement or Metis nation or band, doesn't want it. I'm saying that I think there could be an Auditor General's branch that could be called in – we would pay the expenses of it here, at Alberta taxpayers' expense – either by the people that have been elected to run the settlement or the band or by a significant petition. Now, the petition might have to have 20 percent of the voters or something like that, but I do think the native peoples should have the right of access to the Auditor General to see what has happened to the funds that have been used by those that have been governing them. We have that in our society. We have it in this society. The Auditor General checks the hon. minister's books, the Premier's books, the opposition's books. So why isn't there an Auditor General that could be kick started by the native peoples themselves, by the First Nations themselves, in order to check this and in order to also double-check whether or not there is any reason for the Metis settlements to be afraid to approach the opposition?

Now, certainly I have not been approached by people running the native settlements or Metis settlements or Metis nations or anything else to ask me to do anything, but I have been approached by a number of people that are dissidents, that are not happy. Maybe they don't have a reason for not being happy, but the fact of the matter is that they have no way of those books being audited and gone into. The way the minister seems to handle it – and those two letters he filed in the House are a dead giveaway that somehow or another they seem to be afraid. Why would they write two letters like that to the minister and say: oh no; no, no; we didn't talk to the Liberals? So this is one the things I want to bring out when it comes to spending that kind of money, because \$1.1 million seems to be high for an appeal



tribunal for what it seems to do. I agree that there should be an appeal tribunal, but I think it should be tied in to the Auditor General somehow or another.

Before I sit down, the last question is on page 183. I can't quite understand what appears to be \$25 million for operations and maintenance assistance for the Metis settlements accord. Then I go to the transition commission, and it is \$5.3 million. Now, I would gather that the \$25 million and the future development assistance – which is a little difficult to follow because it says future in all the columns: future '93, future '94, future '95-96. How come we've always got \$5 million in the future? Doesn't the future ever catch up? Just why would it be there every time? How is the \$25 million tied into the \$5.3 million of the transition commission?

Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**MRS. HEWES:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome an opportunity to ask the minister a few questions. Mr. Minister, I want to thank you for your review of your budget. I want to say at the outset that in my constituency office and in my work here in the Legislature I still get a great many questions and inquiries about difficulties that people have making ends meet and so on. I have to say that when we call your regional offices and your workers, we get maximum support. I can't say enough for the . . .

**MR. DECORE:** That's not because of him, surely.

**MRS. HEWES:** I want him to know this, Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, because I think all too often you probably find yourself on the receiving end of complaints of people who are frightened and angry, and I do too, but when the workers in my office deal with the workers in your office, we more often than not are able to solve the problem or at least arrive at something that gives more comfort to the individual. Your workers do that, sir, in spite of the rigorous regulations that you've created that sometimes I think make it very difficult for them. So I want to express my thanks to you, and I hope you'll pass that on to them.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask a few questions about specific programs and then perhaps a few comments about the three-year plans. Under program 2 in supports for independence some of my colleagues have talked about the need to look again at the SFI levels. It's some months now, Mr. Minister, since this program was initiated. How long is it? Eighteen months? Something like that. It seems to me that realistically we should look at those levels and see how they compare with the cost of living, if in fact people are able to manage. I don't know about your grocery bill, but mine has certainly gone up in that length of time, and I think it's only right and fair to review them for the potential buying power of the amount, whether we're talking rent or more properly food, to determine whether or not they are realistic. I would hope the minister would respond to that positively. I know the minister speaks about high needs, and possibly one of the high needs is simply to increase the amount available for rent, food, clothing for some of those people that are really struggling, trying to get off welfare.

Mr. Chairman, again the damage deposits. The Member for Leduc has spoken eloquently to the need to look at that and perhaps develop some more flexibility in how those are made available to people to meet their needs.

I'd like to ask the minister once again my familiar question about the employment initiatives. Where are the people? I know the minister has spoken about the difficulties in following and

tracking some of the people, but perhaps we have enough information now. Are they coming back around again? Are we experiencing recidivism? Are people succeeding in the program? Are they finding full-time employment? I think it would be helpful, Mr. Minister, if from time to time we had an update on that program.

**9:20**

Again, Mr. Chairman, the appeal process for supports for independence. I do have a lot of concerns expressed about this, where workers are faced with saying, "Yes, you can appeal, but it really won't help because the appeal panel is not able to move outside of the very stringent regulations that are there." In other words, they're not in a position to use any discretion for extraordinary circumstances. So the appeal process really isn't an appeal process because there's no possibility of it changing the decision of the regulations that are transmitted by the worker. Perhaps the minister can speak to the need for some review of how that process is working.

Mr. Chairman, if I could go to program 3, social support to individuals and families. The minister went through this one by one, and I'd just like to do the same. In 3.2.3, in-home family support – now, I know this is one that the minister has spoken fondly about, and I think it has some great promise in it. As opposed to removing children or separating the home, someone goes in to support the family within the context of the home. I've never been really comfortable, Mr. Minister, with what kind of people you're able to recruit and the kind of training and, I guess, in particular the kind of backup and supervision you are able to give them, because it seems to me to go into a home that is experiencing difficulty requires a particular kind of person, a particular kind of background, and not only that, it needs someone to give them the backup. It needs a kind of SWAT team support from time to time, and I'm aware that that particular SWAT team was discontinued some years ago. I just wondered if your current experience has indicated, perhaps with that increase in that particular item, which I agree with, that it does require the reinstitution of the backup and support team.

Once again I'd like to express my disappointment in what happened to FCSS. I know the minister will tell us that this now is a municipal choice, but I have said frequently in this House, Mr. Chairman, that I think this is one of the most innovative programs this government has ever put in place and one that gives us tremendous value from volunteers and from community initiatives. It's a best buy, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm sorry that it's gone in the form that it was presented. The Member for Highwood did an excellent review of that program and gave us some good recommendations. I think it's a tragedy that the thing was discontinued. Perhaps the minister could give me some idea about the current status, where municipalities are continuing, whether or not you're following that, and the kinds of programs that they consider significant and important enough to continue through FCSS, because I think that would give us some clues about what they're experiencing in their individual communities.

Mr. Chairman, the minister himself mentioned handicapped children's services and the price tag on this one and that children of course grow up and at 18 they move to a different phase of their development. I wonder if the minister would comment on where they go. I frequently visit schools that have programs for mentally challenged children, young adults. When they're 18, they graduate. I'm not sure where they go and how they move within your department, Mr. Minister, and if that funding follows the individual child past the age of 18.

Another colleague has spoken about food banks. Mr. Minister, it seems to me that the experience of the food banks is one really major clue that tells us that the SFI amounts are insufficient. It's one thing to depend upon the generosity of our communities to help people who are hungry, but I know the minister says that the people who are using food banks are not people on assistance. That's contrary to the kind of information I'm getting. I was alarmed to learn, whether correct or not, that the minister had directed the St. Albert office not to refer people who are on assistance to the food bank. I hope that's not the case. I think when people are hungry and dependent upon food banks, they've usually used up all their markers with their family and their friends and their neighbours, and I don't think that's a very happy experience for them. I think that needs to be taken as an indicator. Perhaps it's something that you could include as an indicator in your three-year plans. If the increase and the demand on food banks increases exponentially over a number of months or years, then that should tell you that there's something wrong with our support system.

On the same subject, early interventions for children and children in poverty. Mr. Minister, I've been involved with a committee that has been working on children and poverty, and there are some very good representatives of your department who also sit on the committee. They've made some excellent recommendations to you and to the government. I'd like the minister to let us in on what's happening to those recommendations and if he has seen fit to act on any of them.

The Michener Centre I see remains pretty much the same, and the minister mentioned Michener. What is the intent? Do we have a definite statement now on what the government's intent is regarding Michener and the board of directors of Michener, that has been serving the people of our province and their families as well?

In the three-year plans under strategic directions I'd like to ask about the move towards privatization. Mr. Minister, I'm not opposed to the notion of private nonprofits or even commercial operations, but I am concerned that we are doing it without sufficient standards being developed and means to monitor them. We have had many discussions over the years regarding day care and the need for standards there. Today and on previous days we've had discussions about boarding homes, group homes, the need for more standards there and also for monitoring. I believe it's high time we had a more comprehensive system. These are very vulnerable people, and as we move to privatize and arrange for community agencies to serve these particular constituents, I think we owe it to ourselves, to the taxpayer who may be funding such services, and to the consumers of those services and their families to ensure that in fact there are standards in place. It seems to me, in regard to the boarding homes, that people who run these homes in most cases would want standards to be in place. They'd want to be accredited. I expect the government to take some lead there, and I think that's only right and proper. That is the role of government. If we are going to privatize services, I think government has a role and a responsibility in developing standards and in monitoring them for those very vulnerable populations.

Mr. Chairman, under income and employment programs in the three-year plan the strategies indicate what is anticipated to happen to SFI: in '96-97 a further reduction of 3,000 cases and in '97-98 a further reduction of 2,800 cases. Now, I have not seen from the minister – and perhaps it exists someplace – some sort of critical path about how the minister anticipates getting to

those reductions. I'd like to ask the minister: what if they aren't achieved? What happens then? Is the money simply chopped off and divided among those who are there? On what kind of basis? Is it just a graph that shows we got rid of X number this year; therefore, we can get rid of the same number? It seems to me that as we go along, the level of need and the level of training required of people who are on SFI may well increase and it may take longer. I'm alarmed because 3,000 and 2,800 in the next two years seems like a considerable chunk. So I'd like to know what your fallback plan is, Mr. Minister, if we don't achieve it.

### 9:30

In several places in this particular document on plans it speaks to parental accountability.

- Reshaping Child Welfare initiatives will address four areas of practice . . .
- parental accountability.

Mr. Minister, I'd like some sort of example or description of what it is you mean by that. Is this where we're talking about putting people in the home to help develop parenting skills? Is this some sort of checklist that you're going to require parents to fulfill? What do you do? How do you punish them if they aren't accountable? You and I must recognize that not all parents are or can be accountable for their actions.

Mr. Chairman, again in services to persons with disabilities, under Strategies we have a line that says, "Responsibility for mentally ill clients was transferred to the Department of Health's Home Care Program in July 1994." Now, I thought that this was under the Mental Health Board, that they were dealing with this. It doesn't appear that that is really compatible with my understanding of where mentally ill clients were being cared for, and I'd like to ask the minister: is this in fact the case? Are people who are mentally ill now under the home care program, and if so, how? Are they, then, under the regional health authorities, or are they in fact under the mental health program, which was my anticipation?

I'd further like to ask the minister, because this is a very important section, about community supports for this particular clientele, about housing, whether housing is provided for them, whether they're helped to find housing. What kinds of supports are available to them and through what agency and what services? How is it ensured that they are on their medication, that they see a doctor regularly if necessary, and that in fact they have help in getting further treatment or in getting recreation and getting employment if their health permits?

Mr. Chairman, I want to go to the prevention of family violence. Here in Strategies it says that in 1995-96 funding for community-based demonstration projects will be eliminated. Well, what did we learn from these projects? What were they anyway? Did we learn anything from them? We put a fair amount of funds into it. Were any of them ever implemented? Have any of them ever been continued? Have any of them proved to be successful either in preventing family violence or dealing with those who are the victims of family violence? For me it is not enough simply to say: this funding has been eliminated. I need some rationale for that.

Mr. Chairman, we see increases in family violence. I was interested to learn of what I thought was a very novel and innovative program run by the city of Edmonton police in training volunteers to deal with people who had been sexually abused or sexually exploited. It apparently is very successful, Mr. Minister. I think we need to look at ways we can use those kinds of model programs to work here. I wondered if in fact perhaps some of those demonstration projects were of that nature and if we have

applied them. I see nothing whatsoever in either the three-year plans or in the budget that would indicate that to me.

The minister has spoken about the women's shelters and paying off the mortgages, but I suggest to the minister that we see increasing numbers needing this kind of shelter and the support that goes along with it, and I don't see increasing funds for that purpose. I don't see any funds available for counseling for abusers who are at high risk of continuing to abuse, either within that family context or another family.

I don't see any funds or any description of programs for early intervention, either with others from your department, Mr. Minister, or with police involvement. I don't see any indication of the use of SWAT teams to go in, as they do in some other centres, to interrupt and deal with the family at the very initial stages when violence erupts. I think those are the kinds of things that communities want to see in this province.

Under children, Mr. Chairman, I only have I think one major question, and that relates to the section in the plan under Commissioner of Services for Children. It says that the commissioner has "identified new and innovative approaches for the delivery of services to Alberta's children and families." Now, we've heard and we've seen the report Focus on Children from the commissioner. I know we're talking about community-based services, about moving the decision-making into the community, but I'd like some more definitive description, please.

Thank you.

MR. DECORE: Is the minister going to respond tonight, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: He has indicated that he will later on. I think he's waiting for your comments.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Chairman, I want to start by going to the responsibility that the minister has for Indian and Metis affairs. I have pursued this question with the FIGA minister and the Minister of Justice, and I'm still not sure what the position of the Klein government is. Perhaps I can explain that there are people in the Indian community and the aboriginal community – I asked this of the minister of transportation as well. He's smiling there. I'm glad he reminded me of that.

I attended a conference not very long ago when the question was put to me: what's the position of the Liberal Party with respect to the governance of Indian lands, aboriginal lands, and specifically, in that context, what is the position of the Liberal Party on bingos and casinos, gambling, VLTs on Indian reserves, Metis settlements? Now, as the minister . . .

MR. JONSON: What is your position?

MR. DECORE: I'm sorry?

MR. JONSON: What is your position, your answer?

MR. DECORE: I said that I was . . . [interjection] The Minister of Education asked me a pertinent question. He asked: what was my position when I attended the meeting? I said that my view was that the Indian community had the right to govern their land as they wished. If they wanted to have gambling and VLTs and casinos, that was their decision, not the decision of this Assembly or the decision in Ottawa. Is that clear enough, Mr. Minister?

Now, I'd like a clear answer because when this question is asked of people in authority in Ottawa, there is a bit of to-ing and fro-ing. People in authority in Ottawa will say: well, it's really

a decision of the provincial governments because licensing comes under the authority of provincial governments. That was the position that the minister of transportation took. The to-ing and fro-ing on his part was that gambling came under the provisions of the Criminal Code, and therefore it was a federal matter.

Well, the Indian community is caught in between the to-ing and the fro-ing. They don't know what the heck is going on. As the minister responsible for Indians and Metis, stand up, Mr. Minister, and tell us exactly what your position is on this issue. I thought I was pretty clear in my response to the Indian community when I met the chiefs of all the bands of Alberta. I'd like to know what you've been saying to the chiefs or what you're prepared to say publicly in this Assembly to the chiefs through this Assembly. That's the issue of casinos, the issue of gambling, the issue of VLTs.

Now, we see even in the newspaper today and we saw it last week that a band in particular has already made arrangements. Perhaps it has even seen the Premier to talk about a casino just west of Calgary. I'd like to know if the minister was present at that meeting. Has the minister met with that band, and is he supportive of that band?

Now, if the minister is supportive of a band, how does he ensure some sort of equality to the rest of the aboriginal community in Alberta? If one or two bands, reserves get casinos, do they get all of the profit from the running of those casinos, or does that profit have to be shared with other aboriginal people in Alberta or other people, period, in Alberta? Is there some sort of formula that the minister has contemplated to deal with this issue? I'd like to know if the minister is prepared to go to bat, come to the aid of the Indian community and the Metis community in this regard. Mr. Chairman, it was even suggested to me – and I find this a fascinating argument – that some Indian bands are contemplating as part of Indian lands settlement claims the acceptance of gambling rights. That is, if the provincial government agrees to give them gambling rights, they're prepared to give off, saw off, do away with part of the money requests that they have against the provincial government or the federal government. I'd like the minister to comment on that.

9:40

My next issue is the issue of food banks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I hope you listen to this because this is an important question for me and for our caucus. There are some 20-odd food banks, I think at last count, in the province of Alberta. We've had food banks in Alberta for a long time. You heard the hon. member from Edmonton whose responsibility it is to track your portfolio talk about the increase in food bank use. My first question, Mr. Minister, is: what's your philosophy on food banks? Should they exist? Should they be there? Should they provide assistance to Albertans in need? Or is there the other side of that argument: that nobody should have to go to a food bank if they're properly looked after and cared for, that there's a certain dignity that people have to live with and in, and that the government has some responsibility for that. So, Mr. Minister, tell us what your philosophy is on that. Now, if you think that there should be food banks – and this isn't repartee time; I have to assume that you're going to say that they should exist – if they should exist, I'd like to know: what's the position of your frontline staff to be with respect to food banks? The people that come to social services offices for help, are they told by those frontline staff: "Well, this is the only money that you can get; this is the only assistance we can provide. You're going to have to go off to the food bank and get some support there"? If that's

not the case, and there appears to be some evidence that that isn't the case, that your frontline staff is telling people not to go to food banks, or they're being mute on that issue, I'd like . . .

DR. WEST: What kind of nonsense is this?

MR. DECORE: Well, I'm glad that the minister of transportation is back in his seat to listen to some more important things that can round out his life a little bit because he sure has a very narrow life.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to just . . .

DR. WEST: I want to hear the Liberal philosophy on how you're going to pay for welfare.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Minister, I think that people should live in dignity. I don't think that they should have to go begging to a food bank. I think that's what you do believe in. I think that you'd like to see people on their hands and knees crawling to a food bank, probably in Lloydminster or somewhere near where you live.

DR. WEST: I'd like to see you go digging deeper into your pockets and giving them something.

#### **Chairman's Ruling Decorum**

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities, we are discussing the estimates tonight of Family and Social Services, and we do so through the Chair. Hon. minister, if you wish to speak, we would invite you to do so. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, there are rules about baiting, et cetera. So if you'd continue with your comments and questions on Family and Social Services estimates.

MR. DECORE: Well, I'm delighted when he interrupts, Mr. Chairman. I really believe that he learns something in these debates. I really do, and nobody could be as cruelhearted as that minister of transportation. There's got to be a soft spot in there somewhere. I'm convinced of it.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. DECORE: Mr. Chairman, I want to continue. [interjection] Hope springs eternal; you're right.

Mr. Chairman, I want to pursue the issue of food banks, because there's some evidence that's rather disturbing with respect to the minister and his attitude toward food banks. There appears to be a suggestion, Mr. Minister, that you are somehow forcing your staff into either discouraging people from going to food banks or you're telling them to be quiet on that issue, even though they know the people that are coming to them need food bank support. I want you to tell us what you're telling your frontline staff. I want you to tell us if there's something in writing that exists to that extent or some policy that has come from a deputy minister or somebody to your frontline staff with respect to how people are treated that the staff know should be going or have to go to a food bank.

That leads me to my next issue, Mr. Chairman. The minister has had some difficulty in dealing with his staff in the past. I recall an incident when he invited staff to come and critique his doings, and he didn't like the criticism.

MR. CARDINAL: I laid them off.

MR. DECORE: You laid them off. The minister correctly put it. He laid them off.

MR. CARDINAL: Who's the boss?

MR. DECORE: He was the boss. There's nothing sort of 'mamsy-pamsy' about this. If you want to criticize me, the minister said, you're laid off. Right? He's nodding yes, and that's the way it worked.

Well, Mr. Minister, our information, my information in speaking to some of the frontline staff is that they're petrified of the way you act. They don't like the way you act. You're high-handed, and you're the most unreasonable person to work for as a minister.

MR. CARDINAL: I'm a tough boss.

MR. DECORE: Tough boss? I think it goes further than that, Mr. Minister. I'd like you to confirm what sort of policy you have to deal with your staff. How do you allow staff to make representations to you from the field? We know that you don't like criticism. We know that you fire people who criticize you. How do you get input from the frontline staff if you work in that high-handed way? Tell us, Mr. Minister, how you find out what's going on in the field.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I reported not very long ago that I had a town hall meeting in my constituency with some 200 people in attendance. That's about 160 more than when you were there, minister of transportation. Many of those people stood up and talked about the difficulty in making ends meet when they are on social assistance. Mothers in particular rose to speak about how difficult it was for them sending their children to school, making ends meet with shelter and with food. Mr. Minister, we said a year and a half ago that your system of cutting back on people on social assistance was too harsh, too harsh. I'd like to know how you track this. What sort of system do you have to watch this to ensure that people are not in grave difficulty, that children are getting the kind of education they should be getting, that children aren't sitting in a classroom while their classmates go off to a museum or to a swimming pool or wherever and they don't have enough money, because they're on social assistance, to go out on these field trips? I want you to tell us how you track that, because we want to compare that with what we're tracking in the city of Edmonton, particularly in my constituency.

Mr. Chairman, I think I'll end there and allow the minister to start to respond.

#### **9:50**

THE CHAIRMAN: It goes back and forth. If the hon. minister wants to reply now, he may. If not, we'll take Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to thank the members for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, Edmonton-Manning, Leduc, Redwater, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and Edmonton-Glengarry for their comments tonight. No doubt there were, you know, hundreds of questions asked tonight. Some of the questions asked, of course, were in relation to food banks, casinos, parent accountability, women's shelters, caseload reductions, privatization, child welfare, why FCSS was moved and what may happen to it, the damage deposit, why we've cut down on the \$10 million on damage deposits, land claims, appeals processes, the review of SFI rates, sharing information - the

Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly wanted to know why we don't share information anymore, and maybe she should review *Hansard* to see why we're a little less open now in providing information to her in particular – concern about the standing policy committee, the number of meetings held, and stuff.

In reviewing all the comments – I am happy to listen tonight to all the positive recommendations made by a number of the members. I know that you do care about the disadvantaged. I know that you're sincere about improving the services provided to the people under my department. The only concern I would have, I guess, is that I've always wanted to know what your social policies would be in Alberta if you ever had the opportunity to be the government. By looking at your debate tonight about the concerns you have and the questions you have, I think what would happen is that we would be back where we were 20 months ago: our budget would be, no doubt, \$1.7 billion and our caseload would probably be 94,000 cases.

That is not what our government is doing. Our government is doing just opposite of what you are recommending. The welfare system, the way it was 20 months ago, will probably never be the same again in the future. What we have done here, Mr. Chairman, is we have moved from a passive welfare system to an active program aimed at getting people, the employables and trainables and couples without children, back into the workforce. In the last 20 months we have been very successful in doing that. Those people that have managed to get off welfare and back into the workforce are very, very happy that we've made that change. In addition to that, it has allowed us to move millions of dollars to the high-needs area, and this government will continue doing that. We will continue moving dollars into children's services,

and for those people that cannot fend for themselves. That is the general policy of this government.

In specific to the questions that have been asked tonight, a lot of good questions, I want to provide detailed answers to those questions. They are very sensitive, they're complicated, and the people questioning are very sincere that they want the right answers for those questions. I am called back here in a week or two to do another presentation. What I will do at that time is provide in detail all the answers, both in writing and I'll verbally present them in the opening of my next presentation.

Because of the time, Mr. Chairman, at this time I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Family and Social Services, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 9:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

