

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 12, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/04/12

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: Main Estimates 1999-2000

Health

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The designated subcommittee met on Monday, March 22, and it's my pleasure to report on that meeting. We met with the hon. Minister of Health and several senior officials from his department. Accompanying the minister were Mr. Donald Ford, his deputy minister, and Mr. Aslam Bhatti, the chief financial officer for the department. Members from both sides had an opportunity to ask questions of the minister with respect to the 1999-2000 estimates. We covered a number of topics, and I would like to provide a brief overview.

The minister informed the committee that total spending for the 1999-2000 fiscal year will increase by \$386 million, or 8.7 percent, over the current year's projected spending. That is a 15.1 percent increase over the comparable 1998-99 budget announced last year. The total spending in 1999-2000 will be \$4.85 billion.

The total spending for health authorities will increase by \$260 million from the '98-99 forecast expenditures, an increase of 9.2 percent. This will bring the total health spending on regional health authorities this year to \$3.1 billion out of a total of \$4.85 billion. After health authorities, spending on practitioner services is \$1.04 billion, or 21.5 percent of the health budget, and it's the next largest component.

Discussions ensued with members regarding the department's performance measures, regional health authority funding, population-based funding, and long-term care, and many, many other issues were discussed. In presenting the report, Mr. Chairman, I'm not able to deal with every matter that was considered by the subcommittee. This is just a brief, brief overview of the discussions that took place. I would encourage any members who are interested in reviewing the debate to check in *Hansard* for that day.

Once again, I would like to thank the minister, his officials, and members from both sides of the House.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. It's good to be here tonight to talk to the estimates of Health. The reason it's good to be here is that we're doing it within the Legislative Assembly and in this committee structure as opposed to being hived off into separate groups where we don't all get an opportunity to hear what is going on with regard to the budget and especially when it comes to health care. That is an extremely important area that needs to be addressed, and I'm sure that all Albertans would like to know that each and every one of their representatives has the opportunity to actually be able to address and hear the issues that are brought up.

Now, we did have a number of questions that we addressed to the minister. As of late this afternoon I had not received any replies. I hoped that there might be something waiting on my desk here today,

but unfortunately there wasn't. So it's difficult to know which areas the minister will reply to and which areas the minister will not reply to, but I'm sure that you all are very interested in knowing that we did not get a chance to ask all our questions in that two-hour period that we were provided with and that there are a number of other questions that have been provided and have been requested to be asked on behalf of Albertans.

Now, when it comes to the WestView area, we know that that is an area that is still in a large amount of turmoil. What we are now recognizing is that there may well be layoffs of frontline staff with regards to that particular area. The program number is 2.3.8. The question is: what is the actual deficit of the WestView regional health authority, and what is the actual debt? There seems to be a number of different figures that are floating around with regards to that particular area.

There's also an outstanding question from the Jasper ID with regards to a sum of \$300,000 that the ID claims are dollars that are owing to them, that the regional health authority and in actual fact the government, it's my understanding, has taken those dollars. Even though there were residences that were funded through taxpayer levy, in fact what is happening is that the residences as well as the moneys coming from those residents, including the rent, it's my understanding, is now going into the health authority pocket. Quite frankly, there is a frustration with the lack of response from the minister with regards to that particular issue.

There is also a question that pertains to WestView -- it would also pertain to the Banff area -- with regards to payment provided from out-of-country and out-of-province individuals who received health care within Alberta. Where do the dollars go? Do those dollars go to the individual regional health authorities, or does that flow into the Department of Health pot?

One other tidbit of information with regards to the funding formula, especially when the WestView area is being looked at. Part of the rationale for the funding, they are being told, is because of the high income levels that are seen out of the WestView area. What is not being taken into account is the high number of students and low wage earners. In fact, because they do not file tax statements within the WestView region -- most of them are from outside the WestView region -- if their earnings were taken into account, it would actually change the income levels and could have a potential impact on the funding formulas.

If I can just go back to Lakeland as well, we had talked about that in the last go-round. What we are now seeing is that frontline staff, contrary to what the administrator has indicated to the mayors and Reeves, are being affected and are being provided walking papers.

There is still the outstanding issue in the Cold Lake area with regards to ensuring that the water is safe, and even though Imperial Oil had written a letter almost two years ago indicating that that water was not safe to drink, this government is still dragging its heels with regards to that particular issue.

We still don't know what happens if a regional health authority submits a deficit budget and what, in fact, the minister does with those regional health authorities that still have deficit budgets outstanding. Even though we have asked for what those deficit budgets would be, the minister does not seem to think that that is useful information for the public to have.

I would also like to ask once again that the contracts, especially when we look at what is occurring with regards to the blue-ribbon panel recommendations, between the private clinics and the regional health authorities be made public. If, in fact, one were to look at the Saskatchewan legislation, which the Premier likes to allude to, the details of those contracts and the financial statements are made directly to the Minister of Health for those private clinics and then would be, you would assume, available to the public.

Physios. We are seeing lots of concerns around how the contracts are determined with regards to physiotherapy, how the billings are tracked to ensure that both the public and private sector are not billed for the same service. Now we see that there is a restriction provided to individuals who have need for physiotherapy in the Capital region and that restrictions are being provided again because of dollars.

8:10

We see -- and I have yet to see from the minister; as I indicated, that information was not available prior to my coming here tonight -- that Wellnet continues to receive increases. We have yet to see what the benefits are of that Wellnet service to the Alberta taxpayer.

There are questions -- again I would reiterate to the minister that this is very important -- from the individuals who have spent many hours fund-raising for hospital foundations in the past and currently. What has occurred with those dollars that were raised by volunteers, and currently what percentage of dollars raised by volunteers is being allocated to spending on essentials? Over and over again we hear advertisements for lotteries for various other kinds of fund-raising that is occurring through volunteer organizations, and more and more we're seeing that those dollars seem to be spent on essentials.

Are there any plans to disband Crossroads region 9 given the continuing conflict between Drayton Valley and Wetaskiwin concerning the equity of funding? That same question can be asked again with regards to WestView. That is a percolating issue. Until the minister resolves the funding, that question will remain in people's minds.

Some other questions on program 2.3. Is the government tracking admissions to hospitals as a result of private health care? That is an extremely important question that I will reiterate, because again as we see that this government's commitment is not as strong as the Official Opposition would like it to be to public health care, there seems to be a reality that it would be helpful to know what the rate of admissions is to hospitals, to publicly funded facilities from private facilities.

Acupuncture. I'd raised some of those issues in terms of the standards and who determines which acupuncture services are paid by Alberta Health.

I believe, though I'm not sure, that I'd asked for the budget for the Broda committee as well.

The Cancer Board with regards to wait lists and what types of cancers are being treated and what the differences are in the time for treatment between now and five years ago, whether there are increases in waiting lists.

I think importantly as well is the interconnection between the effects of the environment and health care. We saw today, I believe, that the northern river basins health monitoring study is being released, and the reality is that there are many questions that Albertans have with regards to the interrelationship between the different industries in this province and its effects on health. Whether we look at agriculture, whether we look at the oil and gas industry, whether we look at other kinds of manufacturing, there are all kinds of questions that are arising as to the quality and the effects on individuals' health of our air and our water.

Foreign physicians. I would like to know what in fact is the total dollar amount that has been provided to foreign physicians in this province and if, in fact, any foreign physicians who have been recruited have not received the re-establishment fee or their moving fee. If so, how many of those are currently within the system who were promised that they would receive an allowance to move and prior to them moving to this province were then told -- and there

are at least two cases that I am aware of, Mr. Minister -- that there was not enough money? So they paid out-of-pocket for their moving expenses and for their re-establishment expenses and have never been reimbursed. There may be many more out there, and it would be interesting to know how many and what the cap is.

Another question with regard to what the protocols are that are currently being considered to discharge patients. When we look at the standards right now with the drive-through deliveries, the drive-through mastectomies, more and more what we're seeing is that the protocols appear to be American based. If that is the case, if they are different in each regional health authority, then it would be interesting to know if in fact the Department of Health and/or the regional health authorities have considered different protocols that are based more on the provision of service as opposed to the making of a profit.

There is a question with regard to the future of community health councils. What in fact does the minister have in store for community health councils? What is the process that the minister is going to look at to review the boundaries of the regional health authorities? There seems to be a review that is occurring, but it is not a review that is standardized across all the regional health authorities, and it would appear that that in fact is something that needs to be done.

Another question. With the percentage of health care premiums that are paid by employers, what percentage is paid by individuals? What is the actual amount that is delinquent? We've had some press accounts of that. But the question also remains: why is it that the physicians have to be the ones that are penalized if the premiums are not in fact up to date and are not paid? It's my understanding that they do not in fact receive payment and in fact are out dollars.

There is a huge concern about operating expenses funded by lotteries and what happens if the operating dollars are not there. There is a question with regard to a report that had been done on ambulances: what has been implemented with regard to that report? What is the cost to Alberta Health of nonpayment of ambulance fees and private providers?

There are a number of other questions that I have as well. There are some pieces of information that the minister and his department may want to look at on page 26 of the Canada Health Action report:

That administrative data and standardized evaluation methods be developed to indicate whether the hospital system has off-loaded responsibility, and to signal an unsustainable shift to community care and families.

There are some other recommendations within those documents as well. It would be interesting to know as well whether in fact the Ministry of Health is prepared to provide information systems so that there can be "comprehensive data on health care consumer status, nursing interventions and client outcomes" and to know whether or not the best decisions have been made about the provision of services to patients.

There are a number of other questions that I would like to raise. My hon. colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford has a couple of comments to make, and after his comments I will then move a motion that the estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$85,000.

Thank you.

8:20

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep it very short. I've been here for 10 years, and one of the major concerns I've had is what's happened to our health care system. I've seen it basically dismantled, destroyed. I've watched the Minister of Health, and he's

been questioned time and time again: why will he not include a provision in Bill 37 or some other piece of legislation that would outright ban private, for-profit hospitals? Are we now asking the Americans to come in and try and fix a system that we've destroyed, or is the government simply saying that they don't have the capability to correct what was destroyed, so they have to call upon the private sector to do it? I'd just ask the minister: would he please stand up and tell us why he refuses to place it in legislation, to do the right thing and ban outright private, for-profit hospitals? That's all I ask, for that one question to be answered.

Thank you.

Ms Leibovici moved:

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on health planning under reference 1.0.16 of the 1999-2000 estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$85,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$4,828,785,000.

MS LEIBOVICI: As I indicated, I've moved an amendment that requests that the estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$85,000, that the references to the dollars provided to the standing policy committee on health planning be in fact deleted. The reason is that the standing policy committee on health planning, though the government likes to say that it is a governmental committee, is in fact a committee of Conservatives. Therefore, if there is a need for a committee of Conservatives to be set up to deal with health planning, then that committee should in fact be paid out of the Conservative party budget as opposed to the budget of the Legislative Assembly. If in fact it is a standing committee of the Legislative Assembly, then there needs to be representation not only from one party within that Legislative Assembly but from representatives from all the parties that are within the Assembly at this current time.

So that is the reason that I have provided that motion. Eighty-five thousand dollars can go very far to address some of the concerns in health care that we have seen throughout the past years.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to have my five minutes. My first few general observations in the five minutes, if I can make them. In this sitting of the Legislature we have seen Bill 204, of course, go down. Bill 204 is the Medicare Protection Act. As a member of the New Democrat caucus, I think that if it had been passed by this Legislature, it would have assured Albertans that the publicly funded health care system and the nonprofit system would be protected by the statutes of this Assembly and of this province. However, that was not to be the case because of the peculiar way in which debate on the bill was brought to a halt by using the procedural mechanism of reasoned amendment.

Talking about the estimates in particular. Although the minister has been quite insistent on saying that the new budget and the new reinvestment in health care will bring relief to waiting lines and will certainly help the health care system to expand to meet the growing needs and the existing unmet needs of Albertans with respect to their health care, I was informed just three days ago as a matter of fact, Mr. Minister, that one of the hospitals in this city, which had opened 16 beds only about four months ago, has found it necessary now to close 50 percent of them. So they are rolled back to eight.

I wonder if the minister knows much about it and how he would

explain the closure of these beds only recently opened in the hope that the new budget would help the Capital regional health authority to fund these newly opened beds. Why is it that half of those beds are being closed again, if that is indeed the case? I cannot confirm it, but a reliable source called me -- in fact I think it was on Friday -- that that is what has happened. This person who called me has a sister-in-law who works in the hospital and who is a nurse, and it is through that means that I learned about it. So I haven't had a chance to look into it myself. If that is the case, that shows how the new budget seems already to be falling short of meeting the very minimum needs for providing facilities that are so badly needed in this region and also across Alberta in other regions.

The issue of the Lakeland region has already been touched upon by my Liberal caucus colleague, and similar problems are arising elsewhere: the problems of impending deficits, prevailing and growing problems with potential deficits in these areas. This afternoon the minister in answering a question from the ND leader, my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands, referred to MRIs and how the new MRIs that are being installed by private clinics are responding to a need that is, he implied, not a medically necessary need. I want the minister to perhaps comment on the Premier's statement.

First of all, by not having enough MRI facilities around, there's a need created for the private clinics to invest in these expensive machines, and of course Albertans seek diagnostic treatment from these clinics hoping to avoid health catastrophes, you know, in their families and to their persons. Then once they're established, of course, that's used as an example of how these clinics are needed: they don't transgress or violate the Canada Health Act and are indeed needed, and people who even don't need them for medically necessary services should be free to, should be able to access these services. I find this contradictory logic. If there are enough MRI facilities available in the publicly funded health care system, there wouldn't be a market demand for the MRIs in the private clinics for which people pay \$850 or \$750 to get their ears or their brains examined, as the Premier was trying to suggest.

I have a question related to that. What's the . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] Okay. I'll conclude just with the last question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

We first must address the issue of the amendment that was moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark that the estimates of the Department of Health be reduced by \$85,000.

[Motion on amendment lost]

8:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Having considered the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Health, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$4,828,870,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Education

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll now call upon the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to begin.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to give a report of the meeting of the designated supply subcommittee on Education, which was held on Friday, March 26 at 9 a.m. I felt it was a very good meeting. We met for the full four hours, and each member had an opportunity to ask at least one question. In fact, any member of the committee that requested had a chance to ask their second question. Also, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore chaired a portion of the meeting to allow me to ask a question as well. With that, I thought it was important that everybody had the opportunity. Many of the questions that were asked during the meeting were answered by the Minister of Education, and he'll be tabling the answers to the remaining questions in the coming weeks. There were no recommendations that came out of this designated supply subcommittee. With that, I conclude my summary.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments about the estimates before I introduce an amendment. I think one of the sad things about the budget that was introduced on March 11 by the government, in particular the Education budget, is that it seems not to have gone very far in silencing the voices of parents and teachers and citizens who are concerned about the state of public schools in the province. Their concern doesn't arise out of particular shortcomings in a particular school but just the fear of what next September is going to bring based on the extrapolation of the budget figures to their particular school and school situation.

I think it's telling, Mr. Chairman, that before the budget was introduced, there was a group of parents who called themselves the SOS parents, three parents from Parkallen school who were concerned about the level of funding for schools, in particular the funding for contract settlements, for technology, and for curriculum change and school resources. They started the petition, and we as members on the other side of the House are filing those petitions in the Legislature. There were some catcalls and some quips from across the way that once the budget had been introduced, those parents would no longer have any concerns and those petitions would no longer be forwarded for filing. Unfortunately, that hasn't been the case. The SOS petitions continue.

These petitions are coming from all parts of the province, from Berwyn, particularly from Hinton, from Edson. They're coming from Vulcan. They're coming from Calgary. They're coming from Lethbridge. Across the province parents, citizens concerned with the impact of this budget on their schools and the schools in their district are signing that petition and trying to draw the government's attention to the fact that in spite of using the figure \$600 million time and time again, the figure for next September is 200-plus million dollars and that some of that money had already been previously announced. When you actually translate what is available in a particular school, the results can be rather devastating.

I had cause to read a letter from Edson earlier today, where the reductions in a local school there of 14.5 teachers -- they are looking forward to reducing that complement by 3 full-time teachers. If that's happening in one school, the letters we're receiving from other schools across the province with tales of equal tragic cuts I think have to be heeded. So the SOS petitions have continued, and I think it's an indicator of how this budget has not met the needs of children in our classrooms.

The e-mails, the letters, the faxes continue. I was reviewing earlier this afternoon a fax that had been forwarded to the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan from, I take maybe a former colleague but at least an associate, Greg Jeffrey. Greg in this fax points out that the funding is just not sufficient and that the pupil grant in no way makes up for the kinds of cuts that were imposed on the system in the past. He further comments that the education funding being about 10 percent below the national average and not much higher than places except for the Maritimes is really an appalling commentary on education in the province.

I ask: what consideration was given? An important question that I haven't had answered is: how was the budget arrived at? Who decided what amount of money was needed for schools to at least maintain the status quo to honour contracts, to buy new textbooks, to put in place the technology that's needed, and to provide the other resources that are needed to support teachers? How was that arrived at? My fear is that it was arbitrarily arrived at as an across-the-board percentage and then the rhetoric was built to support that number. If that's what happened, I think it's not worthy of people who work in the interests of children in our province.

Mr. Jeffrey in his fax to the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan went on to indicate that Rudolph Hennig school parents have committed to raising \$5,000 per year for the next three years to fund the IBM computer lab. The comment at the end of the fax is: it sounds like a user fee to me. A user tax is the term that Mr. Jeffrey uses. That, too, seems to be something that the budget estimates do not accommodate or seem to even address. We've raised the issue time after time in question period, before in estimates, but the whole business of parent fund-raising and the kinds of inequities that that fund-raising can introduce into a school system are really cause for alarm.

8:40

The government is proud to point at their attempt to introduce equity across the province, but by underfunding schools, they are forcing parents to move into fund-raising and are introducing a whole new set of inequities. Again the budget estimates don't seem to address that in any way. The silencing of voices that we were starting to hear before the budget was introduced and we got to examine these estimates has not occurred, and it's not occurred because quite frankly the schools are being underfunded.

A second concern that the estimates raise for me -- and it's not only part of the estimates, but it's part of some of the legislation that's being introduced in the Legislature -- follows on a quote from the Minister of Education in *Hansard* of April 22, 1997, and if I could just quote the minister at that time. Talking about the success of our schools, the minister said:

I think a great deal of credit must go to Alberta's teachers in this regard but also to parents and students, who are all very important partners in the education system in the province of Alberta.

At other times the minister has made comment on education as a partnership, a partnership between parents and trustees and students and those interested in public education, teachers, those professionals, yet the budget estimates and some of the legislation associated with those estimates seem to at least call into question what the minister means by a partnership.

If you go to a dictionary -- and I quote again -- a partner is one

who is united or associated with another or others in some action or enterprise, and then they use examples like a marriage. So a partnership brings into play a very close association, usually on a common project or a common enterprise such as education, and the language of partnership I think is one that those involved in education certainly support. The ideas behind a partnership are ideas that those involved in education would certainly support, yet it doesn't seem to make sense that those partners are excluded from some very important decisions.

I wonder, for instance, if the impact on the budgets of boards was considered when the proposal to delete the Board of Reference from the School Act was put forward as part of legislation. When that provision was proposed, how were the partners involved in that decision? It's an important decision, as we've all heard. I can't believe there's anyone in the Assembly that hasn't heard from teachers in their constituency and people who support teachers that the removal of the Board of Reference is an important action for teachers. My question is: were there provisions in the estimates for the increased costs that the removal of that provision is going to bring into play? Then how did partnerships come into play with Bill 20 and the deletion of the Board of Reference?

I wonder how the partnership and parents were viewed as partners when budget levels were set. What role did school boards have in setting those limits, in setting those per pupil grants? How was their partnership taken into consideration? How were they as partners considered by the government as they made up the budget that we have before us? Again, if you look at the number of letters, if you look at the amount of mail and the e-mail and the faxes that we're receiving, it seems that these were, if anything, silent partners or partners that were disregarded.

I would really be curious to hear from the minister how the minister can justify the comments in *Hansard* of April 22, 1997, about partnership and the actions in the budget and the associated legislation that has impact on this budget. How does he justify his words with the actions that seem to have followed? There seems to be a great discrepancy between what is said and what is done by the Department of Education.

I'd like to move on to a third concern. In the previous discussion of the estimates of Education, I had the opportunity to raise some questions about school-based budgeting. There have been a number of reports and at least two surveys conducted in the province that paint quite a different picture of the schools from the one that the government paints. One of those reports was a report compiled by the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Their concern is with the movement and the support in the budget to school-based budgeting, that much has been lost in Alberta schools, and that there has been a great shrinkage in the support of schools which is hurting learners in classrooms. It's also calling into question the viability of student learning in many classrooms.

They raised their concerns in a number of areas, but the loss of systemwide services is of major concern to them. The movement to school-based budgeting has meant that if schools are going to have in-service programs conducted by authorities, they must now band together and try to finance such operations, whereas in the past central authorities were able either through a staff of consultants or supervisors to provide that service to them.

They indicate that this is leading to schools becoming isolated islands of differentiated effort and experimentation and a lot of wasted energy. Every school running around searching for consultants and for support for in-service programs, every school looking for expertise on their own and really re-creating the wheel is wasting resources. That money that previously had been pooled is now fragmented across the school system, and there's no focus for the

school districts' in-service programs, for example. They talk of schools being isolated islands.

A number of other concerns are raised in their report, but it all goes back to this notion of school-based budgeting being blindly implemented without an evaluation of the parts of school-based management that make sense and the parts that don't.

I'd like to conclude with those comments and introduce, if I might, an amendment, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move that the estimates for the standing policy committee on education and training under reference I.O.12 of the 1999-/2000 estimates of the Department of Education be reduced by \$93,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$1,966,722.

The reason for the amendment, Mr. Chairman, is that standing policy committees are not all-party committees. They are government caucus committees, and we believe that that expense more rightly should appear in that budget and not the budget of the Department of Education. So I would make that motion. I believe that copies of the amendment have been distributed.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further comments on the amendment, hon. member?

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, again, would like to see if I can say a few things in the five minutes that I have at my disposal.

Last year the New Democrat caucus held public hearings in Calgary and Edmonton on education and heard from a wide variety of participants in these hearings about their concerns about the continuing and chronic deep underfunding of our public education system. The report was produced in September and was called *Voices for Schools*. The report certainly chronicles and details the actual nature of the concerns that people had, hoping that this year's budget estimates would be a way of addressing those concerns, and the minister of course was provided with a copy of the report. I'm disappointed to see the results that the budget has produced.

Two things I want to say about the budget. The budget obviously claims to have made a substantial new investment in education. That notwithstanding, we know that parents, school councils, and others have spoken since the budget has been presented. School boards have talked about it. Teachers have expressed themselves. All of these voices indicate that the proposed increases in education budgeting are nowhere near meeting the massive needs of the growing education system, in which student numbers are growing. The number of teachers is stagnant across the system or is declining. Student/teacher ratios are going up, and school boards are beginning to now bargain with teachers. The Calgary school board is a good example of it. In return for making some additions to wages, school boards are demanding increased class sizes and increased workloads. It's not surprising at all that that's what should happen. I wonder if that's exactly what the government expected to happen?

So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by saying that the budget certainly falls far short of the expectations that Albertans had of this government's commitment to increase funding for K to 12 of the public school system. Albertans have been making these expectations clear since the time of the growth summit two years ago. They said very clearly and loudly then that they wanted the government to make sure that our schools were adequately funded. So there may be a little more funds today for our public education, but certainly they're nowhere near being adequate to even go back

up to the levels at which schools were funded in '93-94, when those deep and brutal cuts were brought in. In '88-89 we were still about 14.7 percent short in terms of per capita expenditures in education in this province compared to '93-94 and by the year 2001-2002 will remain about 8.4 percent behind that '93 level. That says a lot about the nature of the so-called reinvestment that's being made in education in this province. We remain one of the provinces which lags far behind the provincial average in terms of expenditures per pupil. We remain one of the provinces which has either the highest or the second highest pupil/teacher ratios in this country.

So, Mr. Chairman, the budget estimates for this year are highly inadequate and create a great deal of dissatisfaction among teachers, among parents, and certainly create unfavourable conditions for students to engage in optimum levels of learning, and the capacity at which they can learn is curtailed by the conditions which are created by continued underfunding of schools.

So it is a rather disappointing situation that we find ourselves in, in spite of the new budget that we are going to be voting on this evening. I would certainly urge the minister to address these questions and address them seriously and answer these questions for all of us. We're asking these questions on behalf of Albertans.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Education, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,966,815,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	8,000,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Family and Social Services

THE CHAIRMAN: First of all, I'd call upon the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The designated supply subcommittee met for slightly over four hours on the morning of March 19 to review the business plan and budget estimates for the Ministry of Family and Social Services. The review began with the Minister of Family and Social Services providing a summary of the 1999-2000 estimates and the business plan.

This ministry's 1999-2000 budget is increasing by more than \$85 million to \$1.5 billion, or a 6.2 percent increase. This increase will primarily benefit children and persons with disabilities. It will also continue to provide employment and training programs to enable Albertans to become independent.

In addition to the bottom line increase . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we appear to have a number of intensive conversations in various quarters of the Chamber. I wonder if any of those important conversations that need to be concluded could be concluded out in the Confederation Room or in the back room or over in the other caucus room. Then we would be able to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Debate Continued

MRS. LAING: In addition to the bottom line increase the continuing success of the welfare reforms have resulted in savings of approximately \$32 million, which has been reallocated to other priority areas. These savings allowed the ministry to invest in such programs as AISH, child welfare, and services to persons with developmental disabilities.

9:00

The minister's budget review covered much of the major program areas of the ministry. In particular the minister highlighted various program increases including significant increases in funding for the AISH program, the services for children and families program, and persons with developmental disability boards.

The minister without portfolio responsible for children's services thanked the dedicated people across the province who'd been involved with the redesign of the service delivery system for children and families in Alberta. More than 12,000 Albertans contributed to the planning process resulting in the transfer of the management of child and family services delivery from the department to the 18 community-based regional authorities. The minister without portfolio was also very pleased to report that the Calgary Rockyview child and family services authority has been up and running and operating successfully over the past year. The remaining 17 authorities will be up and running during the 1999-2000 fiscal year.

The opposition subcommittee members were provided with two hours to ask questions and receive answers from the ministers. After the first hour the government subcommittee members were given the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers. The opposition subcommittee members each had an hour to pose questions and receive answers, and the government subcommittee members were allotted the remaining time.

There were numerous questions asked by the opposition members, and a significant number of these questions related to the business plan document as well as specific questions covering the budget estimates. The business plan questions dealt primarily with the ministry's performance measures as well as the new general indicators that are intended to give a high-level overview of what's happening in the social services system governed by the ministry.

The minister did a very commendable job of answering questions given the very large number and the long list of questions asked by the opposition members. The minister also provided explanations of the ministry's program and plans to meet the various needs and expectations of Albertans. Both ministers committed to review the numerous questions and to provide written answers to any of the budget and business plan related questions that were not answered during the meeting.

The government members also asked various questions, although their questioning was generally limited to a main question and two supplemental questions, which were then answered by the minister.

I would now like to make some general comments. During the course of the meeting two points of order were raised and settled, and a point of privilege was raised by the Member for Edmonton-

Riverview. This point of privilege was later on clarified by the member as being a request to introduce her assistant. This did not seem to be in keeping with the normal practice of this Legislature, which was the procedure to be followed in the designated supply subcommittee meetings.

On behalf of the designated supply subcommittee members, I would like to express our thanks to the staff from the Clerk's office who assisted with keeping the time log and with the interpretation of the rules.

Finally, I would like to thank the eight government members and the two opposition members for their contribution to the review of the ministry's 1999-2000 estimates and business plan.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, that makes for a lively introduction to the debate of the estimates this evening.

I'd like to thank the chairman of the committee for her overview and somewhat biased synopsis of how the debates in the estimates committee went. I will attempt to clarify for the record in fact the course of that debate and the substance that the opposition provided through their course of questions to the respective ministers of Family and Social Services and children's services.

I think to begin in fact it's actually quite unfair to characterize the debate in that committee as only questions and answers. In fact my recollection of that debate, that discussion perhaps more so, is that there were a variety of alternatives and other options proposed to the ministers with respect to their development and implementation of program changes in the Department of Family and Social Services. We spent a substantive amount of time talking about the development of social policy and how that will occur given the new allocation for social policy development in the budget and business plan this year. All opposition members provided some alternatives that the minister could undertake. So I think the chairperson does the committee a disservice to characterize it in the way that she did.

Further, I would clarify for the record that she has continued to misunderstand raising a question of privilege with raising a point of privilege. I raised a question of privilege in the debate, which is most appropriate, and that was simply to acknowledge the work of a member of the public service employed by the Official Opposition. I think that's perfectly in order and in fact should be more a practice in this Assembly, that the public servants that produce many of the debating notes and speaking notes that certainly the government members utilize throughout the course of the Legislature day -- never have I heard there be an acknowledgment publicly made of their assistance.

The reality is, Mr. Chairman, that there were lots of questions and alternatives raised, but I've received no answers. The chairman of the committee did accurately cite that the minister had committed he would provide written responses to the questions that had been asked by the opposition in the committee debates. Those answers have not been received by this member, and that's unfortunate because the reality is that that thereby puts me in a position and puts the Official Opposition caucus in a position that we are not adequately informed and therefore do not feel entirely comfortable in unanimously supporting the estimates proposed for Family and Social Services this evening and, specifically so, the proposed inclusion of an allocation for the standing policy committee on community services, which falls under the auspices of the Department of Family and Social Services.

This is a standing policy committee of the government that has an overlapping mandate, but a portion of the mandate relates to Family

and Social Services. It is comprised of only government members. In the budget plan of this year that committee was to receive \$80,000 for its operation. I would like at this time, Mr. Chairman, to move an amendment, that

the estimates for the standing policy committee on community services under reference 1.0.3 of the 1999-2000 estimates of the Department of Family and Social Services be reduced by \$80,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$1,469,279,000.

I believe that they are being provided for distribution to members of the Assembly.

Perhaps the preamble to the introduction of the amendment this evening, Mr. Chairman, is that really the fundamental question is: what contribution has this committee made to the Department of Family and Social Services in the last year? What actions have they taken? What recommendations have they provided? What reports have they produced? We are well aware that there have been significant changes in Family and Social Services not only in the last fiscal year but in the last five fiscal years within this department.

MR. DICKSON: It's a committee mired in mystery.

MRS. SLOAN: It's a committee mired in mystery, for sure, as the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* has said.

We have seen the department expend taxpayers' dollars to contract repetitively. Last year they did a private contract with Coopers & Lybrand to study the child welfare system. When they have a standing committee that is established and already paid for, I would ask the question: why is that committee not serving some role to advise the minister with respect to child welfare services?

9:10

Further, we saw over the course of the last six months the government again adopt the services of a private contractor, two in fact -- Equus Consulting and Angus Reid -- to establish what the public opinion was and recommendations were surrounding changes to the AISH program. Now, that whole process was predetermined. We know that because of the cabinet report that was published by the media. The reality is that somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$100,000 or more was spent to have Equus Consulting send out questionnaires, operate a 1-800 line, do consultations that were invitation only. Further, Angus Reid was contracted to do a select uninformed sample to construct, in essence, support for the asset testing component of the review.

I guess I look and wonder: what really does the committee exist to do? They seem to have no role in the process that I could determine. I may be mistaken, but I'm sure the minister perhaps took the budget to them for some input or considerations. If in fact they are serving the citizens of this province, it would seem to me that at the very least they should be providing a report to the minister on an annual basis: what submissions have they received; what recommendations have they made; what issues are they considering for further debate or input? The reality is that we do not have that type of report in the business plan, and it has never been a practice, in my understanding, of the standing policy committees to provide that type of report to the minister.

The AISH review is not the only example. We saw today the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* raise questions to the government surrounding hungry children. About 10 days ago the public report commissioned by the mayor of Calgary surrounding hungry children was released publicly. The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that I would dare to wager that the standing policy committee on community services has never spoken about the issue of poverty, that they've never talked about hungry children. We leave that responsi-

bility in this province to a municipal mayor to address. I quite frankly think that's appalling, and it's a waste of taxpayers' dollars to make an allocation on an annual basis to a committee that is not addressing the root causes in this province.

MR. DICKSON: In a transparent way.

MRS. SLOAN: In a transparent way.

The other huge area of change that's been undertaken and that we asked questions in relation to, substantive questions -- we did not receive answers in regards to the questions raised -- is with respect to the regionalization and privatization of children's services in this province. Just 12 days ago we had the regions officially established. Many have not circulated their business plans to any large degree, but they have been given formal authority to now deliver children's services in the province of Alberta. That again is a substantive public issue. It is something that I believe the standing committee on community services would have cared to consider, to have contemplated and provided some report to the minister on. The reality is, Mr. Chairman, that if that did occur, it did not occur in a transparent fashion, and it was not provided in a written form.

Further, we saw really late last month the release of a report surrounding income disparity in Canada but specifically citing the statistics in relation to Alberta and specifically Calgary and how the gap between rich and poor in the province of Alberta is growing. When that report was released, the Premier heatedly chastised the institution, the Parkland Institute, that had sponsored the conference at which the report was released and proceeded to subliminally suggest that that institute's funding should somehow be undermined. It struck me how arrogant that that approach would be taken when I have not seen a report from this government about income disparity, about the social determinants of health and how their program policy and budget changes have had an impact on the social determinants of health in this province.

So issues like housing, issues like income, issues like jobs -- and I'm not speaking about the casual, part-time, no benefit jobs that seem to be the trademark of this government. I'm talking about jobs that provide a stable source of income, some degree of benefit provision, those types of things. While the Premier in a very heated way challenged the author of that report and the institution that provided the launch for its release, the reality is that his standing policy committee certainly didn't contemplate the issue of income disparity. It would have been quite interesting, I think, for them to have actually invited the author of that Growing Gap report to the committee and heard what she had to say, heard the factual analysis the report provided and the specific Alberta component of that report. But that didn't occur, Mr. Chairman, and regrettably so, because I think in more ways than one the committee has really abdicated its role, its responsibility and therefore cannot reasonably receive an allocation of money under these estimates in my opinion.

The other reality that it strikes me is occurring within the Department of Family and Social Services -- and the standing policy committee falls victim to this, whether it's intentional or unintentional -- is that the distribution of information through which the public can analyze the changes being proposed, what impact they will have, how comprehensive they are, and the whole process for sharing that information seems to have gone terribly wrong within the department.

Probably the most poignant example of that was with the AISH review, and that error, if it's fair to characterize it as an error, could not have been made to a more vulnerable population, a population that rightly should have received more respect, more transparent consultation, and more input into the process. The reality was that

they didn't. The government predetermined what they were going to do, and then they began the consultations on the premise that they would market the changes that were going to occur. That is something where there again the standing policy committee could have had a substantive role, I would propose. I don't believe they played a part in the review. If I'm wrong, I'm sure someone will correct me, but I don't . . .

MR. DICKSON: How would we know? It's secret.

MRS. SLOAN: How would we know? That's exactly right.

In fact, I was at the forums in both Edmonton and Calgary; I did not see a member of the government at either. I saw one member of the government at the Calgary forum. One member . . .

MRS. FORSYTH: Which forum was this?

MRS. SLOAN: In Calgary, at Lindsay Park, on AISH.

So there are members of the standing policy committee -- the minister may have been occupied with other duties, but surely the members of this committee would have felt some sense of responsibility to attend those forums and give some consideration or recommendations to the minister on those things.

But the reality is that while it says community service, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that those members primarily come to that committee, receive their salary allocation for doing so, but they are by no means or terms to be confused with being actual advocates for the development of social or community or progressive policy in this province, because they aren't there, they're not activists, and outside of their own political framework they most certainly are not listening to what Albertans have to say about social services and social policy in this province.

9:20

So I would hope, given these thoughts, that perhaps the next agenda of the community services committee might in fact include an invitation and a presentation from the author of the Growing Gap. It might extend an invitation and receive a submission from the author of the hungry children report in Calgary. They might consider extending an invitation and receiving a submission from the Edmonton Social Planning Council in their development work with respect to statistics on hungry children in the northern part of the province. The recent Calgary homeless report is another example that perhaps the committee would like to consider for discussion and debate.

But at the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, given the fact that I have not received written answers from the minister to the questions asked by the opposition in the estimates debates, given the fact that the committee has not produced any substantive report of their activities or recommendations, I am not at this stage able to support an allocation to the standing committee on community services nor will I be supporting the allocations for the basic provision of services within Family and Social Services, because in my opinion there is a basic premise of democracy. That is that the Official Opposition has an equal entitlement to represent their constituencies, their electorate, and we should therefore be afforded the answers, the explanation as to why these changes and these allocations are being made. Regrettably, we have not been.

That is certainly most unfortunate, and certainly the minister cannot say that the opposition is in any respect just hot air because in fact we've produced, published, and circulated in this province I would suggest more reports and analyses in the past fiscal year than his own department has . . .

MR. DICKSON: Absolutely. On a fraction of the budget.

MRS. SLOAN: . . . on a fraction of the budget.

So with those thoughts and comments, Mr. Chairman, I am hopeful there will be support in the Assembly this evening for the amendment proposed, and I'm most optimistic in that respect. If we're truly here to serve democracy and serve all constituents, then I would suggest that hon. members would be strongly in support of the amendment to these estimates.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Family and Social Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,469,359
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Advanced Education and Career Development

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, this is not a designated supply subcommittee. Just to remind us of the rules, it's 20, 20, and five.

We'll call on the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development for his comments.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, tonight we're presenting a pretty solid investment in the future of Alberta. We have just over a billion dollars in terms of finances for adult learning, just under \$300 million that would be directed toward adult learners. Out of all this we'll take a miserly sum of \$16 million to administer all this program. Just for the record, this represents about an 8 percent increase in spending over last year. I know that the members will be interested, surprised, and excited to learn that we're up 25 percent over the past three years.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, and the fact that we know we'll receive great returns for that investment, I'll take my place and listen to the accolades from the opposition.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to continue making some comments and to raise some further questions about the estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development. I'd like to start with a concern that I think has been a major concern since the cuts to advanced education, which have been among the most severe, if not the most severe, of any of the

cuts to the government departments. That is a concern about accessibility, about participation in postsecondary education by high school graduates. I think there is no question that there's unanimity on the value of students continuing education past high school and the benefits those individuals bring to Alberta as a community and also to those individuals personally in having pursued advanced education careers and better preparing themselves for better jobs in the workplace. So we're all in agreement that, in this case, more is better. The more education you have, the better chance you'll have of acquiring a position and acquiring a position that pays a good salary.

So there's unanimity about that. What has to be a concern is the access. We have to be assured that every student, that every high school graduate in the province, regardless of the high school that they graduate from, has the opportunity to pursue that kind of an educational endeavour in one of our institutes, in one of our colleges, in one of our universities or into a career program of some sort. There are serious questions about whether that's now the case, that those institutions are in fact open to all Alberta high school graduates or are really a viable option for many students in the province.

9:30

I'd like to refer for a few minutes, if I could, to a study entitled University Accessibility in Alberta that was issued recently by the students' union at the University of Calgary. The students have gone to some great pains to survey their student body and to look into the problem of participation and participation rates. They came up with some rather interesting observations. Some of their comments, some of their observations we're already aware of, but they focus in on what has been this province's and the federal government's solution to accessibility. That solution they have named as student loans. The accessibility problem has been addressed by providing students with larger loans and increasing loan limits and increasing the amount of money that is made available for student loans.

They make some interesting observations about those loans themselves, the fact that those loans have "much higher interest rate than consumer loans or mortgages," that "student loans are not erased if a student declares bankruptcy," that the remission program actually affects "a very small minority of students," and that as a matter of fact the student loans do not ensure accessibility in the province.

They go on to give some figures that I think should give us pause to reflect; for instance, "the maximum a student can borrow for housing, including all utilities, is \$286 a month," and "the maximum allowed for food per month in Alberta is \$146." Now, I don't know about the young people in the minister's house and their eating habits, but I do know that for the students that I associated with at the University of Alberta and in our own household, when they were there, that \$146 a month came nowhere close, not even touching the kinds of food bills that those students could run through. The rate is the lowest in the country. It actually works out to about \$1.60 per meal.

They go on to talk about the impact on the loans if you have a job earning more than \$200 a month and how that is deducted from the loan limit, and they also go on to observe that student debt is at a record high. I'm not sure it's in this document, but in at least another document there are some comparisons between student debt load in Canada and their American counterparts south of the border, and it's dramatic. I believe the Canadian figure is something like \$17,000 per student, but the American figure is \$3,300 per student.

They go on to indicate that there's been a great effort by governments -- and again this isn't confined to the provincial government

but includes the federal government -- to put a positive spin on the use of loans and the use of the loans program, to say that this is a good thing, that this is an investment, that you don't think about it as going into debt, that to borrow money for an education is a very positive thing to do, which is rather curious coming from two governments who are so determined to not be in debt themselves for any reason. It's curious that they would see fit to encourage young people to do just the opposite. Nevertheless, there has been this positive spin and the notion that that debt doesn't affect student decision-making.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

One of the questions that the University of Calgary students posed was: when I think about the amount of debt I'll have when I finish and how long it's going to take to pay off, I have second thoughts about whether I want to continue my education. They asked their students directly: what does the impact of that debt and how much they're going to have to pay later have on their decisions about continuing their education? They broke it down into household income, and as you might expect, for parents whose household income was less than \$30,000, 29 percent of them strongly agreed that the debt would impact their decision on whether to continue their education or not. Another 28 percent somewhat agreed. So here we have over 55 percent of parents from low-income households saying: you know, debt does affect whether we're going to continue or not. That impacts their decision. Fifty-two percent of the students from household incomes of \$30,000 or less gave the same response, that they would have to think twice about continuing their education given the amount of debt that they were going to be required to go into and have to pay off.

Now, that changes dramatically. The table that the students provide shows what happens in households where the income is \$50,000 or more. There, not surprisingly, less than 30 percent, 29 percent of parents in those households say: we have some second thoughts. But, clearly, 70 percent of them indicate that debt is not a problem, the same with students from households of \$50,000 or more. Only 28 percent of them agreed that they would have second thoughts about going into debt for education or continuing their education. Again, for 72 percent of them, going into debt wouldn't bother them.

So when we look at participation and we look at accessibility and we look at the emphasis and the item in this budget that increases loan limits and think that we are somehow or other helping to deal with the problem of accessibility, if we believe the evidence of the students at the University of Calgary, then it's quite the contrary: debt and future debt greatly affect both parents and students in their decisions to continue.

9:40

One of the other things that the students did recommend and that is something that I think I asked for over the last number of years in advanced education budgets is for us to get some solid information on a number of groups, information that would look at the decisions made about postsecondary education by parents, by graduates, by high school students, and by postsecondary students themselves, those that are currently in the institutions. The University of Calgary students have called for an independent study regarding accessibility to university education in Alberta. They agree that we need to get a hard, solid pool of knowledge about the student body and what affects their decisions whether or not to attend or continue postsecondary programs.

They offer an outline of the kind of information they think is

necessary for the government to have on which to base future budgets and to base government policy. They feel it's important that the postsecondary graduates' attitudes towards debt be tested, that we have them look back at why they made the decisions they did about the programs they eventually pursued and why they made the kinds of career choices they did, and also -- and these are the students that are now out paying back their student loans -- what choice they had for repayment options and how those choices might have affected their decisions.

They would like some information, and I think rightly so, from parents of high school students and their attitudes towards the cost of postsecondary education in terms of the decisions they make about the choice of program, the decisions they make about financing their youngster's education, and about the choices and decisions they make about living arrangements for students once they enter a program.

They make a plea for a study of high school students, and this is one that I have asked for before and I think is particularly needed, that we have to get to high school students while they're in high school and find out the basis on which they're making their decisions to enter a postsecondary institution and look at those students across a wide range of socioeconomic classes and geographic areas in this province. We have to look at what decisions they are making, what they base their decisions on in terms of financing that education. When they are looking at living arrangements, what are the factors they consider important in making that kind of a decision?

One of the important pieces of information -- and it's been referred to in the University of Calgary study in a number of different places -- is the impact of work during their postsecondary experience. I know that there are some who have extended their programs for four, five, or six years because they're out working, and others who indicate that maybe that's a good thing, but we don't know. I think it would be valuable, if we're looking at tuition policy, if we're looking at financing postsecondary institutions in the long term, to look at the factors that potential users of those programs consider important when making their program choices.

They also -- and I think they have gathered a bit of the information -- call for a more rigorous and a more inclusive study to be done of postsecondary students that are currently enrolled in the institutions and again asking some of the same questions that they would ask of high school students; that is, on what basis did they make their education choice? What was the impact of the cost of the program on that choice? While they were studying, what was their employment status? Did they have a part-time job? What was the impact of employment on defraying program costs? What impact, more importantly, did employment have on their ability to complete their studies? The career choices they made: what were the influences on those career choices? Why did they decide to pick one career over another, and did the cost of programs play a major role in making that decision?

The length of study, how long a program is going to be -- a two-year program at a junior college, a two-year program at a technical institute, or a four-year program at a college or university. What kind of an impact did the cost of the program have on the length of the study programs they selected, if any? I think that's an important factor. I agree with and I commend the recommendation to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development to find ways, if there is not in the budget, to have conducted the kind of baseline study that the students at the University of Calgary deem to be important. Not only that, but I think the kind of information that they are asking for is the kind of information that every institution in the province would be interested in being part of and that every institution in the province would be interested in in terms of its

impact on the kinds of budget decisions that are made by local institutions.

I only have a couple of minutes left, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to comment about a couple of items that I'd mentioned before when we had our budget estimate discussions. I think the educational infrastructure has to be addressed. The \$400 million backlog, that's been mentioned by the Auditor General, is a problem that the government can no longer afford to ignore. There's some provision in these current estimates but nothing that goes towards the long-term program that's needed to make sure that the infrastructure that's needed to support students is there.

A second point -- I think it's an important one -- is the condition of the libraries at our postsecondary institutions. I believe that those libraries are the heart of and in large part make up the reputation of many of our institutions, and they have been allowed to deteriorate and to slip into a state of repair that none of us, I think, can be very proud of.

I'm sorry; I have a number of other items I'd like to talk about: enrollment, research, competition, and the kinds of impact the government's notions of competition have. But I can save those comments for a future date.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Within the very few minutes that I have -- five minutes, that is -- I would like to touch on a couple of points. In my last set of comments that I made on the estimates, I raised questions about the student debt loads, with the report of the average to be at \$18,000 here while for all of Canada at \$25,000. I would like the minister to explain this. Is he talking perhaps only about the provincial portion of these debt loads and not the federal one? Is he throwing the two-year colleges and the four-year programs together to arrive at this figure?

Anyway, it appears as if some new funding has been added to postsecondary education, but overall the allocations are quite disappointing. The use of funding envelopes, for example, continues to grow, which decreases institutional flexibility in operations. Funding envelopes such as the access fund means that this government is dictating which disciplines will expand. This type of central planning seems quite inconsistent with this government's free-market rhetoric.

Furthermore, there appears to be no significant increase to the base grants of postsecondary institutions. This is of significant concern given the erosive effects of inflation coupled with extra infrastructural pressure resulting from access fund allocation increases.

9:50

Also of concern -- and this is my central point -- is the direction that the budget indicates the KPI-driven performance envelope is taking. The Alberta performance envelope currently distributes \$50 million annually to postsecondary institutions based upon their scores and the key performance indicators. In 1998 top performing institutions received a 2.26 percent increase to their budgets as a performance award. The performance envelope is now partly funded by a one-half percent clawback of institutions' operating grants. A recent review of this program floated the idea of funding the performance awards entirely from budget clawbacks within the system. This would have the effect of annually redistributing funding away from poorer performing institutions. This would create a snowball effect whereby poor performers will see their

budget and therefore their ability to perform reduced each year.

The 1999-2000 budget estimates suggest this may come to pass. In the past the government has added \$50 million to the system each year in new funding to cover the performance awards. In 2000 this will be reduced to \$8 million, and in 2001 the government will be committing no new funding to the performance awards. Unless the performance envelope is to be phased out or new funding is to be announced next year, both unlikely, the performance awards will have to be funded by increasing the clawback from the base budgets.

This is extremely bad news for institutions such as the Grande Prairie, Fairview, Red Deer, and Keyano colleges as well as AVC Lesser Slave Lake. They tend to perform poorly on the KPIs because of Alberta's boom/bust economy. In order to achieve a top ranking, an institution has to have high graduate student satisfaction and high employment rates as well as an enrollment growth. During boom times graduate satisfaction and employment are likely high at these institutions, but enrollment suffers. Conversely, during a bust, satisfaction and employment may fall, but enrollments increase. This existing mechanism may structurally preclude these colleges from doing well. If the performance envelope is to be funded by redistributing base grants, over time the mediocre scores of the institutions, scores that they cannot control, will result in the erosion of their base grants and therefore their capacity to provide an education to their students.

Such a marketlike approach is inappropriate to education, Mr. Chairman. In a market, poor performers are driven out and efficiency increases, but colleges that perform poorly on government KPIs and suffer funding reductions can never close or relocate because of political pressures from local areas to keep colleges open. This system has the potential to ultimately erode the quality of the education these colleges provide. I would therefore want the minister to consider moving away from this KPI-driven performance funding model to a more reasonable one which will provide these institutions some cover and some protection during those bust periods as well as provide opportunity to expand during the boom periods.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, are you ready for the vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,374,742,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$66,000,000

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Carried.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. I'd like to move that the committee do now rise and report, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, for the departments and purposes indicated.

Department of Health: \$4,828,870,000 for operating and capital expenditure.

Department of Education: \$1,966,815,000 for operating and capital expenditure; \$8 million, nonbudgetary disbursements.

Department of Family and Social Services: \$1,469,359,000 for operating and capital expenditure.

Department of Advanced Education and Career Development: \$1,374,742,000 for operating and capital expenditure; \$66 million, nonbudgetary disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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: Second Reading

Bill 24
Traffic Safety Act

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mrs. Sloan]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of concerns with respect to Bill 24. I've listened carefully to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities in terms of defending the bill and justifying it, and I've heard the commentary by my colleague the critic for Transportation and Utilities. I must say that for the most part Bill 24 seems to represent a lot of very positive changes. I think the minister has consulted widely, and I think that seems to be well recognized. I think that there is a genuine effort on the part of the minister to make our roads safer for all of us and our families, and I think that's a positive item as well.

I think there are a couple of elements. I could go on talking about the positive elements in Bill 24, but I'm not going to have time, so what I would like to do is focus briefly, Mr. Speaker, with uncharacteristic brevity perhaps, on a couple of the items that give me some real concern. Since we're talking about principles, I want to refer the minister to section 88. You know, I was in Medicine Hat, which is a wonderful place to be on Easter weekend. The *Medicine Hat*

News is always an interesting thing to read to sort of find out about and to get a flavour in terms of some of the issues that are important to media in Medicine Hat. You know, the minister is doing even better research than I am. He probably wasn't even in Medicine Hat at Easter, and he's already got the clipping.

There was an editorial there by the managing editor, Gord Wright, and the minister maybe has even phoned him because he may have been concerned when he read the editorial. I just want to quote one brief paragraph because I think it's useful to share with members. [interjections] Just one brief paragraph. The minister can read in the rest if he wishes.

Here is Transportation Minister Walter Paszkowski talking about denying people their right to drive upon being charged -- not found guilty by a court of law but only charged -- with drunk driving.

It is not so much that Paszkowski can come up with a prize-winning piece of stupidity limiting the rights of an individual, it is that he can find others to go along with it.

10:00

Now, I understand there are many who think that the ability of a police officer to effect a licence suspension is a good thing, and I know there are some who will say the fact that now there's a 21-day provision rather than seven that had been discussed before is a positive move. But there is a very basic principle at stake here, and it's as simple as this: whether we describe the ability to drive and hold a valid operator's permit as a right or a privilege . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: You'd rather have a drunk on the road.

MR. DICKSON: I was trying to keep my comments short, Mr. Speaker, and we've got a minister of transportation that wants to be provocative. We can use all the 20 minutes. I was hoping to make my point as briefly as possible. [interjection] It's always fun to have the Minister of Justice engaged, and I'm glad he is, because actually one of my queries is for him.

There is a basic notion: whether we describe it as a right or a privilege, if someone chooses to refuse a demand to give a breath sample, that does not indicate guilt.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, it does.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, there may be members in this Assembly who believe in the infallibility of the justice system, in the infallibility of our police services and our police forces, and I wish that were so. But in the 22 years I practised law -- and I continue to talk to lots of people involved in the court system. I'm continually reminded that police are hardworking, well-meaning professionals, but, you know, they're subject to bias. They're subject to mistakes. Judges make mistakes. Different components in the system -- people make errors, make mistakes. But ultimately if your licence is to be suspended, let it be as a result of a judicial act.

I wish the minister of transportation and the Minister of Justice had spent as much time trying to provide an expedited hearing after somebody is charged with impaired driving or blowing over or refusing to give a breath sample as they did in terms of creating this kind of roadside suspension. The problem is this: for an awful lot of people in this province . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling
Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a few minutes past 10 o'clock. We have still not suspended the idea that in an Assembly, only one person stands and speaks at a time. The hon. members who seem to

be wishing to speak will be given their chance in a moment, but right now the only person speaking to this issue is the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. HAVELOCK: Does that mean we can't heckle?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: That means you can't heckle, hon. Minister of Justice.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: In any event, the concern is this. I'm looking forward to the other arguments to be made, but I simply start off with the proposition that if your licence is going to be suspended, it should be the act of a judge, not the act of a police officer on the side of the road.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Why not? Why not?

MR. DICKSON: You see, there are some members that don't make the distinction between refusing to give a breath sample . . . [interjections] Well, the minister of transportation is confusing what's happened in some other provinces with the fundamental principle that some of us still believe: if you're going to have your licence suspended, it has to be as a result of a judicial act.

MR. HAVELOCK: The judiciary has ruled that this is quite a legitimate provision. The courts have ruled on it.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hon. Minister of Justice, your turn will come as soon as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo concludes his, and the hon. minister of transportation of course is not able to enter into debate until the end because when he rises to debate, it closes debate on second reading.

Right now we have the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and no other.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: My deepest apologies, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister of transportation, no other.

Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In any event, my point is simply this, that we'll get in and we'll have an opportunity to debate what courts have ruled on this. I'm simply talking about a first principle that says you ought not to forfeit your driver's licence without at least a hearing before a judicial officer. We already have the ability for a police officer to suspend the licence of an obviously impaired operator. You can do a roadside suspension right now for a short period of time. That's important and that's appropriate, because if somebody's intoxicated, you want to make sure they're not operating. What this act proposes to do, though, is mete out a penalty. This has nothing to do with taking an intoxicated driver off the road on Saturday night. What this has the effect of doing is imposing a penalty on a driver . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: For being drunk on Saturday night.

MR. DICKSON: No, no. The driver doesn't have to be drunk. This

is what's interesting, Mr. Speaker. There are some people who are reading something else into this than is in section 89. This doesn't say that a driver who is found by a police officer to be driving in an impaired condition loses his licence. Oh, no. It goes much further. It says that if you refuse to give a sample, you leave it to the police officer to determine what's reasonable and probable grounds. Well, the reality is that the police officer that is presuming to charge an individual has already made his mind up. There is an entire body of law under the Criminal Code that demonstrates what's a lawful and reasonable excuse.

MR. HAVELOCK: To refuse to give a sample is grounds for revoking the licence. It's already grounds for revoking the licence.

MR. DICKSON: I know.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members. The hon. Minister of Justice will have his time. Let there be justice here in the Assembly, and allow the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue his remarks.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I think that if you addressed, as is the custom in this Chamber, your remarks to the Speaker and not to the individual you seem to wish to engage in discussion with, then maybe they would remain silent and attentive and await their turn.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely overwhelmed with the amount of good advice I'm getting from the front bench opposite.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: The point I would make is this. We have to expand our horizons a bit. We have people in here that are anxious to defend what exists now. We've got people in here that are anxious to defend what already exists in provincial legislation. What I'm concerned about is the provision that's being put forward in this legislation. I wasn't here when the original provision in terms of licence suspension was debated, and I would have argued the same thing then if I had been.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No suspensions for drunks?

MR. DICKSON: No. What I'm saying is that absolutely you take somebody who's impaired off the side of the road, but you don't mete out penalty because the police officer on the side of the road decides to impose a suspension.

MR. HAVELOCK: It's 21 days. You're giving them time.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the 21 days, you have a suspension.

MR. HAVELOCK: Then you prove your case.

MR. DICKSON: So what you've got is a reverse onus thing which says to a citizen: you now have to go and prove your innocence. The police officer on the side of the road makes the decision of whether you're guilty. You now have to go seek out the transport board to make your case, to try and demonstrate that in fact you're innocent.

Well, that turns the system on its head. [interjections]

10:10

You know, I'm absolutely astonished, Mr. Speaker. There are people in this Assembly who think that everybody charged with .08 is guilty, that everybody charged . . . [interjections] No, but this is what we've got. The men and women in the government of the province of Alberta are saying that they accept the fact that somebody charged with a criminal offence is proof that they've committed the criminal offence. So let's just shut down the court system. Let's just wind up the court system right now. Let's close the doors to the courthouses. We can save a whole pile of money. Let's get rid of the judges, and let's get rid of the Crown prosecutors. Let's lock the doors to every courthouse in the province, because we've given the power to police officers in this province. They can do it all. How convenient. We're going to save money, and we're going to reduce those vexing delays in the justice system. We'll have the scariest system of law enforcement that one can imagine.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to get tough on drunk drivers. Why is it that we've got a government that thinks one- dimensionally? Why is it that we're blessed with a group of cabinet ministers who sit there like a sort of holy chorus on the opposite side, that think there's nothing else but one solution to this problem? The reality is that if you want to make it tough on impaired drivers, what you do is ensure there's a judicial hearing within seven days of a charge. There's a whole host of things that you can do in terms of more aggressive enforcement of driving standards. This, in my respectful view, is not the solution; it's not the answer.

Section 88(2)(b)(ii) says that a peace officer

has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the person while having alcohol in that person's body failed or refused, without a reasonable excuse, to comply with a demand.

You know, in the entire time I practised law, I rarely remember a police officer ever thinking that anybody had a reasonable excuse to refuse to comply with the demand, yet time after time after time we found courts that said there was good reason why that demand was refused. [interjection] I'm going to send the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, from the Criminal Code annotation, a list of about 40 cases that offer good, compelling reasons.

I don't accept the fact that because a police officer stops me and asks me to give a breath sample, that means I've been drinking, that means I've committed an offence. [interjection] Well, you know, we have the proposition here from the Minister of Transportation and Utilities that the police never make a mistake. I think this is the most amazing assertion I've ever heard in the seven years I've been in this Chamber.

If the minister is interested in finding ways to address impaired driving, a scourge we all lament, then let's talk about ways that are going to work. Let's talk about ways of making our streets safer. This kind of on-the-road justice in fact leads to a very unjust result. I think it's offensive, and I think it's inefficient. [interjections] It seems to me that the more I hear the side comments from the minister of transportation and the Justice minister, the more frightening that element of Bill 24 is. We've got an abysmal lack of appreciation of the kind of justice system we've had and the fact that people are not presumed guilty. It's just a sad, sad day, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. HAVELOCK: Standing Order 23(h),(i),(j): using language to provoke debate, imputing motives . . . [interjections] Excuse me, but the hon. member has suggested there is a frightening lack of

understanding of the justice system on this side of the House. That's not the case at all. Where the frightening lack of understanding is with respect to where the general public . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

On the purported point of order, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my hearing is probably a little defective at 10:15. I didn't hear the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the point of order was merely a pretext for the hon. minister to make his point of clarification, which of course is not within the rules, but he's achieved his purpose.

So we would ask you to continue your discussion on Bill 24, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, you know, there are some who think the end always justifies the means. We have a whole history in this province of civil liberties of citizens that have been encroached, impaired, affected in all kinds of ways by well-meaning legislators who get caught up with a genuine concern to achieve some positive public good, but in doing so they either take a shortcut or proceed in a way that creates a whole set of problems of its own. I guess it's my respectful submission, when I look at the administrative licence suspension that's set out here, that the government has opted for something that they may think is politically popular, but hopefully in this Assembly we have the responsibility to do what we think is right.

There may be many who don't share my view of what's right, but I want to tell you that when I look at what's happened in Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia, I've seen legislators attempting in different ways to come to terms with the carnage on our roads. I think we can learn from those jurisdictions. I think we can improve the system, and I think we can find a way, Mr. Speaker, to be able to make our streets safer and reduce drunk driving but to do so in a way that respects the fact that we still have the rule of law in this jurisdiction. I think we do, although every time the Minister of Justice makes an observation, I start questioning that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing what amendments come forward at the committee stage, because I started out saying that I thought there was some merit in the bill. I started out saying to the minister of transportation that I think there may be some value in much of the reform that's in here. I would have expected that the minister of transportation would say: okay; I'm interested in finding a way to make this administrative suspension thing work. Instead what we see is a minister who appears to be sending the message that it's his way or no way at all: my way or the highway. Well, it may be appropriate for the transportation minister, but I think Albertans deserve and expect better.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The debate on Bill 24 has certainly been invigorating. I hate to be a spoilsport, but I must adjourn debate.

10:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You must adjourn? You move that we adjourn? Good.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has moved that the debate on Bill 24 be now adjourned. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, as much as I'd like to challenge the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I will at a later date. I move that the House do now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 10:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

