

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Monday, March 18, 1996 **8:00 p.m.**  
**Date:** 96/03/18

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. Hon. members, before we begin, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to revert to the brief introduction of guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure tonight to introduce a wonderful couple from High Prairie, Bill and Irene Salisbury. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE CHAIRMAN: For your guests' benefit and to remind all members of the committee, we have tonight, then, the designated supply subcommittees. Just to review again the understanding that we've had in previous years, we will begin the first part, the first department, with 10 minutes or less by the chairman of the committee or his designate. Then there will be two 10-minute sessions for members of the opposition, followed by a wrap-up of no more than 10 minutes by the minister concerned for the department. We'll then move on to the next of the departments whose estimates are under consideration. The first department that we have under consideration this evening is the Department of Health, and it's my understanding that the designated speaker to begin is the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

head: **Main Estimates 1996-97**

### Health

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the chairman, the Member for Bow Valley, it's my pleasure to report on the meeting of the designated subcommittee on Health. The subcommittee was comprised of 12 members with representation from both sides of the House. We met on Monday, March 4, and Monday, March 11, for two hours each evening.

We met with the hon. Minister of Health and several senior officials from her department. Accompanying the minister were Dr. Jane Fulton, deputy minister; Mr. Aslam Bhatti, assistant deputy minister of corporate services; Mr. Don Ford, assistant deputy minister for area services; and Cec Lord, executive director of intergovernmental issues secretariat. Also accompanying the minister were several members of this Assembly who were not members of this subcommittee. The Member for Calgary-Currie was in attendance in her capacity as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, the Member for Calgary-Egmont as chair of the Health Facilities Review Committee, and the Member for Calgary-Bow in her capacity as chair of AADAC.

Members from both sides had an opportunity to ask questions of the minister with respect to the 1996-97 estimates. I would like to thank the minister for attending the meetings and providing straightforward answers to the members' questions. I would also

like to thank members from both sides of the House for their cooperation in making the meetings run efficiently.

We covered a great many topics on those evenings, and I would like to provide a brief overview of what was discussed. This year's estimates show an increase of 4 percent in the Department of Health's budget. The government will not proceed with \$57 million in planned reductions to the RHAs. Community services funding will increase by \$40 million this year, and \$15 million is being committed to the purchase of new medical equipment. The rural physician action plan is being increased by \$1.1 million to a total of \$2.8 million. The Action for Health initiative will see its budget grow by \$2 million to a total of \$6.5 million. The estimates also show that the Provincial Health Council will receive an increase of a million dollars to reflect its full year of operation. Alberta health care insurance premiums will not rise. Premiums will stay at the 1995-96 level.

Major adjustments to the 1996-97 budget as compared to 1995-96 include medical services provided to First Nations that are no longer provided by the federal government, \$5 million; increased utilization of Blue Cross nongroup benefits, \$41.1 million; health systems, \$4.4 million; advanced card technology, \$3 million; savings in the areas of reductions in administration of \$5.6 million; and savings from outsourcing amounts to \$1.3 million. The complete adjustments to the Department of Health, some of which I have listed, add up to an increase in the health budget of \$141 million, for a total Department of Health budget of \$3.694 billion.

In addition to fiscal issues the minister also answered questions on governance and the delivery of health services.

In presenting this report, Mr. Chairman, I cannot deal with every matter that was considered by the subcommittee. I have provided an overview here of the discussion that took place. I would encourage all members who are interested in reviewing the debate in more detail to consult *Hansard* for those days, and for those that are interested, the transcript numbers are 23-4-2 and 23-4-4.

Once again, on behalf of the Member for Bow Valley I would like to thank the minister, her officials, and members from both sides of the House for an informative session.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I had a number of questions I didn't get an opportunity to put to the minister or at least to elicit a response to during the designated committee, and I wanted to do that now.

Madam Minister, it's of interest to me that when I look at the 1994 business plan for the CRHA - you'll have seen that as well - when you look at page 14, they describe a community health centre. They call it the "bleeding station." Now, my concern is that this was 1994. Here we are in 1996, and, Madam Minister, I'm not sure that you've told Albertans anything more in terms of what this community health centre will be than what had been suggested back in the 1994 business plan. At that time we talked about maybe its being in the Alexandra Centre; maybe it's in an office building; maybe it's in part of the General hospital. You know, all we knew was that it was going to be low-level diagnostic services. Now with the closure of the Holy Cross hospital and a sharpened public focus on what the alternatives are going to be, my understanding is that there are some different subgroups from the CRHA looking at this.

I think that surely, Madam Minister, two years after this was set out as part of the plan, we must have a very clear picture of what this is going to be, if not the precise site. My question would be to the hon. minister, through the Chair: can you give us now with as much specificity as possible a clear picture of what this alternative vehicle is going to be that's going to replace all of the acute care services that have been lost at the Holy Cross and that will soon be lost at the General hospital?

Just on that point, I guess a further question to the minister. I'm getting two very different messages. The CRHA has said – and Mr. Paul Rushforth, the CEO, confirmed it as recently as last week – that the Bow Valley centre is closing. Yet when the minister was pressed on this in our designated committee, I still got a response that this is still being assessed and the future role of the BVC and the General hospital is still in the air. Well, Madam Minister, I think we need some greater clarification. There is concern in downtown Calgary. It's not anxiety stirred up by the opposition as you and your colleagues have suggested. It's genuine anxiety on the part of those people who know what they're losing, because that's very clear, but it's very murky what the alternatives are going to be.

In that regard, I wanted to ask the minister: now that your government has committed something in the order of \$1.5 million to the 2005 world's fair bid, there is a concern, real or perceived, that the lack of an acute care facility in downtown Calgary will in fact compromise the prospects of that world's fair bid. There is a concern in terms of the plan to deal with disasters and routine emergency situations. You've told me before, Madam Minister, in the designated committee that this is a subject of review with the emergency medical services and so on, but there may well be some urgency just from the perspective of trying to secure the world's fair bid in terms of ensuring that there's an adequate level of health care service.

#### 8:10

Madam Minister, since you said at the AUMA conference that the taxing authority of the regional health authorities would be eliminated, I'm wondering whether you plan on introducing legislation to amend the governing statute in the spring session and, if it's not going to be done in the spring session, when you plan on doing that.

The other thing I wanted to raise with the minister – she had said, I think it was two weeks ago, that she was looking further into concerns I'd raised about the future of veterans' services at the Colonel Belcher hospital. Madam Minister, you may not have had time to look into that yet, but if in fact you have, I'd appreciate a response. You remember that there are about 135 beds currently at the Colonel Belcher hospital for veterans, and it's of enormous concern, not only what the federal government is going to do – and we're doing our advocacy in that arena; we haven't forgotten – but you also have some ownership in the problem and the possible solution. So I'm interested in knowing what you plan on doing in that respect.

I expressed the concern earlier in question period today in terms of access to information, and, Madam Minister, the concern is still there that with the very large budget that the Calgary regional health authority has to deal with, there is still not the degree of transparency and openness that I think the tax dollar contribution warrants. Notwithstanding the fact that they hold some public meetings and that there's a budget available which is more detailed than usual, I'd ask you to reconsider the position that you expressed this afternoon in terms of not making RHAs subject to the freedom of information Act.

There are additional concerns and questions that could be asked, but I think there are other members who haven't had a turn yet, Madam Minister, so I'll take my place at this point.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to say a few things on the subject of health, ask a few questions. I would like the minister to know first off that I have as usual perused Agenda '96 and looked at the vision, mission, pledge, and all the goals. As usual, one could not possibly find fault with the way in which the objectives and the goals and the mission and the vision have been laid down. Where I have some difficulty, Madam Minister, is with the lack of specificity, if I could call it that, as to how these goals are going to be carried out.

When I look at core business 3, service delivery, goal 1, "Services are accessible: range of core health services," for instance, I am totally at a loss as to what constitutes core health services. There's no definition there that guides me, and I'm moved to ask you, for instance: does that include home care services? I would imagine it does, but it doesn't say so. If the answer is yes, then I would like to have some idea as to how much money is set aside for that, which I haven't found. Maybe that gets to be too detailed.

I do know from the situation in my own riding that there's a tremendous need not just for funding in home care services but for personnel, and I could give you a fair number of rather horrendous stories, in my view, where there is such a lack of either services or funding or both that some people are going without; others just pay for it themselves. So that is an area of grave concern.

Other services that in my view are core health services and ought to be available are things like speech/language therapy and occupational therapy. Again when I look at the situation in my riding, there's a vast shortage of that. I know there is one speech/language therapist stationed in Hinton who looks after services in Edson, Hinton, and Jasper and has a waiting list of about half a year long. As a result, the special-needs students of really any stripe, either modest or severe, are falling through the cracks because they're not being able to access those kinds of services, which are simply not there. Now, I realize that we're getting into the realm of education, but of course there has to be a tremendous amount of interplay there. So if you could allay my fears or at least reassure me that something is being done there, that would greatly help.

I'm also looking at the measure that accompanies goal 1 there, "Services are accessible," and that includes the communicable disease services that are going to be integrated under the regional health authority. I have some fear there, Madam Minister, that a provincewide service is going to be sort of balkanized, with each RHA focusing on communicable disease, having its own person, its own secretary, et cetera, et cetera, with some RHAs doing perhaps a poor job of providing those services. Again I'm looking at my own riding, where in the town of Jasper, because of its attraction to lots of young Canadians, there is a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, and consequently the population there needs more of a focus on that than perhaps on other areas. So that is a question I have, the balkanization of communicable diseases, of the system that we have now, which I think is almost second to none. At least I've been told that, not

being an expert in that field.

Then going down to goal 2, "Services are appropriate," and the measure of finding out what Albertans and consumers think it's going to be: ratings, questionnaires, and so on. Now, I'm pleased to see that you're not just going to question consumers; you're also going to ask Albertans in total. The question I have would be: who does the survey? Because if it's done by hospital authorities or by RHA people, then obviously it is perhaps a conflict of interest, one might say, because they're looking for good results. So I would suggest to you – and I hope that is in fact the case – that there be an independent body that does that kind of assessment.

There's also the promise of "Indicators of consistency with selected clinical practice guidelines and standards." My question would simply be: why haven't they been developed yet? Certainly I think that ought to have been first.

Then another item that I'm concerned about on a provincewide basis is that to my knowledge the lack of progress – and I may be totally wrong. Perhaps behind the scenes tremendous progress has been made already. But in terms of medication for patients who have been released from hospital, those who either are faced with prescriptions at home or those who have to rely on prescribed foods that are only available via prescription, and they have to pay for it themselves because they don't have any insurance. You know the situation. While they're in the hospital, they get that for free; when they're out, they don't. There's a tendency then to go back, which of course jacks up the cost and so on. Perhaps you could reassure me that progress has been made. Quite frankly, in my view that should all be for free. I think the medication at home, too, that a patient who has just been released from the hospital needs which is prescribed should be for free, in my view. We're talking about "Services are accessible." That's the overriding sort of line that you've started your goals with. These services can only be accessible if people don't have to go to the bank to mortgage the house in order to pay for them.

8:20

That leads me to my next point, which is essentially a two-tier approach to the provision of services, and by that I am not talking about private/public, but I'm talking about rural/urban. I think that more has to be done in order to even that situation out to some extent. I know you're looking into ambulance services. We've already discussed that before, and you've very adequately and very generously dealt with one of my constituents who was in trouble on that score, but there are many others. I think you're aware of that. So I would hope that that too, the provision of ambulance services, is going to be provided at no direct cost to the consumer, to use that word that I don't like.

Now, there is another category of services that I have discovered is problematic to people in rural areas, and I'm referring to the return of test results. I'll give you one example here of an 11-year-old girl in Hinton whose doctor suspected that she might have that blood disease. Now I've forgotten the name of it.

MS LEIBOVICI: Leukemia?

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Leukemia. So the girl was sent to the city for the necessary tests, and after that was done, 14 days later the mother called me and said: "I still haven't heard. We're getting really frantic because the girl is losing weight. Why is it taking so long?" So I called the test program and found out immediately the results. I was told in the process – of course, I asked why it was taking so long, and they said, "We have a

backlog a mile long." Those things, of course, did not reassure me whatsoever, but once again I was moved to think that the rural people have to go to the city. I can see that perhaps now, you know, that's the new way. We can't do that in Hinton anymore, but why does it have to take so long? So that is very problematic, and I would hope that you can reassure me that something is being done on that score.

Finally, I would like to come back to a very old complaint which I must put forth every time I have a chance, and that is the inequity of the funding of the regional health authorities. I've mentioned this time and time again, and I know you're working on a new funding formula, which has been sort of hiding in the bush for the better part of a year, I think. I can only urge you, Madam Minister: please, don't allow any politicians to have a go at that funding formula. Just make sure that the thing is being arrived at by independent thought without any regard for party stripe so that what finally comes out can benefit all of us. I'm sure that any funding formula will be better for the WestView RHA because it is so sadly underfunded and underbedded, as you well know.

That is my final plea, Madam Minister. I thank you very much for your attention.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan in the minute remaining.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. One of the concerns that is really significant around the province of Alberta and particularly in my own constituency is that of addictions. I was concerned to see at vote 4.0.1 that we're looking at a reduction of \$2.35 million. Based on the fact that a number of my constituents came with concerns regarding particularly VLT addictions, I felt this was a concern, that we're looking at this reduction.

The other is that I notice the community of Stettler – and I think it's reflective of many communities around the province of Alberta that are identifying drug difficulties with our young population, our teenagers in essence. I don't think it's a time that we should be looking at reductions in that area. I really think that we as a government and as Members of the Legislative Assembly ought to be aggressive in education programs and also treatment programs in that area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, thank you, and thank you to the members for their questions. A number of them from Calgary-Buffalo we dealt with in committee, but there was I think a new query, a new wrinkle on the community health centres. Hon. member, I will tell you that you will not see a definition of a community health centre for Alberta. I think we talked about that maybe briefly. What we would be looking at is community health centres that meet the needs of the community. For example, the Grey Nuns hospital in Edmonton is a community health centre. Well, I don't expect you're going to see a community health centre in Oyen that will be quite like that. It won't be doing several thousand day surgeries and deliveries of babies and so on, but what is important in a community health centre is that it meets that community need.

As you know, in Edmonton the Capital regional health authority has identified a northeast community health centre which is

designed to meet the needs of that area. That might be different than what the Calgary regional health authority finally come up with for the downtown area. So as we indicated in the discussion at estimates, it's important that they do the needs assessment and then look at it.

I don't believe I said that the jury was out on whether the Bow Valley centre would be closed. I don't think there is any question that the Bow Valley centre as we know it will close next year. What I did say – and I'll shorten this up – is that

the regional health authority in Calgary are still working with the community as to what are the appropriate services to be [provided] in the downtown core. They haven't decided on a site where a community health centre would be placed in the downtown core. They haven't ruled out, as I understand it, the Bow Valley centre. In fact, I'm not absolutely positive they've entirely ruled out the Holy Cross. What they have said is that the Holy Cross will close this fall, will no longer be doing the programs it has. The Bow Valley centre will close a year from now. It will close as far as doing what it does now, which is a great deal of acute . . . services.

So as I encouraged the hon. member in my estimates, please work with the regional health authorities. Please look at what's best for the downtown area. The status quo is not the best answer for that centre, so we have to see what will happen. The acute services from those areas are moving to other sites, so they will no longer be provided there.

Legislation that was raised. I can assure you it'll come forward in the fullness of time, I think the term is, but it will come forward.

Veterans. Yes, we have some concerns about what the federal government's future plans are for veterans' services. It is primarily their responsibility.

I already answered the question on freedom of information this afternoon in question period.

I am sorry, Member for West-Yellowhead, that you have not had a copy of the document core services for Albertans. I will see that my office delivers one to your office right away. It does give a full range of the health services that we expect every region to provide in their region or, if they're not providing them in their region, show where their residents can access them.

Home care. I don't have all of the figures in front of me; at least I'm not fast enough to dig them out of my book. I believe it's about \$110 million this year just for home care. There are other additional dollars that are in community services over and above that.

Speech/language therapy and occupational therapy. I am surprised if you don't have those programs. The community rehab programs should be providing them there. As far as I know, the health units are still working with the schools in speech therapy. I will question that. It's often felt that you have to have the speech therapist on the scene all the time working with the students. I know very well that many rural communities have the speech therapist also work with volunteers so that that work continues with the child, because it's extremely important that they have a continuous program.

**8:30**

The measurements. I assure you that the communicable disease centre and disease control will continue. We have, I think, a marvelous record in this province for control of communicable diseases. We will still have a provincial focus, but it will not be carried out by the department; it will be contracted, with provincial guidelines and standards, to the regions.

The benchmark survey. I can also include to you a copy of the

last one that was done last May. It was done by an independent firm, a very large sampling of 4,000 people, and the regions then can be given the results of those surveys from their region and respond accordingly.

The drug plan I guess is a tough one. Where do you draw the line? We do have programs in this province, either employee programs or, as you know, a provincial drug program, that has about a \$141 million subsidization by this government to nongroup and to seniors and widows. I suppose you could look at maybe one or two days' medication if that's what you would have received in the hospital, but at some time you do have to become independent. There isn't one province that I know of in Canada that supplies drugs free. In fact, Saskatchewan has just moved to a deductible in their program. I've reviewed the other provinces' drug programs, and I think ours is still the best. That doesn't mean we can't improve it, but I think it still works the best for our recipients.

The funding formula. Work is ongoing in doing some cost factors and so on. But I have to tell you, hon. member, that it would appear that as much as 80 percent of acute care services for your region are accessed in the Capital health authority. Please don't ever think that that region is going to be funded for services it's not providing. So a funding formula may not change the amount of money if the services are not being provided there. I've reviewed that funding in that region for every year since I became minister, and it's very difficult when a large part of that area is coming into the Capital health authority to access acute care. We simply have to fund the deliverers rather than just by population. WestView do have some concerns on their funding. We've been working with them, and I think we've been able to deal with that.

Mr. Chairman, I think the chairman of AADAC would like to give the answer to the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan on addictions, and I will respond in writing to anything I missed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to respond to the question about the reduction in funding and what has happened to the addiction services. In the last year, '94-95, there was actually an increase of 18 percent in services delivered by AADAC, for a total of 34,948 admissions to treatment services. In the restructuring of the budget it was decided that administration would be downsized and that we would retain the frontline service and retain the funding to the funded agencies in the communities, so that was done.

The administration was rolled into about three departments where they had originally six or seven, so they have done a lot of tightening up. They are doing a lot of partnerships with community agencies. They are working very strongly with the schools and community services such as FCSS in smaller areas, so they are working very strongly in making sure that the resources go further. They did do a big cutback in media-type promotions, and they're going more now to community letters and pamphlets and things that are there and available at the community level.

You mentioned adolescents, and adolescents have been a focus for AADAC. We have the two treatment centres, one in Edmonton, one in Calgary. We have set up a panel to help with assessment of teens with special needs and to make sure that they're referred to the proper program. We have also participated in a lot of community activities, and you'll find that AADAC is

part of most of the planning steering committees for a lot of the things such as the teen fairs that they've had in some of the communities. They also work very closely with the Boys and Girls Club and those types of agencies.

They work with the schools. They have peer support groups in the schools. They have helped prepare curriculum for the schools. They follow children who have been in treatment back into the schools. They collaborate with the teachers, ensure that they are accorded, you know, the right services when they get back to the school. Both Edmonton and Calgary treatment centres have teachers who are seconded from the education system. So they have made adjustments to the programs.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that when the committee rises and reports, we report the consideration of the estimates of the Department of Health.

[Motion carried]

### Environmental Protection

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call upon the chairman for the special subcommittee, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to report on the meeting of the designated supply subcommittee on Environmental Protection. We met on the morning of March 12, 1996, at 7 a.m. On this bright and early morning we had 11 members: seven government, which included myself as chair, and four opposition members. We also had quite a number of ministerial and agency staff, who were involved in a variety of questions which were asked by both government and opposition members.

During a review of the business plan and estimates for Environmental Protection, the Minister of Environmental Protection and members of his staff provided the committee with supplementary information pertaining to our review. I'd like to thank the minister for his assistance in conducting our review. As usual, we found the minister and his staff to be accommodating and well prepared.

Mr. Chairman, the questioning which occurred was thoughtful, provoking, and very thorough throughout the three and a half hours we utilized. Overall we dealt with many questions, and the efficient and effective questioning as well as the time we completed it in I believe can be interpreted as the process of the designated supply subcommittee working well and providing members with the opportunity to ask as many diverse questions as they wanted.

During our time we concluded that the department's overall goals and fiscal priorities are in keeping with those of the Alberta government. We believe the department has made significant reductions and is continuing to look at better ways to do business, including an ongoing function review of all activities taking place in the department. Through this review the department will continue to identify new opportunities for partnerships, outsourcing, and privatizing while at the same time protecting the environment.

For example, the department is making significant progress in reducing administrative costs. The Alberta special waste management board has been eliminated, the Water Resources Commission

is gone, and funding for the Environment Council of Alberta was eliminated last year. Moreover, the Alberta special waste management facility has been almost completely privatized. These reductions have been possible because the department has focused on four key goals, which, when viewed together, make Environmental Protection an effective, performance-driven organization.

Mr. Chairman, the session held on March 12, 1996, at 7 a.m. was excellent. The mood was great, the openness welcomed, the co-operation genuine, and the effective method of finding out information was definitely an asset and was indicative of the time we spent on these issues. I would like to thank all members for their willingness to co-operate on the subcommittee, for truly being gentlemen throughout the entire meeting. I was extremely pleased by the performance of my subcommittee members and their efforts to fully investigate the 1996-99 business plan for the Department of Environmental Protection.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to participate this evening in the reporting on the designated subcommittee of supply for Environmental Protection. I want to start by thanking the chairman for her report and for chairing the meeting, but I do have to say that perhaps we weren't at the same meeting, because the minister's staff wasn't as prepared as I would have hoped they would be. In the designated subcommittee of supply, we had asked for and had been looking for – and all members of the Assembly here will appreciate this – from the Department of Environmental Protection a continuation from last year's budget and business plan document, A Better Way II, which contained a total of 31 performance measures, a number of tables with detailed information, a number of appendices with detailed information. We were looking, then, for the continuation of that information and the presentation of that information to come to us in the designated subcommittee of supply for that time period that we had.

### 8:40

I put the question to the minister that we were looking for that information and commented to him that in fact the business plan for 1996-97 looked a little thinner than it was last year. Mr. Chairman, to my surprise and to the surprise of my colleagues, the minister responded by saying that the business plan that was presented this year in the budget documents was not yet complete. On page 74 of *Hansard* for Environmental Protection he said, "Actually, we haven't totally completed our business plan." Well, that's what the purpose of the designated subcommittee of supply is, to review the business plan and the estimate.

I asked the staff of Environmental Protection if they could comment on the tables from A Better Way II – tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 – appendices 1 and 2, and various information about both revenue and expenses. One of the staff members for the government that joined us at the 7 o'clock meeting said, "Sorry; I don't have all the tables in front of me that you referenced." Well, that's exactly why we were there, Mr. Chairman: to get updated information about those tables and to get updated information about performance measures.

Now, the Minister of Environmental Protection says: no, no, no; we have not abandoned the performance measures that are necessary. The minister has assured us that the detailed business plan, the one that we will not get an opportunity to debate in this

Legislative Assembly, should be out shortly after the budget is passed. Well, that doesn't do us very much good, Mr. Chairman, because we need that debate in this Assembly today. It's incredible that the Minister of Environmental Protection comes to designated subcommittee of supply and comes to this Legislative Chamber and says: first of all, I'm going to ask for \$111,366,000 in interim supply on one piece of paper with no explanation and no accountability, and at the same time says: and when the budget is passed, then I'm going to release a detailed business plan. Well, the purpose is to do that in this Assembly and to do it here today.

We talked, Mr. Chairman, in designated subcommittee of supply about the reductions in the Department of Environmental Protection. The minister fully confirms that this Department of Environmental Protection will be cut by a total of 41 percent in its operating budget from 1992-93. The minister also fully acknowledges that there will be a total of 527 positions cut from the Department of Environmental Protection over that period of time. As the chairman of the committee referenced this evening, the minister continues with a plan that involves privatization, outsourcing, and any other way he can find to get rid of staff in the Department of Environmental Protection.

In referencing the number of positions that are going to be cut, I asked the minister how it was that he knew exactly the percentage of cuts that are going to take place in the business plan, how he knew exactly how many positions were going to be cut but still didn't know which aspects of his department were priority programs and which were nonpriority programs. That hasn't yet been figured out even though he knows the budget amounts that are going to be cut and knows the number of positions that are going to be cut. But he doesn't yet know which are the priority and nonpriority programs. If he doesn't know the nonpriority programs, how is it that he can, then, know the exact percentage cut and the exact number of positions to be lost?

His answer was interesting, Mr. Chairman. The minister has indicated that the target number of employees, full-time equivalents in the Department of Environmental Protection, has been set for him by Treasury. So we now know from the designated subcommittee of supply that the Minister of Environmental Protection does not arrange and organize his department as is necessary for the protection of the environment in the province of Alberta. Step 1 is for the Treasurer to announce to the Minister of Environmental Protection how many staff he is entitled to and for the minister to then figure out how to cope with environmental protection. The balance has been lost. What we are to be doing in the Department of Environmental Protection is finding the balance between effective, necessary resources and a way to balance the budget for the province of Alberta. In my view, it has now been skewed. It is entirely dictated by the Treasurer, and the Minister of Environmental Protection simply follows along and does the Treasurer's bidding.

If we don't know at this point what the nonpriority programs are – we do know at this point that the minister is fully prepared to privatize provincial parks. Not just campgrounds but every aspect of operation in provincial campgrounds is on the block to be outsourced and privatized. For positions in monitoring the minister has again fully acknowledged that if you want to know anything about environmental protection – air quality, water quality – all you have to do is phone one of the major industries in the province, and they'll tell you anything you want to know. Well, I think, Mr. Chairman, they ought to be phoning the Department of Environmental Protection to get that information.

The minister has clearly indicated he's prepared to outsource monitoring, outsource campgrounds, provincial parks and continue on that process. At the same time the minister is moving forward with a deregulation plan that has been structured so that it will not involve public participation, all done behind closed doors with private industry through the direction of Treasury. That's how we're going to end up with the Department of Environmental Protection. Mr. Chairman, I guess if anything comes of this, it's a question to the minister: why is it that the Treasurer and not the Minister of Environmental Protection is the one who decides how effective the department can be and how many resources are necessary for the Department of Environmental Protection to be effective?

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to take my seat. There are other colleagues who would like to address questions and comments to the minister, and I'll allow them to do that now.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to be able to say a few things and ask a few questions on the subject of environmental protection, which is relatively new to me but rather dear to my heart as I'm representing one of the areas that has the cleanest air, the cleanest water, and presumably the cleanest forests and land in Alberta, I would say. But I think there is a danger that all that cleanliness is gradually being diluted.

Nevertheless, I want to start, first, by kind of dragging an old cow out of the ditch here and congratulating the minister once again on his achievement of declaring Willmore wilderness park out of bounds to any development. I think that was done about a year ago. I'm sorry; it's the only compliment I can make the minister, so that's why I keep mentioning it. Once again with feeling; right?

Mr. Minister, there are a few other things that have not quite lived up to the expectations that you sort of created by the Willmore Wilderness Park Act. I'm looking at your goals, which purport to

contribute to building a strong and prosperous province by ensuring that:

- Alberta's renewable natural resources (air, land, water, forests, fish, wildlife, parks and natural reserves) are sustained; and
- high environmental quality (air, water and land) is maintained.

There is the assumption, of course, that the quality is still good, and I beg to differ in certain areas. I think the northern water basin resources study – I may have the title somewhat wrong – has clearly indicated that our waters are less than pure these days. So rather than just maintaining the quality as it is right now, I think I would like the department to aim for an improvement, which is apparently quite necessary.

8:50

Now, that is just the water, and I think the same can apply to the air. I know that in my home town of Hinton a great deal of improvement has already occurred by the minister and the government insisting on improvements in the air emissions of the pulp and paper plant in Hinton. Still more can be done, I think, rather than just simply accepting what has been done so far. I realize that a balance has to be arrived at. It has to be economically feasible, and there have to be certain demands that the government has to make.

"Improve the delivery of Ministry services to Albertans." I'm

not entirely sure how the minister intends to do that other than by contracting out and by allowing all kinds of corporations to practise self-monitoring. It sounds a little kinky. There's the assumption, of course, that they will do the best possible job. I'm with the old school, Mr. Minister. I'm afraid that if there were no police, I would occasionally exceed the speed limit, and I think that, particularly these companies that are interested in making a profit, even though they are good corporate citizens, they do not always stick to what is desirable from the point of view of keeping our air and our water clean.

I have another point here, Mr. Minister, that has to do with Special Places 2000. I've just received a letter from the Alpine Club asking me to use my good offices, such as they are, to urge you to make sure that Special Places 2000 will take effect in the Cardinal divide area near Cadomin. They tell me that it has been designated as such, but it hasn't been enacted for some reason. They asked me if you could speedily do that, because there are lots of encroachment of highway vehicles and so on, and consequently it is really being eroded there.

A question I have regards the missing integrated resource plan, and I've spoken to you before I think on an earlier occasion. There's an area between Highway 16 and the Berland integrated resource plan north of it, and that particular area has not yet seen an integrated resource plan. There are lots of developments taking place already under the aegis of equal tourism developments, and I really think that there is a need for a definition, for strict regulations as to what is in fact tolerable and acceptable under that label ecotourism, because there's more and more of that coming. I think we've got lots of room for it, but without any guidelines there are going to be all kinds of developments all over the area, and we don't need that, I think.

Mr. Minister, there are far more things. I haven't even spoken about forestry, but I'll leave that for a later day because my colleagues are urging me to sit down so they can speak.

Thank you.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**MR. WICKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep my remarks very brief. The Member for Edmonton-Roper wants to follow. I'll be very, very brief.

When I was first elected in 1989, I remember that the big issue when I went to the schools in particular and of course in the general population was the environment. Environment, environment, environment: that was number one. We seem to have gotten a bit careless. There were some corrections taken in terms of the environment, but we can't cool our heels now. When we talk in terms of the environment, we're talking in terms of a future that we want to leave behind for the generations of today, for Albertans, and we want to ensure that it's the right type of future.

I worry somewhat when I go through the budget documentation. I know actually a lot of people that used to work in the department of the environment that are now gone. There were a lot of retirements. There were numerous incentive programs to move people out, and of course we know hundreds and hundreds have been moved out. So your basic core group that is providing a service from the point of view of government has been slashed considerably.

I do have some questions specifically, and the minister doesn't have to answer them tonight. If he can answer them later on in writing, that's fine. I'd like some written detail on a question that

was asked here in the House dealing with the agreement that was given to log in Kananaskis Country. I'm sure the minister is aware of the agreement I'm referring to. It was raised by the Member for Sherwood Park, if I remember correctly, in the absence of the former Member for Redwater.

Also, if the minister can recall, it was prior to his time as the minister responsible for the environment, but he may have had a briefing on it. There was an agreement, a settlement made as a result of a project that was undertaken by some businesspersons, and it was scrapped because of the necessity of further environmental assessment studies and such. That involved the ice glaciers, and there was about \$800,000, if I recall, involved that the government had to pay out as a settlement, so if the minister can come up with some final figures on that.

The other question. I wouldn't mind just having an indication as to what type of inventory the department of the environment has when we talk in terms of the trucks that are required to cruise throughout the province. Secondly, specifically how many boats does the department of the environment own that are used to check the rivers, the waters, and so on and so forth?

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I'm going to conclude to allow the Member for Edmonton-Roper to continue.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

**MR. CHADI:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions with respect to Environmental Protection lie in the Tire Recycling Management Board. The questions I have relate to different constituents of mine that have contacted me from time to time, and this is a perfect opportunity to find out from the minister.

The revenues that we anticipate this year with the Tire Recycling Management Board appear to be \$9,500,000, and the expenses are around \$9 million according to the income statement in the estimates book of this year. There's a section in there that says, "change in accumulated net revenue," and the accumulated net revenue in this management board appears to be almost \$17 million. Now, am I led to believe that the management board currently has \$17 million in its bank account? It appears as though the net revenue this year, to be added to that \$17 million, is around a half a million more dollars. If that is in fact the case, that it would amount to around 17 and a half million dollars total accumulated to date that sits in the management board, what are we doing with the money that's sitting in the management board compared to what we are doing with old tires as well?

It seems to me that there are an awful lot of old tires that don't seem to get any attention at this point in time and that the new tires that are coming onstream are the ones that are getting the attention. The ones that are in storage sites, et cetera, are not being dealt with, and I'm wondering if the minister can address that, the issue of the old tires versus the issue of the 17 and a half million dollars that's sitting in the accounts. What is that accumulated revenue sitting there for if we're not going to be dealing with the accumulated surplus of old tires?

My other questions, Mr. Chairman, lie in the income of stumpage fees, in particular in forestry, but I take it that my time is up and I'll be contacting the minister for those answers on a private basis.

**9:00**

**THE CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

**MR. LUND:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I wanted

to thank the chair of the committee and members of the committee that met and went through my budget. I think that it was a good exercise. Of course, the opposition once again are huffing and puffing and trying to make some political points, as they did that morning, but in fact they did learn a lot. Those that came to learn learned a lot, and that's a compliment, hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Those that were there – it's unfortunate that you were unable to make it, because I'm sure you would really have appreciated the discussion that we had on forestry. When you want to learn some more about forestry and what's going on in your area, just come and ask me, and we'll be only too happy to sit down and discuss it with you.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Sherwood Park wailed on once again about some charts that he says are not available. It's unfortunate that he would drag in the fact that he's talking about some charts that are in the overall government measurements and books. It's unfortunate that he drags that in. Yes, I did say that these were targets. They were targets on the number of people that we were going to reduce by and the amount of money that we were going to be reduced by. Those were targets that we had taken to Treasury, and Treasury approved those targets. We will be working through – it's a very, very complicated department with all of the various line services, and we're finding it very difficult to reduce by that number and still maintain the very reason that Environmental Protection is here. So we're working on that.

I corrected the hon. member in the committee as well when he talked about privatizing parks. That sends out an image that we're going to somehow sell off the parks. Nothing could be further from the truth. I told him that at the meeting, and it's very plain in the transcript, but once again tonight he uses privatizing of the parks. We are going to outsource what we can in the parks, but I can assure the hon. member and this Assembly and the people of Alberta that we will be protecting the parks, and they in fact will be there for future generations in the pristine state that they are currently in, Mr. Chairman.

I guess maybe I'm speaking too quickly, because I don't know how many times in this House I've told the hon. members on the other side that currently and for some period of time at least 75 percent of the monitoring is done by the private sector. Did you catch it? Seventy-five percent of the monitoring is being done . . . [interjection] Well, one of the other hon. members has repeated the same thing again, and I've said it many times. This is not something new.

Yes, it's being expanded, better technology, better mechanisms. As a matter of fact, some of the new technology is just amazing, and you will see over the next five years some changes that are just dramatic. As a matter of fact, we won't even have to go on site in order to check about 60 substances that can be coming out of a stack. So that kind of thing is coming.

Then he made a comment about no public participation on the deregulation. There are different stages, Mr. Chairman, in this deregulation, and in the area of the administrative, no. It's administrative, but that does not affect our ability to protect the environment and enhance the environment. When we get into the more delicate regulations, then we are committed to some public participation. That will happen, but that's over a three-year period.

Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, I think the study that you were referring to is the northern river basins study. That study is one that's being conducted in conjunction with the federal government, the provincial government, and the Northwest

Territories. It's very interesting in that study, because in fact the preliminary reports show that the Athabasca River is in better condition now with the five pulp mills on it than it was before with the one pulp mill on it. So there's some interesting information coming out of there. There are some hot spots – there are four as a matter of fact – but we will be dealing with that.

He talked about the air quality emissions, and here we get back to this thing again, and I hear it constantly from the opposition: in fact, we can't trust the industry. Well, the fact is, hon. member, that right in your own constituency they are installing equipment in their plants to reduce the emissions. Their emissions are already below Alberta's standards, and Alberta has the toughest standards. They're voluntarily doing this. This nonsense that the companies are out there, are going to rape and pillage and spoil everything – it's absolute nonsense. That's not happening.

You mentioned the Special Places. Well, it is a process that is taking some time, and we're trying to move it across as quickly as we can. You talked about the divide by Cadomin. In fact, that's an ecological reserve. There is a management plan, and that's what the Alpine group were talking to you about: the management plan. It wasn't Special Places 2000. That is in progress. We all last year put up some signs that we're treating it in a different manner than we used to. We used to pass regulations. We now are trying to get the public involved, and we're going through that process. In the spring as soon as the frost goes out, we will be putting up more signs where the public can go and where they can't go and how they must access that.

Edmonton-Whitemud talked about logging at Kananaskis. Mr. Chairman, I'm afraid that I don't have enough time to go into great detail on that one, but the fact is that that area was licensed for logging a number of years ago. Spray Lakes forest products are putting together some cutting plans. It'll be quite some time before they actually start the harvesting there. I've got to compliment Spray Lakes because in fact they're doing it in a new manner. They are doing it in an ecological area, something that companies haven't done a lot of, and they're going to be looking at different forms of logging. So they are taking a very responsible manner.

You talked about the ice mining. Yes, there was, but that was concluded before I became minister. It was concluded I think in '92. The decision was made not to give them a permit to do any more ice mining.

You asked about how many boats we have. Well, I think it's one. I'll check to make sure, but I think we only own one boat. We do hire some.

The tire recycling board. In fact, yes, there are 17 million. [interjection] It'd be great if the Member for Edmonton-Roper would listen to the answer. I wonder: how do I get the attention of the Member for Edmonton-Roper? [interjection] I don't? Just to the Chair? Okay; I'll just talk to the Chair.

Mr. Chairman, currently there are about 6 million tires in landfills. There are about 10 million on vehicles on the road. Each year we sell about 2.5 million. Four times 2.5 works out to 10. It's just a little less than \$10 million, the estimated income. This year for the first time ever the tire recycling board is going to recycle about 2.5 million tires. So that's why the income and the expenditure are about the same.

The \$17 million that is in the reserve is gathering interest, but they've also set up some research projects. As I indicated, we've got about 14 million to 16 million tires that have not been paid for, and those are going to come into the stream someplace. So in order to handle those – in fact, I am just hoping that the \$4 can



begin to cover it. I'm afraid it might not.

With those answers to those questions, Mr. Chairman, there are a couple of comments I would like to make relative to my overall budget. Let me say that under the '96 to '99 business plan, our budget will be reduced by 20 percent for administration costs, and we have targeted a 14 percent reduction for program costs. This means a reduction of about \$10.2 million in administrative costs and \$40.1 million in program costs. Our total reduction for the '96 to '99 business plan will be about \$50.3 million. This is in addition to a spending reduction of \$22.3 million remaining from our '95 to '98 business plan, for a total of \$72.6 million by the end of '99. The total reduction since '92-93 is about \$117.2 million and a reduction of about 1,360 positions.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your patience.

**9:10**

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, when the committee rises and reports, I move that we report progress on the consideration of the estimates of the Department of Environmental Protection.

[Motion carried]

#### **Education**

THE CHAIRMAN: We have next, then, the estimates of the Department of Education, and in order to begin that, we'll ask the Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to report tonight on the meeting of the Designated Supply Subcommittee on Education.

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

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm sorry; your considerable voice is being drowned out by those who are not considerate. We would ask all hon. members who wish to carry on lively discussions to please do so, after they've cleared it with the Whip, out somewhere in the adjoining chambers, but not in here. It's impossible for some of us to hear the hon. member.

Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's hard to believe my voice can be drowned out by anybody, but we'll try again.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. MAGNUS: It is my privilege tonight to be able to report on the meeting of the Designated Supply Subcommittee on Education. The subcommittee was composed of seven government members including myself, four opposition members, and one independent. The subcommittee met for four hours on the dates of March 11 and 13, and I'd like to extend my special thanks to the Minister of Education and his knowledgeable staff on behalf of the subcommittee. Throughout these couple of days the minister, in particular, was articulate and thorough in his responses to all questions. I would also like to thank the minister in advance for his commitment to respond to members' questions that we did not have time to get to during the subcommittee meeting.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

The questioning that occurred throughout both days of the subcommittee meetings was, for the most part, thoughtful, probing, and thorough. It does not detract from the central purpose of estimates of questioning of the minister during the time period that we were going through this. Over the two-day period we covered a lot of ground, and just as a matter of recapping where we've been, I would like to give the subcommittee a brief overview.

Questions covered areas such as growth and enrollment, projections, budgetary assumptions, and the recording of revenue from fees charged. Under capital project expenditures we spent a significant amount of time. We had questions about modernization of existing facilities, new school construction, block funding and debentures on capital projects, just to name a few.

We also had questions about national and international education exchanges, student evaluation services, and diagnostic testing. Concerns about western protocol and the repealing of the GST rebate for school boards were also raised. Discussions surrounding school boards and councils, performance measures, independent schools, pension administration costs, the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, ECS, and many other topics were informative and, I believe, reflect the commitment of all members of the subcommittee to this new process. Obviously, the range of topics and questions were far and wide, again reflecting the usefulness and efficacy of this subcommittee.

I'm please to conclude by noting the estimates of the Department of Education were complete, and these estimates should not require further review by the Committee of Supply.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the subject of education I have a few questions for the minister. I've already, I think, heaped lavish praise upon the ministry on an earlier occasion for his decision to revert to the full kindergarten program. I do have a few questions for the minister on the ECS program, though, because it seems now that upon closer scrutiny, the funding has not been fully restored to the level that it used to be at before the axe fell. Mr. Chairman, if you could perhaps order the minister of social services to pipe down a little, then I could make myself understood.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Order. Order. That's uncalled for.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Whip. Oh, was that directed to me? Then I won't accept it of course.

Mr. Chairman, I will continue unabatedly. Still on the subject of ECS I was trying to make the point that the restoration of funding has not quite been up to the par it used to be before the axe fell. It is all the more difficult, Mr. Minister, because locally that amount cannot be topped up because of course there's no supplementary requisition to speak of. I'm sure you're totally aware of that. When you announced with a flourish that funding would be restored for 400 hours, it was generally understood that it would be on the old basis, not the old basis minus 2 and a half or 5 percent or whatever it turned out to be.

Another question on the subject of ECS. It seems to me that now you are prescribing much more than used to be the case the content by objectives for the ECS program, and if that is in fact so, I would like to know why you're not simply making the

provision of kindergarten programs mandatory. You still haven't done that. I think that one sort of follows the other. Then while I'm on the subject of ECS, Mr. Minister, I'd like to know whether you have even considered possibly increasing the number of hours and of course the necessary funding to 475 hours, because that represents half of the number of hours that an elementary student generally has, and the funding then of course could be half.

Now, there seems to be an assumption by the shortage in funding that somehow it is less expensive to offer a kindergarten program, almost as if the qualifications for kindergarten teachers are perhaps of a lesser nature, which view I know you don't hold at all, but that seems to be implicit in the lower funding that is provided, or perhaps the feeling is that it can be provided less expensively because the building costs are somehow less or the heating costs. I don't understand this. Perhaps you could clue me in on that score.

I've spoken about transportation on many an occasion, Mr. Minister. I simply cannot resist the opportunity once more to point out that there is inequity in the funding formula, especially as it applies to in-town transportation beyond the 2.4 kilometre range. I won't say more on that particular score except that, as you are well aware, many of my constituents and many other Albertans are fed up to the gills with having to pay transportation fees, which I know have not been implemented by you personally but one might say could well have been brought about sort of indirectly.

The credit funding. Mr. Minister, if you are perhaps wondering why I'm bringing up this great variety of items, I've just made several so-called education trips or tours to the east and the north, and I've gathered all kinds of impressions after speaking with school boards, school councils, teachers, students; yes, that's it. One of the items of concern was the funding on the basis of credits for senior high students. It was not that they actually found fault with the system itself. They can see the need in most cases for some form of funding.

What they said was, "We told the minister that we would pretty well be close to the provincial average no matter where we were," and that has proven to be the case after going through an enormous amount of bureaucratic work to send in the computerized data, to get them back with a request for clarification from the department, and send them back and forth. Finally, after about three-quarters of a year you find out that you are in fact for the current year being paid so much per student. That seems to be a very cumbersome way of doing things with of course getting the knowledge as to what your level of funding is so late in the year. It sort of was compared with getting mustard after the meal, but that's probably a bit of a Dutchism here.

9:20

Another item, Mr. Chairman - I'll just keep on going - is funding for disabled students. Whereas in the past I've often spoken about the need for more funding for moderately or mildly disabled students, this time I discovered that there's even a need for more funding for the severely disabled. It was explained to me thusly, Mr. Minister. The extra amount allotted for a severely disabled child is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$8,000. I think it's \$8,500 on top of the usual per student funding of course. I'm told that some of these students need a full-time aide, and I'm told that that amount of money absolutely doesn't even come close to buying the services of a half-time aide. So that was a problem.

Also, the problem is the way in which one has to apply for that funding. First of all, you have to get the student tested, and when

you're living in High Level, it is not so easy to procure the services of a psychologist. I'm sure you're well aware of that. It takes a long time. So after all the necessary hoops have finally been jumped through and the wealth of information has been sent to the department in order to gain approval for the suitable labeling of this student - and that means the release of the funds - again, we're into March. Then sometimes it turns out that the funding is not available. It's not approved. Then the school finds that they've been paying for the services of an aide, full-time or half-time, yet they're not getting the money. That, Mr. Minister, makes it very hard to budget and to live within a budget.

I have many more things, but I see my colleague for Calgary-Buffalo looking at me in an alarming fashion, so let me just come up with one final item here. I must once again compliment you for finally entering the sweepstakes of full or partial computerization in the schools and a connection to the Internet and so on. I give you marks for this entry, but, Mr. Minister, it is a fairly meek entry when compared to other provinces that have taken greater strides. I've spoken on that score earlier.

I just would like to emphasize what is in my view a great need, and I think I've mentioned it earlier, but at my age I tend to be forgetful. That is the delivery of services in an audiovisual transmission fashion so that rural students, too, will have the benefit of the wide range of programs and courses that are available to students in the cities. I think it's going to be costly, but I hope that you will encourage your cabinet, your government to authorize the funds so that we can truly be in the forefront of creating a one-tiered system for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I note from the transcript of the session on March 13 that the hon. minister hasn't had a chance to get to the AGT workplace school, and I wanted to encourage him to make that a priority the next time he's in the city of Calgary because it's an exciting experiment. That school's able to offer some really unique opportunities to the children who attend there.

Moving on, what I wanted to do was address the business plan summary on page 130 of the estimates book. What strikes me as being interesting is I go through that whole page, through the mission, through the goals, through the selected strategies - do you know what I can't find anywhere in there, Mr. Minister, are the words "public education." They don't appear anywhere in your mission or your objectives or your selected strategies.

The hallmark of public education is that all schools in the system are open to children without regard to the race, creed, or colour of such children. My concern is that we've got a situation here where we've seen a recent decision by the Edmonton public school board that gives me enormous concern, Mr. Minister. It's simply this. We've seen in 1983 in Calgary when this issue surfaced - and it was at that time when people like the Member for Calgary-Shaw, who was then on the Calgary public board or perhaps even chairman of the Calgary board at the time, and Rita Dempsey and Sheldon Chumir, the former MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, and a number of other prominent Calgarians were concerned with the proposal for a third Logos school in the city of Calgary.

There was a massive campaign in the city of Calgary to reassert the role of public education, and ultimately that view prevailed in

the 1983 school board elections, but, Mr. Minister, it seems that we have not learned from that experience. I think that you set up some safeguards to prevent a charter school being set up with primarily an exclusive religious-based program, yet we seem to have a big loophole or lacuna in the amended School Act, because there seems to be no means of stopping a Logos type school from now coming in and being accepted within the public system.

Mr. Minister, I want to know whether you're prepared in this session to deal with an amendment to the School Act that would prevent a school which may discriminate on the basis of religiosity or religious affiliation, whether you'd be prepared to put the brakes on to prevent that in the same way that you've taken steps to prevent that happening in the context of charter schools. I think that would be an important initiative, Mr. Minister, because as I've told you before, my view is that you're the minister of public education, and somehow we have to start talking about that. I'd hate to think that that's a dead issue, that now the role of public education is somehow seen as being something less important. I don't think we can afford to take that stand.

Mr. Minister, moving on, I want to focus on an issue which is very important in my constituency, and it's English as a Second Language instruction. I see the \$644 grant, and I see that your grant was based on the September 30, 1995, enrollment. You have a growth factor of only 0.8 percent. That seems low to me, and I'd ask you to give me some particulars as to why you came up with that very modest, very conservative growth factor. Tell me what your numbers are.

My understanding is that there are approximately 3,000 school-age children in the province of Alberta who can't communicate in English. These are native born children, so they don't qualify for the ESL instructional program offered by this province. I'd like to know if you agree or disagree with that number of 3,000 and, if you disagree, what your estimate is for the number of children in Alberta who have no currency, no fluency in English but who don't qualify because Canada was their birthplace.

The other matter is something Calgary-Montrose raised the other night, on March 13, and I'm puzzled by your response. We know the dropout rate for ESL students, particularly at the high school level, is easily double what it is for non-ESL students, and the minister will be well aware of the Forest Lawn high school study done by a constituent, David Watt, and Hettie Roesingh.

Now, your response is something that's not clear to me, Mr. Minister. You said on page 111 of *Hansard*, "Well, certainly we do, and we're trying to improve our co-ordination with Family and Social Services." I'd like particulars in terms of what this co-ordination comprises. What concrete steps are you and your department taking with the Minister of Family and Social Services to address particularly the unacceptably high dropout rate of ESL students, particularly at the high school level?

9:30

The other question, Mr. Minister, is something we've corresponded on in the past, and that has to do with teen suicide. We still have an unacceptably high rate of teen suicide in Alberta, and interestingly the suicide rate for teens who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual is easily three times higher than it is for straight youth. Now, I'd asked a question, and we had corresponded on the question of teen suicide and particularly the problems with gay and lesbian youth. What you sent me back was some information about teen suicide generally, but curiously you didn't identify one of the prime markers in this suicide problem. I'm interested in terms of what you're doing about it in 1996.

I'm sure there are other questions that people may want to put

to you, so I'll hold mine in reserve or correspond directly with you, Mr. Minister.

Thanks very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, rise to speak to the budget estimates for Education. An ongoing concern in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is the added cost of having your children educated within the province of Alberta, and it doesn't matter whether you're in rural or urban education. It's to do with transportation costs, and I know this has been raised many times in this House not only by members of the Official Opposition but also by members of the government. When we look at the level of taxation that we pay, whether it be through our property taxes towards education or through our provincial and federal taxation, I would suggest that that indeed should pay the full cost of education. To suggest that transportation is not a part of the education requirement I think is doing a disservice to Albertans. The bottom line is: if you can't get to the school, you can't be educated.

I grew up on a farm in a rural area, and even in those days it was part of the cost of being educated that was passed on to the taxpayer. It wasn't something that a farmer had to pay to get his child educated, paying that transportation cost. There certainly was a recognition that the boundaries for education acknowledged the most effective and efficient utilization of the transportation corridors to get your children to school.

The other is supervision. Why, when children can't get home in some jurisdictions, are there actually charges for supervision of that child during the lunch hour? It's all part and parcel of the educational system. Those children can't go home during the lunch hour. So there are inequities in there. When we looked at the pooling of our taxation to bring equity to the educational system, I firmly believe that this government didn't go far enough, that transportation and supervision should be an integral part of the funding of education.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to reply to some of the questions posed by members of the Assembly, and I repeat a commitment that I made in committee, that other questions I will as soon as possible reply to in writing.

There are four or five questions that have been raised at more than one time that I would just like to respond to, Mr. Chairman. First of all, as was reported to the committee, in the subcommittee meetings there were a number of questions raised with respect to capital. Specific items that were brought up I'll respond to in more detail, but I would like to answer a question that was raised with respect to how we arrive at those capital projects which are approved in any given year.

We have the School Buildings Board, which looks through the submissions which are prepared by school boards in this province, and that is, we do not create any of the proposals that come forward and we do not prioritize them as far as the local level is concerned. The School Buildings Board of course has to put all of this information together and make recommendations, make decisions on the basis of certain criteria. The three general

criteria that are used for school buildings projects are: first of all, health and safety concerns that are connected with the condition of building; secondly, they look at growth and enrollment, and of course those areas of highest growth and enrollment receive priority; and thirdly, they look at projects that are required because of program needs or the need to modernize. You can see by the estimates, Mr. Chairman, that the amount spent in this area was raised over what was projected last year. It of course is not an amount of money which would meet the over \$400 million in requests that have come in from school boards across this province. So the School Buildings Board carefully prioritized the projects, met the areas of highest need, and the decisions have been communicated to school boards.

The second general area – three or four of the questioners raised it in subcommittee and then again today both the Member for West Yellowhead and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan – is with respect to the transportation system. Mr. Chairman, a review of the budget report forms and the plans of school jurisdictions across the province indicates that a large number of school jurisdictions are able to handle their transportation needs without charging any fee. We have to acknowledge – and I will outline this in a detailed response – that we do have a formula for funding school transportation.

If a school jurisdiction chooses to offer a service beyond the minimum or maximum parameters of the formula and of the legislation, then that could possibly, yes, cost money, and they'd have to charge fees to balance their budgets. This is something I hope that school boards are discussing and sounding out their ratepayers on. As I understand it, that did occur out in the jurisdiction of the Grande Yellowhead school division, and a number of items of service which were beyond the parameters of the funding formula, which seemed to be okay in other parts of the province – but there was some additional service being offered there, and people had certainly become used to it and they wanted it preserved. That was an understandable phenomenon, but the overall formula is there, and I think it provides a sound basis of funding with respect to transportation.

The third area that I would like to comment on, Mr. Chairman, is that in the subcommittee there seemed to be considerable interest in the selection of our new Deputy Minister of Education. I just wanted to report a bit about the process, because these questions were raised there. The selection process for the deputy minister involved the selection of Price Waterhouse from a number of bidders or proposals as the firm to carry on the search. The selection committee was comprised of Mrs. Linda Steinmann, a former president of the Alberta School Boards Association; Ms Muriel Dunnigan, associate superintendent with Edmonton separate and a former president of the Conference of Alberta School Superintendents; and Mr. Jim Gray, who is president of Canadian Hunter Exploration. He's also a gentleman who has been involved in the Science Alberta Foundation and has been very much involved in the area of special education. So those were the three participants. Mrs. Steinmann as chairman is from Ponoka.

**9:40**

I'd like to comment on the question raised by the Member for West Yellowhead with respect to early childhood services funding. It is quite correct that the early childhood services restoration of funding was based on restoring it to the same level that grades 1 to 12 funding was reduced. We had reduced the basic instructional portion of ECS by 50 percent. We moved that back up to the previous amount less 6.2 percent, which was the same grant

reduction that was experienced out of general revenue funds for grades 1 to 12 support.

The other issue that was raised here is with respect to there being no ability to utilize other funding from the ASFF to support ECS, should a board choose to do so. Perhaps I misunderstood the hon. member's question, but a number of jurisdictions were able to offer 400 hours of instruction last year without charging any instructional fee. An example would be Edmonton public and Edmonton separate right here in this city. So it would appear, just by way of example, that there is flexibility within the funding framework to allow that to be provided as far as school boards are concerned.

The other item that was raised was with respect to going from 400 hours to 475 hours, and here, Mr. Chairman, I'm just a little bit perplexed, because I did get the impression through the last session of the Legislature and the one before that the Liberal position was 400 hours, over and over and over again. Now it's 475. Is it going to be 600 next year? I don't know, but it's an interesting thing to speculate on, I suppose. Anyway the 400 hours' funding is based on the approach that I just described.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to crediting enrollment units and that mechanism for providing funding at the high school level, I acknowledge the point that the Member for West Yellowhead makes, that, yes, there have been concerns raised about the reporting mechanism, its complexity, the amount of time it takes. We are taking steps to improve our system of reporting through the use of CD-ROM technology and our education information exchange, and we do need to work on improving that area.

As far as the area of disabled or high special needs students I think we have to keep in mind that the amount of funding that is available for each of these students that qualify according to the criteria does total in the neighbourhood of approximately \$13,000, \$14,000 when you put the basic grant and the special-needs grant together. There are, yes, Mr. Chairman, some special-needs students that need services that cost more than that. On the other hand, there are others that cost less.

MS LEIBOVICI: A point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

#### **Point of Order Questioning a Member**

MS LEIBOVICI: *Beauchesne* 333, if I might ask the minister a question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes or no, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, normally I might be open to that request, but I am moving as quickly as I can to answer questions of opposition members who, incidentally, were recognized before she was. So I'd like to continue.

#### **Debate Continued**

MR. JONSON: With respect to . . . [Mr. Jonson's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. minister.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that when the committee rises and reports, we report progress on the consideration of the estimates of the Department of Education.

[Motion carried]

### Family and Social Services

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

MS HALEY: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I wish to report on the deliberations of the designated subcommittee of supply that reviewed the 1996-97 estimates of Family and Social Services. The subcommittee met this past Friday morning, March 15, at 9. We used most of the time allotment to complete the review. Five Conservative and four Liberal MLAs participated in the review of the estimates.

The minister began the meeting with a fairly comprehensive review of the various elements of each program and provided information that described the reasons and makeup of the changes between the '95-96 forecast and what is planned to be spent in '96-97. I want to emphasize that the committee members worked very well together and that participants were very amicable.

Members took turns asking the minister and his officials questions about various aspects of the ministry's budget and its operations. Members from both parties were concerned about the people who require more help in our society. The minister and his deputy were very willing to discuss the issues and were very open and honest with their answers. There were questions about each of the programs, and they covered both the operating and capital votes. Some of the questions will require further research, and the minister and his officials have committed to providing written answers for budget-related questions to the committee members.

One of the areas that generated much discussion was child prostitution. Members from both parties agreed that this is a very complex issue, and there was agreement that members from both sides should meet to determine what solutions can be put forward to protect the children, who are in fact the victims in this criminal activity.

There were other questions about benefit rates and caseloads for all of the ministry's programs. The adequacy of rates and support that is provided to people in need was also reviewed. In addition to questions on benefit levels and government support, there were also questions about people's ability to access information from their files. There were questions about authority and responsibility of agencies that are contracted to carry out the ministry's programs. As well as reviewing the numbers, the committee members also questioned and commented on the budget highlights, performance measures that supplemented the ministry's budget estimates.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that this was an excellent and informative means of reviewing the estimates of one of the departments that supports one of the government's core businesses, which is people. Members are encouraged to read the *Hansard* report on the proceedings. I'd like to thank again the members for their participation in the review and to thank the minister and his staff for their willingness to answer the wide-ranging questions that were posed to him that day.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my overview of the subcommittee's deliberations.

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

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to report

on the delegated supply estimates from last Friday. Although four hours were allotted, we didn't get all of our questions asked, so I will ask a few more during the presentation. I'm pleased to report that the process was informal and flexible, and, as said by the chair, it was very pleasant actually.

The minister has offered to send written responses to our questions, and we ask if the questions asked by the government committee members might also be sent to us.

In regard to income supports, we're pleased to see a review of the levels of assured income for the severely handicapped is under way, and we would like to know the time frame of that review and when we can expect some positive changes. Unfortunately, there's still no indication that the government will review the abysmal rates paid under the supports for independence program.

The department has cut welfare caseloads by half. The stress on our social agencies such as food banks, crisis lines, shelters, and soup kitchens is debilitating, and all of the signs are there. If only the government had more compassion for people who have run into difficulty in tight economic times, in this tight economic climate, we would see that welfare rates more adequately reflected the real cost of living in Alberta today.

9:50

We have said all along that the cuts in government services were done too fast and too hard, with little or no understanding of the impact or devastation that the cuts would cause. We see from the Blues on page 11 how little understanding this government actually has when the minister stated: "Nobody expected the caseload to drop like it did. We did not project that, and it dropped beyond our expectations." How can we possibly have faith in a government that can implement a policy with such a poor grasp of the outcome?

I'm pleased that the government is looking into changing the long-term assistance for those unable to work. We have long maintained that it is ridiculous to group people needing short-term assistance with those who require permanent assistance.

Another issue was family violence, and it is a glaring omission in the budget, especially in the business plan. Outside of support for shelters, there was little mention of this growing social problem and what government is going to do to help reduce the number of families suffering in abusive relationships. It is no surprise that abuse appears to be on the increase, because poverty, lack of hope, and anxiety all attribute to family violence and abuse. If there ever was a social problem crying out for early intervention and prevention support, then family violence is it.

We wonder why this government wants to shove family violence programs into the new children's authority. The move doesn't make sense, especially for women without children, and we would like an answer to why that is being done. About 25 years ago when the need for shelters for abused women was recognized, a group of volunteers found a place and set up their first shelter. They didn't discriminate between women with children or women without because they recognized that both at times need shelter and support. I believe this is very much a backwards step.

Even the minister admits that 55 percent of the people who use women's shelters now are families with children, but that leaves 45 percent of women without children. These women are unrepresented under the children's authority. How can we expect a children's authority to have any understanding, let alone the resources given their other demands, to respond properly and effectively to an abused woman who has no children? According to the authority's mandate, they are to provide assistance to

children and families. So where does this leave women without children? The move is a terrible and offensive oversight and should be corrected.

In regard to child welfare, I was disappointed with the minister's remark that reforms have been misrepresented as wholesale privatization. The minister claims on page 27 of the Blues that all they are doing is "moving from a provincial level of government" to the community, to a different level of government, not to private agencies. But the communities are not going to be the sole service providers. They won't be delivering all of the needed child protection services, and they are going to have to contract the needed services out with the community, which will result in a form of privatization. Even the minister's deputy admits on page 28 of the Blues, "We're simply going to transfer [child welfare] responsibility to an authority that will contract the service out." It sounds like privatizing services to me.

As well, there was a disappointing silence as to the ultimate liability. For example, when something goes wrong and, heaven forbid, a child is hurt, who will be ultimately responsible? Where does the buck stop, Mr. Minister? If it is with your office, then why does not the enabling legislation spell out that the minister shall be ultimately responsible?

Also, we're still not satisfied with the government's response over the enabling legislation. We believe it's too fast, premature when volunteers in working groups and the steering committee members are still developing their plans. Despite what the government claims, many, many volunteers have told us that they have had no opportunity to even read the draft legislation, let alone provide input. We asked and are still waiting for a clear description of what the public responsibility vis-à-vis the private responsibility will be under the new child welfare reforms.

In regard to children in poverty, for years now we've been pointing out the statistics to the constant derision of members opposite over the number of children living in poverty. Countless studies and reports have pointed out the numbers, and still the government scoffed, so we were pleased that the government seemingly worked up to the problem and has finally admitted some recommendations to the Treasury Board in order to increase supports for children in poverty. We would welcome a chance to see these recommendations and offer our support and assistance.

In regard to services to persons with disabilities, the minister clarified some of the more contentious points in Bill 12, and we look forward to its debate. The Bill is still unclear about not allowing the foundation to spend money on operating. The minister had said that the foundations will only be allowed to put money into capital projects; that is, to raise money and to manage it. The Bill needs to reflect that, and I don't think Bill 12 does that. We also want to know if the regulations have been written, and if so, will the minister table them in the House? The Bill is so sparse that we would like to see what you're saying in the regulations.

Also, will the foundation have an income security role? That's of great interest. As well, what will the mandate of the foundation be in relation to other social service agencies? Because there are agencies out there maybe doing the same thing, if the foundation has the ability to solicit and raise funds, won't this be yet another competing agency for the shrinking charity dollars? Nearly all nonprofits that are currently out there are surviving on fund-raising from the community as much as on government funding. I would also like to know what percentage of the foundation budget will be provided by the government of Alberta.

In regard to performance measures, these are still inadequate.

We question why the government still can't set appropriate success targets.

In regard to tracking, we're pleased to hear that they're listening to the opposition and the Auditor General and are beginning to pilot a tracking system. We would like to know what the methods are of tracking and over what time frame. What information is being maintained? Will the minister provide the House or the opposition with updates as he gets results?

Mr. Chairman, I will take my place. There are others who wish to speak.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] I'm delighted that my colleague for Calgary-Fish Creek is interested in following the further questions I have for the Minister of Family and Social Services, and I encourage her to read the whole *Hansard* from the go-around last Friday, when we had a chance to examine the minister.

A number of specific things. The first thing I want to acknowledge publicly is the leadership demonstrated by this minister last Friday morning when he indicated in response to questioning on the issue of juvenile prostitution that he would be open to a bipartisan task force or group.

MR. CARDINAL: An informal work committee.

MR. DICKSON: An informal work committee he prefers to style it as. I applaud that initiative, because I think all members realize on both sides of the House that this is a serious problem.

Mr. Chairman, six of the seven strolls in Calgary are in Calgary-Buffalo, and I think that even those members who don't see this as an issue in their own backyard can recognize the importance of providing these children with the kind of support that they don't currently have. As much as I appreciate that, there are some things that we're not doing, Mr. Minister, that I want to follow up with. Because the session was last Friday morning and I don't yet have *Hansard* from that time, I looked back, but do you know what I found, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister? I still have the *Hansard* from the designated committee dealing with this department on March 11, 1994. What I found in looking at that is that there are still some unresolved issues that go back to that point.

10:00

The baby boy M case: this was a decision of Mr. Justice Mason of the Court of Queen's Bench that dealt with the adoption pipeline from California. Now, Mr. Minister, to your credit, you've taken some steps to eliminate the role of unlicensed agencies. You've taken some steps, but there are some other things you haven't done. We haven't amended our Domestic Relations Act to ensure that if you have a father in Oklahoma who thinks that a child he has fathered is being put up for adoption in the province of Alberta – there's no place where he can register his interest. I've suggested that in Bill 219, and I'd like to know, Mr. Minister: is that something you're prepared to do this year in the province of Alberta? It would give fathers an opportunity if they thought that they wanted to be involved in the raising of that child, some place where they could register an interest. So if there were an adoption application, they would get notice of it. It would still be up to a judge to decide whether they should have any further role, but at least they would know what was going on.

We haven't done that in Alberta yet, and I think that would be a nice complement to the package of reforms that have been brought in before.

The other concern has to do with something I'd asked on March 11, 1994, on page 65 of *Hansard* of that subcommittee. I was concerned about the high-needs area in downtown Calgary. What the minister told me then, Mr. Chairman – he talked about being “able to serve our clients better,” and he said, “That was always the intention: once we reduced the caseload, the high-needs area will require more dollars.” So what I understood is that we were refocusing resources. Well, there are few areas in this province that are more high needs than downtown Calgary.

When I look at the early intervention dollars that are going into that area, Mr. Minister, my concern at 3.3.3 is that we've got a substantial increase in the overall envelope of money, but when I look at the projects for the city of Calgary, it seems to be that one and perhaps two are going to have an impact in downtown Calgary. The other programs relate to other areas and other populations. Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask whether you've done an assessment to decide why no further dollars are being spent in downtown Calgary. Just for those who put a partisan slant on it, I'd say, firstly, I'm sure this minister wouldn't drag dollars on the basis of how people vote, and secondly, the larger inner-city area encompasses not just my constituency but part of Calgary-Bow, maybe part of Calgary-West, maybe part of Calgary-Currie. So if you take that bigger downtown area, the number of constituencies involved: still a high-needs area. Mr. Minister, I'd ask you to review your priorities because it seems to me that we're still not providing the dollars and resources that we need.

I'm still looking forward to responses from you, sir, through the Chair, to the questions I'd asked about why we don't have an access enforcement co-ordinator in this province and what you're doing in terms of the backlog in terms of those people trying to use the custody mediation program. In Calgary we still have a six-week backlog, and I'm interested in what you're doing, Mr. Minister, to deal with that.

I'm sure that there are other members with questions they want to raise in this area, so I'll take my place. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

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

**MS LEIBOVICI:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had the opportunity to ask a lot of my questions and to put forward some of my concerns with regards to the way the reforms in social services have taken place and the impact they've had on not only Albertans generally but constituents, my constituents in particular.

I did forget to ask about one technical issue, and that's with regards to the AISH cheques. It's my understanding that the cheques are to be provided five days before the end of the month. In actual fact what happens is that if the cheque is to be mailed to an individual, it is in fact mailed on the fifth day before the end of the month. However, if the cheque is directly deposited, that doesn't happen on the fifth day before the end of the month. That can happen on the third day before the end of the month or the second day. There seems to be some fluidity in terms of the policy. It's an issue for people who are depending on those cheques in order to then go out and buy groceries.

This situation came to my attention by one of my constituents who came into the office and asked for help as to whether or not this was happening. It was on a Friday that she came in, and she

was hoping that the cheque would be in the bank on the Friday. She had in a former life been an accountant, so she was very, very good with her figures. She was down to her last 42 cents. She said: “Don't worry. I've got some food left, but that means I won't be able to get any fresh fruits and vegetables this weekend. I had counted on that.” Her condition also required her to have some fresh fruits and vegetables. So that is a huge concern that the policy is that flexible, and that's what I would like the minister to answer along with some of my other questions.

Thank you.

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

**MR. WICKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just going to spend a few minutes on the budget of Family and Social Services. One question that many of us have is in terms of the reductions in the number of cases on social assistance. There is that ongoing fear that some of them that are going in for retraining and getting out of school – are there going to be opportunities, or will they simply shift back onto the social assistance roll? With the hardening of positions in provinces like British Columbia and Ontario, are we now going to start seeing an influx of many of the recipients of social services returning to this province with one-way bus tickets supplied by the other governments? I would hope that they're not tossed back and forth like that. I would hope that the minister – and I believe he does have a sense of direction with his department and some very positive things have happened.

Mr. Chairman, my major concern at this time is the plight of persons with disabilities that are very, very dependent on government. Over the course of 25, 30 years persons with disabilities have come a long way, and they've fought to find their rightful place in the community. They've said institutional living is fine for some people, but there are other situations where it doesn't work, and their preference is to be in the community, people like Ms Larsen, whom we've dealt with specifically in this Legislative Assembly, that the minister has met with. The minister has attempted to accommodate this individual.

Mr. Chairman, those persons with disabilities that are living in the community need certain resources to maintain a lifestyle. One of those resources is that monthly cheque, and that monthly cheque becomes less and less when it doesn't even meet the rate of inflation, plus there's a greater dependency on that cheque in terms of having to supplement some things that have been covered in the past.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, will the minister give us guarantees that those under AISH can expect to see some type of increase? Because they desperately need it. Desperately.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** The Minister of Family and Social Services.

**MR. CARDINAL:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by thanking the chairperson of the subcommittee for the excellent job she did, ensuring that the subcommittee members were given every opportunity to ask questions about the ministry's budget and numbers. I also want to thank the subcommittee members from both sides of the House, the government side and the opposition side also, for the excellent line of questions they posed during the review of these estimates. As I indicated to the members, if there are more budget-related questions that were not answered during the first meeting and also tonight, my officials of

course will be providing written answers to your questions. It is unfortunate, though, that the members from the Liberal caucus had to have so many questions tonight. I guess, though, that that's how their system works. I suspect research must have prepared their questions, because they had to read them into *Hansard*. If I remember right, on Friday we adjourned half an hour early. Therefore, many of the questions that were asked tonight should have been asked on Friday. I'm a little disappointed, but I guess when research prepares the stuff, you have to read it into *Hansard*. So we'll try and answer it in writing, because we won't have time tonight to go through all the answers.

#### 10:10

As I mentioned to the subcommittee, this is a good-news budget. The ministry will increase in fact its '96-97 spending by over \$26 million when compared to the '95-96 forecast while at the same time remaining on schedule to meet or do better than the spending targets that have been set for the ministry in each of the three-year business plans that have been developed.

You will notice also from the estimates that there are plenty of examples of success of the welfare reforms that were introduced in '93. These reforms have enabled the government to redirect funds to high-needs areas like child welfare and programs for persons with disabilities. I know that the question came up again tonight as to when we may review the rates provided for persons with disabilities. Of course, that's a very high-needs area, and definitely we are reviewing it. As long as we can maintain the reduced caseloads and have healthy Albertans working and not living off the system, then no doubt we will have dollars in the future for high-needs areas such as persons with disabilities and children's services.

I want to just basically take this opportunity to briefly recap the success of the welfare reforms. By implementing the major structural reforms of the welfare program, the ministry has been able to fund new employment and training initiatives for people who are able to work and want to work. In fact, more than 35,000 clients have been assisted by initiatives shared with Advanced Education and Career Development since March 1993. In addition the Alberta community employment program has created over 6,800 positions. The Alberta job corps has provided training spaces for over 1,400 welfare clients, and the employment skills program has created 2,800 positions for welfare recipients since April of 1993. These are all examples of people wanting to take positive action instead of passively relying on the welfare system.

That represents only phase 1 of the welfare reforms, Mr. Chairman. The second phase began in the fall of 1994 and was represented by the redesign of services for children and families that is based on four key principles: community-based services, early intervention, enhanced services for aboriginal people, and integration of services between various departments in the community. The third phase was announced in January of '96 and includes the transfer of the management of services for adults with developmental disabilities to the community. The objective is to strengthen the partnership with communities to better meet local and regional needs of persons with disabilities.

Regarding the transfer to the community of services to persons with disabilities, there are three components to this initiative. First is the establishment of a board to manage Michener Centre. This board will be established in the spring and will report directly to the ministry. The second component is the creation of a foundation responsible for raising funds to support capital purchases, pilot projects, and research. Finally, six regional

boards and a provincial board will be created beginning in 1997 to manage the delivery of services to persons with disabilities in a manner that meets local and regional needs.

Finally, the reduction of 129 full-time-equivalent positions for 1996-97 will be achieved mainly through attrition. Over the next three years the total staff complement reduction will be 560 full-time positions. At the same time, it is important to note that we are adding 55 new child welfare positions to meet program demands. This is another example of redirecting resources to high-needs areas while at the same time achieving the government's goal of increasing administrative efficiencies.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my comments on the ministry's '96-97 budget.

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, when the committee rises and reports, I move that consideration of the estimates of the Department of Family and Social Services be reported.

[Motion carried]

MR. DAY: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
head: **Third Reading**

### **Bill 11** **Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1996**

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I'd move Bill 11 for third reading.

MR. GERMAIN: Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly will recall that Bill 11 is a most peculiar Bill. It's a Bill that purports to spend \$2.7 or \$2.8 billion in total, and it purports to spend it based on a fractionization of the annual budgets of the Legislative Assembly for the various departments. There is no consistency in the percentage of capital expenditure versus the portion of the year.



During the debate last week, for instance, the hon. minister of agriculture kept suggesting that the fact that spring was coming was the motive to spend virtually 90 percent of his capital budget in the first 60 days of the year. Well, I understand how spring works and how it's seeding time on the farm in the spring and those niceties of the agricultural community, but I still do not accept that as a legitimate explanation. I want to suggest to all Members of this Legislative Assembly that it is simply wrong for us to pass that amount of money with that little scrutiny of all those estimates. Only the hon. minister of transportation rose to the challenge in the last debate and came forward and said why and how he had calculated his percentages and why and how he needed his capital expenditure.

I would urge all Members of the Legislative Assembly to take their duty seriously. This Bill is not a crisis Bill. We do not need to pass this Bill. The normal budget process will be finished and concluded prior to the 1st of April based on the nose-to-the-grindstone agenda of the hon. Minister of Labour and Government House Leader. So I would urge all Members of this Legislative Assembly to think twice before saying yes to this particular Bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

[At 10:20 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

