

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Friday, March 15, 1996 **Designated Subcommittee**
 Date: 96/03/15
 9:03 a.m.
 [Chairman: Ms Haley]

Committee of Supply: Designated Supply Subcommittee Family and Social Services

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we should begin, ladies and gentlemen. Prior to beginning, there are just a couple of things I'd like to say. First of all, welcome. My apologies for messing up your Friday morning by booking this at this time, but I felt that in looking at my options, this was probably the easiest time to get people here.

We have a little bit of housekeeping to take care of. There's a motion apparently that we're supposed to deal with.

Be it resolved that the Designated Supply Subcommittee on Family and Social Services allocate the 4 hours allotted to it pursuant to Standing Order 56(7)(b).

The motion goes on to indicate that opposition and subcommittee members and independent subcommittee members have – and it says specifically – “1 hour” for questions on each side. I would prefer, with your consent, to look at this in a slightly different way. I'd like to have the minister make his opening comments. He's indicated that he may take slightly more than 20 minutes because he wants to go through element by element, but that after that that we have questions rotating from opposition to government members rather than the one hour designated. I'd like your approval on that, or if not your approval, then we can handle it another way if you have a better suggestion.

We'll do our best to make it for the four hours, but if we do in fact finish early, we would ask your consent to consider adjourning earlier than that. Those are just my thoughts on it, but if you're agreed, then we can move ahead. If not, please speak up.

MS HANSON: Yes. I think that's a good idea. Certainly the minister needs to take all his time. But we talked yesterday about being a little more informal about it, because sometimes you ask a series of questions, and then you want to go back after. If we could have that kind of debate, it would be better.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think it's far more productive to do it that way. The minister can cut in and answer some questions from time to time and just make it more of a give-and-go.

So with your approval, ladies and gentlemen, we'll begin by having the minister do his presentation.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. First of all, I want to introduce the people I have here: Duncan Campbell, director of budgets and financial analysis; Don Fleming, deputy minister, to my right; Frank Wilson, executive director of resource management services. Bob Scott over there is director of communications.

Good morning. I want to begin with the review of this ministry's budget estimates by making some general comments followed by review of specific element spending patterns.

This is a good-news budget. When compared to the '95-96 forecast of expenditures, the ministry will increase its spending in '96-97 by \$26 million. At the same time, the ministry is still on schedule to meet or do better than the spending targets that have been set for each of the three-year business plans. We will continue to make progress in helping welfare clients find new opportunities for work and training.

The reduced welfare costs let government redirect funds to high-needs areas like child welfare and to programs for the disabled. Administrative efficiencies are being achieved through a review of manpower requirements, looking at how we do our job, and outsourcing of activities such as computer systems

operations.

The ministry's workforce continues to get smaller. Full-time positions will be reduced by 560 over the next three years. At the same time, it is important to note that we are adding child welfare workers to meet program demands in the high-needs area. The ministry's intention is to continue to accomplish its downsizing requirements through attrition or job offers in the private sector rather than layoffs.

From 1992-93 to 1998-99 this ministry will have reduced its workforce by over 960 full-time positions. This represents a reduction of 18 percent. Since 1989-1990 the ministry will have reduced its administrative manpower component by over 750 full-time positions. This is a 50 percent reduction in administrative manpower, which has been accomplished through increased administrative efficiencies.

Family and Social Services has the lowest ratio of managers to frontline workers in the Alberta government. I believe we have 5 percent; the rest are frontline workers. The emphasis in the ministry over the next three years will be to place more of the service delivery in the hands of the people who know best what is required in their communities. There will be an orderly change in the progression of moving delivery responsibilities from departmentally controlled staff to professional staff who are responsible to local authorities. The government will continue to be responsible for legislation, funding, and policy setting and monitoring to ensure its programs provide the kind of quality of service required.

If you would agree, I would like to systematically review the 1996-97 estimates and highlight some specific changes. I will be comparing the 1995-96 forecasts and the 1996 estimates because this is the best measure of anticipated change in spending: next year versus the past year. My review begins on page 217 of your book, under departmental support services, operating expense, at the top left-hand side of the page. Most of the nine elements – there are nine elements under that, which are totally administrative programs – have reduced spending requirements in '96-97. The exceptions are 1.0.2, standing policy committee on services – and you'll see that – 1.0.7, personnel services, which remain the same, and element 1.0.8, resource management services, where spending goes up by \$0.5 million. The reason for the increase in this element is the transfer of some responsibility from Public Works, Supply and Services to the department.

Also, under capital investment, 1.0.8, which is at the bottom of this page, there's a reduction of \$149,000 in capital investment as a result of reduced computer systems development activities.

We'll move on now to page 218. Again, if you look at the total program spending line – it is about midway down the page – there is an increase of \$12 million from the forecast of \$727.7 million in '95-96 to \$740 million in '96-97.

Under operating expense I'll go now and look at individual elements. I want to begin with 2.1.1, program support, and 2.2.1, program delivery. You will note that these two elements were reduced a total of \$3.3 million through the outsourcing of computer operations along with reduced staffing and administrative costs.

We'll go down the operating expenses. We need to look at four elements related to welfare caseload together: 2.2.3, supplement to earnings; 2.2.4, employment and training support; 2.2.5, transitional support; and 2.3.4, assured support and supports for independence. There is a net spending increase of \$0.6 million in these four elements. The welfare caseload will be reduced from 49,420 in '95-96 to 48,620 in '96-97, resulting in a saving of \$3.4 million. However, these savings will be offset by increases in health care costs and day care support for individuals enrolled in

training and employment support programs, costing a total of \$4 million.

We'll continue on to 2.2.6. You will notice that in element 2.2.6, employment initiatives, the spending will increase by \$8.5 million, bringing the total spending to \$40.8 million. This demonstrates the government's continued emphasis on helping people help themselves through employment and training initiatives such as the Alberta community employment program and the Alberta job corps program.

The other significant spending increase in program 2 is in element 2.3.3, assured income for the severely handicapped. As a result of an expected caseload increase from 17,150 to 17,620, spending will increase by \$5.6 million from \$171.6 million forecast to be spent in 1995-96.

Under the capital investment vote, references 2.2.1 and 2.2.6, which are listed at the bottom of the page – this is again on page 218 – there will be a shift in spending from 2.2.1, program delivery, to 2.2.6, employment initiatives. The change is the result of completing welfare computer program development and redirecting the money to equipment purchases for the Alberta job corps.

We'll move on now to program 3, page 219. Am I going a little too fast?

9:13

MR. WOLOSHTYN: No, you're not. Speed it up.

MR. CARDINAL: Should I speed it up? No, I don't want to speed it up. I want to make sure you can at least follow the areas.

Again under operating, reference 3.1.1. There has been an 11 percent increase in element 3.1.1, program support, which represents a \$73,000 change from the '95-96 forecast and is for training and relocating staff of child welfare services to persons with developmental disabilities. As well, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee will visit more facilities in '96-97 than in '95-96.

Still under program 3, under operating expense you will notice that in subprogram 3.2, child welfare services, the ministry anticipates a reduction of \$2 million, going from the forecast of \$181.1 million to \$179.1 million. This reduction is expected as a result of the implementation of the early intervention program, continued focus on low-cost in-home support, and some onetime 1995-96 expenditures on computer equipment for child welfare workers.

Moving on under operating to reference 3.2.1. Within the child welfare services subprogram, I want to comment on the net \$1.2 million increase in element 3.2.1, program delivery. This is a result of adding more staff to meet caseload demands and the introduction of the child welfare intern training program, the costs of which are partially offset by the elimination of expenditures on computer equipment for next year.

Still on program operating expenses under vote 3, under services for children and families, subprogram 3.3, you will note that in element 3.3.3, early intervention programs, spending is expected to increase by \$14 million, increasing spending from the \$6 million forecast for '95-96 to \$20 million in '96-97. This reflects a full implementation of this important initiative.

On the same page, still under operating expense, 3.4.1, day care. Day care reductions that were announced in 1993-94 are to continue with the operating allowance rates going from an average of \$77 to \$69 per month and the family day-home rates reducing from \$68 to \$64 per month. This will be combined with improved fraud and error detection that will result in a total

reduction of \$3.9 million in element 3.4.1, day care programs.

Still on the same page, element 3.4.2. An earlier press release indicated that the family and community support services program, reference 3.4.2, has been returned to Family and Social Services. The budget will total \$31.1 million, and the final installment, a 5 percent decrease announced in 1994, will be implemented in the '96-97 fiscal year, resulting in a \$1.7 million reduction in spending from the '95-96 forecast.

Still under operating, references 3.5.6 and 3.5.7. Subprogram 3.5, services to persons with disabilities, will see a net increase of \$7.1 million. Over \$9 million will be added to element 3.5.7, personal support services, to meet the needs of disabled individuals living in their communities, at the same time saving \$2.6 million in element 3.5.6, Michener Centre, which will be achieved by serving these clients in the community.

Under capital in program 3, reference 3.2.1 on page 220, the capital investment vote shows a dramatic reduction in expenditures, going from \$0.6 million in element 3.2.1, program delivery, to zero as a result of the completion of the child welfare services computer systems development.

On page 221, the program for aboriginal affairs, operating, under reference 4.0.1, federal/provincial/aboriginal affairs reflects a reduction of \$1.2 million from the '95-96 forecast, resulting in a '96-97 budget of \$5.3 million. This change is a result of one-time grants to aboriginal groups in '95-96 that won't be required in '96-97. Together with some administrative streamlining within the aboriginal affairs branch, that saves \$0.2 million.

Operating, under 4.0.3. The ministry has again budgeted \$2.6 million in element 4.0.3, Indian land claim settlements, even though only \$0.7 million will be spent in '95-96. As these negotiations are ongoing from year to year, the \$2.6 million is a standard budget item. If we need more, then we put more, but we always budget a base, hoping that some of the land claims would be settled.

Again, going to page 222, reference 5.0.1 and 5.0.2, program 5, Métis settlements accord. Savings from administrative streamlining in the Métis Settlements Transition Commission, element 5.0.1, have been partially offset by a potential increase in appeal activities under the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal, element 5.0.2, resulting in a reduction of \$0.5 million in the '96-97 budget of \$5.6 million for the total program. As we move forward to streamlining and moving the administration and local government structures to the community, the savings are incurred by that.

Page 223, operating, 6.0.1. The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families ceased operation in '95-96; therefore, there is no estimate for '96-97.

On page 224, again operating expense, 7.0.1, spending in the children's advocacy program, program 7 on this page, will decrease by \$43,000. In '95-96 some costs arose to help youth in care to participate in the consultation being managed by the commission of services for children and families. In '96-97 some of these costs will fall within the commissioner's area of budget.

Page 225, the statutory program budget, although not voted, will once again provide \$25 million for operating and maintenance assistance and \$5 million for future development assistance. This is again in relation to the Métis settlement legislation. This money is there, it's legislated, and there's a financial review going on this year, so we can't project anything as far as changes until the financial review is completed.

The department's business plan summary of budget highlights on pages 228 and 229 gives a concise picture of the program and spending plans for the ministry and doesn't require further comment. However, I do want to comment on the key perfor-

mance measures that begin on page 230 of the estimates. These are the ministry's measures that demonstrate the degree of success of its major programs. As we gain experience with these performance measures, you can expect them to be improved or refined in the future.

I want to quickly turn to the department income statement on page 234, a reasonably important area which provides detail of the consolidated income statement on page 232. It shows that total revenue is expected to decrease by over \$100 million. This is a direct result of decreased transfer payments from the federal government under the Canada assistance plan with the new transfer agreement. We'll actually reduce \$100 million from our department. However, as I noted before, the ministry's total '96-97 budget has increased by \$26 million from what we are projecting in '95-96. The budget demonstrates that this government is not passing on the reductions of the \$100 million for social programs in my department.

9:23

Finally, on page 235, if that's the final page, there is a manpower authorization table on the left. It shows we are continuing to reduce our staff complement from 5,028 full-time equivalent positions to 4,899, a drop of 129 for this fiscal year. As mentioned in my earlier remarks, these are reductions as part of the department's continuing downsizing efforts that have resulted in total staff reductions of 18 percent since 1992-93. While we were doing this, you will notice that I believe we increased by 30 positions or so in the child welfare area as we do reduce. So we reduced generally, but we still increased in the high-needs area by I believe 30 positions.

MR. FLEMING: Fifty.

MR. CARDINAL: Is it 50 positions? Okay.

Now, I guess I look forward to listening to the comments and questions of other members of the committee. If there are questions that require more research, my officials will prepare written responses to your questions in case there's some detailed stuff that we don't have.

Thank you.

Don, do you have any further comments? What's our time like? How long did it take?

THE CHAIRMAN: Not as long as you thought.

MR. CARDINAL: Oh, okay; that's good.

THE CHAIRMAN: It was 20 minutes.

MR. CARDINAL: Was that a little too fast?

THE CHAIRMAN: It was just fine.

Okay. Your questions; I'm not sure. Do you want to just indicate when you're ready to talk?

MS HANSON: Yeah. I'd just like to start off, Madam Chairman, Mr. Minister, about the overall, this \$26 million. I think it's confusing. The Family and Social Services news release did state that the incoming budget would see a decrease of \$12 million from last year, from \$1.4 billion in '95-96 to \$1.389 billion in '96-97. Yet the budget document on page 229 says, "the Ministry has planned to increase spending by \$26 million over the 1995-96 forecast." It seems to me that this is not a \$26 million increase,

at least according to the news release, and I wondered if you could explain that to me.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. Who wants to do that?

MR. FLEMING: I think with the forecast estimate we've increased spending in a couple of areas. One is in the employment program with the ACE project and with the job corps areas as well as with the shared initiatives with Advanced Ed and Career Development. Another major area was the increase in AISH caseload and also in the health costs and additional costs due to day care changes. In fact, you know, there are some significant increases along with the early intervention addition of \$14 million above what we would spend or are forecast to spend. The last one was in the personal supports area for persons with disabilities.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah; that was \$5.5 million on that.

MS HANSON: Yeah. When you read the news release and then you read the budget and try to match those two figures up, the \$12 million decrease is confusing.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. I can quickly go through some of the areas that are the higher expenditures. Don mentioned, you know, increased Alberta community employment programs, Alberta job corps initiatives, \$8.4 million; increased caseload of AISH, because we reviewed AISH and made sure that people that were eligible for AISH benefits received it. That caseload increased; that'll require a \$5.5 million increase. The increase in SFI health care costs, additional costs due to day care changes, additional costs for clients moving from Michener Centre to the community runs a total of \$4 million. An increase in widows' pension costs per case: that's \$800,000. Those are reasonably high-needs areas.

The other one is new funding for early intervention programs for initiatives for children, which was not fully utilized in '95-96, but that one will show \$14 million. The other one is increased caseload for personal supports, again for people moving to the community and people that are receiving assured support, over \$9 million on that particular one. An increase in child welfare caseloads from 8,750 to 8,960 is \$1.4 million, and this is not an increase in apprehensions. Our plan was always to increase the caseload and provide home support services with the families at home rather than apprehending the children. Actually, the number of children apprehended dropped, but the child welfare caseload went up, and that's exactly what we want to do, to keep the families at home together, provide the support services and the counseling that's required. Therefore, we expect the child welfare caseload in that category to continue going up. The side of the apprehensions will probably drop, which is what we have planned. The other part of that is increased child welfare staffing due to caseloads. Don mentioned that we increased that by about 50 staff, which is \$1.6 million, and there are other, smaller items that are mentioned here that are part of the increase.

MR. FLEMING: I think what's confusing is estimate to estimate to actually go down \$11 million from year to year, but with the savings that we've had with the reduced caseload, we've been able to increase spending in those high-needs areas that the minister has indicated.

MS HANSON: Yeah, so it's the gross amount.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MS HANSON: Okay. Thank you very much.

I just wanted to ask a couple of questions about day care. The total day care spending is down to \$62 million. You were saying that the day care operating allowance and family day home administration fees are being reduced, at least you referred to the reduction in day care, and I assumed that's what it is.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, we announced that when the refunds were announced.

MS HANSON: Yeah. I'm just a little disappointed in that. I know that there is a shortage of subsidized day care in the province. A lot of people can't afford good day care. So I just wanted to put forward my disappointment in that.

MR. CARDINAL: We are working very closely with the feds on that to see how we can, you know, complement each other in some of their plans. They're a little slow getting off the ground, but we'll want to make sure that whatever is there, we take full advantage of it in Alberta.

MS HANSON: So, Mr. Minister, the federal initiative was withdrawn, but I think the news release said that they were going to be consulting. So that's moving ahead, is it?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, that's still moving ahead. They don't have a concrete plan yet because, like in Alberta, we have so many different ways of providing support for children that I think they like to look at each province and actually see how – rather than announce a program for across Canada, it sounds like they want to sit down with us and work out a plan for Alberta, specifically for Albertans. That could take a little bit of time. It would be better, yeah.

MS HANSON: Okay. That's good. Thanks.

MR. CARDINAL: Because we can tie in after-school care at the same time while we're working on that.

MS HANSON: Yeah, that needs to be looked at.

MR. FLEMING: In the actual spending in day care, we exceeded our budget by about \$3 million, but we've moved from \$63.6 to \$66 and that was to take up – because of the welfare reforms there were a lot more people back into the workforce, so we had to increase the subsidies. So indeed we spend more this year than what was forecast.

MS HANSON: Yeah. My concern is that many people say they can't afford good day care. But I'll pass on to someone else.

THE CHAIRMAN: Moe was my second person on the list.

MR. AMERY: Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, and good morning Mr. Minister. I would like to start with your business plan summary.

MR. CARDINAL: What element is that?

MR. AMERY: I haven't got to the element yet. I will in a minute. I will in a minute.

9:33

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MR. AMERY: It states in your business plan that there has been an increase in the past year in the number of people requiring and receiving AISH. In response to that growth the estimated net expenditure for AISH in 1996-97 has increased by over 5 and a half million dollars. Now we're looking at vote 2.3.3.

MR. CARDINAL: Two point – what?

MR. AMERY: Vote 2.3.3. Can you hear me?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, I can hear you. Vote 2.3.3, assured income for the severely handicapped.

MR. AMERY: For the severely handicapped, under program 2.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MR. AMERY: Income support to individuals and families. The forecasted net expense for 1995-96 is \$171,648,000. The expected net expense for 1996-97 is \$177,239,000. I wonder if you could explain the increase in funding for this AISH program, and I wonder if you could comment on the number of Albertans that are currently receiving AISH and compare this figure to the number of Albertans that received AISH last year.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MR. AMERY: The other thing is – I haven't finished on this subject. I'd like to say a few things. Are there any plans to continue to increase the amount of funding allocated for the AISH program or AISH recipients? The increase of \$5.5 million I think was because of the increase in the number of people receiving AISH; I don't believe it was that the recipients received any extra moneys. You know, Mr. Minister, these people are the most vulnerable of all. They are severely handicapped. They can't work. They can't get a part-time job. Their programs haven't been reviewed for the last three or four years, but knowing that their rent has gone up, their utilities have gone up, their food has gone up, their entitlement stayed the same. I think this program should be looked into and reviewed to reflect the needs of these people.

My second question refers to vote 3.3.3, early intervention programs, under program 3, social support to individuals and families. In 1995-96 the forecasted net expense for the early intervention program was \$6 million. In '96-97 the estimated net expense is \$20 million. This is a substantial increase. I wonder if you could explain the rationale for this increase.

Again I notice that in the business plan summary on page 229 of the 1996-97 government and lottery fund estimates book it states that \$10 million was added to early intervention programs in 1996-97. This is \$4 million less than what the estimate figures show in vote 3.3.3 on page 219. I wonder if you could explain this discrepancy.

I wonder again, Mr. Minister, if you could comment on the various programs that are funded as early intervention programs. Are there future plans to expand the number of programs funded?

Again I'd like to make a couple of comments on vote 3.2, child welfare services.

MR. CARDINAL: Just excuse me. This is going to be tougher

to follow. If you're going to ask all the questions on all the votes at one time, we're going to have to send you the stuff.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's fine.

MR. AMERY: Yeah, that's okay. That's fine; sure.

MR. CARDINAL: That's fine? Okay; we'll do that. If there's so much, you know, I'll spend a whole day answering all your questions.

MR. AMERY: Vote 3.2, the child welfare services. This is an area of great importance to many of us. The resources allocated to child welfare services has decreased this year from 1995-96. The forecasted net expense for child welfare services was \$181 million in 1995-96, and the estimated net expenditure for child welfare services is reduced by over \$2 million. I wonder if you could explain the rationale for this reduction, Mr. Minister.

The Department of Family and Social Services' business plan summary, page 229, states that the number of caseloads in child welfare has increased and that the government will respond to this increase by providing additional funding of \$8 million in 1996-97. I wonder if you could point out where this increase of \$8 million to child welfare services is reflected in the expenditure.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Take a deep breath, Moe.

MR. CARDINAL: Keep going. We'll mail the stuff to you.

MR. AMERY: Okay.

My last question. I wonder if you could provide us with the number of caseloads of child welfare that are expected in 1996-97, and how does this compare with last year?

On the last page I just noticed that we have the manpower authorization, full-time equivalent employment. That's on page 235. As a result of the downsizing you said we are losing about a hundred jobs. I wonder if we have any knowledge or any tracking system to see where these people are going. These are people who are losing their jobs, and they're probably ending up, you know, on welfare. If they're not employed, they're probably receiving benefits from your department.

MR. CARDINAL: That's it?

MR. AMERY: That's it. Thank you very much.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Were you here when I made my opening comments?

MR. AMERY: Yes.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, most of those questions you asked were answered there in detail. So if you look at *Hansard*, you will find that most of the questions you asked were answered. The ones that aren't, because you covered so many areas at one time, we're going to have to go through the *Hansard* and pull out.

Specifically, your first question of course was on a very important area; that is, assured income for severely handicapped. As you are aware, we are assisting many individuals that want to transfer from an institutional setting to community living, and this is why in fact the caseload has increased. Of course, the balance of the increased caseload is normal population growth. The caseload is expected to grow, as I have indicated in my opening statements, from 17,150 in '95-96 to over 17,620 in '96-97.

We are setting aside a special start-up fund for individuals who move into the community of \$1.3 million to cover the start-up costs of their new homes such as damage deposits, new furniture, utility deposits, et cetera. The benefit available for the assured support category is up to a maximum of \$1,000 per client.

You mentioned the income level of AISH. We are at this time reviewing all of the income levels for the widows' pension, assured support, and these recipients. As the information comes in from Albertans recommending how we reinvest in the future, I would hope some would indicate that. We should look carefully at the AISH category, for example, at the possibility of bringing that to an acceptable level. You will notice the seniors. I believe the basic level for seniors' income is about \$945, while AISH is \$820, and the needs are, I would say, equivalent if not higher in the AISH area. So we need to consider that very carefully, as to what it would cost if we were to increase that, but we are definitely reviewing it.

MR. AMERY: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Madam Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for that last remark, because one thing that I think causes a lot of concern and that we hear a lot about in our constituency offices is AISH. If I can be assured that it is being reviewed as to adequacy.

Mr. Minister, I have at last count 12 questions that are of a general nature. I'll only ask you one to start. Many are of a far more specific nature, and if we don't get to them this morning, perhaps I can just write them to you.

MR. CARDINAL: Oh, sure.

MRS. HEWES: One of the recurring problems that we ask you about in the House, Mr. Minister, and that the Auditor General has asked about is: where are the people? I know you speak positively about how the number who are on social assistance has been reduced, but I think we want some understanding of where they are. I think the AG has said exactly the same thing: are they going around? We're not satisfied any longer, Mr. Minister, with the sort of notion that they're in training or that they're in low-income jobs or minimum-wage jobs or that we don't know, we can't track. Nobody's comfortable with those answers, and we really need to find that out.

9:43

The other related question in that is that you've told us you're reviewing the AISH rates. What about the social assistance rates? I have no idea how – those numbers, the way they're set, just seem to come out of the hat. It doesn't seem to me to be related to anything. No question, it's too low. I don't know how people survive on it.

How do you get to it? What are you doing about it? Are we looking at those? Are you going to increase them this year? If you are, it doesn't show in the budget anywhere. So I'd be interested in that. How are those rates determined? Are those numbers being reviewed for adequacy? What are they related to? What kinds of complaints do you have? Are workers in the position to up them if they see extreme hardship?

Those are the kinds of questions that people are deeply concerned about, Mr. Minister, because over and over I get single women age 55 who simply cannot survive. Maybe they're bad

managers, but they can't survive. I need some answers for them.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. I will start off – and Don, maybe you want to touch on the issue of the pilot projects we have in Calgary and Edmonton, because that's where the biggest caseload is for SFI that left the department on the pilot project.

MR. FLEMING: Well, we're doing a number of things, and your point is well taken. It was one that we hadn't embarked on earlier because of, I guess, the enormous amount of energy that would have to go into it in terms of what we would put in and what we would get out. But we have in-house a participation tracking system now that will track anything within government. For example, if you're on assistance and you move from assistance to advanced education upgrading and training, it'll track all of that and track the client all the way through the process. It'll also track them into the job market for a period of three to six months.

We are going beyond that with some pilots in Edmonton and Calgary this year. We'll take a select group of clientele, those ones that disappear, and providing they're not out of province, we'll monitor what happened to them. There are a few, obviously, coming here from Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, so those ones, if they've gone out of province, we won't spend a lot of money tracking. For those that are local, we will start to gather some data, because you're right: the Auditor General has had a discussion with me, and it is a concern.

MRS. HEWES: Can I ask a supplementary, Chairman? I can't, for the life of me, imagine putting a program of this magnitude in place without some system of tracking and evaluation. That has puzzled me from the outset.

MR. CARDINAL: Bettie, to be honest with you on that, nobody expected the caseload to drop like it did. We didn't project that, and it dropped beyond our expectations. We had targeted initially a 10,000 drop in the caseload, and it dropped the first year . . .

MR. FLEMING: Let's not forget, though, we're talking about a fairly small number that we aren't accounting for, because we do know that a lot of them are engaged in advanced training.

MR. CARDINAL: There are 35,000 cases in the last two years in that alone.

MRS. HEWES: Some of these are in your performance measures, but these are inconclusive. I mean, here we say: 71 percent employment initiative graduates not receiving welfare 12 months after. Well, where are the other 29 percent? Those are the kinds of questions that I think we have a right to answers.

I'm sorry to interrupt, Madam Chairman.

MR. CARDINAL: That's no problem, because it is an important area. You know, like Don says, we do follow some. There is a percentage we may not be able to track, and there's a percentage that don't want us to follow up.

You know, when you look at the last two years here, at least 35,000 individuals were attending various forms of academic upgrading, life skills counseling, and training programs that we know of for sure. In addition to that, when you look at the Alberta community employment program, which is not part of the 35,000, over 6,800 people went through that, and there are currently 3,000 under that. So we know we have those. The other one is the Alberta job corps, which employs presently 1,400 individuals. Then the employment skills program currently has

343 active files, and 2,800 positions were created in that period. So we do know, no doubt, where a higher percentage of the drop-in caseload is at now, but there is a percentage that we haven't tracked. I would say that when you really look at it, we probably haven't tracked maybe 30 percent.

MR. FLEMING: Hopefully next year at this time we'll have something a little more concrete. I think that any of us who've lived in rural areas – I know I can certainly speak for the area from whence I originated. We know that there were a number of individuals on our caseload – single, employable individuals who were drawing welfare – who were basically bums. I hate to say that, but that's the case. Those people are probably still bums. They're the ones that will sponge off whoever they can get the money from, whether it's their grandmother, grandfather, or relatives or friends. So there is that element. We also know that within that category a lot of them were working and receiving money under the table when we started to tighten the net a bit. Those people said, "We don't want any more assistance." So we know that. I suppose we could have pursued that and got a lot more charges for fraud if we'd wanted to, but that wasn't the point. So, you know, there are elements, and I think that what we're talking about, if it is 30 percent, that's even probably high.

MR. CARDINAL: I'd say it's high, yeah.

MR. FLEMING: So it would be interesting and I think factual for us to know what's happening there.

MR. CARDINAL: The other questions you had, of course, were on the SFI caseload. We are reviewing on an ongoing basis, especially for AISH, for example, the widows, and also people that are not employable. We know they're going to be on long-term assistance. We are looking at maybe setting up a separate category of people that are not expected to work and looking at rates to address those. When you look at the welfare caseload of around, I'd say, 48,000 now, there is a percentage, probably over 30,000 of those, that are not expected to work and maybe need more money to survive.

On the other hand, you may have 10,000 cases or so, closer to 20,000, that are young, healthy people that could be working. When you look at that category, in fact in the last two and a half years we transferred over \$80 million to Students Finance for grants for these particular 35,000 individuals. Their rates actually were 30 percent higher while they're attending school than the old welfare rates before we started making adjustments in '92-93. So there's a real incentive for people to get back into the workforce, and that was always our plan, but it does cost more to train and work at times, especially during the transitional period.

In addition to that, we do have a thousand dollar emergency fund so that if there is an emergency, people can access that. It's available. We have a sheet here that is information about Alberta welfare. This is available in all of our offices. It's public information, and people can go through it and find out what's available in emergency funds and all of that stuff. We try our best.

MRS. HEWES: Madam Chairman, just one supplementary. Are the rates for that group you mentioned, the group that you and I know for this year or perhaps over a longer period of time is not going to be employed and is not going to be in school, going to go up this year?

MR. CARDINAL: We're reviewing that right now, and we would

hope we'd have something positive within three or four months. I hope before that. We have submitted in fact to Treasury a plan of some thoughts as to how we may increase money for that category.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Madam Chairman.

MR. CARDINAL: That is a very high-needs area, and you're right: it's the toughest area.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mike, my question isn't on your budget. It's on a matter of policy. Being as I have had this bugaboo for years, as you know – and we've talked about it off and on. I think the current Child Welfare Act has got sufficient teeth in it, where permitting the continuation of child prostitution in Edmonton and Calgary is totally unacceptable. My question is: when are Justice and social services going to get their heads together, quit hiding behind federal legislation and prostitution laws, take these young girls off the streets, put them in homes, do your early intervention, and hope like hell we can save at least one out of 10?

MR. CARDINAL: That's a very good question, because it is one of our top priorities right now. In fact, we've commenced meetings with our staff between the two departments and also the two ministries. Within the next two weeks we want to have an official meeting with the minister and myself to look at how we're going to deal with that issue. We have to deal with it. We have no choice.

9:53

MR. WOLOSHYN: Can I attend the meeting?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. You can, if you want. We need everyone with an idea on to how to resolve that problem. It's a complicated issue. We can amend the Child Welfare Act and put legislation in place.

MR. WOLOSHYN: We don't need to, Mike.

MR. CARDINAL: But we can if we want. One of the problems with that, though, is that the early intervention programs and the community delivery system for child welfare may address some of those issues in a preventative manner – and we hope it does – but that's not a complete answer. One of the problems with the children: if they are arrested, for example, it has been found that the majority will not testify against . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: The pimp.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, and if they don't testify against the pimp, then it can't go to court. That's the problem: how do you make these young people testify against the pimp?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mike, we're focusing on the wrong end. Even at that point my concern is, yes, with the pimp, and I agree with you totally that those girls won't testify. We've gone through this before, and you're absolutely correct. I can't think of a way to make them testify. What bothers me more than anything is that same young kid goes back into the same activity because the policeman on this thing gives up because she won't testify, because a social worker hides behind some innocuous thing and doesn't want to get involved, and mostly because we don't have any safe house to just put them in, like a group home

or whatever. I think our focus should be not so much on worrying – although that is a concern – about convicting the pimp; my concern is taking that girl out of circulation in a positive way and giving her, while she's young enough to influence, alternatives.

MR. CARDINAL: So the way to do it would be arrest the child, apprehend the child?

MR. WOLOSHYN: You betcha. If that's what it takes, that's what we'll do.

MR. CARDINAL: That's all you could do. You can't do anything else. You'd have to arrest the child, apprehend the child, and put him in a safe place and provide the counseling. Now, that can be done, you know, with the existing legislation; right?

MR. WOLOSHYN: There's one other question on the same kind of thing, Mike. I don't know if we've talked about this one or not. This would tie in with your no-fault, early intervention, sort-things-out approach. With respect to primarily the native communities, but even other communities, are there consultations, if you will, or discussions to have overnight safe homes where a child or a woman can go – it doesn't matter – or a family for that matter, when there's an instant crisis in the community, where they can go without having six miles of paperwork and 10 months of follow-up? You know, we're talking about putting the families together with counseling, without the apprehension factor. In many cases, when there is especially a Friday night issue going on, the police or social worker would have to have a place to drop them off without, like I say, the stress, without the paperwork. Is that being considered in any of the 17 initiatives?

MR. CARDINAL: That's in place now with the aboriginal communities. That support is still there. You know, anytime there's difficulty within the family, another family, a relative, or a community member . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: No. I mean an independent designated home. Because very often going to the other family brings the problem over there. I'm talking about a safe home where the police or whatever would put it out of bounds, for lack of a better term, for the perpetrator or the aggressor. For 24 hours they wouldn't be able to come within five miles. I know currently there's a system there, but it breaks down because it is with relatives. But an independent site: has that thought been given, especially with your going to the regional things where it's community-based? I think that sort of an idea could be floated out with an awful lot of success.

MR. CARDINAL: I believe some of the reserves are thinking about it, but I don't know of any that are out there now. Don, do you?

MR. FLEMING: There are a few here and there. Your point is well taken. It's something that's been around for a long time. I've been in the system for a long time. There are others around the table who have done their part. It's not an easy problem; it's not a simple fix. I could fill up all the empty hospital beds tomorrow morning with kids that are in various states of need, but that's not the answer. We've tried that. I've over the years apprehended in Fort McMurray, for example, as many as a hundred children myself, when I was up there as the manager.

I'd take the kids out. You uproot them, you put them in places, and it just . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Don, that's just the point I'm talking about. I'm not talking about apprehension. I'm saying leave them in the place for 24 hours, no strings attached. The family gets their act together, and the kid goes home, and we don't worry about them.

MR. FLEMING: And I agree with you, and that's what we're trying to do with the whole children's services initiative.

MR. CARDINAL: And we need support workers.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah. We can't do it alone as a department or as a government. It's got to take the community, and you're absolutely right.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes, that's why I stress in consultation with the community.

Mike, I wouldn't have asked those questions here, but you've given such good coverage on your estimates that you left me no alternative.

MR. CARDINAL: No. Those are good questions. We can talk about stuff like that. There's nothing wrong with recording some of your good recommendations. We don't have all the answers, and if someone has good recommendations, we'll sure consider them to improve the delivery system for the people we serve. The way we've structured the department, we do have the financial resources now and we have the human resources and the time to be able to plan better programs to target specific areas, such as the children on the street. I mean, we can now concentrate our efforts to deal with that issue. Before we couldn't do it because we were out there just trying to keep ahead, to provide dollars. We're not in that position anymore. We can plan now and implement new programs and go into the really high-needs areas, the complicated areas like child prostitution.

MR. FLEMING: It's not that we're not doing anything. There is a lot actually happening. We've got homes in Edmonton, we've got homes in Calgary that are sort of halfway places to get the girls off the street and back into some sort of an independent functioning . . .

MRS. HEWES: And the boys.

MR. FLEMING: And the boys.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, exactly.

MR. FLEMING: They work quite well, but again it's the tip of the iceberg, and those are the ones that . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: You could never do enough, Don.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah, that's right.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I'm aware of that and I appreciate that. That's good. My concern, as I indicated, is the ones that have gone that extra step and are salvageable in my opinion.

MR. CARDINAL: That's a good point.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MS LEIBOVICI: Just to sort of add my 2 cents to that topic as well. I'm glad to see that Stan does have some – shall I say? – Liberal bones left in his body.

You made the comment that you don't want to arrest these girls or boys, but the reality is that I don't think you need to arrest them in order to gain guardianship of them, and I think that's what part of the solution might be. The other comment that Mr. Fleming made was that this problem has gone on for a long time, and that to me is almost a defeatist comment: that it's gone on for a long time and we can't do anything about it and we've tried everything. I think the situation is so grave and our children are so important that it should be a top priority for this department.

I do have some questions around child welfare reform with regards to that, but the first thing I'd like to ask, because this came as news to myself, and I'd like to know what the department's policy is around this particular issue. I understand that on April 1, it appears that there's a deadline that's been put forward as a result of NAFTA. What that deadline will allow for is a dispute settlement process, where a company or companies in the States or Mexico would be able to file claims directly against a government if they feel their rights as an investor – and I'm quoting from a newspaper article – have been infringed, and the claimant may be awarded damages after an arbitration process. Health care is a prime area for American firms to come after the Canadian system, but social services is also an area. Now, under NAFTA, it goes on to explain, there is a blanket exception in the deal that exempts any social services provided for a public purpose. However, there are provinces that are worried the exemption isn't broad enough, so they are going along and planning to exclude everything that they do, and it's areas such as income security, welfare, social insurance, social services, public education, training, health, and child care programs. Quebec in particular is working on an annex to deal with this. I'm wondering if you've considered this at all and, if you haven't, what you're planning to do about it.

10:03

MR. CARDINAL: B.C. now, I think, has a problem because they have a residency clause. That would be a problem, of course. We don't have that in Alberta. They have a three-month residency clause, which the Canadian government is against.

MRS. HEWES: Which they can't do.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. They can't do it and they shouldn't, and you know, we don't support that, of course. I think mobility in Canada is good, and we want to make sure that if someone has to move somewhere for employment or training or if someone wanted to be closer to a family member, we would always, always support that. We haven't had any problems, and we don't expect any problems with the policies we have in Alberta.

MS LEIBOVICI: Yeah. But maybe I haven't made myself clear.

MR. CARDINAL: It's clearly consistent with what the feds have.

MR. FLEMING: Does Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs deal with any of that kind of stuff?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. I guess Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs would be the most appropriate department.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, FIGA may well deal with it, but if it isn't brought to FIGA's attention and the department of social services

will be potentially adversely affected in the kinds of services that you can provide . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. We'll put it out and make sure it's dealt with. Mr. Rostad is leading the role in Alberta in relation to social reforms, which is, you know, part of the overall plan to look at the restructuring of social support programs for Canada. He is in charge of that in Alberta, working with the Premier, of course, and other Premiers and territorial Premiers.

MS LEIBOVICI: Yeah. I guess the concern is that there isn't any clear exemption in terms of the kinds of services that either the department of social services or health care or education provide, and with the trend toward privatization, it leaves it open for American firms to come in and say that they can provide that service and that government should not be providing that service, and in the provision of that service there's an indirect or a direct subsidy.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MS LEIBOVICI: So it may well take out of your jurisdiction the ability to provide any kind of child welfare services, the ability to provide any kind of income support services. They list in here dental care, physiotherapy, you know, on the health care side. But that becomes a wide-open area for competition, so I think that's a real concern. If the government wishes to protect certain areas and keep it under governmental mandate, NAFTA, as of April 1, opens it up. So I think you need to be aware of that and you need to be looking at that.

MR. CARDINAL: Yes. We have requested an exemption from our intergovernmental affairs. We haven't received any response on it yet, so we are waiting.

MS LEIBOVICI: Again, from the article it looks as if you'd have to pass it in legislation perhaps. That's what I'm not sure of, and that's what I'm asking. I just saw this article yesterday, and it came as a total surprise to me. I knew there were some deadlines in terms of implementation of various NAFTA arrangements.

I've taken a fair amount of time on this. I do have questions on child welfare, so I'm wondering if I should let other members in and then come back.

THE CHAIRMAN: Why don't you go ahead, and then we'll move to another. [interjections] Well, Shiraz is my next man. Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: I don't mind if Gary wants to continue on that train, and then I can go after him.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Go ahead, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Minister. I have some specific questions, and they relate to Alberta Place office in Calgary and the fact that it no longer does SFI. You'll recall, Mr. Minister, that on October 18, I think, I had asked you about the closure of that office, and you had assured us at that time that before it closed at the end of March, there would be alternative services in place. Now, I guess my question would be to start with: why did you close the office on February 7 instead of March 31, which was the original plan?

Further, one of the things you'd said at that time was that there would be as an alternative outreach workers going into downtown

agencies to provide, if you will, enhanced access and service. As best I can determine, the only outreach that exists right now is one worker going in a half day to the Sheriff King Home and a half day at the Calgary Drop-In Centre. There is no presence by any outreach worker dealing with SFI in any of the other - I'd say that there's probably a good two dozen agencies in downtown Calgary. I'll give you examples: Connection Housing, CUPS, the Mustard Seed. All of these agencies also deal with a high-needs population. I had perhaps assumed too much. When you gave me the response on October 18, I thought the outreach worker was going to work out of most or all of these different inner-city agencies, and I'm concerned that it turns out only to be two.

I guess the other thing, Mr. Minister, related to this is that you had indicated that the job corps would be an alternative, but as I understand it, to be able to be eligible for the job corps you first have to go to one of the remote SFI offices and then get steered to the job corps office, which is way out in northeast Calgary. If that's accurate, what are you doing to deal with access once again for the single mother in Victoria Park with a couple of children who has to go someplace to see one of your workers? What have you in place to deal with that kind of access?

Those are the questions I wanted to ask you, Mr. Minister, relative to the closing of Alberta Place.

MR. CARDINAL: Sure. I'll let Don and them address the issue of the specific office itself, but first of all, I'd like to also indicate that we do still fund over 150 agencies in Alberta. Edmonton, for an example, has 27 major agencies that we fund in addition to the services we provide, and I suspect that Calgary would run around 30 also, major agencies such as Catholic Social Services, the Boys and Girls Club, and that type of stuff: at least 150 agencies. I believe over \$10 million is spent in funding those agencies to provide some of the, you know, support services that we need out there.

In relation to the urban job corps, we'll review that to make sure that access is available to the clientele. We'll definitely review that. I have offered to the city of Edmonton, for an example - I believe we have about 60 or 70 individuals employed now in the urban job corps in Edmonton. Of course, we have rural job corps in northern Alberta, about 13 or 14 sites. But in the Edmonton one, in specific - and Calgary could be the same - we can no doubt employ up to 500 people. We could look at utilizing the satellite concept within Calgary and Edmonton, where communities can actually run the job corps themselves and satellite out of the central area. People would report to a community hall and do the eight-hour work or whatever's required in that particular setting - for an example, cleaning streets for seniors, parks work, shoveling roofs or walkways for seniors, et cetera, maintenance of parks, and so on - as long as they're not offsetting private industry. So we're looking at that now.

That offer would be available also to Calgary, to look at the expansion on the job corps, which could mean jobs could be provided right across Calgary, up to 500 jobs or more, depending on what the caseload would be and how we could administer that. So we're looking at that.

Don, specifically to Alberta Place, could you possibly give an update on that, and what we're willing to do if there is a problem?

MR. FLEMING: Yes. Okay. Well, I guess first of all I would say that the minister and I - when this was proposed, the proviso was that the service would be as good as or better than what was being provided previously.

MR. CARDINAL: Right.

MR. FLEMING: I was assured and am assured that the clients still have access and that there are outreach facilities available. I'll have to check on what you're raising. We'd have to have some specific cases, I guess. It would be helpful for us to follow up if you could provide that. The idea of moving it to the setup we've got was that our offices are all in the general proximity of the downtown sector so that travel wasn't deemed to be a big issue at the time.

Any of the outlying reaches of the city were and, to my knowledge, are still served in the same fashion that they were previously. So I don't know; I guess I'll just have to check into your specific comment.

10:13

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much.

The other related Calgary concern – I'm wearing my Calgary hat, Mr. Minister, this morning. My understanding is that very recently your department decided to give a substantial contract to the Children's Cottage in Calgary, and then subsequent to this contract, which I understand involves in excess of \$100,000, there was an administrative decision to suspend the contract and review it. So I guess my query is: under what vote was money to go to the Children's Cottage? What were the criteria? I don't expect you necessarily to have this response now.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MR. DICKSON: What were the criteria that were used in identifying that Children's Cottage should receive that money? What's the reason the contract has been suspended or held in abeyance? Who's doing the review? What's the purpose of the review, and when will it be completed so that we know whether in fact Children's Cottage is going to receive the money that was the subject of the contract?

MR. CARDINAL: Don may want to address that issue.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah. Well, in all our contracts, Gary, it's a supply and demand sort of business, and if there's a need in a particular area, then funds are made available to look after that need. I don't know, again, the specifics of this particular operation, but I'm very familiar with the service they provide, the crisis relief primarily for single mothers in distress. To my knowledge, the services that are required are being provided.

MR. CARDINAL: They're still there. We'll look into it though. We're not aware of any changes in the funding. We're still funding the cottage the same as before. If there's a change, it may have happened, you know, lately, but I haven't heard of it.

MR. FLEMING: I believe Calgary expanded their service. Did they not open another operation?

MR. DICKSON: I'm not sure exactly what the money was committed to.

MR. CARDINAL: In Calgary they're talking about an expansion. I'm aware of that, but I haven't seen any . . .

MR. SHARIFF: They renovated a building. They built a new centre, an extension to the existing place. They've already done that.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay.

MR. DICKSON: The final narrow Calgary-based question would be this. I'm particularly interested in the FAST program – families and schools together program – which I tell you is an excellent initiative. I'm very impressed. That involves three schools, two of them in Calgary-Buffalo. Can you provide me with a catalogue of the other early intervention dollars that are going into, let's say, the 13 communities that comprise what's generally regarded as downtown on both sides of the river? You've got about 51,000 people there. It's clearly a high-needs population, and I'm interested in where the other early intervention dollars are going and if in fact you have programs other than the FAST one. I'm familiar with that, but I'm having trouble finding out what other early intervention dollars are committed to that area with such a high-needs population.

Thanks, Madam Chairman.

MR. CARDINAL: There are some examples here, Don.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah. Again in answer to your question, I can't give you the specifics on the general geographic area that you're talking about. I guess I can tell you that overall across the province our department, in co-operation with the departments of Education and Health and family and community support services, has several projects where we have on-site social workers in the schools where we have a central contact area for children experiencing problems or families experiencing problems, and we've got lists of those.

In terms of the early intervention areas, there are a few here that we can give as examples: the Chinook's Edge regional school division where we're providing \$95,000-plus to provide support and guidance to parents of school-age children and develop children's academic and social skills; the Mill Woods Centre for Immigrants here in Edmonton, \$25,000 to help families of immigrants and new Canadians adjust to norms and build effective parenting skills; the Ermineskin primary community school, \$110,000 to work with high-risk children and families as well as to teach traditional values and culture awareness; the Rocky Native Friendship Centre, \$104,000 to help reduce patterns of abuse and alcoholism through counseling, workshop, recreation, and support groups; Hobbema Parents Place, \$126,000 to strengthen First Nation families by providing drop-in play groups and support to parents; Strathmore Youth Development Society project, \$134,000 to help youth in trouble with the law, school, community or family, and develop recreational facilities, and on and on and on. So it's that nature of service that we're providing.

MR. DICKSON: Just a last thing. You had said to Mr. Woloshyn he'd be welcome to attend the meeting with you and the minister. As the MLA who represents a constituency with, I think, seven of the identified schools in Calgary, can I attend?

MR. CARDINAL: We can sure talk. No, but what I've always said is: look, you know, we don't have all the answers, and I don't know of anybody that does. We need all the help that anyone has to provide us with information and some recommendations. I'd be willing to sit down with you individually and any other of your colleagues from your caucus to come up with some ideas as to what we may do. It's a tough issue, and we need every good idea we can find out there to work towards resolving the problem. It's a complicated issue.

MR. WOLOSHYN: That issue, in my mind, Gary – and I think it's fair – is not a political issue; it's a people issue that everybody's got a stake in now.

MR. DICKSON: Agreed.

MR. CARDINAL: However we arrive at, you know, coming forward with a plan, we can do it. Like I say, I think we have the financial resources. Now we have the human resources, and we have the time to be able to tackle that issue, and we sure need your help.

THE CHAIRMAN: Karen, on a point of clarification.

MS LEBOVICI: Just a point of clarification. Are we talking about the child classification?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MS LEBOVICI: If I might make a suggestion, I'm willing to put my name forward to work on a joint task force with Stan and whomever to try and come up with something and try to keep it nonpolitical. I think we can do that because we're working in the best interests of the children.

MR. CARDINAL: I think that keeping it nonpolitical is going to be the only way we're going to resolve it. It's tough enough as it is.

MS LEBOVICI: I was actually going to approach Stan on an informal basis.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. You keep in touch with Stan, and Stan will keep advising me on how we can get together, possibly with some form of working committee, to look at that issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to begin by making a few opening comments about the ministry as such. I've always believed that governance is about people and about communities, and while I am an advocate of free enterprise and I believe free enterprise is good for our community, I believe that free enterprise without social conscience is not acceptable. As such, I would like to compliment you for being very open and trying to look at the issue from a community development perspective as opposed to a political thought process in itself. My question today – and I have a number of them, but the one I'll ask you right now pertains to the reservoir of information that the social services department has. Over the years a lot of information has been gathered that affects people that were your clients and the families of those people as well as the professionals that would have worked with these individuals. I do notice that you have set aside in your budget about \$600,000 for administering the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. What I'm interested in knowing today is: what kinds of activities will be provided through this budget that you have set aside?

10:23

MR. CARDINAL: Basically, what it is for is, you know, the information and privacy branch. Of course, we've got a very sophisticated branch setup, because we do have a lot of confidential and complicated issues in our department. It basically responds to requests to access personal information and general information on the custody or control of Family and Social Services. The other thing we do is actually respond to corrections in the files and stuff. That's part of some of the personal

information that we hold. Sometimes people ask for corrections in their files and stuff.

The branch also provides training and advice to ministry staff and acts as a resource to ensure that the policies, procedures, and practices are consistent with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. So we've got a good system set up.

MR. SHARIFF: Then my supplementary would be: do you have any projections of how many of these applications we may process in the coming year? Maybe you can base it on the requests that you may have received until now.

MR. CARDINAL: We have close to 400; 375 actually have been dealt with since October, and a higher percentage are related to child welfare issues. So there's a considerable amount and a considerable amount of work to do that.

MR. SHARIFF: Then let me go one step further in terms of the supplementary. If people were to come to you requesting information through freedom of information and if the files do have information about families that have been related to the individual through an adoption process but the families would not have signed a release of information as far as the identity, would that information be shared with people trying to track their biological family?

MR. CARDINAL: No. At this time, you know, any child welfare information that is outside the sealed adoption records we cannot release. As you're aware, we are moving forward again to amend that particular legislation, where we will look at adult adoptees. Siblings and parents can actually make an application to find their children or fathers or mothers, sisters and brothers, again keeping in mind that each individual would have an option to file a veto if they don't want to be found or be contacted. They'd have to go through the same process of using one of the 10 agencies we have licensed in Alberta. We're bringing that legislation forward of course this spring.

MR. SHARIFF: I'll wait for my turn for the next round.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Because we went Karen Lebovici and then Gary Dickson because Shiraz traded, Stan, you had another question?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yeah. On a different topic, Mike: Indian land claims. I would like to take this opportunity to compliment your staff on that one, especially Ken Boutillier. I think the success of the program is by its lack of publicity, and I'm thinking specifically of the one with the Paul band where it was complicated and I think involved all four levels of government. The nicest part about it was that it was finalized at a low cost, everybody's happy, and it didn't make a big splash in the newspapers. The question that I have, and this is one more for that informational update, which you didn't cover: how many land claims have been finalized through the efforts of people like Ken, and what do you see on the horizon to get more of these resolved in a nonconfrontational way?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. You know, Alberta of course has taken the leading role in resolving land claims in Canada. When I was meeting with the federal minister recently, he indicated: why doesn't Alberta take more credit and more publicity when you do settle land claims? I indicated to him that as we move forward in settling land claims, the aboriginal people prefer to keep it

reasonably low profile. The public support out there for native programs and native land claim settlements in Alberta and in Canada in general is very limited. It's complicated. The political support is not all there. We find the best way to do it is to keep the program low profile. As long as the aboriginal people are satisfied and the municipal governments and the taxpayers of Alberta and as long as we can successfully negotiate with the federal government or assist in the negotiations with the federal government, then we're happy.

The land claims that are filed are filed with the federal government, and we only become actively involved when asked by the aboriginal people or the federal government. Then we do get involved. We have to transfer lands once the settlement is agreed upon. We have to transfer that land and the dollars for compensation to the federal government. They in turn then transfer it to the Indian band and also the natural resources. Generally, what has been settled in the past few years is – we have a budget. It's not a big budget, but '95-96 is forecast to be \$0.7 million. We do have an ongoing amount that we set aside so that if a land claim is settled, the money is there.

There were eight land claims settled in the past few years. Fort Chipewyan was one, Sturgeon Lake, Whitefish Lake, Woodland, Grouard, Janvier, Tallcree, and Alexis. There are five under negotiations. Loon River is almost at the final stages. In fact, Loon River have agreed between the feds, the province, and the federal government, but the conflict with Loon Lake is that the Lubicon land claims process feels that some of the members that are at Loon Lake now as part of the settlement may be their members. So they have to resolve that issue. Alexander is another one that's almost there, Fort McMurray, of course Lubicon, and Salt River. The other ones that are under review by the federal government, four more, are: Bigstone Cree, Peerless Lake, which is part of Bigstone Cree but they want a separate land claim on that, Sucker Creek, and Big John. So that's basically it for land claims.

What has happened: the eight that have been settled cover a total of 109,000 acres. Alberta's cash contribution to that is \$44 million, and the federal contribution is \$93 million. In addition to that, of course, we have transferred in the past few years 1.26 million acres of land to the Métis people as a land claims process along with transitional dollars for a 17-year period, I believe, of \$350 million to work toward self-government and self-administration. Again, there's no other jurisdiction in Canada that has dealt with the Métis people in that particular fashion. So we have lots to be proud of.

The municipalities, the province, the Métis settlements, and the Indian bands continue to work together reasonably well in Alberta, and as long as that continues, we'll continue working.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thanks, Mike. You do such comprehensive answers that it makes it tough to ask the next question.

There are two groups that you skipped over that are areas of concern. That is the controversy between the urban aboriginal, I'll say, because I'll throw in the Métis as well as treaty people, and their desires to get some recognition and some support through their home bands. Just as a tag-on and then I won't say any more: do you have any comments on the status of the six Métis co-ops that are up in the Hinton area?

MR. CARDINAL: The co-ops themselves, most of them are doing quite well. There are two or three of them that have some difficulties in relation to local taxation, and we've assigned an individual in fact now to work with that organization on a full-time basis for a year to settle some of the issues in relation to the

taxation system between the MD and the co-ops and also to look at some economic strategies, short- and long-term planning as to how we may increase their standard of living. That report will be probably done in a year or so, six to eight months maybe.

10:33

In relation to the urban aboriginal people, of course, any urban member that is a treaty Indian, for example, is eligible for all the benefits that any treaty member would be eligible for including postsecondary education, free hunting and fishing, the health care – dental, optical, medical: all the medical services – some tax exemptions for fuel and tobacco, and GST-free in some cases of major items of purchase like cars and so on if it's done the way it should be done, legally. We haven't had any actual individuals or groups filing a claim for a land claim within the urban centres, and at this time I don't expect any will come forward. That could be a very, very complicated issue. Is this in Edmonton?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The E.L. Smith power plant. Enoch's got a claim on that.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. That would go with the feds. It could complicate issues if, for an example, an Indian reserve were to rise in the middle of Edmonton. It could upset the balance in the economy. We'd have to be honest and be fair to all Albertans because I think we can do well together rather than throw in a balance that's unfair.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thanks, Mike.

THE CHAIRMAN: Bettie.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Madam Chairman. First of all, Mr. Minister, let me just say I'm pleased to hear your comments about co-operation and so on. I think when we're dealing with human problems, I don't like the confrontational approach, as you know. I still have that little edge of resentment in me that we don't have an all-party committee working on it, and I think that's all of our loss.

Having said that, I've got questions, Mr. Minister, around two issues not totally related but not unrelated: child welfare and family violence. The whole business of child welfare reform, Mr. Minister, is of major concern right now: the timing of it, why we're introducing legislation before the steering committees are completed. You have hundreds of volunteers out there working very hard and doing excellent work and really committed to their task. I know all of the reasons given about permissive and so on, but that doesn't satisfy me. So I'd like your comments about that.

More importantly in that regard, can you provide for me, because I haven't seen this anyplace clearly enunciated, what in the department's view or your view, Mr. Minister, are those divisions between public responsibility and private responsibility in child welfare? I believe there is now and always will be a public obligation in caring for children, whether they are wards of the province or whether they are simply somebody's children. I don't see in your information or in any of the direction to the steering committee or in the reports that have come out so far where you find that line. I need to know that, Mr. Minister, and I think they need to know that. What are the services that you believe can be contracted out, and if there are services to be contracted out, what is the public responsibility vis-à-vis those services besides the obvious standards and so on?

MR. CARDINAL: Legislation and funding and monitoring, you mean.

MRS. HEWES: Yeah. So that whole business of the timing of the child welfare reforms, I think, has our good volunteers up in arms out there. What I'd like you to do is leave the legislation on the table until they've reported to you, and let them have a good look at it.

The other one, Madam Chairman, is somewhat related. Well, there are two. One is child poverty. Now, this is not a separate issue from child welfare. I don't see in your budget or your business plan any direct intervention in trying to deal with child poverty. Now, I recognize, Mr. Minister, that this isn't just a provincial matter, and I plead with my federal counterparts to make this a federal matter as well, but I don't see initiatives there.

The other one is family violence. There's a line item in your budget. What are we doing? It's been absolutely quiet. It doesn't even appear in your business plan summary. It's not mentioned in your business plan summary. It isn't in your performance measures anywhere. Yet this is something that is happening. The rates are going up, the numbers are going up, and of course it is related to some of the anxiety in unemployment and so on in our province. But I don't know what initiatives your department is taking or what you plan to take, and you didn't mention that in your overview. So I'd like comments there, please.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. I guess I'll start off just generally, you know, because some of the concerns are general in relation to child welfare. I don't believe we've ever been in a better position financially or in human resources as far as staff and the time to plan a good program for providing services to children and families. At this time, I believe Alberta has no doubt the best programs in North America. I don't think there's any jurisdiction that has better programs than we have.

To start with, you know, the number of children in care, the programs we have in place are probably as good as any jurisdiction's in Canada or North America, but that doesn't mean that we can't improve in certain areas. One of the weak areas, we felt, in the past is that we didn't really do the responsible thing. Anytime there was a problem at home, we walked in and apprehended the children when the children were really never the problem. We tried to deal with the issue by taking the child away and putting the child in a foster home, and then we'd continue providing the services for the child when the family might continue having the same problems. The direction we've gone with this is that we want as much as possible to provide the services that the family may require in order to keep the family together or children at home with the family or with extended family in the community. Now, I know in some cases we have to apprehend children. I would hope that in most cases it's temporary. Because we apprehend a child on a temporary basis, for example, we will work with the family. That is where the home support services come in.

[Mr. Woloshyn in the Chair]

We have been talking to the agencies we fund, for example the Mennonite Central Committee. We had a meeting with them. We've asked them to see if it would be possible for that committee to provide some home support services in Edmonton, for example, on a pilot project basis. In northeastern Alberta the report has come in now that a private company was providing some home support services, and they're reasonably successful. We hired a private consulting firm to do the review. They pointed out some weaknesses in the system which would allow us then to improve that particular area. There is not one quick

answer, but generally most of the services are being done by nonprofit organizations or governments at different levels, and only very few are contracted to private industry.

Now, one of the things you hear, of course, is that we are wholesale privatizing the child welfare system. We are not, unless someone misinterprets it. And it's not your caucus. You know, I think the press sometimes misinterprets what we are doing. Fifty percent of the children in care are aboriginal children, and we are concentrating some financial resources, probably more now than in the past, in relation to providing the supports that are required for aboriginal people to start running some of their own programs. Of course, you know, too many of our people continue to live in poverty. As long as they live in poverty, we're going to continue to have some of these problems. So it's not only dealing with the responsibility of child welfare; we're going to have to deal with the economic basis – self-government, improved education, improved health care, and generally improved standard of living for the aboriginal community – before we actually deal with the issue of reducing the number of children in care.

10:43

I think 22 out of the 46 Indian bands now deliver their own child welfare services. What we would hope would happen in the future is that the Indian bands themselves will have their own child welfare legislation. They will receive, then, a hundred percent funding from the federal government, and in turn they could satellite out to the urban centres and provide the services for their people. That's where there is some misunderstanding by the press in particular. They feel that it's a wholesale transfer to privatization. When you're moving from a provincial level of government to an aboriginal level of government for service delivery, you're not privatizing; it's another level of government you're transferring services to. That's where it becomes a little misunderstanding at times, that we are privatizing child welfare. We are not. We're only moving it to the community, a different level of government, not to private agencies.

The authorities: I guess maybe Don wants to expand on that a bit as to how they may have some of the delivery systems in that area.

MR. FLEMING: First of all, I'd like to address the comment about the legislation ahead of the steering committees. What we've said is that we will continue to run departmental services within government until such time as the community establishes a plan, an authority is in place, and the service will be delivered there.

MRS. HEWES: Better than health care. Thank you.

MR. FLEMING: So there's no danger of anything falling between the cracks as we look at the transition.

I think the most misunderstood part of this is in relation to the legislation. What we're really doing is enabling legislation. We're not changing the Child Welfare Act appreciably, only allowing it to be delegated to a local authority for actual delivery. All of the protection that's built into the Child Welfare Act, for example, will continue to be there. So it's not as big an issue as some people believe it to be. I think the minister mentioned the media. Stuff gets hyped out of proportion by the media, and then, of course, everyone believes that we've got a major catastrophe on our hands. That's not the case. Steering committees, co-chairs, and others have had input into the enabling legislation, both in the initial draft that was proposed to the minister and

myself and subsequently to the standing policy committee. They've also had consultation on what we have submitted to the standing policy committee. Some changes will ultimately flow from that. So indeed there is participation, albeit not everyone in Alberta, but certainly a fairly representative group have had input into the enabling legislation.

MRS. HEWES: If I can just interrupt, Mr. Chairman. Don, the minister knows that some of us sat in on the standing policy committee when the Calgary group submitted. I mean, we clearly saw the anxiety there. I think they were very frank and very open and honest. I don't think we can simply say that the consultation has been sufficient there. And it's not just media hype. These are real folks out there that are doing our work for us.

MR. CARDINAL: One of the problems with Calgary, though, is that 50 percent of the children in care are aboriginal children from surrounding reserves. The aboriginal communities are laying out their plans to also deliver the same services. So when the group from Calgary moves forward with their plan to deliver services for all children, they don't have the authority to do it, because there's another group planning to deliver.

MRS. HEWES: All the more reason to be cautious about the legislation.

MR. CARDINAL: It's going to be complicated.

MR. FLEMING: Subsequent to that meeting with the group in Calgary, I met with David Pickersgill and company, and we've gone over that. I don't think that degree of anxiety is there. I think there is a better understanding of what's happened. So I would be surprised if that exists.

You know, we're continually wrestling with those things. It's quite a juggling act to keep things in order. We can't sit back and not have the legislation ready to go when the authorities are in place; otherwise, we'd delay it another year. Then all the people that you talk about that were involved start to lose interest, and the thing starts to slide. So we've got to do certain things. We've committed that there would be a legislative review within three years. We need to get some experience with the new system as it establishes.

The second point you made was: where do you draw the line between public and private responsibility? Our budget, if you note, in child welfare over the three-year period is actually going from I believe \$165 million to about \$192 million. There's no withdrawal of dollars. There's no backing away by government from the services to be provided. We're simply going to transfer the responsibility to an authority that will contract the service out. In terms of who does that service, I would be very surprised if a very high number of our staff aren't the actual ones that do it, because there's not a glut of social workers on the market these days. In fact, the same people in all likelihood will be providing those statutory and support services to Albertans. So I think we need to see this thing evolve. It's not easy; it's not simple. I think when you go through a major change like this, there are some rough spots.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Chairman, if I can interrupt or ask a supplementary on it. What I'd like to see is some narrative description of where you see those divisions between public responsibility and private, the whole issue of liability. I mean, there are statutory requirements on us as a government to provide certain services, and we understand that. If I read some of the

descriptions that are going out to those steering committees and so on, liability is transferred to the authorities. Now, I don't really understand how that's going to work, and I think the same thing maintains in the RHAs. I think we haven't seen any challenges yet, but this would trouble me immensely unless there were a clear statement that says: here's what the public responsibility is, here's where it begins and ends, here's what we can contract out, and here's what you will be responsible for. I haven't seen that yet, Mr. Deputy Minister.

MR. FLEMING: Well, you will, and if you haven't, we can certainly supply it. In the proposal that we took forward to standing policy, we laid out the responsibilities of the government and the responsibilities of the authority. I think the key to this all is that the authorities will remain accountable to the ministry. So we're not sawing it off and saying: that's the responsibility of the private sector. The accountability is still there. The minister is the last one on the totem pole.

MR. CARDINAL: We have to approve all the service plans. They have to submit three-year business plans. It becomes part of the departmental process. They don't have the authority like the health authorities.

MRS. HEWES: Well, I've seen that, Mr. Minister, but I don't think yet that it's clear in people's minds.

MR. FLEMING: Well, I think that a lot of it isn't clear.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Excuse me.

MRS. HEWES: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: We'll move on.

MRS. HEWES: I had another question. Perhaps they were going to answer it.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Go ahead.

MR. CARDINAL: We haven't finished answering your first question, if you don't mind. I'd like to address child poverty, because that is, you know, a high-needs area. Again, it's one area that we're looking at in the department as part of the reinvestment, and you'll notice that booklet that goes out. One of the issues it mentions is services to children, trying to get a feeling from Albertans as to how they feel about that. We have already submitted a number of options to Treasury as to how we may work towards increasing supports for children in poverty. So we are looking at dealing with that issue. It's going to take a while, but we hope we can come up with at least, you know, some possible reinvestment in that area.

The other one, of course, is the family violence budget, which is over \$8 million now. When you go back to 1985, that budget has grown by 250 percent. So we are working on it, but again we need to continue assessing and reviewing how those programs are working. In some areas it seems that there are vacancies; in other areas there may be not enough units. You know, when you look at these shelters, it shows that there's about a 26 percent vacancy rate, but maybe in Edmonton it isn't 26 percent. I don't know that right offhand, but maybe Don would.

Second-stage housing shows a 60 percent vacancy rate, while rural centres show a 50 percent vacancy rate. So there are vacant units. We have a total of 420 spaces presently, and then of course

we have the backups of utilizing motels and hotels. Also we have the thousand dollar emergency fund that could supplement a family or an individual to be able to move into a particular centre.

10:53

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Okay. Are you finished, Bettie?

MRS. HEWES: Prevention of family violence: the minister didn't touch on that. I mean, shelters is secondary or tertiary. Aren't there some provisions?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, as part of the whole issue of services to children and families, I believe 55 percent of the people that use women's shelters now are families with children. Therefore, automatically the home support services that are available now to families and children would be available at least immediately to those 55 percent. In addition to that, we haven't separated the individual that also has a problem. They could fall under the children's services program.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah. A lot of the early intervention dollars that are out there can and in some cases are being used to address that issue. Of the shelter funds, the shelter budget for family violence, I think 93 percent of it goes to the actual shelter, and there's 7 percent that's allocated for education and information. A lot of the shelters in the second-stage housing facilities have, as you probably know, information packages. There are blitzes from time to time that this is where you can get service, and this is what's available. Again, it's one of those big ones that I think it takes a lot of work to come to.

[Ms Haley in the Chair]

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Roy.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you. I'd like to talk a little bit about the issue of institutionalized care for persons with disabilities. I see that your budget for Michener Centre is down just about 2 and a half million dollars, and I imagine, Mr. Minister, that is the result of reduced resident population. In that you're appointing a new board, I guess my question would be on the level of autonomy that new board will have and what the population of Michener Centre will be, as you see it. My concern is with a facility that was basically designed to house in excess of 2,000 people and that is down now to somewhere around 600 people.

I know that interest has been expressed by people like the YMCA, for instance, to manage some of the facilities there. While you can close some of the buildings as the population decreases, there are some buildings that must remain open, such as the recreational centre. You can't really shut it down; you require it. Yet it is far larger than what is required for the current population. So I wonder what initiatives you're contemplating in that area or if this is a responsibility you're going to turn over to this new board and what level of autonomy they'll have to make those kinds of decisions regarding the future of Michener Centre.

MR. CARDINAL: To start with in relation to Michener Centre, you know, yes, at one time I understand there were 2,000 people at the centre. Now of course we have a thousand employees and about 699 clients in there, I guess. In Alberta, of course, I

believe we lead in North America in services provided to persons with disabilities. We have nothing to be ashamed of; we have the best programs available. All we are trying to do with this is allow the communities to participate more in improving the services to these individuals wherever possible and whenever possible. That doesn't mean that there will be major, major changes take place if they're not required.

What we don't have at this time is the opportunity – and we haven't had it in the past – to allow us to design and develop a long-term plan involving the community and the residents and the parents as to how we may provide these services to these most sensitive areas. What this does now is allow us to actually develop a 10-year plan of what these services will look like, keeping in mind that community integration works for some people but that there are some people that will no doubt always need some form of institution. What we don't have now and haven't had in the past is knowing the balance, keeping in mind the capital costs, and how we may redesign these structures, such as the Michener Centre, that will provide the services.

The Michener Centre is outdated. It's an old facility. It's not efficient any more. It's not attractive. It's not suitable at this time for the clientele. What this will allow us to do is design on a long-term basis what types of changes need to take place as far as capital structure for facilities and also keeping in mind what type of services we provide at the community level when we move to assist people to integrate into the community. What we've put forward, of course, will hopefully achieve that.

The transfer to community management will occur in three stages, and I think I've mentioned this in the House. The first stage will be in the spring of 1996. A management board will be established to oversee the operations for Michener Centre in Red Deer. This board will initially report to this ministry until the provincial authority is operational in the fall of 1997. So this board will report to me over the next a little over a year.

The second stage of the transfer, of course, is the development of a foundation, which will be established through legislation this spring, if it goes through. Hopefully it will. The foundation will assume the title to end-manage the land and assets of nine facilities currently utilized by the services to persons with disabilities and also fund-raise for capital and research, not programs. The foundation is not for programs. The government will retain the staff, the legislation, the monitoring and will continue providing the dollars for the programs.

So the foundation is specifically for capital and also research and studies, et cetera, but not for programs. The foundation will also allow people to direct their investment or their donation. For example, if they want to put it in a specific project in Edmonton or Athabasca or whatever, the foundation will allow them to do that. The foundation will be responsible, again, to the minister initially but will report to the provincial authority, which in turn reports to the minister.

The third stage of the reforms, which will be fully operational, again, by the fall of 1997 – we hope to bring in legislation in the spring of 1997 – is the establishment of provincial authorities and also regional authorities. I believe we're establishing six regional authorities and one provincial authority, and the line of reporting will be from the regional authority to the provincial authority to the minister. Again, these groups will have to develop service plans that we have to approve, and the six service plans could be different from one another. They don't have to be all the same. That's what we want to be here: innovative, targeting a specific area and a specific region. They'll also become part of the three-year business plan, of course, of my department, which comes to

the standing policy committee and caucus and government.

Of course, there was some controversy lately in relation to press coverage which seemed to think that we are moving everybody into the community. Well, it's not possible. I wish it were possible that everybody could live independently, but we know it is not possible. The press should know better, that it's not possible to do that. But that's how it was written, and it created a controversy between the people that were pushing community living and the parents that were interested in institutional living that was required. We've always said: let's develop a long-term plan, keeping in mind that there has to be a balance. Our objective should always be that wherever possible and whenever possible, we assist those people to become as independent as possible and as fully productive members of society as possible. That is our objective, and that should be the objective of the parents' groups and the people involved in community living. We want to make sure that is our objective always.

11:03

MR. BRASSARD: Just to finalize that one topic, then, Mr. Minister: is it your intention to dispose of some of the property that is not being used because of the reduced population? That's certainly in a prime location, and it would seem to be a practical . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. For example, Michener Centre. I believe the land itself is valued – what is it? – at \$12 million dollars. You know, it covers a large area. That's just one example. If facilities are outdated, we can provide better services for those individuals, probably maybe smaller settings throughout the community even or other communities if that is what's . . .

MR. BRASSARD: More of a village concept.

MR. CARDINAL: . . . a village concept that is required. It'll allow this foundation then to dispose of that land and use those same dollars to reinvest in new capital projects.

There are some very innovative projects out there now. I believe I toured one – I'm not sure if it's in Fort Macleod – the other day that was attached to a hospital. It had six different units that allowed individuals to live in there. It was a beautiful facility. They had their own cooking facilities and central recreation area. The hospital was there if they needed it. They're right in the community. It's a beautiful facility, very attractive. When you look at it, you will never know it's an institution, and that's beautiful.

That is the type of concept we can develop. When you develop smaller, cluster-type facilities for individuals, as your population changes and we find that fewer and fewer people need institutions, we can use those institutions for other purposes or else dispose of them if we don't need them any longer. The way it's set up with a large, large centre, you're stuck with it. You're going to have to heat it, even if the population declines. Sometimes you pay taxes, maintenance, and all that costs money – and a staff that's required to maintain an empty facility.

MR. BRASSARD: Well, you've led right into my final question, Mr. Minister, dealing with Rosecrest and Eric Cormack Centre. I imagine those are listed under government-operated facilities in your estimates. I'm sure you still operate those two facilities. Both of these buildings are extremely old. I wondered if there's anything in this budget – because it's not broken out – to either upgrade these facilities, or with all of the restructuring that's going on in Health, whether or not there aren't other facilities that could be utilized and possibly moved to?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Don may want to expand on that, but you know, there were talks again that we were going to close Rosecrest down. We had no intentions. In fact, we have a joint project between the federal government and the province to look at providing alternative services for some people that want to use facilities other than Rosecrest. But we have no plans of closing Rosecrest. Again, in society if we ever get in the position where everybody's at home and healthy and happy, that would be fine, but we know it's not possible at this time. Therefore, facilities of that nature have to remain open. Hopefully, we can continue a review and make sure we develop, say, a 10-year master plan of how those services could look 10 years from now rather than going year to year and creating some uncertainty for the parents that utilize those services.

AN HON. MEMBER: Most unfortunate.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. Most unfortunate is right.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS HANSON: I have a little smorgasbord here that's come out of all the other questions, so I hope you don't mind.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. No problem.

MS HANSON: One is back to the native part of the budget. There are about 2,000 native women and their children in Alberta who are C-31s, and many of them would like to return to their reserves. Of course, the reserves have been resisting, and there is a Federal Court of Appeal at the moment – I'm sure you're aware of that. I wondered if you've put any thought into having an intervenor in there to do some sort of advocacy on the part of those women.

MR. CARDINAL: They do have an organization. Doris Ronnenberg, I believe, was one that was kind of in charge of it in Alberta. We continue to meet with her, of course. But, you know, we'll look at your suggestion and see how we may assist.

I know what you're talking about. There are quite a number of people. I believe there are 9,000 total settlements for Bill C-31 in the last number of years, and as we move forward with the welfare reforms . . . Of course, for people that don't want to participate in our welfare reforms, say in Edmonton for example, some have chosen to move back to their reserves because the Indian reserves continue, in most cases, to still provide the welfare dollars as they did before. It's something that no doubt will have to change, because they are tracking people back to the reserve, and there's pressure with people moving back to Indian reserves. But I would hope that, you know, some of the bands will accept some of the people. It's something that may never happen. I don't know. We'll look at your recommendation, anyway.

MS HANSON: What I was thinking of is the intervenor status with the court. I knew there was advocacy going on, but I didn't know if they had any kind of actual status with the Court of Appeal or whether they're just seen as an outside individual. I think it's fairly important, because I feel these people have been kicked around a bit, you know.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, I'm in a conflict. I'm a C-31.

MS HANSON: Actually, you had told me that.

MR. CARDINAL: I've been kicked around.

MS HANSON: The ones that I have been most in contact with have been women and kids who have tried to go back to it. There seemed to be two or three reserves that are adamant: no C-31.

MR. CARDINAL: The Sawridge band is one. Bigstone band is flexible. Some are very flexible.

MS HANSON: Yeah, some of them are, I know. Okay.

The other thing I wanted to look at, just a small question, but it's back to AISH. You had mentioned it earlier, Mr. Minister. The savings from the budget are – you're looking at saving in drug program costs in AISH. I understand those costs have been terribly high in the last few years. I'm just wondering how you're going to go about that. How do you keep them down, other than having the generic kinds of drugs, you know? Have you got any specific plans?

MR. CARDINAL: We have, you know, in the past few years – our health care budget in our department used to run, I believe, \$118 million at one time. It's down to \$82 million. So when you're talking about the health care budget in the Health minister's department, we also spend a considerable amount on health care. Like it's down to \$82 million, I believe, somewhere up there.

Don, do you want to expand on that a bit?

MR. FLEMING: Yeah, well, there's not much more to expand. I think that the way we're reducing some of that cost is with the generic drug usage. We have a contract with Alberta Blue Cross to operate that program for us. They monitor the usage as well, so it's just tightening up the . . .

MR. CARDINAL: It's like a dental program.

MR. FLEMING: Yeah. All of these services are contracted out. The Alberta Dental Association monitors that one. Again, it's restricted by different procedures and so many things that can happen.

MR. CARDINAL: We had one of the better contracts with a dental association, for example, in providing dental services at a much reduced cost to our people in the past.

MS HANSON: I was just concerned that you might be cutting back, because I have had some people – and I think there is some misunderstanding sometimes about the difference between the generic drugs and the others. So we've had a few calls from people. I wanted to make sure you weren't cutting back on that.

MR. FLEMING: No. In those cases where some people react to generics, there's a process through Blue Cross that, with a doctor's signature, they can continue to get their trade name.

MS HANSON: Yeah. Okay, thank you very much.

The other one is back to adoptions. You mentioned, Mr. Minister, about reviewing the adoption legislation. I had two questions about that. It wasn't clear from what you said whether or not birth parents are going to be able to do searches for their birth children.

MR. CARDINAL: That's adult children. They can.

MS HANSON: The adult children. They can't at the moment, but they will be able to under the new legislation.

MR. CARDINAL: They will be able to unless there's a veto filed by the children. That could happen.

MS HANSON: Yeah. The veto is necessary.

MR. CARDINAL: It's necessary.

MS HANSON: Okay, I've had a number of calls on that.

MR. CARDINAL: That's what we're moving forward with, and I hope you support it.

MS HANSON: Yep, I do.

11:13

MR. CARDINAL: It's another step. It's not a completely open adoption, because I have said before that it's a very sensitive and complicated area and involves a lot of people, and we moved with the first step in adjustment. This is a second step. We'll assess this another year and see if it's sufficient, and if it isn't, we'll make the changes that are required to make sure we completely address that issue.

MS HANSON: I've been there.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MS HANSON: Another question I have about adoption is about the cost of the search fees. You know, we do get people saying they're just too high, and I don't know if there's anything you can do about that. Also related to that: the search fee subsidy. Can we have it include more than people on AISH and seniors? There are a lot of people at the moment who can't afford the service.

MR. CARDINAL: Well, people on welfare, for example, are eligible for support, of course, and people on AISH and seniors, but the average cost is about \$300. So you know, it's not a big amount. It's a big amount, I guess, to some people if your income is that low.

MS HANSON: If you're on low income, it is a big amount.

MR. CARDINAL: Now, that's the working people, no doubt. We don't have any plans at this time, Don, to subsidize other people who are under our support systems.

MS HANSON: Yeah. Well, I would hope you'd keep it in mind anyway, because I know that it's a concern to a lot of people.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Bonnie.

MRS. LAING: Oh. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I almost went to sleep there.

Mr. Minister and staff, it's good to have you here today. Before we get into our questions, just a couple of comments I wanted to make. There have been a lot of changes in Calgary and some I'm very, very pleased with. I'd especially like to commend you on the changes in the drop-in centre by bringing the services into the centre and meeting the people right at that level. I think that's very encouraging. For instance, they're getting medical and

dental services from CUPS, there are employment services there now and the Family and Social Services social worker in there as well to help them with their claims and help them get started. So I think that's very encouraging.

Your support of the homeless forum, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I both attended, I think was a really excellent indication of your concern for the people in that area, and it certainly went a long way, I think, to help create awareness. There was very positive media coverage. One of the exciting things was that there was participation pretty well from the public, the agencies, some of the homeless people themselves, and the business community. I think that was a very excellent project. Committees have now been struck from that forum, and it's hopeful that there'll be some community action developed to help the homeless there.

Also, the support of the Brenda Stafford Shelter, which is in my riding: I'd like to thank you for that. It is helping to take a little of the pressure off the women's shelters as it takes women and children from the shelters after they've done their three-week initiation. They also have individual suites, which is a little bit more accommodating, I think, to family life, and they have a longer stay there. One of the interesting parts, I feel, in this particular project is the fact that there's a partnership with the Brenda Stafford foundation to pay for the counselors. To my knowledge, this is one of the first projects where you've actually had someone from the private sector come in and help sponsor the operation costs. I think that was very excellent, and of course you're paying for the SFI and the security of the buildings. So I'd like to commend you for those projects. I think they will really help life in Calgary for those who need the assistance.

I'd like to ask you about now, looking at the estimates, 3.2.0, the child welfare services. You explained in your opening comments why child welfare spending is dropping by about \$2 million from the '95-96 forecast. What happens if the expected savings don't occur? That's my first question. My supplemental. Within child welfare I see element 3.2.1, program delivery, is increasing from '95-96 forecasts. Does this suggest that the administration costs will now be higher in that field? The last supplemental on that one. From '95-96 forecasts, the costs are increasing for element 3.2.3 in home family support while they're dropping for element 3.2.5, foster care, and element 3.2.7, residential care. Does this suggest that more cases are moving from residential care and foster care back into their homes?

One other question at this time with services for children and families. On 3.3 of the estimates, services, you said earlier that the spending for early intervention programs will increase by \$14 million from the '95-96 forecasts. What kind of programs will be initiated with this new funding? I think this was mentioned a little bit earlier, but I wondered if you had some more examples. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo mentioned more specifically Calgary, and I wonder if we could hear a bit more about those types of programs. Supplementary: is it realistic to budget \$20 million for '96-97 when spending was only \$6 million in this past year?

There was a large increase in spending during '95-96 in element 3.3.2, community service planning. Will there be another increase for '96-97, and why is the spending in this area increasing so dramatically?

I'd also like to ask you about family and community support services, element 3.4.2. Family and community support services was previously budgeted under Municipal Affairs, and it has now returned to Family and Social Services. What were some of the reasons that this happened? Also, will the program continue as it is, or will there be changes?

One other comment I'd like to make, which I have made to the

minister before, is that I would like to see some control on the amount of documentation that groups have to make to receive family and social services. For some of the seniors' social groups and centres it's really an onerous task to prepare the huge amount of documentation that seems to be required. It may just be by the city; I'm not sure. They seem to feel it is. It really is a task and a half for them, plus the audited statements. Many of these groups have been around for several years, maybe 20, 25 years, and they've been doing a very excellent job in outreach and helping the people in that community, the seniors. So I'd like to have you look at that, because that is an issue in Calgary.

Thank you.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Those are good points. I'll start off with element 3.2.0, child welfare services. You enquired about the \$2 million. You know, with the implementation of the early intervention programs we are preventing crisis situations and also providing, of course, the lower cost income support programs, which will keep children in their communities. We are hopeful that we will be saving dollars in this area, and I'm sure we will. Of course, any additional funds from that program will be allocated or reallocated to other high-needs areas. So the dollars will be used for similar purposes.

The other one you asked of course was on child welfare again, element 3.2.1. You were questioning if it's the administrative costs that are high. What's happened is that due to the caseload pressures that recently occurred in child welfare, it was necessary to increase frontline staff to enable effective case management. I mentioned before that we increased staffing by 50 in the front line, child welfare in particular. You know, part of our plan is to make sure we continue to provide services in the high-needs area.

The other one you mentioned was 3.2.7. Again, it's the department's aim to keep children in their home communities whenever possible, and I've given you the reasons why. Before, we used to apprehend children and really never dealt with the problem. Children, of course, when they are apprehended, will only be returned to their homes if we know it is safe, and we would hope that in most cases the children apprehended would be so on a temporary basis, not permanent. Now, in some cases you have to do it permanently, but hopefully in most cases you don't.

Under element 3.3 of course we will be initiating community programs which will give families, teens, children access to services that can help them before they reach a point of crisis. That's again the preventative programs. We are trying to encourage families and communities to help and support each other to ensure children and youth remain safe and healthy, and I think that's a critical area. We'll facilitate the process to make sure that happens, especially in the aboriginal community.

Of course, half of the \$50 million we've committed is going to the aboriginal communities; at least that's targeted. The reason for that is that half of the children in care are aboriginal children, unfortunately. You mentioned: is it realistic to budget the \$20 million when we only spent \$6 million in '95-96? The first year that we implemented this particular program was 1995-96, and it was a bit slower than we had anticipated. We still feel the program will be fully operational in '96-97 and therefore will require the full amount of dollars. So that's coming together quite well.

11:23

The other area, community service planning, 3.3.2. The first full year of operation under the new mandate to develop local authorities was 1995-96. When the program was initiated, we had no history of determining the potential costs, and we were just

basically guessing. Costs are expected to stabilize in '96-97 as local authorities are established, and that will happen this coming year as legislation moves forward. It should be noted that the resources for this were redirected from lower needs areas within the department. So again, it was a good move.

The area of family and community support services. Of course, you're aware that as of April 1 we will have that. That's under 3.4.2. When it was moved, it was not our choice at the time. Both the deputy and I made it pretty well known that we weren't totally supportive of the change, and of course we were right again. It came back to us because other people saw the same need. We have to thank here the Urban Municipalities and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which both passed resolutions recommending that it come back to our department. The other thing we found was that out of the \$32 million or so, \$25.7 million of it remained conditional, so the majority of the dollars remained for conditional use.

I guess we have made a commitment for the calendar year, because FCSS operates on a calendar year, that we will not require the funding changes other than the 5 percent reduction for this calendar year. In the next two or three months we will be reviewing along with the stakeholders the future of FCSS as to what changes may be required to make the system better and more effective. So that is the direction.

MRS. LAING: Are you going to try and answer about the documentation?

MR. CARDINAL: The other one on the documentation, yeah. The reason the documentation was there, of course, was that a percentage of the programs were cost shared under the Canada assistance plan. The Canada assistance plan required all kinds of forms, and you can't blame them. They needed to have controls in order to control their expenditures and make sure that they're verified. We don't have that anymore, so therefore the documentation should be a lot less now.

MRS. LAING: Okay. I'm going to circulate that.

MR. CARDINAL: The *Hansard*? Sure.

MRS. LAING: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Karen, please.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I have a list of questions under the issue of children and also the child welfare reforms that are being put forward. I had to go out of the room for a few minutes, so some of them may have been brought forward by other hon. members. If they have, then you can let me know. Also, because there's a list of them here, if you want to get back to me with written responses on some of them, that's fine as well.

There is a lot of concern around the draft legislation. I'm not sure what number we're at right now. One of the chief concerns is that in the preamble, I think it is, to the legislation there is no mention made of protection for children, and I know that that's a key concern. I'm not sure if that's been addressed in any of the later drafts, but I know that's a concern.

Another concern is with regards to the qualifications of the individuals who will become part of the process once the community takes over. There's a push right now from the Association of Social Workers indicating that one way to ensure adequate standards with regards to qualifications is to have mandatory registration of social workers in this province, which we don't

have at this point in time, and I'd like the minister's comments on that.

Community is part of the thinking that goes on behind the child welfare reforms. Whenever the minister mentions child welfare reforms, in the next breath he talks about the community taking over the functions that are currently being provided by the department. My questions. Who is that community? How is that community being defined? Is the community aware of the magnitude of the issues that they are being requested to take over? Have the issues of liability been addressed? How will this be different from what has happened in the past when social services was fragmented amongst many communities, private agencies, charities, churches, et cetera? Are we just not reinventing a wheel that didn't quite work well 20 to 30 years ago?

When we look through the various budget documents, spending and dollars are predicated in some respect on cases and caseloads. I know that last year the average monthly caseload for program 2 was approximately 54,500. I'm wondering if the minister could tell us what the average monthly caseload is for this year. As well, as a former social worker I'm interested in what the definition is of a case. How are those statistics gathered? Is it possible at all to get some breakdown, without breaching any confidentiality, as to the average length of the caseload, how long it takes perhaps from intake to assessment to the closing of the case? Just some of the parameters around those issues I think would be very comforting to know when we're talking about what the budget is.

It's my understanding that in home family support – and again I've sort of expanded the area of children; families do exist without children but generally do include children – there seems to be about \$7 million worth of contracts that have been given out by the ministry. That divides up amongst some 60 agencies. If the minister could provide us some ideas as to who they are, what types of services they're providing, and if those contracts were tendered.

MR. CARDINAL: There are actually 150 agencies, mostly nonprofit.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. In vote 3.2.7, residential care, there has been a cut to that program. In light of what we were talking about with regards to at-risk children or children in need, I'm wondering why there would be a cut to that program when right now we're being told by workers that there are no available beds, that there's a problem with children and finding a safe place for them.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar touched on day care in her initial comments. I notice that there is a cut to the day care subsidy program. What was interesting was that this morning on the way here I heard the hon. minister on the radio saying that he was aware that Edmonton required about \$2 million for their day care program and he was hoping that the federal government would become a partner. My question is: if the government, as they must have known, was going to cut the dollars to that particular program, why would they have not, when the federal government had those dollars on the table for day care, at that point picked up those dollars? Why would they have waited for those dollars to be taken off the table and to have to renegotiate?

11:33

Another question was poverty, and at the end it was briefly touched on. We all know there is a relationship, though that's not the only relationship, with children and poverty and crime and later developmental problems. When I had asked the Minister of

Labour last year, I believe it was, as to what he was doing with the minimum wage and whether there was a requirement for an annual review, his comment to me was that cabinet has committed – and I'm actually reading from his document, what he had sent me – to a regular annual review of the minimum wage; however, they are flexible as to the form of such reviews. The reason for that comment was that we have been suggesting there be an annual review of the minimum wage by a group of interested parties that would recommend to government.

As the minister of social services and the minister responsible, as it states in your mission statement, for ensuring economic viability, I believe, of families and some other really wonderful statements, has the minister been lobbying other cabinet members and in particular the Minister of Labour to take a good look at what the minimum wage is in this province? If someone works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, at \$5 an hour, his annual wage will be \$10,400. Now, we all know that that's not sufficient to raise a family.

Perhaps the minister can correct this piece of information if it's wrong. I'm nearly at the end.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll have to provide these in writing, but we'll look at the comments.

MS LEIBOVICI: I understand; yes.

It's my understanding that the number of children who have been given up, not that have been apprehended but that have been given up for care, has increased in the last year or two years. I would like to know if the minister has found that this is the case, if he has investigated as to why this is occurring, if he is seeing any relationship between the welfare reforms and the strains that those welfare reforms are putting on families and on single parents and their ability to keep their children in their own households. It's my understanding that people can't afford to keep their children and that's why they're giving them up for care.

The Quality of Life Commission had a number of suggestions, and I'm wondering what, if any, the minister will follow up on.

The other question that I have – two more, three more perhaps – is with regards to the council on the family that was disbanded. My understanding is that there are dollars to be provided to the Vanier institute to focus on some of the research that the council on the family did engage in. I'd like to know where those dollars are in the budget document.

MR. CARDINAL: That's not under ours. Community Development.

MS LEIBOVICI: Is that, the council of the family, now under Community Development? The minister mentioned that in his opening statements.

MR. CARDINAL: We are providing \$25,000, I believe, to that particular expenditure.

MS LEIBOVICI: Right, and it is in your budget, so that's why I thought it would be under your mandate. If the minister can find out, then, as it is in your budget documents, what those dollars are and how the Vanier institute was chosen – I'm not saying they're not the correct choice. I'd just like to know how that choice was made. [interjection] Could have been. As I said, I'm not saying that they were not the correct choice. I'd just like to know how . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Question period recommended that.

MS LEIBOVICI: It is public dollars.

MR. CARDINAL: We listen; we care.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, you know, I think it is public dollars, and we need to provide accountability for the expenditure of those public dollars.

Job retraining. I know that a lot of the welfare reforms are predicated on people finding jobs and that the minister has provided funds for job retraining. There are a lot of studies which indicate that job retraining doesn't always work, that in fact what job retraining is is an income supplement to business, and that as soon as that supplement is not available, the job becomes unavailable as well.

MR. CARDINAL: None of our programs supplement business.

MS LEIBOVICI: What you may not do is supplement business, but you provide an income to the individual, and that in turn supplements business.

MR. CARDINAL: No, we don't do that.

MS LEIBOVICI: So you don't provide any income to individuals who have attained jobs as a result of . . .

MR. CARDINAL: What happens is that they obtain a job, and if they need additional dollars, then it goes the other way. They come and apply for additional dollars.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that, because the concern there was that we were providing a cheap labour pool.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, that was one of our thoughts when we were reviewing the whole income program. We never had to go that far.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. And just a sort of closing comment on this issue is that though the welfare reforms have managed to substantially reduce the budget of the Department of Family and Social Services, what we are seeing is that the number of food banks has increased, the number of individuals who are not able to afford a quality of life that I think we would like to have people afford in this province has increased as well, and poverty has increased. I'd like to know if the minister's department is engaging in any studies as to the actual effects of the welfare reforms on individuals' quality of life, much like the Quality of Life Commission has done in this province, and if the minister will then rectify some of those reforms that have created demands such as increases in food banks.

With those comments I will close for now.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. I'll start off with the top one because it's the most important area. Protection of children is the legislation we're moving forward. It's just enabling legislation under the Child Welfare Act. The Child Welfare Act still has the protection of children in the Act, so that covers that area. The services to children authorities Act is enabling legislation to set the authorities. Our child welfare legislation is still there, so that covers that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Just as a point of clarification, I think the

realization is that everyone understands that it's in the Child Welfare Act, but there is a concern that it's not expressly stated in the enabling legislation.

MR. CARDINAL: Day care, for an example – and you heard those comments, of course. We did make an official application to the federal government when they came out with the program, basically for the training of staff. They rejected our application, but we still have ongoing meetings with the federal government to see if they come up with any new programs, in relation to after-school care in particular. You know, the province is responsible right now for day care for children six years and older, but under that of course is the school or after-school care. We are working also with the mayor of the city of Edmonton to look at what their needs are.

As you are aware, we do have day care spaces in Alberta. In fact, we have 32,000 spaces in Alberta, and there is a 30 percent vacancy now. In the area of subsidies for individuals, for an example, we do have an average subsidy for day care space and then we have a subsidy for operation or administration. Then in addition to that, of course, individuals are eligible for subsidies, if they are on assistance, to subsidize their day care. But we will continue working with the – normally, FCSS funds the after-school care in the city of Edmonton. Some of the changes that took place in the past year, I guess, in relation to FCSS have created some pressures on the city, and that's something we're looking at right now.

In relation to the minimum wage, it's something that I guess the Minister of Labour has to look at, and we'll see what happens. I didn't sit down and talk – it was reviewed, I guess, about six years ago and updated, but we haven't done too much since then.

11:43

Some of these issues we'll give you in writing, of course, because they're detailed. But in relation to the overall welfare reforms, we found – and any jurisdiction will tell you – that more welfare is not really the way of dealing with poverty. More handouts are actually I think the irresponsible way of helping people, because to start with, that's not what the people want. We can't continue fooling ourselves, thinking that welfare dollars will get people out of poverty. We have proven that in the native communities, when 45, 50 years ago they were completely independent and self-sufficient, although the standard of living was different. People were independent, the welfare system came in, and now we have three generations of people depending on welfare.

I look back, and that is why Don and I have worked on these projects for years now to make sure that we do the responsible thing, and that's to provide the dollars where they're needed. Children's services, the elderly that can't work, persons with disabilities, and families that have to stay home are where the dollars should go. The employables, trainables: we have to get those people back into the workforce, and more welfare in those areas would keep the people there. That's exactly what we've done. We've reversed it and worked towards ending the welfare cycle, and it's working. It's working, and we're confident that we're on the right track. Although we may be perceived as mean-spirited at times – it's a little tough love – and it's a tough way to go, we think it's the right way to go, because most clients support that. Most clients do not want to be on welfare or dependent on government, and we're trying to do our best to assist them make that transition.

Don, I don't know if you want to add more to it. Maybe you want to do a little correction on that, on the day care itself.

MR. FLEMING: Well, just the one. I think the minister had indicated that we were responsible for six years and over. It's actually the other way around. We're responsible for children under six.

MR. CARDINAL: I just couldn't read his writing.

MR. FLEMING: That's 'cause I only got to grade six.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Or age six, not grade six.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll get the rest, Karen, in writing to you.

MS LEIBOVICI: Perfect. I understand.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Shiraz.

MR. CARDINAL: I thought you were done already, Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: I had many questions, but many have been answered, so I don't need to go through them again. I might ask you the time though.

MR. CARDINAL: It's 10 to 12.

MR. SHARIFF: Ten to 12; sure.

Before I ask my questions, I just want to clarify for the record a couple of things. With the new model of community-based services, the government will be passing responsibility for programs over to the authorities, but the accountability will still rest with the minister. Correct?

MR. CARDINAL: Absolutely. They have to develop service plans, and they become part of our approval process. We develop three-year business plans, monitoring, evaluations, standards.

MR. SHARIFF: Another point, just for clarification for the record. With this transition that will happen, the Child Welfare Act will remain as is at the present time. There is no plan, right now at least, to open up the Child Welfare Act?

MR. CARDINAL: It will remain the same except in areas where we develop new systems in place to address the issue. We will have to provide enabling legislation to do that.

MR. SHARIFF: I'll go into my questions then. You did talk in your opening remarks about a number of staff reductions that have happened and that are anticipated to occur. I think you talked about 560 full-time staff being reduced over, I think, last year.

MR. FLEMING: Five years.

MR. SHARIFF: Yeah. The overall was about 960 full-time staff reduced. My question, then, is this. With the number of staff that have been reduced, how will this impact the new model that's going to come into place? Will they have adequate staffing available to them? The reason I'm asking that question is because there was a time in this province when we went out of the province to recruit staff to deliver services.

MR. CARDINAL: Because the welfare caseload has dropped by 50 percent, the majority of those reductions will happen in that area. In fact, we have increased, you know, 50 staff in the child

welfare area. So we're just moving in the direction we should be moving.

MR. SHARIFF: Okay. Then my supplementary question. With income security being reduced to the level which you didn't even expect – and I'm glad that has happened – I'm a little bit concerned about the people that may have fallen through the cracks. Do we have any plans to try and study the impact of the changes that we have implemented until now and how they are impacting particularly the children who cannot speak for themselves?

MR. CARDINAL: That was asked already. Don, you answered that, I think. Do you want to do it again quickly? It's in *Hansard*.

MR. SHARIFF: Okay. I'll read *Hansard* then. I'm sorry.

Then my final supplemental for this one is pertaining to day care. You did mention a reduction in allowance that we give. From \$77 at the present time you're reducing it to \$68. However, the question that I have is: do we have a means test, or is this given to everyone? Does a person who earns \$70,000 get that same \$68 that a person with a \$25,000 income receives? If so, is that an area that we would be looking at dealing with on a means test basis?

MR. FLEMING: There are two parts to the day care. There's the operating allowance and the subsidy allowance. The operating allowance is given to the operator, and basically anyone who uses day care benefits from it. The subsidy one is based on income.

MR. CARDINAL: The operating allowance is, I think, \$61 across the board for everybody, somewhere in there.

MR. SHARIFF: So why are we subsidizing everyone, \$61 or \$68 for everyone?

MR. CARDINAL: We're waiting for your recommendation. It amounts to \$14 million.

MR. FLEMING: We've been cutting it down and will continue over the next couple of years, but that is one area that we looked at. We initially at one point were looking at doing away with the operating allowance completely and upping the subsidy, but the day care operations were so fragile that we were starting to knock off a few operators, so we changed.

MR. CARDINAL: We weren't sure, also, what the feds were going to come up with, and so far we're still monitoring that to make sure that we provide supplements to what they come up with or they supplement what we have, you know. So we're kind of waiting and maintaining as good a service as we can out there now, and it's good service.

MR. SHARIFF: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Minister. The other questions that I have I certainly will be able to follow up with you.

Just looking at the time, I'm wondering, Madam Chairman, if this would be an appropriate time for lunch? No? Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: There is no lunch. It's a good thought, but no.

One of our colleagues had to leave, Mr. Dickson, and he had left some comments with Karen to read into the record for him.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Sure. Go ahead.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you. I'll just list them. There are three questions. Under vote 3.4.4, why are there reductions in the mediation and court services? He indicates that there is currently a six-week delay to access mediation through the child custody access program in Calgary, so he's wondering why there was that cut.

His second question is: why isn't the government looking at having access enforcement co-ordination such as that provided for in Bill 219, which is based on the Manitoba model, and has there been an assessment of costs involved in such a project or an attempt to quantify the benefits of such a project?

His third question is under vote 3.2.4, adoptions. He'd like to know why there's no registry or no other place where an unwed father from out of the country, for instance, who believes that the mother is placing the child for adoption in Alberta can register his interest, again such as was proposed in Bill 219.

MR. CARDINAL: What we'll do is get you that in writing; okay?

11:53

MS LEBOVICI: Yes, that would be perfect. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Betty.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, I've got seven questions that I want to get on record here for you. The first one is – and you've spoken briefly to this – the fact that you're transferring money into education, into training programs. I agree with that, but I'm not sure I understand how that works; that is, who makes the decision relative to the individual client? Is the client, then, required to take a student loan and therefore further become indebted?

MR. CARDINAL: I'll touch on that. We've transferred over \$83 million, I believe, in the last two years to the Students Finance Board. There are criteria set up. We recommend the people, and they will get a grant. They don't repay it. The grant is actually 30 percent higher than the old welfare rates. They've made some adjustments since. I don't know what the adjustments are.

MRS. HEWES: There are also some things they don't get when they get that. Again, I don't see that in your performance measures, and I'd like to see some assessment of how that's working.

I'm glad the Member for Calgary-Bow, Madam Chairman, asked about FCSS. This is one of my favourite programs. I'm glad you've got it back, Mr. Minister. I was terrified when it went over, and I'm thankful it's back now. Does getting it back mean that the original criteria or the Tannas report recommendations are still in place and we're still thinking along those lines?

MR. CARDINAL: The 34 recommendations?

MRS. HEWES: The 34 recommendations.

Are the grants still unconditional that go to municipalities, or are they tied now through your department to family and community support programs?

MR. CARDINAL: In 1996 we will not make changes except for the 5 percent reduction in the overall budget. We will grandfather the existing structure, where a percentage of municipalities are conditional and a percentage are unconditional. Unconditional

covers most of the budgets, like \$25.7 million out of \$31.1 million or \$31.2 million, so it's not a bad issue. We are going to review it in the next two years, and we'll take into consideration the Tannas report and recommendations in the next two or three months as we review with the stakeholders what direction we need to go with FCSS.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks. In the meantime, no new municipalities can come outside?

MR. CARDINAL: Not at this time, no.

MRS. HEWES: Okay. That is a good and cost-effective program, I believe, and I'd like to see it not only maintained but expanded. I think the Tannas report verified that.

Madam Chairman, group home standards are still a major concern to me and particularly as we get into devolving more and more responsibility into communities in private, nonprofit as well as commercial operations. I see it related to seniors or people in that 65-year age limit where they're getting into boardinghouse situations that are possibly even unsafe and with no legislation, nothing to protect them.

I wonder if you could at some point, not necessarily now, give me some clues about the department's thinking there, because as we move to more community-based, commercial-based operations, I think that if we don't have standards that are very clear long before the authorities are set in place that deal with personnel, with training, with nutrition, with social recreation programs . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Those are the smaller group homes you're talking about? Not the major, major ones, because those have standards.

MRS. HEWES: No, no. Those that are run by private nonprofits and church groups I think have their own standards. It's now as we move into this handing over into community activity and into the potential for commercial homes – and this again goes back to my public/private question.

MR. CARDINAL: One of the problems with that is that seniors are not our clients. You know, it could be under Community Development.

MRS. HEWES: I understand that, but these are people 60, 65.

MR. CARDINAL: We could recommend that. Yeah.

MRS. HEWES: Mediation: Gary Dickson spoke about this or asked a question about it, Madam Chairman, and again the Minister of Justice and the – there's a private member's Bill that will increase costs. Is that going to be yours? How do we deal with that, the mediation costs?

MR. CARDINAL: We're funding it now, at this time, but we will have a review . . .

MRS. HEWES: There are going to be more costs there. There's no question in my mind.

MR. CARDINAL: If it expands, that is. You know, there's a pilot project being run now by Justice. I think it's 80 kilometres around Edmonton. I think what we're looking at now is the possibility of waiting for some results from that in order to determine where the other Bill goes.

MRS. HEWES: With the other Bill who pays has never been clear either.

Madam Chairman, Mr. Minister, the performance standards I find . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Too high?

MRS. HEWES: No. Adequate. Not too high, never too high.

I've spoken to one or two of the others, but the first one: percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while in the ministry's care – that's an important standard, but leave off the last five words and say: the percentage who stay free from abuse. They come into your care, and then they go back into the community or whatever: that's the standard that I want to know. Did it work? I know that while they're in your care, we can count on it, and you've got a hundred percent, but it's when they're out of your care. That's the performance standard that we need to aim for. I think this one is negligible in my mind.

Madam Chairman, the disabilities foundation. I had to read it three or four times before I finally figured out you're talking about developmental disabilities only.

MR. CARDINAL: We changed that. That is one amendment that's coming to the legislation on the recommendation of your caucus, not you particularly, someone else.

MRS. HEWES: And the title will be changed.

MR. CARDINAL: To developmental disabilities.

MRS. HEWES: And the references will be changed.

Now, Mr. Minister, did I understand you correctly when you said that that foundation will only have to do with raising funds for capital expenditures?

MR. CARDINAL: Capital and research, not programs.

MRS. HEWES: Will the foundation have a responsibility or a mandate to receive resources from you and deal with operational programs?

MR. CARDINAL: No.

MRS. HEWES: Who will deal with that?

MR. CARDINAL: We will continue doing that.

MR. FLEMING: The funding will go to the provincial organization and be dispersed from there.

MR. CARDINAL: The provincial organizations, then to the six regional authorities.

MRS. HEWES: That's not clear in the Bill, Mr. Minister, and perhaps you'll make that clear when you speak to that Bill when it's before the House. The Bill itself and the comments that have gone along with it are still pretty fuzzy on that, where that begins and ends. You're going to give to the authorities the responsibility to hand out the resources, I take it, but you're also going to give to the foundation the responsibility of raising money and taking bequests.

MR. FLEMING: There are two basic thrusts here. There's the operating and the capital. The capital and the holding part of it,

the fund-raising, will be dealt with through the foundation. The funding for operations will flow from the government to the provincial organization, who in turn will fund the six regional ones.

MRS. HEWES: Two separate things.

MR. CARDINAL: But the other thing, too, is that the government has to have the option to put money into capital if necessary.

MRS. HEWES: Of course.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Minister, reading that legislation, that Bill that came down, that wasn't all that clear in my mind. So hopefully we can get that cleared up.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll clear it up in the speaking notes.

MRS. HEWES: Madam Chairman, one final question that I want to get on the record is: what is your government's policy relative to Head Start? Now, I know this is perhaps thought to be in Education, but you're responsible for them until they get there. I think these programs have proved themselves over and over. I think this falls into the whole child welfare reform bundle. Do we have a policy relative to Head Start? If not, why not or could we get one?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah. The funding that goes into early intervention will address some of those issues.

MRS. HEWES: Not enough.

MR. FLEMING: Part of the reason for the change is to do that integration between the various departments. You're right: Head Start looks after some of the same issues that we look after in a different way. So it's coming together, making sure that we don't have duplications and overlaps and using that money in a way that's going to give us the best possible service to kids. So although we haven't got a policy, I guess it will evolve over time with some of the early intervention initiatives.

12:03

MRS. HEWES: Madam Chairman, I want us to be clear and have a policy on such things as Head Start. I'm not content when it's kind of left out there. I think it's something that works.

MR. CARDINAL: We can get it in writing.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Moe.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, I have two very brief questions. I'll draw your attention to page 218, vote 2.3.2, widows' pension. I would like to get some information on this particular pension. Is it income tested, means tested? Is there a residential requirement or a citizenship requirement? Things like that.

The other question. I know in your opening statement you mentioned something about the fraud cases taking place in your department. I'm sure you realize that every dollar that's paid out

in a fraudulent way is taken away from a legitimate single parent or a legitimate child. So I wonder what mechanism you have in place for recovery of these dollars that are given away in a fraudulent way.

These are my two very brief questions.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Very quickly I'll answer them. We have over 3,100 widows under the pension. It is income tested, and the average income is \$317. It is another one we're reviewing along with AISH and the other assured support to look at how we may address that. Part of the reinvestment could possibly do some of that, so we have to look at that. For the AISH the rate can go as high as \$815 a month right now.

The other one was fraud. As you're aware, a percentage of the individuals, once we tightened up and expanded our fraud investigation, we feel no doubt were receiving funds that they did not deserve to receive and therefore voluntarily closed the files before we got there. That is why we feel that there was such a drop in the welfare caseload. In order for us to investigate and follow that, it may have cost more than we would recover, so we just left it.

MR. AMERY: So if a person has been defrauding the department for three or four or five years and closed his file voluntarily, then it's not worth going after him for recovery of the money that he received in a fraudulent way?

MR. CARDINAL: We do that on individual cases; yeah. If any individual case stands out that there is fraud, then we will follow up on individual cases. Any people that voluntarily closed their files, we didn't go out to find them. It would have been too costly.

MR. FLEMING: If we even suspected there was fraud, we would have gone after them.

MR. CARDINAL: We'd do it; yeah.

THE CHAIRMAN: Alice.

MS HANSON: Thank you. I have a few more questions. As usual, it's all over the place. One of the things I wanted to go back to is child care and the numbers of vacancies that we have in Alberta. I suspect that they are due to cost. As you recall, we had a number of conversations, Mr. Minister, or a bit of debating over the legislation last year that allowed – and I forget what you call them.

MR. CARDINAL: Day homes. Family day homes.

MS HANSON: Well, are they the ones that can take up to six children . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Six children. Yeah.

MS HANSON: . . . and do not require a licence?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MS HANSON: I wondered if you're doing any kind of tracking of those. They concern me a great deal, particularly since they're allowed to take three children under two, I believe.

MR. FLEMING: Two children.

MS HANSON: Two children under two? Okay.

You know, I have visions of some places, particularly in parts of my constituency, where kids can be popped in a room with a television and left there a good part of the day. So I'd like to know if you are doing anything to track those or if at the moment it's in limbo.

The other thing that we talked about a lot last year is the project in the northeast region, the Keith Tredger project. I know it was being evaluated. At least, I had heard it was being evaluated. Also, I believe it's not renewed for this year. I wonder if I could have information about the results of the evaluation and, you know, what sort of changes or improvements you might have made on the basis of that.

Is the budget increase in in-home support a reflection of increasing in other regions? It's provincewide, is it?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah.

MS HANSON: Okay. Thank you very much.

I've got another question here about foster care. There really is a dire need for foster care homes, according to many of the workers that I talk to and people in the community. I wonder if you would describe what actions your department is taking to expand the number of foster homes in the province, particularly native foster care. I know it's a really sticky issue, but I wondered what you are trying to do about it.

MR. CARDINAL: Okay. Is that it?

MS HANSON: I have one more question.

MR. CARDINAL: Oh, one more.

MS HANSON: This is about residential care. The cost of residential care went way up last year, something like \$2 million, yet you have a cut in the budget. I'd like to know why it went up last year. You know, what was the cause of being over budget at around \$2 million? Why a cut when social workers keep saying that there are no available beds for at-risk children? We hear that all the time, and we wondered what your reasons were for cutting.

I wonder if we could have some information about the residential care facilities in child welfare? You know, number of beds, type of beds, occupancy levels: that kind of thing. If you could provide that to us, it would help so that we'd have an understanding if that would be available.

MR. CARDINAL: We can do that. I'll address the Tredger contract. It's been reviewed, and a report is completed now. We are in the process of re-rendering that contract.

MS HANSON: Okay. So you are.

MR. CARDINAL: With some adjustments, of course, based on some of the recommendations from the review. So that will be going forward.

Don, if you'd like to address the foster care.

MS HANSON: Sorry. Can I just ask you: can we get a copy of or information about the review of the northeast region?

MR. CARDINAL: We should be able to, yeah. It's available. There's no reason why not.

MR. FLEMING: It's out there.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, it's out there.

MS HANSON: We haven't been able to get one.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll get you a copy.

MS HANSON: Okay; I would appreciate that very much.

MR. CARDINAL: I thought you'd have got it first, but you didn't.

MS HANSON: Sometimes we do, but not always.

MR. CARDINAL: Beat you to that one.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I have only one person on . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry.

MS HANSON: No. I was just muttering that you can't win them all.

MR. CARDINAL: You try hard; right?

THE CHAIRMAN: There's only speaker left on my list, and that's Karen. When she's completed her comments, I've got a motion. In order to conclude early, we need unanimous consent.

MS LEIBOVICI: Just a couple of quick questions. One is around employment policies and procedures. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly has been asking you about certain severance payments. I guess my question is: what is the department's policy with regards to severance? Is severance given; yes or no? From question period yesterday, it sounded as if there was a review, and it was over a year's period. But it still boils down to the bottom-line question: if employees are being told that their services are no longer needed, will they be provided severance as per governmental policy?

MR. CARDINAL: Because you heard me before, I'll let somebody else answer that one now.

MR. FLEMING: Well, yes, severance packages are available, and our severance packages are exactly the same as other departments give out. Where we differ a little is that because there was a wholesale change in what they were doing, some departments offered severance packages to anybody and everybody that wanted to go. But with our operation, we still have to provide service. We have to maintain enough staff on the ground to be able to provide that service. So for the individual whose service is being provided, if that service is no longer provided, yes, a severance package will be provided if we don't find alternative employment for them. Secondly, if their direct leaving will not create a vacancy but will allow a vacancy somewhere else where we require it, we will consider a severance package, so it's different in that way. But in terms of the dollar value of the severance packages, they're exactly the same as other departments'.

12:13

MS LEIBOVICI: So just as a supplemental so I'm perfectly clear and I guess the employees are as well, in the particular situation of information services, if I understood the minister's comments yesterday, it sounded as if these employees had been given a one-year notice period. My question is: is that one year-leeway or lead time going to be considered as payment in lieu of notice? Do you know what I mean?

MR. FLEMING: We haven't even decided to outsource our IT operations at this point. What we're doing is going out with the request for proposals. Once we get those in, we will make a determination as to whether it's more appropriate to go and outsource or keep our own staff. So we haven't even made that decision.

MR. CARDINAL: As part of the overall planning the staff were involved in the planning and were aware that the potential was there, so they know. There were no notices given, of course, because we didn't know if it would even happen. And it may not happen.

MR. FLEMING: If we do decide to go to the private sector for those services, in the context of the tendering process we will stipulate that there has to be at least a one-year commitment to the existing staff.

MS LEIBOVICI: If they choose to go to the contractor. If they don't choose to go to the contractor, will it be like, for instance, transportation? Will they be given the severance?

MR. FLEMING: It's not a matter of choice. If we offer them the option of going with the other provider, that will be considered to have fulfilled the terms of the contract.

MS LEIBOVICI: If all those positions are there?

MR. FLEMING: If there isn't, obviously then they would get the benefits of any other person that was abolished.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. So they don't have a choice of going to the provider or not. They'll have to either go or there is no severance. They'll either go or they don't go. If they don't go, then they're considered terminated. So I guess that's where some of the confusion is coming in.

The other – and I know this is a sensitive issue for the minister – is in terms of the so-called gag order. I think it would be useful for employees to have a very clear understanding of the procedures and process if there are concerns within a department. One of the things that I think sometimes happens in bureaucracies is that people feel that those they immediately report to or the supervisors and the people they report to perhaps are not as concerned about the interests of either the worker or the children as opposed to keeping their own positions. I don't know if the department has thought at all about perhaps having an ombudsman within the department that employees might feel comfortable to go to if there are sensitive issues, and the ombudsman would then report to the minister. But some other avenue than the normal reporting procedures, because it's not always possible, and I'm sure you may have all been in situations where it's not always possible to . . .

MR. CARDINAL: Definitely better than the press.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, exactly.

MR. CARDINAL: And none of my staff can answer that.

MS LEIBOVICI: I don't think that either being forced to perhaps feel that you have to go to the press or that your concerns aren't being dealt with is going to help the clients in the long run.

MR. CARDINAL: There's some misunderstanding out there on

that particular one. There was never, ever a gag order in relation to employment or employee-related issues. It was individuals, not all the staff, and it unfortunately got carried on. It was perceived that it was in the department. The policies we have in place – in fact, I just got a copy of a memo, and I was going to file that in the House – are exactly the same policies as in 1981, identical to what we have today, where yes, staff participate in reforming the whole structure of the welfare program and participate in designing policies and procedures, but we still don't allow staff to go outside the department and to the press to criticize departmental policies.

Now, in that particular individual's case – and that's still in court, so it's really hard to talk in detail – it was in relation to policies of the government that were criticized publicly by one of our own employees. I feel that if it was a union issue, if it was related to employee/employer relations, then fine; that would be their role. I understand that fully. But if it is program policies and procedures, then that's a departmental responsibility, not an employee to go outside. Enough processes are in place now that could deal with those through management and the executive staff, the deputy and myself.

MR. FLEMING: It's really unfortunate that this has got blown out of perspective, because we want and we need our staff to participate in the new children's services initiative. I've told them many times, as have many of the other senior people in the department, that for you to participate in the planning process and give your views – if you do it this way, it's good; if you do it the other way, it's not good. It's critical that we have that because we don't want to have systems develop that are going to not be better than what we've got. So we struggle with it.

Your idea of an ombudsman: I don't know. I'd like to talk to the minister on that one.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll think about it.

MS LEIBOVICI: It's just a suggestion. I think that the employees in the public sector in particular are undergoing a lot of stress, as we all know. It's never comfortable to know whether your job will be there the next day or how different your job will be from one day to the next. The individual that we're talking about I believe is VP of the union. There's always been strong precedent for a union representative to be able to speak out on behalf of his union members.

MR. CARDINAL: On employee/employer related issues, not policies of any department. They never, ever had that authority to do that. They may have gotten away with it, but that is not the authority of unions. They represent workers, employer/employee relations issues, not policies of a department. That's where there was a conflict. It's very unfortunate because it had a negative impact, then, to so many other employees that wanted to participate. It's very unfortunate.

MS LEIBOVICI: It's always a fine line in terms of determining what is and isn't policy versus speaking out on behalf of employees. I think there is a message that was given by the discipline, and that may in effect have stopped other people from feeling comfortable in approaching the proper channels or any channels at all to indicate what some of the concerns are. We all know that the front line knows how best to save money and how best to better the services.

Two other brief, brief comments. With regards to the AISH program, my office is indicating to me that there seems to be an

increase in terms of the rejections and that the appeals are now taking anywhere from six months to a year.

MR. CARDINAL: That's AISH?

MS LEIBOVICI: With regards to AISH. Perhaps that might be something the department wishes to look at.

MR. CARDINAL: The AISH budget is increased, and there are a thousand new cases of AISH.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay, but the appeals seem to be taking longer.

Just a point of clarification. I think it's the facilities review committee. Right? You would be able to tell me whether this is right or not, because I'm working purely from memory. When I remembered looking at last year's report, there seemed to be a very large number of facilities that were being reviewed. When I looked at this year's report, there seemed to be significantly less from last year.

MR. BRASSARD: I can answer that. We're not down, or at least very marginally.

MS LEIBOVICI: Is it? Okay.

MR. CARDINAL: The other thing that's happening in that is that we hired a person in Edmonton and also a person in Calgary to review the data in specific in relation to some of the standards, in relation to the structure of the facilities themselves: how high the fences are, if they're safe, if they meet the municipal standards, that type of stuff. We've hired two of these new people in fact to do that.

Again we're reviewing with Roy the particular mandate of that committee to make sure that it's updated and that we are moving in a positive direction.

12:23

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Committee members, could I please have unanimous approval to depart here a little bit early? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Approved.

[The committee adjourned at 12:24 p.m.]

