

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 20, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 04/04/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly a former high school classmate of mine and a former colleague of ours, Mr. Gordon Miniely. Mr. Miniely served the constituents of Edmonton-Centre from his election in August of 1971 to March of 1979. During his two terms as MLA he also served as Provincial Treasurer and minister of hospitals and medical care.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, with Mr. Miniely are his wife, Linda, and their grandchildren Alexander Youngblut, Rayne Davis, and Connor Davis. I would ask the Miniely family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of this Legislative Assembly a very special young man. Mr. Réal Gauthier, who works out of Vegreville, is in the public gallery. He is a nephew of mine and my godson. I have had the pleasure of spending a lot of time with him and would like him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of students from Rosemary school. They are led by principal Mr. David Blumell and teacher Mrs. Carol Gibb as well as parents Shauna Deschamps, Joanne Fauser, Tammie Cage, Bev Johnson, Vanessa Plett. There are about 13 grade 7 students. I believe that number's correct. I would ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 25 students, teachers, parents, and bus driver from the Mistassiniy school of Wabasca-Desmarais, Alberta. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd like you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Mr. Klapstein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 22 students from College Jean de la Mennais in La Prairie, Quebec, which is near Montreal. They are accompanied by their teachers Mr. Jerry Johnson and Ms Monique Mainella as well as four students from l'école secondaire Beaumont composite high school and their teacher Mr. Gino Salvalaggio. So as I ask them to rise, I would ask that the Assembly extend to them the warm traditional welcome of our Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 27 of central Alberta's greatest kids. I'd also like to say that they come from the school that was featured on the Premier's address on TV, the school of Benalto. They're accompanied by their teachers Mr. Kevin Frey and Mrs. Betty Brassard and parent helpers Mrs. Shelley Lambert, Mrs. Angele Downie, Mr. Tom Moore, Mrs. Danielle Venardos, Ms Shari Neis, Mrs. Brenda Mahoney, and Mrs. Rhonda Vick. I'd like them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Given the minister of health's speech yesterday in Toronto, a copy of which I've obtained, can the Premier tell us if his government is considering taxing the sick by charging extra to people who use the health care system?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the text of his speech, but following the speech, there was the usual scrum, and what I'm about to say alludes to what I addressed in this Legislature yesterday, and that is the propensity of the opposition parties to take something totally and absolutely out of context and use that as the 15-second sound bite because it sounds good.

The minister's comments, as I understand it, were given in the context of discussing health reform, and we all know that this government is embarking on a program of health reform. Now, I will say that the fact that the national media latched onto this one idea I think demonstrates quite clearly what I've been saying, and that is that people will focus on the easy, controversial sound bite rather than talk about health reform in the broader context. We just heard it from the opposition. He picks out one simple thing, one thing, one part of the puzzle. There are numerous aspects to this.

You know, I alluded to one time mistakenly – I will remember in the future not even to think, never mind think out loud, because if you think out loud, it becomes government policy. None of this has become government policy yet, but that's not to say that the minister can't think and can't mention and can't say: well, this is an example of what I'm talking about. Nothing wrong with thinking. The only people who are opposed to thinking are the Liberals and the NDs because they're not capable of doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this govern-

ment's policies have already led to higher health care premiums, higher electricity costs, higher auto insurance, higher tuition fees, how can this Premier justify policies that seem intended to charge people more for health care?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, no policy has been developed relative to this issue, the issue to which the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition alludes, or any other issue. No decisions have been made about what steps will be taken in health reform other than to say that we will reform the system. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has put out a program, a chronology of how he hopes to proceed in this matter. But let me be clear: as long as I'm Premier – and that could be for some time – no Albertan will ever, ever be denied needed health care because of an inability to pay. It's as simple as that.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Well, given that evidence from around the globe shows that user fees for health care are a failure, will the Premier do the courageous thing and rule them out as part of his government's health care reform?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if we start ruling out one item after the other, then we won't have the ability to bring forward a package to consider in total context what should be ruled out, what should be accepted.

Albertans know that as good as the system is, we can do better. They also know that cost increases of 7 or 8 per cent per annum are not acceptable, and they also know that the system as we know it today is simply not sustainable. They also know that we need to address fundamental and basic things like reducing waiting lists. We need to make sure that people get the care they need when they need it, and that's what our goal is. But we also need to achieve sustainability. [interjection]

Mr. Speaker, we didn't break a thing. I hear some chirping over there about breaking something. No. As a matter of fact, this province is being touted by other jurisdictions across North America and around the world as being the leader in health care reform.

Just recently I read I believe it was in the *Edmonton Journal* that probably we have one of the best heart programs, if not the best, certainly in North America. We see tremendous research taking place in a number of areas. We have committed ourselves to developing centres of expertise for cardiac surgery and bone and joint surgeries. We have state-of-the-art children's care, pediatric care, in the Stollery hospital, soon to be in the new Children's hospital in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, we are a leader in health care. The only people who don't recognize this are the Liberals, because they are by nature negative people.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Expense Claims

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On March 1 of this year the opposition sent a letter to the Premier asking basic questions about spending on travel and hospitality by him, his staff, and his ministers. Now, the Premier claimed it would cost \$6,000 just to provide answers on only six of the 23 questions. In other correspondence from Economic Development it's indicated to us that it will take dozens of hours and thousands of dollars to get information on other government trips. This just does not make sense. My questions are

to the Premier. When the Premier and his staff spend money out of their own pockets for travel, do they or do they not need to submit expense claims along with receipts so they get reimbursed?

Mr. Klein: When we spend our own money out of our own pockets, no. If it's for government business, I assume yes. I never do it. You know, I haven't done it lately. I can't remember in recent times. Someone else usually picks up the bill. I probably have used my credit card once in . . . [interjection] Well, someone usually picks it up, or else, Mr. Speaker, I just get a sandwich out of the cafeteria and I have a working lunch, which is usually the normal course. During lunch hour I try to have my workout and get a little briefing prior to question period, see what the Liberals will come up with in terms of ridiculous questions, so I can try to provide intelligent answers, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I did say that the government is evaluating whether we need to change the law and change the policy relative to the way expenses are reported and how we might do a better job in the future. We will announce in the future what changes, if any, will be made, and as I said yesterday at the scrum, I hope that the Liberals will be happy with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier and his staff use government credit cards on travel, does the government receive statements from the credit card companies?

Mr. Klein: We do receive a statement from the credit card company. My staff normally handles that, and I very seldom see the statements. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that if my statement were submitted today . . .

Mrs. Nelson: Would you read this, please.

Mr. Klein: . . . to the hon. member, he would find nothing for at least the last 10 months on my statement.

I'm sorry; what do you want me to read? Oh, the Auditor General's recommendation. Yeah. Notwithstanding the fact that we are evaluating the system and we hope to do a better job in the future, we can only be better than we are already, and we are pretty good according to the Auditor General, who says in his report, "We did not find any evidence of inappropriate MLA expense reimbursement and we concluded that the systems in place would generally prevent inappropriate payments." Now, that comes from the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

But as I alluded to yesterday, you know, expenses apply not only to the government, the \$27 jug of orange juice that worked out to about \$2 and some odd cents a glass, but they also allude to the expenses of the opposition members. You know, a member of the media asked me yesterday and legitimately so, although we don't FOIP as a rule as government – I don't know what the rules are relative to the government's ability to FOIP. The media brought up: well, what about the \$10,000 in travel expenses to go from Gold Bar to the Legislature incurred by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar? You know, that's recorded, but we don't get into the nitty-gritty as to what he saw along the way, who he was visiting, who he was meeting with and why. Only the Liberals want that kind of information, Mr. Speaker, but they don't want to give it themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the people of Alberta want this kind of information. So my last question to the Premier is:

why won't the Premier simply have his staff make photocopies of those receipts, expense claims, and credit card statements and make them public so that the Alberta taxpayers can see how their money is being spent? It's as simple as that.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we are doing a full evaluation of all this. [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. The Premier has the floor.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario government has frozen postsecondary tuition fees and provided compensation to universities and colleges for the lost revenue. That province is working with students, parents, and institutions on a long-term plan to provide adequate funding and affordable tuition. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Has the minister considered taking similar action to address funding and tuition concerns here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really do sincerely appreciate that question. I've taken a very close look at what has happened in Ontario. Ontario has frozen their tuition fees, but the Ontario postsecondaries are extremely worried about what is happening there because the Ontario government has not replaced the money lost in tuition fees. So what, in effect, we are seeing in Ontario is actually a decrease in the amount of funding that will be available for postsecondary institutions. Mr. Speaker, that is something that we do not want to see happen in Alberta.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: students here are clearly upset and concerned with yearly tuition increases. Why does the minister continue to dismiss their concerns?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, it is anything but dismissing their concerns. Over the past year I've probably had four to five meetings with the students associations, and as a matter of fact in Bill 43, as the hon. member knows, there was a clause put in that would increase tuition at a rate of the cost of living plus 2. This was actually a recommendation that came forward from the student groups in order to increase tuition at a rate that was manageable, at a rate that would not see any large increases. We still have the 30 per cent cap in place for those institutions that have not reached the 30 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. A cap that's no cap.

My next question to the minister: what solutions other than more student debt is the government seeking to keep postsecondary education in this province affordable? More debt doesn't do it.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, the student debt in Alberta has consistently gone down. We have increased the student loans that have been available, and it is very nice to know, actually, that for the first time the federal Liberal government is actually coming on board, saying

that student loans are a priority, saying that the student loan program is something that they're worried about and wondering about. I muse publicly: could it be that they will actually get a remission program like Alberta has?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Health Care Reform

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier admitted that he didn't want to release the Graydon report because he was afraid of opposition from this corner of the House. The Premier went so far as to suggest that I pledge to not criticize the report in exchange for its release. To justify the fact that his government is developing radical health care policy completely behind closed doors, the Premier is telling the public that they have to choose between their right to know or having an opposition that does its job. So my question to the Premier: can the Premier tell the House if health care reform will be unveiled during the legislative session, or will he wimp out and wait until a quiet Friday afternoon in the middle of summer, perhaps before a long weekend, when no one is paying attention?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there are some advantages to doing that, but no. Quite clearly the Minister of Health and Wellness has laid out a chronology. I don't have it in front of me, but the chronology is basically thus: we will bring together all of the information available to us, including the Mazankowski report, the Kirby report, the Romanow commission, and, indeed, the Graydon report, plus we will review best practices in other jurisdictions and determine why those jurisdictions in studies commissioned by the OECD are better than Canada. We will assess all of that.

We will form some recommendations as a government. Then those recommendations will be taken out for public – underline public – consultation so that the public can comment on what ideas are being put forward, what should be rejected, what should be accepted. So there will be full and open public disclosure of all of these recommendations, Mr. Speaker.

What I'm afraid of – it is a political reality, and I alluded to it before in this question period and, of course, yesterday – is that they will take things out of various reports, various scenarios if we release them one at a time and highlight that as government policy when, in fact, it is not government policy. Mr. Speaker, they have no interest in telling the public the truth. What they will say is: the government is thinking about doing this, folks; are you ever going to get mad about this because this is what the government is going to do. That's what they will say, and that's unfortunate, and that's why we will not release these reports individually.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I wonder: when did the Premier develop this phobia?

Given the fact that this government has released other aspects of the Mazankowski report with dispatch and shared its position with the public, what is it about the Graydon report that is such political dynamite that it sends this Premier scurrying for cover and coming up with lame excuses for the delays?

The Speaker: Hon. leader, you've asked three questions there. You're only allowed one without a preamble, so the Premier will take the first one.

Mr. Klein: It's not a phobia, Mr. Speaker. It is a legitimate suspicion or a legitimate feeling, based on my many years in politics, that this is what the NDs and the Liberals will do. They will seek out what is sensational to get that 15-second sound bite. That's the way they operate, and I've watched them through this legislative session. I've been around for 13 or 14 years, and I've seen the way they operate.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Straightforward question to the Premier: given that the Premier has indicated his belief that a major overhaul of the health care system is needed, does he not believe that this Legislature is the place to debate major health care reforms?

Mr. Klein: Yes, and there will be ample opportunity, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, to have that debate. I don't know what changes to legislation might or might not come about, but I'm sure that there will be some as a result of the reforms we are about to undertake. What those reforms might be I can't say at this particular time because I don't know. We haven't discussed them. We haven't brought the package together. There hasn't been the public consultation process. I'm sure that if any of those reforms require legislative changes, there will be ample opportunity, of course, to debate those changes in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, that has been done in the past. I recall a very prolonged debate over Bill 11, for instance, which ended up becoming law. Nonetheless, there was a full and public debate and some misbehaviour, of course, that we witnessed in this legislative Chamber. Nonetheless, there was a full and public debate, and I imagine that that will take place if, indeed, the reforms lead to legislative changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Canadian Wheat Board

Mr. Hlady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marketing choice for wheat and barley is an important issue for Alberta farmers. It seems inherently unfair and unjust that farmers in western Canada have no control over how they market their wheat and barley. I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development recently met with the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, the Hon. Reg Alcock, and I was wondering if the minister could advise us of the outcome of that meeting?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I did have the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting with the hon. minister. We had exchanged letters prior to the meeting. It was an opportunity to talk to the minister, to put the facts of our case forward: the fact that the Alberta government is not calling for the demise of the Canadian Wheat Board. The Alberta government on behalf of the producers – the majority of producers are asking for fairness – is asking for choice for our producers. We're asking that our producers be treated the same as all producers in Canada or at least the ones in eastern Canada, that do have that option now.

I had an opportunity to discuss the performance of the Wheat Board with Minister Alcock. I had an opportunity to talk about the election process, the way boundaries were set, who the eligible

voters were. I had an opportunity to question the board's role in wheat and barley marketing, particularly barley, Mr. Speaker, because they handle a very, very low percentage of barley and really control it. I did ask the minister to give a favourable consideration to our test market proposal, which I had forwarded to him previously.

2:00

We had the opportunity to talk about transportation, rail access, car allocations, and, Mr. Speaker, although no firm commitments were made on the specific issues, there certainly was an interest to discuss these issues further. I think we had a very fair hearing from a minister that is not locked in the past and is interested in fairness and choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hlady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: did Minister Alcock speak to the \$85 million deficit last year and assure you that taxpayers would not have to cover the Canadian Wheat Board losses this year or share with you a plan to pay off their approximately \$7 billion debt created by bad contracts?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, when we talked about the board performance, we did talk about the \$85.4 million deficit payment. I found it interesting that one of the first tasks that the new minister had to do was to write himself a cheque as the chairman of the finance or revenue board to cover the deficit. We did talk again about the \$7 billion debt that the Wheat Board carries in the concept of performance only.

Mr. Speaker, it is very upsetting to Alberta producers that last year when we saw some of the very best grain prices since 1996, somehow this board managed to run a deficit. Everybody should understand very clearly that taxpayers are on the hook for that deficit, and we should all be concerned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

BSE Testing Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government should consider a different BSE rapid test to boost the credibility of Alberta's cattle industry and improve and strengthen consumer confidence in the beef industry in light of concerns raised about the rapid test currently used by this province. My first question is to the minister of agriculture. Given that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and other international bodies have indicated that tests susceptible to false positive results could seriously damage consumer confidence in the beef market, why did Alberta adopt such a rapid test for BSE, which unfortunately can indicate a false positive result?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I saw the press release or news availability or whatever was put out by the hon. member opposite, I was disappointed that he hadn't picked up the phone and called because I think I could have saved him a lot of time in giving him the information.

First of all, I will remind him that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency approved the use of the rapid test, the Bio-Rad test, in Alberta. They approved the laboratory upgradings that occurred, that this government expended to do with no assistance from anywhere else. They approved the level of training of our staff in that laboratory.

What I would have explained to him was that there is a very good reason for using that particular test in Alberta, whereas it may not be applicable in other parts of our country or others. The Bio-Rad test is capable of testing for chronic wasting disease, for scrapie in sheep, and BSE in cattle, and because it is capable of doing those three things and we test for those three things, we use that test in Alberta with the approval of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Mr. Speaker, if there is a false positive, it is quickly run on the gold test, which is the standard test, that takes three or four days. We're not afraid of that. I have not seen where somebody is concerned that this is an issue in credibility. Everybody who knows the science of this understands the tests that we use, understands that when we use a rapid test, if there is a false positive, it is again tested with the gold test.

So next time you come upon something and you think, "Wow; have I found something here?" give us a call, because I'd be happy to give you the information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the *New York Times* in an editorial on Sunday – and this was and still is our largest trading partner in the export of beef – expressed a concern over the use of false positives in rapid BSE testing and what it can do to consumer confidence, why is this government continuing with the rapid test when there are better tests on the market?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, there is a distinct difference between this caucus and that caucus. There's no question. We don't use the *New York Times* or other papers' editorials. We read them; it's important to have information. But when you want to deal with the science of this, you go to the scientists.

We have the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in our country, that is respected throughout the world. They make the determinations. They do the studies on these tests. We studied three tests of the rapid variety. We did it in consultation with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. When the Minister of Infrastructure did the upgrading to our labs, we did that in consultation with our Canadian Food Inspection Agency. When we did the cross-training of our staff to ensure that they could read these tests appropriately, we did that with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

I would suggest to this hon. member that if he has questions on what we're doing, he should contact the Canadian Food Inspection Agency rather than the *New York Times*.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I have contacted the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Given that we have in this country a standard identification system for cattle, why can we not have a standard system for rapid testing of BSE?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I answered that in my first question. If we could sort of go from question/answer, question/answer, and if the question that he was going to ask has already been answered, maybe to a new one.

I have explained that in Alberta we test for scrapie, for chronic wasting disease, and for BSE. In other provinces in the country they may not do that. We have a standard that is nationally set, and our test meets that standard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Armed Forces Personnel

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the proud home of many Canadian soldiers and police officers who are risking their lives and leaving their families behind while serving in high- and moderate-risk operational missions in the theatres of war. The list of turbulent places where our troops are present at this time is astonishing, and it includes Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Kuwait, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, East Timor, Guinea, and Jordan.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll be really patient, but you try and get to a question, because as far as I know, Alberta has no armed forces.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, Alberta is home to Canadian armed forces who are serving in these theatres of war.

While these brave Canadians are abroad, their families are not always as well taken care of as they definitely should be. To the Minister of Revenue: would the minister consider granting all Alberta-stationed military personnel and police personnel serving abroad in a recognized mission complete absolution from provincial income tax for the duration of such a mission?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first state that this question is very pertinent with regard to today. We have many Albertans that do serve presently, right now, overseas, many of our military personnel. Even recently there was an announcement of another 600 troops from the Edmonton Garrison that'll be going overseas to Afghanistan shortly. Recently the federal government made some announcements.

But I've got to first state that it is important that we as Albertans, despite that it's the federal government's responsibility, are very proud of those that serve in the military from this area. They do a tremendous job in preserving the liberties that we enjoy right here in Canada, and we thank them for their tremendous service.

The federal government recently in their budget announced that they were going to provide an exemption in their personal income whereby they wouldn't pay any federal income tax. We are waiting for clarification on that issue as to seeing how that impacted our provincial income tax, and we are pleased to clarify that they automatically also qualify by that exemption to not pay provincial income taxes.

2:10

We actually have an agreement. The hon. Minister of Finance worked hard with the federal Minister of Finance with respect to a tax collection agreement. In that agreement we have complied with the definition of the calculation of taxable income. If their income is exempt for federal income tax purposes, it is also, therefore, exempt for provincial income tax purposes. So as soon as the federal government implements these changes, that will automatically flow through to those same military personnel now serving overseas.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human

Resources and Employment: since many of the previously mentioned Canadians are Alberta reservists who also hold regular civilian employment, will the minister consider securing their civilian employment upon their return to Alberta in a manner similar to which we secure employment for maternity and paternity leaves?

Mr. Dunford: Yeah, I think that we would be prepared to take a look at that. Certainly, many collective agreements currently in place, Mr. Speaker, provide provisions for what happens in terms of a reservist when they're called into a theatre of war.

I might add – and I thank the hon. member for the question – that it was something like 17 or 18 years ago that I had an opportunity to change a policy within a company I worked for in order to provide just exactly what the member is asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: No more. Thank you.

Stucco Wall Systems

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned that stucco wall systems are not being constructed in accordance with the building code, placing immediate and long-term health and safety risks on Alberta homeowners. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that the stucco and home-building industries freely confess that they have long been ignoring the minimum stucco wall thickness of 19 millimetres laid out in the Alberta building code, what is this ministry going to do to enforce compliance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not aware of the particular situation, but I am aware of this: for those of us in this Assembly that have stucco homes, we want to make sure that our homes are at the highest standard. That is something that the Alberta safety code does certainly assure Albertans, and we continue to work towards that. So in answer to the hon. member's question, we are going to ensure that the safest and the best protection for Albertans is always there regarding the Alberta safety code.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why is this ministry allowing the stucco and home-building industries to implement their own industry standard despite the fact that there is no scientific evidence to prove that this practice will not harm Alberta homeowners in the long term?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm not a carpenter. My wife tells me I'm not a carpenter, but I do know this. We want to ensure that whatever the product is we're using on our building, we want to do the best job possible. I can say to the hon. member that if there is a particular example where there is a relative concern, I'd be certainly willing to work with him to ensure that compliance of what we want to achieve in Alberta.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister: how many complaints of noncompliance has the ministry received in the last three years concerning the improper installation of stucco and the resulting water damage to condominiums and homes?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, at this time I am not aware of any

complaints that have come directly to my office, but certainly I will investigate further within my ministry. But to me personally I have not received any complaints.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Coal Bed Methane

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March I had the pleasure to attend one of the natural gas in coal information sessions that are being held to ensure that the regulations guiding the development of natural gas in coal, or coal bed methane as it's often called, are the right regulations for the future. About 135 people attended the meeting in Wetaskiwin in my constituency to hear more about methane in coal development and to share feedback for the consultation. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. How will the information from these sessions be used in the consultation process?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, that was an important seminar that was held in Wetaskiwin, and there was one held in Rocky Mountain House and in the south in Pincher Creek. They've been held throughout Alberta. In fact, we've had in excess of 700 people attending these seminars. It's part of our usual brand of transparency, open consultation, and the policy development process. This has been going on for some two to three years.

During that time, of course, coal bed methane, or natural gas in coal, has been treated under the existing regulations. Mr. Speaker, in fact, we will continue this consultation and will be going to Grande Prairie in a short period of time, on May 19. So even though there isn't a great presence of coal bed methane at this stage in that area, we want to ensure that that area is well represented.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that these working groups come together. They do provide us with recommendations. These recommendations are fundamental to policy input to the advisory committee and will be taken in as such. I'm actually thankful and appreciative that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose would take time out from his busy schedule and attend this seminar.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: as I observe that many concerns about possible water issues could be associated with the development of coal bed methane, how many methane-in-coal wells are producing fresh, that is potable, water in the province, and where is this development taking place?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. It's a question that, as Alberta has developed its important oil and gas resource, has been put into play. I remember the former member from Grande Prairie who used to talk about potable water and drilling in those areas. There are strict supervisory laws and regulations that prohibit open-hole drilling in aquifers. These wells must be cased. It is absolutely illegal to dispose of drilled fresh water on the surface.

As the water issue becomes discussed with respect to coal bed methane, firstly, I can tell you that the exaggeration of water presence in Alberta has been caused by the way the Wyoming example unfolded with their development of coal bed methane. In Alberta, actually, our coal structures are different, Mr. Speaker, to the point where we don't have fresh water associated to a large extent with our coal and with our methane inside the coal.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, thinking and anticipating that a question like this might indeed be asked in the House, we did some research. There are no wells today presently producing potable or drinking

water in Alberta. In the only one that we do know of that made an application for fresh water, in fact, the water became saline or brackish. So there is no evidence of fresh water production to date.

Mr. Johnson: Final question is to the same minister. Would the minister consider a suspension of all drilling of natural gas, or methane, in coal wells?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is, as well, a good question. In fact, I don't believe a moratorium or a suspension is necessary. I would direct members to the latest land sale in Alberta. That land sale brought in some \$95 million in land sale revenues. Some of that may indeed be coal bed methane acreage that is being assembled by different companies to drill.

As I said in my second answer, Mr. Speaker, the presence of water in coal bed methane is not very high at this stage. We want to ensure that wells are drilled and wells are tested with outstanding and world-class environmental practices just to find out: if there is water with it, how much? What could be the issues associated with it? So I believe it's important to continue to collect, assemble this data, and respond with an appropriate policy for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Programs for Homeless People

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past winter the number of homeless people seeking shelter in Edmonton has outnumbered the number of shelter spaces available and forced the city to open the doors of a fire hall, a warehouse, and other sites to homeless people. Homeless people across the province are not having their needs met, such as in Lloydminster where a social action group hopes to have a six-bed shelter open by September to house some of that city's hundreds of homeless. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and responsible for housing. What is this government doing to help Lloydminster help its growing number of homeless people?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to take issue with the inaccuracies in the preamble. This year we've kept a daily usage tally of the funded shelters in the province. Very pleased to state that the shelters in Edmonton had an empty ratio of about 20 to 25 a night, with the exception of people who have addiction or drinking problems. There was a shortage there. The Hope Mission through the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund opened up a second trailer to accommodate these people, so they were taken care of. In some extreme cases, yes, for two or three nights this winter in the city there was the need for more, and I am thankful to the city for picking up the slack. But to say that we have a shortage of spaces for the outright homeless in this city is inaccurate.

We have also embarked on opening up significant numbers of transition housing, of affordable housing. As a matter of fact, more units opened up in this province in the last couple of years than in any other province in the country under that program.

So with respect to Lloydminster specifically, I would have to get back on that because, quite frankly, there are specific problems. If they have any, I don't have that at my fingertips.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Then to the same minister: what, specifically, has the minister done to increase the transfer payments to the municipalities to deal with this issue?

Mr. Woloshyn: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be aware that through my budget, which will be coming up in May, we allocate in excess of \$16 million to deal with homeless people in this province, the funding going to the shelters. We have a variety of arrangements with housing authorities throughout the province where multi-millions of dollars go into supporting people in transitional housing, in social housing, in seniors' lodges, in seniors' self-contained apartments, and the list goes on and on. Those obligations are made continuously, and we honour them. Specifically, we deal with the municipalities where appropriate and with the authorities which they appoint who are appropriate.

Ms Blakeman: Lots of information. No answers.

My final question to the minister: why does this problem arise year after year with no long-term solution being proposed?

Mr. Woloshyn: The member is correct that the number of homeless and our allocation to that have been increasing annually. We have embarked on several initiatives to see how to deal with the problem, but I might add that this problem is not unique to Alberta. It is not unique to Canada. It is a growing problem with a lot of concern.

We have made a lot of progress in getting people out of homeless shelters. A lot of the people in there have problems with substance abuse, have problems with incomes, have problems with addictions, and so on. The problem is not a simple one of just opening up a few more shelter beds. It's a very complex issue, and we are currently having a cross-ministry look to see what we can do to ensure that these folks in these shelters can be moved out and that the people in the province who require housing are housed appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary Health Region

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week on Friday the British government cancelled a fast-track surgery scheme involving the Calgary health region and a well-connected, for-profit health care company called Surgical Centres Inc. Anglo-Canadian's contract to provide joint replacements and other nonemergency surgeries was cancelled because it would have cost more than those surgeries done by Britain's National Health Service. My question, I guess, is to the Deputy Premier. Why is the government allowing the Calgary health region to run around the world playing health care entrepreneur while at home Calgarians are facing overcrowded emergency rooms and long waits for surgery?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta isn't allowing the Calgary health region to run around the world. You know, rather than trying to make this some kind of a bad issue, which I know is the hon. member's wont in this, perhaps he should look at it from another aspect and commend the Calgary health region for getting out into the world. The Premier stated earlier today that Alberta is looked to in Canada, in North America, and indeed the world as one of the top-rated deliverers of health care anywhere, certainly in North America.

Mr. Speaker, instead of being bogged down in what was – I heard one of the hon. members say: you broke it. Surely that hon. member does not want to go back to the health system of 1990 or '91, where

we had one or two MRIs, where we had none of these new drugs that are offering quality of life to people. They would not be available. It is time that this group started to look forward instead of living in the past.

There are some new realities in the world of health. I've said this many times, and I'll say it again here today: to play politics with a subject like health is absolutely irresponsible and should not be done by any party provincially or nationally. This is too important to the people of this province. They didn't appreciate it the last go, and trust me, they don't appreciate it now.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to two groups today, this morning and at noon, and I'll see another one tonight.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Deputy Premier, we just may have an opportunity in the supplementary questions to hear about them. The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been playing politics with health care for 15 years.

Given that the Calgary health region's mandate is to deliver health care to residents of Calgary, not residents of the U.K., will the government put an immediate halt to the CHR involving itself in any similar schemes in the future, and if not, why not?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again introspective, absolutely introspective. Look for bogeymen; look for problems.

Let's look at celebrating moving forward and innovation. Calgary health region: first in North America to introduce the operative MRI, designed and built in Calgary; a bone and joint centre will occur there; the best cardiac care and research in Canada. Let's not stop with Calgary. Capital health region: two years in a row top deliverer of health services in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, let's be proud of what we have. Yes, let's look to improve it, but let's do it in a very positive way. This is something we should be proud of. We are moving forward, and I am very proud of the achievements of both these regions, that have dealt with huge growth.

Mr. Speaker, you talk about waiting lists. The fact is that we're doing more surgeries. It's not that we're not doing more. We are doing more surgeries, and we're doing more of them on the same people. Probably a dozen years ago one hip replacement was it. Today it may be three or four with the same person. That gives a quality of life to people. Let's realize that we're living longer. Let's realize that this province will continue to grow, the highest growth again in Canada, and that it will be the place of choice for people to live, and we'd better stay with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that bidding on overseas contracts can be a very pricey proposition, when can Albertans expect to find out exactly how much the Calgary health region spent on this bidding process and how much the taxpayers are on the hook for this failed venture?

2:30

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, introspective. I'm sure the minister of health will be pleased to provide some further information.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, if we had never left this province, we wouldn't have the innovation that we have here. I realize that philosophically and ideologically we're not ever going to agree on a lot of things, but in Alberta we will continue to strive for a higher bar and to be the best, not for the lowest common denominator.

Speaker's Ruling Cellphone Cameras in the Chamber

The Speaker: Before we move on to the next order in the Routine, I'd just like to make a comment on a matter that I've raised in the House on previous occasions, but with a large number of members here this afternoon I just want to repeat it again.

Our Standing Order 110 alludes to certain media being available in the Assembly. As an example, Standing Order 110(2) says, "Photographers may take still photographs of the Assembly, subject to conditions set by the Speaker." Further it says, "Persons in the galleries of the Assembly may take notes or tape-record the proceedings of the Assembly or of committees of the whole Assembly, subject to conditions set by the Speaker."

Standing Order 111 says that in the case of committees of the Assembly "the recording and broadcasting of proceedings by the broadcast media and the taking of photographs shall be at the discretion of the chairman of the committee and subject to any conditions set by him."

In the letter that I sent on February 12, 2004, to all members with respect to the decorum in the House, item 19 says that with respect to cellular telephones and pagers, "Cellular phones, tape recorders and pagers are not permitted in the Chamber."

We had an event on April 28 of 2003 when certain papers were read by other members of the Assembly, and we had a long discord with respect to a proposed point of privilege. I remember making such comments as that there's an old saying that gentlemen or in this case gentlewomen do not read other gentlemen's mail.

Now, if an hon. member in this Assembly wishes to have a photograph taken of himself or herself, kindly contact my office and we'll arrange to have the photographer located somewhere in the galleries where they might take a picture of the individual themselves. But in recent months there's been the infusion in this Assembly of cellular phones that also have cameras attached and pictures are being taken. That is an invasion of privacy, but more importantly that's an invasion of the privilege of the member in this Assembly. That is not an acceptable practice. There is no such thing with these unique little devices, whether or not they may be in pens or in telephones or anything else. But there's a privilege of being in this Assembly, and I'm asking all members of the Assembly to bear in mind what decorum is.

If you want a picture taken of yourself and you have a professional photographer, we can have them sitting up in the galleries and they'll take pictures of you in your place. But they will not photograph what is on another member's desk, and they will not photograph another member without that member being notified that he or she is being under somebody's gun. It may be a game for some. We're way above that. Way above that.

head: Members' Statements

The Speaker: In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of several members, but before we do that, today is the ninth anniversary of the by-election conclusion for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, who joined this esteemed group on April 20, 1995.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Booster Club Awards

Ms Kryczka: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 25, 2004, I was very honoured to represent this government at the Calgary Booster Club's 51st sportsman of the year dinner.

As I have been involved in amateur sport organizations for 35 years, I have the utmost respect for the Calgary Booster Club, a

unique organization which is dedicated to the development and encouragement of athletic endeavour. The club has a 51-year tradition of honouring people from all walks of life for their dedication and commitment to sport. From community-level sports programs that involve young athletes to national-level athletes, volunteer support is needed by parents, coaches, leaders, and administrators, and eventually through commitment many of these grassroots people become very valuable athletic leaders in the larger sports community.

So I was very honoured to join over 700 people at this year's Calgary Booster Club dinner to recognize a constituent of mine in Calgary-West, Stan Schwartz, as 2004 sportsman of the year. Described as a class act by the media, for more than 45 years Stan has made significant contributions to sport within amateur and development levels as well as the professional ranks.

Born and raised in the Medicine Hat area, Stan first became connected to football in Calgary as a player with the U of C Dinosaurs, followed by a career in teaching and coaching with the Calgary board of education with junior football, conducting training clinics, and building football practice equipment. Stan's 28-year career with the Calgary Stampeders included dedication to many critical roles that have earned him the admiration and respect of football players, officials, and fans in Calgary and across Canada.

Also, Calgary's female and male athletes of the year, Taryn Swiatek and Jeremy Wotherspoon, were recognized for their pursuit of athletic excellence, as were a number of athletic leaders.

Mr. Speaker, it was wonderful to be part of the Booster Club dinner this year to connect with many athletic leaders I know, such as Curly Hunt, club founding member, and many past sportsmen of the year: Doug Kyle, Keith Kendal, Deak Cassidy, Marg Southern, Dorothy Read, Tony Anselmo, Margaret Scott, Bill Warren, Eldon Godfrey, John Semkuley, and Frank King. It was truly a happy and memorable celebration.

The Speaker: The hon Member for Calgary-Currie.

Teenage Behaviour

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As someone who has had considerable experience, although not necessarily considerable success, in dealing with teenage kids, it has come as a relief to me to hear that there are now some possible scientific explanations as to why teenagers behave, or don't behave, and think, or perhaps don't think, the way that they do. It isn't necessarily our failures as parents at all, as many fear. It isn't necessarily modern society and too much TV either, as many have speculated. And it isn't even all those raging hormones that are giving teenagers a raging desire to go out and do something incredibly stupid, especially if you've just finished telling them not to. No. It seems that there may be a much better scientific explanation for it all.

It turns out that many teenagers may be, quite literally, a bit insane as the result of too much dysfunctional brain growth too fast from about the ages of 15 to about 20, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which governs logic and regulates the ability to assess risk, as well as the amygdala section of the brain, which plays a leading role in impulsive behaviour. Probably none of this comes as any surprise to most parents.

But there is more. Further research is indicating that the teenage brain sometimes grows too fast for the skull bones to keep up, putting too much pressure on them or at least their brain, something they are often complaining about, actually. The bottom line is that they may not be capable of thinking or acting normally or considering consequences of actions the way we think they should.

Surprisingly, this biological oddity apparently plays a very valuable role in evolution. It might be a good thing overall. However, in the modern world it can also be very dangerous. Children between the ages of 15 and 19 are three times more likely to die from all causes as children between the ages of 10 and 14 are. There are lots of other implications to this finding, such as when we ponder juvenile rights and prostitution or the Young Offenders Act or adult courts.

The facts are that many very good kids really do go through a period of temporary insanity. Of course, the problem sometimes is that they tend to drive us insane as well, and unfortunately we don't have any similar defence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think the chair is prohibited from making comment, but did the hon. member say between the ages of 15 and 19? Or did I misunderstand and did he actually say between the ages of 15 and 89?

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

2:40 National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and bring attention to National Soil Conservation Week, which runs from April 18 to April 24. National Soil Conservation Week helps promote soil conservation among farmers across Canada. Soil quality is the foundation for the preservation of agriculture. That's why National Soil Conservation Week is so important. It recognizes the producers and the industry organizations that are managing soils and improving sustainability. All week promotional events take place across Canada to highlight the importance of conserving vital topsoil.

Our producers have always been leaders in conservation. Over the past decade Alberta producers have more than doubled their direct seeded acreage. Nearly two-thirds of our province's acreage is now direct seeded. Certainly, more and more producers are realizing the benefits of conserving topsoil. Those who use direct seeding and other beneficial management practices can significantly improve their crop productivity. Some of the benefits include better water infiltration, increased seedbed moisture, enhanced organic matter, and less risk to soil erosion.

Alberta producers are fortunate to have a very diverse agricultural base: crops, livestock, dryland, and irrigation. This diversity allows Alberta farmers more choices in how they plan their field management systems to conserve their soil. For example, thanks to our sizable livestock industry, producers can choose to plant forage crops, which are better for building up soil quality. Better soil conservation increases soil organic matter, but there is also a larger benefit.

Sequestration of carbon results in reduction of overall greenhouse gas emissions in the province. The prairie region has 85 per cent of the nation's capacity to store additional soil carbon by using good soil management practices. This could contribute significantly to Alberta's climate change action plan.

In short, today's soil conservation practices mean a better environment and a better future for everyone. I applaud the conservation efforts of Alberta's producers, the best in the world, and I'm pleased and honoured to recognize National Soil Conservation Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and in all fairness, as two hon. members went nearly one minute over, you can go four minutes.

Automobile Insurance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. When car accidents do happen, it's a relief to know that your insurance company will help you obtain the medical attention or compensation you need to restore you and your vehicle back to preaccident condition without being unduly penalized. But ensuring that this process remains fair – it should not happen as a result of an accident, but the process should be fair.

This government claims that automobile insurance consumers will benefit from low premiums and reliable treatment under its auto insurance reforms, but its haphazard approach isn't setting Alberta auto insurance consumers on the road to fair and affordable insurance. This government should be charged with consumer neglect. Swift and decisive action was promised by the minister, but the response has been slow and indecisive as auto insurance premiums have skyrocketed.

Only when it saw elections being affected in other provinces did this government send out the automobile insurance reform implementation team to try and seek a solution, but it told them not to even consider public insurance as an option. In fact, this group of industry insiders did not even conduct any public hearings. When this crisis came to a head, this government froze insurance rates, but this freeze has so many loopholes that it didn't apply to all auto insurance policyholders. This government's only answer to high rates has been to limit the compensation an injured motorist is entitled to receive. Albertans are still waiting for this government to make affordable insurance changes. Albertans deserve peace of mind and relief in their pocketbook.

The Alberta Liberal opposition saw the crisis in automobile insurance coming well over a year ago and offered its research and findings to the government, but this government rejected a public model of insurance similar to the one in British Columbia without even studying it. The Alberta Liberal opposition believes a public system of insurance is the best way to guarantee affordable auto insurance to Albertans while maintaining fair compensation to accident victims.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition signed by 82 individuals from the Lethbridge regional police service petitioning the Legislative Assembly to support Bill 204, the Blood Samples Act, "which will provide more security and peace of mind for people working in occupations who have a higher risk of exchanging bodily fluids with a potential carrier of a blood borne disease."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of many Albertans who petition the government, and their petition states:

We: the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to:

"Urge the government of Alberta to raise the minimum wage in our province and recognize that there is a connection between the low minimum wage and the housing crisis in Alberta"

"Urge the government of Alberta to recognize that our minimum wage is too low and that under these conditions our low

income workers cannot afford the basic necessities of life, and urge the government to recognize that the minimum wage needs to be raised immediately."

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document on behalf of my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. The tabling relates to a letter from Les Steel, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, to the Minister of Health and Wellness as well as an accompanying press release dated April 20, 2004. These documents express serious concern about the priorities of the Calgary regional health authority and request a report on expenditures related to the Anglo-Canadian consortium.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a chart with all the provinces and territories in this country, and it's a chart comparing auto insurance systems and results by province.

The second tabling I have is a copy of an editorial from the *New York Times* entitled A Strange Ban on Testing Beef.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the appropriate copies of the 2003 College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists annual report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will table appropriate copies of two memoranda today. One, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs requesting early consideration at Committee of the Whole of Bill 204, the Blood Samples Act, was received in my office at 11:35 today.

The second is the appropriate copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-West requesting early consideration at Committee of the Whole of Bill 203, the Canada Pension Plan Credits Statutes Amendment Act, 2004. That arrived in my office at 1:21 p.m. today.

The manner in which we will deal with these bills will be in chronological order. Bill 203 will come first.

2:50head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2004-05

Children's Services

The Deputy Chair: As per our standing orders the first hour is dedicated between the minister and the members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate in the estimates.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. It's a great privilege to rise today and deliver the opening comments relative to the Children's Services budget for the year 2004-2005.

I would just acknowledge at the outset, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. House leader from Her Majesty's Official Opposition has indicated an interest in knowing some other material, and I wondered if she was actually indicating that she wanted to have that statement made by herself prior to my statements or following that.

Ms Blakeman: You go ahead.

Ms Evans: Great.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, it's a distinct privilege to introduce some people in the gallery today, more than usual, some coming for their very first time to sit in this Assembly and view the actions in the House and view Committee of Supply and view the exemplary conduct of people in this House who are dedicated to listening to our estimates.

I would be pleased and privileged to ask them to stand as I introduce them so that you have the understanding of who is accompanying me today: the deputy minister for support services, Keray Henke, in whom the responsibility centres in preparing this document; assistant deputy minister Bill Meade, who also has involvement predominantly with child welfare, and we're pleased to have him here today; the person who is director of finance, Shehnaz Hutchinson, is here today, very integrally involved with the development of the estimates; also in our financial support area Don Boisclair and Larry Olatonade; also in support services the communications director, Lorelei Fiset-Cassidy, who is often viewed as she comes with me to the House on a daily basis; and for most of the members of the House the lady that looks after the problems that are received in my office and who is executive assistant to the minister's office, Alyssa Haulholter, is with us today.

Hon. members, it's I think a point of great pride for Albertans to know that among all of the places in Canada where you live and where we travel, Alberta has a Children's Services ministry that strives to nurture, cherish, provide homes for children in need and provide opportunities for families to feel supported no matter what their circumstances. When the rain falls, when the cracks develop in relationships, when there's indeed trouble in paradise, children always need supports, not only children but youth and senior citizens as well. Mr. Chairman, in our ministry we look after children of all ages, and I'd be pleased to explain.

The 2004-05 budget is a total of \$742 million, including about \$8 million beyond the transfers from the general revenue fund. It is up \$33 million from last year, or approximately 4.6 per cent. The great bulk, or two-thirds, of this budget is spent on keeping children, youth, and families safe and protected. This area includes core programs such as child welfare services, resources for children with disabilities, and that represents 68 per cent of our overall budget. I want to take a minute and explain this area because it is the crucial area of child welfare delivery, and it is the area where we provide human and financial resources to support families in several ways.

First of all, we want to provide services that prevent things from going wrong in families. With the new Alberta response model, which means that we provide community capacity to support families that are fragile, we look first to preventing things from going wrong. We look at providing programs such as home visitation for the newborn, early childhood developmental programs, our new child accreditation program for daycares. All of these programs are geared to provide supports for parents, to provide watchful and caring eyes for people who might be undergoing some trauma or strains in their relationships, and to provide those services that

prevent things from going wrong. Our whole emphasis there is from breaking up the family to making that family more complete.

The second part of this child welfare delivery system is really that heavy emphasis on preserving the family unit, where if there are vulnerabilities, a social worker, a caregiver may go in and provide respite, nurture the family, counsel the family, and give that family that extra support so that the child can remain in that family feeling safe and not vulnerable from any type of risk.

The third part of this delivery system is the protection, where we remove the child only because we believe there is a crucial protection issue, an issue of lack of capacity from the family because of drugs or alcohol or a combination thereof and an opportunity to make sure that that child is nurtured.

The fourth and final P of these areas, from prevention, preservation, and protection, is a permanency plan so that that child may return home. So that plan is in place, working to get that child opportunities for capacity back in their original home as well as providing a plan with a caregiver, a foster family, or group residential home that sufficiently looks after their needs. This is a very important area of expenditure and one which predominantly our 10 regional authorities are integrally involved with.

Mr. Chairman, we also spend approximately \$220 million, or approximately 29 per cent of the budget, on services for young children, early intervention, and child care. This is an increase of \$19 million, and it focuses on those areas of support to the community and a heavy emphasis on prevention. I like to look at this as the part where we're out in front of the game, helping families be resilient, helping communities know how to help themselves. In this area of expenditure we have significant support from our partners in the community: nongovernment agencies, local governments, and other people who have expressed a willingness to do the due diligence on behalf of children, youth, and families.

Mr. Chairman, I said that we look after children of all ages. It's no laughing matter that one of our biggest initiatives coming up in this coming year relates to the currently underway round-table on family violence. Elders who are abused receive services in our ministry through our elder abuse service delivery system, either in facilities such as the Kerby Centre in Calgary or in various communities where there's counselling support for elders who are either abused by their children or are abused while they are in a circumstance of a delivery system for their needs, and who feel that there's nobody else to turn to.

Mr. Chairman, our total ongoing activities this year and the ones that are going to focus a great deal of the public's prioritization are family violence prevention, resources for parents, children, and families, and resources for redefining and reshaping our child welfare and children with disabilities systems. Two years ago when we were heavily committed to consultations and bringing the best Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act forward, we were looking at what should happen. The thrust and engine that will drive child welfare will be one which talks about abbreviating the time where children are floundering in places outside the home and looks to re-emphasizing the stability of the home and making permanent solutions for children.

3:00

Well, Mr. Chairman, in this year's budget are the dollars to make sure that that new act is successfully underway, where training is provided, where technology supports that trained professional, where the multidisciplinary teams that assess certain complex cases are in place in child and family services authorities. All of these things have taken some additional provision of dollars, and those are part of the emphasis of what will happen in this year's budget.

I think it's been exciting that the legislation and the legislative framework that was introduced last spring by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has become a lighthouse piece of legislation relative to resources for children with disabilities, supporting families to make better choices for supports for themselves. This legislation, too, with its regulations is being developed, refinements undertaken, reassessments of children who have needs are being done, and that's a good part of what this budget will cover.

Over this past year we've successfully launched the initiatives relative to family violence with the workshops. Through this next year there are dollars in this budget to support ongoing programs for all members of the family, whether they are men, women, or children. In this year's budget, as I've mentioned, the two pieces of legislation will be supported, the child care initiative for improving the quality of child care delivery to families who have children in daycare or day homes. We have successfully launched over 100 companies as partners in Alberta's Promise, a very small program but a program that while at arm's length from this ministry is bringing new partners on board, bringing ministry partners at the local level, businesses large and small that are committed to helping children in this wonderful Alberta.

We have established the very successful children's forums, Mr. Chairman, just this past week a very successful forum with 100 children in Hobbema who have come forward to provide their chiefs with a letter, a promissory note if you will, asking for a partnership between the children and the community and the First Nations that are in that region.

We've got some exciting initiatives underway in this year's budget which build on the resiliency of families and children, build on the community capacity, build on our supports to communities, and more closely monitor and evaluate the provision of contract services as per the notes in last year's Auditor General's report and look to new horizons, new beginnings such as the office of the children's lawyer, providing children ready access and government officials ready access to defining a lawyer for children who have been abused in care.

This year's budget provides even stronger fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives and more incentives in communities for involvement. It provides for legal services protocols and independent review processes, all things which we believe will help us in our proper due diligence and accountability and improve the outcomes in Children's Services.

Mr. Chairman, many people have asked what the most important thing we do in Children's Services really is, and I believe our privilege is to support Alberta families in receiving those supports that they need to make their lives better, to make their lives more complete and their children ready to face a challenging world. I believe that what we've done by dedicated staff illustrates that commitment.

I believe that what we've done by new programs such as our bursary funding to youth in transition, enabling them to launch themselves in a new way in the world as they gain more education, are examples of lighthouse programs that will further assist us in developing the citizens of tomorrow. I believe that what Children's Services provides is a preventive health budget, preventing bad things from happening to children and youth and families, educating them on how to protect themselves and to go stronger into the workplace and in the workforce.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know how many of you know this, but every year Children's Services was budgeting with an anticipated increase in child welfare delivery of 10 to 15 per cent of new cases. Well, that's not happening. We have fewer cases of children in either permanent or temporary care today than we did two years ago,

and it's because we're building the capacity of families. Even though our population is growing, even though last year we had 40,000 births in Alberta, we are making steady improvement in the resiliency of families. To me that is the best possible outcome of having a ministry such as Children's Services because ideally we're working ourselves out of a job; we're working ourselves to a place where families look after themselves.

Now, because I have had a small signal that there may be some request for information about services to sexual assault centres, I'm only going to make one reference here, and that is that we have provided training dollars this year in the sum of about \$40,000 at the end of last year's budget plus an additional amount toward a group in Calgary involved with the family advocacy centre to make sure that there are supports for people that are nongovernment agencies that are trying to do the right thing, trying to engage community in supports for people affected in sexual assault centres.

They are partners with shelters in many communities. Every community has a different template, but we will be most anxious through this process of the round-tables – and they are very integrally involved – to see where that piece will fit in the future of government service delivery; in other words, not having them ignored like a foster child in our society but integrally involved in the way that we embrace these people.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

These people, these children, youth, and families, are affected not in the same way that some are in the women's shelter system today but very definitely affected by violence in our society, by violence that is as important for us to recognize as the violence of any criminal attack. I know that the Solicitor General though not present at this moment shares my view that this is an important element.

I look forward to our discussion through the remarks of the hon. members that are in the House today. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The minister is correct. She is responding to an indication from me that I did want to raise and have some discussion around the funding of the operations of sexual assault centres in Alberta.

Off the top, the first question that comes to mind to anyone listening to this or reading it later is: well, what does the funding of sexual assault centres have to do with the provision of children's services? Indeed, the same question is often asked around battered women's shelters. In fact, the shelters are funded, operational funding is received through the Ministry of Children's Services. That's just sort of where they ended up when the government decided to hive off the Children's Services section from Human Resources and Employment. The battered women's shelters ended up going into Children's Services.

What I've been interested to find out as I've started to look into the whole issue of provision of services by sexual assault centres in Alberta is that, in fact, they do not get co-ordinated funding. They don't get operational funding from the government. What they get is very piecemeal, and what I'm trying to do today is to start that discussion with this minister, and I'll carry it on during the budget debates with the Solicitor General and any other ministers that we can pull into this discussion. Frankly, I'm astonished that we haven't gotten on top of this up to now, that we're in the year 2004 and we're still approaching this very much in a haphazard or piecemeal fashion, and it does seem that in many cases one ministry doesn't communicate with the other ministry.

3:10

Both the sexual assault centres and the battered women's shelters are providing services to people who are at that point in their life because they have been the victim of a prohibited action, in the case of a battered woman, a victim of an assault. That goes further to even an emotional assault, emotional abuse. Sometimes financial abuse, as well, is recognized. It is a prohibited action. We do not in this society approve in any way of beating on someone, especially an intimate partner.

The same thing comes up around someone who is the victim of sexual assault, but it seems a more difficult subject for people to grasp. I don't want to say that it's less fashionable, because that's putting too crude a spin on it, but certainly the sexual assault centres have more difficulty attracting funds, attracting sponsors, attracting guardian angels, if you will, and now, I discover, attracting reliable, predictable operating funding from the government. Because it is sexually based, there still tends to be a misunderstanding that somehow sexual assault is about sex. It's not. It's about assault. But there's still a reluctance to classify the services and the effect of sexual assault on people more closely aligned with what's happening with the battered women's shelters.

In talking to several shelters across the province and to the umbrella organization, this is what my understanding is. I may not have fully grasped this, but my understanding is that the funding is very piecemeal and their administrators end up spending a lot of time trying to figure out which different grant program to apply to this year to try and get them up to the level of funding they need to operate. Indeed, I'm aware that through the Solicitor General there is funding to cover costs around counselling, sort of precourt and court appearance, but there's a lot more to dealing with a victim of sexual assault than just around the actual court appearance.

In fact, we know that in many cases women choose not to go to court at all, or they may delay bringing charges for several or many years. So that sort of takes them out of the loop of being able to access any assistance if they're not directly involved in that sort of immediate precourt or court appearance activities. The Solicitor General seems to be funding the counselling around that specific activity, but if you get any distance away from that activity, that funding does not cover it.

So, you know, what kind of funding are we talking about here when we talk about operating funding? Well, we're talking about, you know, the administrative staff, the other staff that are involved there that maybe don't have their salary covered by this court-connected counselling, things like the office rent, telecommunications, your Internet hookup, resource materials that you have to buy, resource materials that you would produce to distribute to the public, outreach costs and involvements, and the non court related counselling that I referred to earlier.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I know that many of the sexual assault centres – the one in Edmonton here, SACE, Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, has been really vigilant in building liaisons and partnerships with community organizations like the police services, the United Way, the medical profession; for example, doing special seminars for emergency room personnel and having them understand all of the issues around sexual assault and how they need to be working with individuals who have been victims of sexual assault.

I need here to clarify that in a lot of cases – and I don't have the stat at the top of mind – we are dealing with adult survivors of child sexual abuse, and that's a particularly difficult one for people to deal with. It's hard to understand what the circumstances were around that. It makes people very uncomfortable. As a result, that group of

people, you see, is not imminently involved in the court process, so there's a perfect example of what I was talking about. If you're an adult survivor of child sexual abuse, you're left out of this loop and you don't really qualify for the funding that is detailed under the Solicitor General.

On Saturday night I was at the Jim Shewchuk banquet, the labour appreciation night, and they were honouring their twenty-four 2004 graduates from their union counselling program. What that really turned out to be is that these are 24 people from across the province who work for various unions who are trained over an extended period of time – I think it's six months or even a year – in all of the services that are available in the community that they can help plug their union colleagues into. So if they see someone on the job who's troubled, they can approach them and start to help refer them to a group in the community or to a service provider who can help this individual. One of the groups that was specifically mentioned was the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton that had been out and had done a seminar to help educate these 24 colleague counsellors.

So there was another example of how hard these groups work to build that partnership in the community. But, you see, that activity is not funded either by the government. So we have a group out there that's really struggling to keep up provision of services. This gets more complicated, not less complicated. We seem to have more people that are in need of the support, that are victims of sexual assault, whether it's child sexual assault, adults, and we don't have any kind of consistent funding program from the government.

So I'm bringing this to this minister at this time. She has acknowledged the involvement of sexual assault centres around the round-table on family violence. You know, as I was reading through some of the documents, over and over again it talked about the round-table on family violence, and it almost always said "and bullying." The bullying was attached to this round-table, and good on the minister. You know, that is something that's a form of violence. It's certainly an incubator for violence and the attitudes that people carry into adulthood that may well result in some of the other perpetrations of violence upon people. Bullying should be brought into that, but you don't always see "and sexual assault" tagged onto that as well.

So even though there has been some attempt to bring the sexual assault centres and those providers and workers under the umbrella of family violence, sexual assault, number one, is not always about family violence. It's often involved with strangers or with acquaintances, for example acquaintance rape – assault. You don't say that word any more; my apologies. So there's some struggle here with definition and with inclusion that I am just underlining so that the minister is aware of it.

Now, she mentioned that \$40,000 had been provided at the end of the last fiscal year, and there was some amount of money around family advocacy, I think, or to a family advocacy group that was included in this budget. But, you see, I've just spent 10 minutes talking about the kinds of things that these sexual assault centres are not funded for, and nobody seems to be picking them up. The Solicitor General is picking up a piece that is directly related to the area she covers; that is, you know, policing, corrections, and victims' services. She's picking up just that one piece around court appearances for victims that are involved and close enough to court to be covered by that, but nothing else that I've described in the many costs that these organizations have is being picked up on a regular, predictable, sustainable basis by any government department.

3:20

I guess I'm starting my own personal campaign here to start to bring this issue up repeatedly until I can see some sort of threads being knitted together from the various ministries that are affected here. I would assume that the Minister of Justice also should have

a piece of this pie, the Minister of Children's Services, the Solicitor General certainly, perhaps the Minister of Community Development in his role overseeing human rights and particularly issues specifically affecting women.

Again, that's not quite accurate either because, as we all know, sexual assault can be perpetrated on both men and women and is equally devastating to both genders. I'm not going to pick one out as being more affected than the other. Frankly, I don't even know how the numbers stand right now. It used to be overwhelmingly a crime committed upon women, but I don't know that that's true any more.

So what we have here is a very uneven approach to this. I know that it's an uncomfortable subject, but it is 2004. We should be able to, you know, be adults, be grown-ups about this, and be able to work with it. I'm really concerned about the lack of co-ordination and even awareness that the government is exhibiting around this issue and around the funding of these centres.

Now, perhaps the minister has a reason and she's been in cabinet discussions where there's been a discussion and there's a concrete, identifiable policy about: no, we will not fund sexual assault centres because . . . If so, fine; then let's hear it, and then we know where we stand on this.

But I suspect that that has not happened, and it's simply a matter of this being a group that has fallen through the cracks over and over and over again. They pick up a little bit of funding this year from a Wild Rose grant, a little bit of funding next year from some other kind of grant, a little bit of a CFEP, a little bit of a CIP grant, a little bit of court counselling from the Solicitor General, and every now and then something from the Minister of Children's Services.

I'm afraid that it's going to end up coming to rest on the table that the minister is responsible for, and I am looking to her to see if . . . I guess what I'm hearing is that there was no specific funding coming for these sexual assault centres in this budget. If there is, I'm delighted to hear it and, you know, please share the good news with me. If there isn't, then can I ask her to start looking for ways to support these groups? As I said, we're not ending up with fewer victims here; we're ending up with more victims. As we have learned, of all the lessons that we've learned around the effects of domestic violence and how much that costs society in very real terms – lost production, lost work days, hospital costs, effect upon children, the likelihood of the cycle repeating, all of those lessons that we've learned – most of those can be transferred into the sexual assault arena as well.

So I think that there's a fairly large human deficit that's been created by a lack of coherent policy and funding around sexual assault centres, and I'd like to start working with the minister to address that and move forward. I was hoping and I had heard, actually, a rumour that there might be some specific funding for sexual assault centres in this budget. It doesn't look like I had my rumours right, but the minister, I know, will answer me on that. If that's not the case, then we need to start to look to this.

I know that there are expectations and an idea that something will come out of the round-table on family violence that would capture the sexual assault centres under that umbrella, if you will. My concern is – I've already pointed out – that even as you look at the literature in the workbooks and in the explanatory notes around the round-table on family violence, the bullying is always added in; the sexual assault is not, and it's not consistently added in. So it's not top-of-mind to people. I think in a lot of the discussions and in the responses and answers back in the workbooks you don't get people going, "Oh, yes, and sexual assault centres," and adding in what all of that means and how people expect that it should be dealt with. What kind of services should be provided? What kind of funding should be set aside?

So, you know, there is an attempt to bring it under that umbrella. That's good, but I also think that you're not going to get a true picture of it just because it isn't always spoken of on equal terms, and it has tended to be hidden. I admit that there are historic reasons for it being hidden. Not good reasons, but nonetheless there are historic reasons for it being more difficult.

So I don't want to take up any more time, but I appreciate the minister starting to think about this, and if she could answer me about specific funding this year and what we can look to accomplish over this fiscal year around sustainable, predictable operating funds for these groups.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, of course, just to address the obvious, there has been no discussion in cabinet about not giving acknowledgment to sexual assault, or I wouldn't have just announced that we did give some money.

I would like to indicate that the issues of sexual assault, when I have talked to people either with sexual assault centres or relative to shelters, are not simple ones. In the past sometimes sexual assault activities in a community were part of the shelter network and have broken away for one reason or another. That's a very interesting phenomena because of obvious differences.

In some communities sexual assault is being dealt with through the victims of violent crimes and through the justice system as it's delivered through the police. They are delivering programs, victims' services, to those groups, and there are community programs for that.

In some communities family and community support services provides dollars for prevention programs, and so Children's Services funds in that capacity a lot of prevention programs, which would be under the whole auspices of the 80-20 funding through FCSS. As you'll note in this year's budget, it's increased to about \$63 million in FCSS.

So, as the hon. member opposite has indicated, it's fragmented at the community level. Within the individual budgets here the definition of responsibility for assault because of the criminal nature of this has predominantly placed it under the authority of the Solicitor General.

However, I commit to this House that the work of the family violence round-table is not exclusively limited to family violence. The issues of sexual assault have been raised in the 13 regional forums. In our \$2 million in the prevention of family violence budget this year, part of the \$2 million that's the increase will support operating funding, but other supports will be provided in conjunction with Alberta police forces in co-ordinating collective responses.

Zebra in this city is an ideal example of a one-stop shop where the police are involved; family violence counsellors are involved; sexual assault counsellors are involved; the doctors from the Stollery centre are involved with the children. It's a co-ordinated community response that's also being attempted to be emulated subject to the results of a study four years ago in Calgary, and that's the family advocacy centre and the groups down there that are working to put those agencies together.

I think that what we have to find through the outcomes of the round-table on the 7th and all this information – I've been very pleased to extend this opportunity to Members of this Legislative Assembly to join the other members of the Alberta children/youth initiative ministries – is to see whether or not there is an appetite for a parcelling of specific funds towards the sexual assault.

Let me also provide you with some other thoughts. We have a

record of those that are disabled in our disabled community where adult disabled people tell me that 80 per cent of their numbers have been assaulted or victims of family violence, whichever category you want to put it in. We have the gay and lesbian community that have come forward to talk to us. We have former and existing prostitutes that have come forward and talked to us. We have men's groups that have come forward to talk to us. We have grandmothers and mothers of men who believe that they have been traumatized by wives and families in violent situations that have compromised their mental health. We have, obviously, mental health issues. We have about 15 separate groups, identifiably separate groups, that are coming forward in the round-table on family violence – cultural groups, immigrant groups – that have their own unique needs.

3:30

I am fascinated that I thought I knew something about this subject before we had the round-tables, and now I realize that today I stand before you and know almost nothing because there's so much out there to learn. I think that what we, hopefully, will find during the action as a result of this round-table is what the hon. member opposite has suggested: at least a co-ordinated provincial support, a co-ordinated federal/provincial strategy on this issue, because I know that the Justice minister and the Solicitor General have discussed that at their ministers' meetings, as we have on the social services end.

I do sincerely hope that we have some willing federal ears to listen to that co-ordinated response who'll understand the passion in this House for making that happen because that is exactly what has to happen. It is not an island performing this or a ministry performing it but, better yet, a collaborative performing what needs to be done for those victims of sexual assault. You know, our new identities for victims of violence in the office of prevention of family violence have addressed a number of victims of sexual assault cases in the past. So we have in that capacity provided them supports through the NIVA program, which the hon. member opposite is fully aware of. But we'll just take a look again through this process to see if there can be some redefinition, a profiling in one centre.

Maybe I should take my quantum leap and go one step further. Because the hon. member opposite who has just spoken is so knowledgeable, she knows that the women's shelter groups have wondered about the opportunity to develop some sort of commission that would embrace this, much like AADAC. The whole issue of violence is affecting one another in society. Not necessarily were they looking at the bullying piece but the rest of it. That might be an outgrowth of this discussion, this dialogue, so that there is a formal, collaborative framework for delivering services to all of those people, not only the operational expenses of shelters but dollars to provide children and the elderly and all people of all ages some considered support.

Until we have gone through that process of dialogue, I hesitate, Mr. Chairman, to go further on the subject except to say that I think there are willing ears in all of the ministries involved in this partnership because we do want to make Alberta much more safe as a society for families and we take seriously the fact that there have been so many deaths in Alberta relative to family violence and, no doubt, relative to assaults of a sexual nature, that impact families in a very devastating way.

So I'll be prepared to answer further questions, and thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address the Children's Services budget this afternoon. I'd like, I guess, to make a couple of opening comments.

I listened to the minister speak about support for families and her enthusiasm for what's being done in the province, and I quite understand that. But it strikes me that the words are so different from what I experience in my constituency office when I have a call from a mother with a daughter who's in junior high school. The mother is on SFI, and her daughter is unable to take part in the art classes that the school's offering, some of the extracurricular activities. It seems to me that there's this disconnect, with one department so enthusiastic about supporting families and trying to ensure that families are treated as a whole and another department not involved in providing the resources that make that happen and, in fact, helps create conditions of poverty that lead to some of the very problems that the Children's Services ministry has to address.

So I would be interested in a comment from the minister with respect to the kind of co-ordination that goes on among ministries, between Human Resources, in particular, and the Children's Services ministries, so that one department isn't really creating the kinds of problems that Children's Services is trying to solve. It did strike me.

The other thing that struck me was as the minister was speaking. I have before me a multipage complaint from a handicapped parent. I continue to get those: parents who are caught in the system between the Learning department, Health, Children's Services, local school boards. I'm not sure any longer, when these parents contact me, what kind of advice to give them. They have a severely handicapped youngster, they've been to department after department, and all you seem to end up with is a sheaf of paper and reports and appeals and a parent who is still begging for service for a youngster. I guess my question to the minister is: is there a one-stop place for that person to go so that this bouncing from ministry to ministry can stop and parents can get the services that we all know those youngsters deserve?

Those were two things that sort of struck me. I'll pass this one along to the minister; I know that she's had it before.

As the minister commented, I think none of us would argue with the goals that the minister has outlined: preserving the family unit, protection and permanency plans, prevention, and trying to make sure that we're there first in creating the conditions so that youngsters and families don't find themselves in difficulty.

It does lead me to some specific questions about the budget. I don't have last year's business plan with me; I had the 2002. But as I looked at the current business plan, there's a subtitle that keeps coming up: "Source: Child Welfare Information System." That's under a number of the performance measures. It's the performance measures that I'd like to address and I would really like the minister to address because they seem to have changed quite dramatically.

I think I know what it means, but I'd like the minister, if she would, to explain on page 125 of the business plan the performance measure that says: "Percentage of expenditures in the children/youth project and service category of Family and Community Support Services." Then it says: "What it means: Alberta's children and youth, aged 0-19, account for 28% . . . of Alberta's population." It goes on to talk about this being jointly funded. What exactly is that measure going to do? Is it going to say that because they account for 28 per cent of the population, that's the resource that should be allocated to it? I didn't find the "what it means" actually very, very helpful.

I would be interested in the kind of criteria that have been used for the "percentage of childcare centers that provide a developmentally appropriate environment for children."

Underlying these performance measures, I'd like to link it to an increase of \$1.2 million in corporate administration and a news release that came out today from Cognos. It was to the attention of

business and technology editors from Cognos. Cognos ReportNet is evidently being used by the department. Can the minister give me some background into the corporate spending, the changes in the business plan, and this announcement by Cognos? How deeply involved is Cognos? What's it costing the province?

3:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to take the last comment first because it relates to an announcement made by Cognos today on behalf of Children's Services. I think they were jumping up and down with pride, probably got out a little ahead of giving me an opportunity to say something nice about it. Quite frankly, the reason for Cognos's involvement is this. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is so knowledgeable about children, youth, and families and about child welfare that he'll appreciate that when we decided to bring in the ARM model and look at providing preventive social services in the home, obviously these children were not being brought into child welfare for protection. So the same CWIS system wouldn't necessarily apply.

You might have a Big Brothers & Big Sisters agency working with mentoring in that family. You had a very new definition of how you track the records and the family supports that were provided to somebody who wasn't technically part of child welfare. So it was important to look at new software to create a different kind of capacity for making sure that if you were the child welfare director in region 6, for example, you went to sleep at night knowing that the people that needed permanent supports got them, that needed temporary supports got them, and those that simply needed to have community strength built through linkages through counsellors and local community support agencies were there.

Cognos is providing us better quality of data both in the collection and reporting of how effective the systems are in delivering what I would call soft children's services to those families that may be vulnerable. We've enhanced our information technology with Cognos. The capacity on investment in Cognos software is going to give us some interactive capacity to talk about our issues and for social workers to communicate through the system, front-line workers with supervisors.

The company itself has been instrumental in giving us a better ability to organize and disseminate the information. You know, when you consider all the tremendous number of files, if you look at even the number of complaints that come to a crisis line being significantly more than the actual case files that are opened, there's such a tremendous responsibility that child welfare delivery has to do the records management properly, and it's probably somebody today in social welfare who needs to have an opportunity as a decision-maker to understand the use of technology in the best possible fashion.

I will table at a later time exactly what the costs were attributable to Cognos for that particular system. But we are so satisfied that for the first time we're going to be more interactive in our conversation with it. Overall this year our shared support service agreement with the ACSC has grown only by \$2 million over last year, yet we are dealing with many more intricate file adjustments. We've moved from \$36 million to \$38 million in our shared corporate support service delivery, and that includes payroll and a lot of other capacities that we have responsibility for. I will get the breakout of what this particular cost will be for Cognos in helping us with the community-based ARM model.

I'm going to be pleased to take a couple of minutes and just say this. I will refer to the Minister of Human Resources and Employ-

ment some further discussion based on the member's comments on SFI and will be very anxious to see whether we can resolve it. The member said handicapped parent. I assume that it was the file of a parent of a handicapped child. Now that we're in transition on our new resources for children with disabilities legislation, I think there may be some confusion. We can get somebody to sit with that person – and I promise that – and go through this file very solidly.

We've had two schools of thought in this city from parents coming to me. Some want to choose their programs and be reimbursed, and others want us to be very hands on in the delivery. If it's something that relates to the Minister of Learning, he's a very willing and compliant member. His estimates are up on Thursday, and perhaps he will be able to share the good news of the gospel on his part of that.

The hon. member has done me a great favour in giving me a chance to talk about some of our core businesses and our performance measures quite specifically. I think that in terms of the questions, although I may not have received all of them, in the performance measures we've reduced from 17 measures to 13 with a consolidation to better do a couple of things: fit with the national measures on early childhood development and not have so much wordy discussion about what outcomes should be but to simplify the measures so that everybody, both in the community and throughout, understands them. So we have tried to make our targets more understandable.

I want to look at just a couple of them; for example, giving children and youth a healthy start in life. The targets are constant at 29 per cent for each of the three years. The last result for this measure in 2001 was 29 per cent. We're looking at 29 per cent in close proportion to 28 per cent of Alberta's children being between the ages of zero and 19. We're trying to target the measure to the actual demographics of the children so that when we're making a contribution of 29 per cent to 28 per cent, it's because of the range for the age of the children. Information for this measure is from the audited financial statements of FCSS.

As you know, that program is actually a favourite of mine. It enables communities to take a look at: what are my demographics here? In communities where they have a larger elderly population, then it seems reasonable to target the dollars to that population proportionately, but if they are a very young community, then it's very useful to contemplate that the dollars should go to that population.

Twenty-eight per cent represents the 840,000 children that are zero to 19, so FCSS, generally, as a rough guideline should be spending about one-third of the dollars that they receive from the government on children, youth, and family programs. In the case of a community like Calgary receiving about \$17 million, they look the biggest on the sheet, but actually Edmonton has \$13 million, and then the surrounding satellite communities make up almost the equivalent of \$17 million. So you look across Alberta at the dollars that FCSS receives and say: what are the demographics, and how are they apportioning the money? I would only be concerned if a community took 100 per cent of the funding they're getting from the province and made the decision to support, for example, all middle-aged adults from 20 to 50, because if they had children and elderly, then those two groups would be missing out.

So that's how that measure dealing with FCSS is written. It's just making sure that there's a target of support for the demographics of children in Alberta. When you look at other measures, they are almost all trying to target and focus on the number of people that really require them.

Let me talk about core business 2 and goal 2: "Families . . . safe, healthy, and able to promote children's development." We've got a

target of 85 per cent over the three years, and this percentage is through our child welfare information system data, hoping to achieve a delivery system that resolves issues before they escalate, requiring child protection.

So to the hon. member and his questions, I'll look very clearly at whether or not later we should provide you a more complete breakdown on those performance measures, but the thinking is to make it readable so that the FCSS community understands it.

3:50

One final thing. There is incentive funding in this budget for FCSS partnerships with child and family services authorities and other agencies so that if they would have formerly received a dollar, they'll get \$1.50 because of the partnership adding an enhancing value to the partnership so that we get more agencies collaborating and co-operating to benefit the family.

The Deputy Chair: I guess we have passed the one-hour mark. I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for permitting me to join the debate of the budget for the Children's Services ministry. When I look at the amount of money that we spend on children's services in Alberta, I have mixed feelings. On one hand, I am very happy that we are able to set aside a significant amount of money, in the neighbourhood of \$735 million, to provide services for the children of this province. On the other hand, many of my constituents have concerns about the rate of increase as far as the budget of this ministry is concerned.

We remember that about 10 years ago, in 1994, the budget at that time was somewhere between \$175 million to probably about \$285 million because there were different things being covered under the ministry of family and social services at the time. Over the past 10 years we've had an increase in the population of Alberta, but certainly we don't have that many more bad parents or that many more children at risk. Looking at the budget, it has increased at least a hundred per cent or even more. Some people had said that it has increased as much as 200 per cent. This begs the question: are we spending the money in the most cost-effective way?

You could take a look at the number of children that are in the system today. There are around 13,000 kids, 5,000 in permanent care and about 8,000 in temporary care of the government. Also, the ministry is helping about 7,200 handicapped children. If you look at those numbers and look at the amount of money that we spend on it, then we have to ask ourselves the question: can we find another way to spend this amount of money on that number of kids? Should we wait until the children come into the custody of the government to provide that kind of help, or should we spend that money at the family level to provide support for the family to reduce those numbers in the first place?

Going further down to look at how the money is being spent, you can see that there are nine regions that are receiving money from the ministry. When the money passes the ministry level going down to the region, what kind of control mechanism do we have at that point to ensure that the money is being spent at the right place, at the right time, and for the right purpose? Many of my constituents have expressed concern about the ballooning bureaucracy and the very heavy administration associated with each region.

In the year 2000 I had the pleasure or displeasure of working very closely with region 3, and I'm glad that Mr. Bill Meade is here this afternoon to hear this. My experience at that time was not a very good one. The practice of some of the staff at that time, in my humble opinion, was not as straightforward as it should be. I'd be

more than happy to repeat what I say in the House outside this House if needed. The practice of making up stories and misleading the minister's office and misleading elected officials certainly is not something that should be taken lightly, and when you add that with the huge percentage increase year after year, it begs the question: who is actually controlling those monies once it has gotten down to the regional levels?

Looking at the money that we spend for the minister's office, I have absolutely no problem with that. I have no doubt that the minister is very committed and very responsible when it comes to spending taxpayers' dollars, but once the money is passed down to the regions, then we look at this and we see right now region 6, Edmonton and area, which I think Mr. Bill Meade is responsible for, spending \$211 million, there is very, very little explanation as to exactly how that money is being spent.

Today if anybody is suggesting that the government should reduce spending money on Children's Services, that will not fly because as members of this House we'd love to see more and more money spent in this high-priority area. However, if we look at the number of children in the system and the things that we are doing today and the things that we used to do 10 years ago and the number of children 10 years ago and the amount of money that we spent 10 years ago, maybe we can learn some very, very useful lessons.

Tough questions need to be asked of the regions who spend more than 70 per cent of the budget of the ministry. Each of these regions should submit a detailed breakdown of how they spend their money. We should go over it line by line and compare how the money was spent in the past to ensure that the taxpayers receive the best value for their money.

I am not advocating reducing the amount of money for this ministry, but I'm advocating that we should have detailed reviews of how the money is being spent, and maybe we can refocus the money on the children rather than on the administration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, just briefly I want to make a couple of observations. Coming back to the end of the discussion at the beginning of the hon. member's comments, let me point out how \$203 million is spent.

Now, 10 years ago we didn't have a program for resources for children with disabilities, but 10 years ago we weren't identifying a hundred new cases of autism every year. So this year when this budget includes \$72 million as support for resources for children with disabilities, that is a brand new program that wasn't there before. Ten years ago we spent a fraction of the \$63 million that we currently spend on family and community support services going directly to municipalities to provide supports for preventive programs. Ten years ago we didn't spend money on daycares trying to improve the qualifications of their staff. We were subsidizing the daycare directly, but we weren't subsidizing the parents, and we didn't have the number of working poor, that were so-called categorized as working poor, that required assistance. So that would account for at least \$203 million of the expense that has not been something that you would have seen in the same capacity 10 years ago.

I believe that the hon. member behind me here in the House has raised some issues that the Auditor might take an interest in, and he does. Every year, annually, we get reports and management letters on every single authority, how they've spent their money and how they perform according to their business plans and the expectations of the department and the legislation.

4:00

This past year in our letter to the Assistant Auditor General we cited and agreed with the issues that he raised specifically relative to

recoveries from Canada Customs and Revenue Agency dealing with provincial systems and reconciling the dollars in that particular area. We agreed with and accepted recommendations on the expenditure and accounting officer role directly related to our articulation with Alberta Finance principles and making sure that our expenditure officers in the area of child welfare delivery were designated appropriately and that the delegated First Nations monies were properly accounted for. We dealt with access security for information systems. In short, we have now complied with everything that the Auditor General raised in his letter.

I'd like to take a moment and just address one other thing. I really appreciate that the hon. member wouldn't necessarily spend less on children but just challenges to see whether we're spending the appropriate amount in the appropriate way. I think that the families themselves receiving the more preventive style supports, a greater aggression in keeping children in the home with the Alberta response model, the two new pieces of legislation that work to more rapid family reunification, are very strong indicators that we're moving in the right direction.

In terms of the services that have been delivered in a region now identified as Calgary and area, I'd like to go on record as saying and stating that I believe that they are well delivered, delivered with integrity and in the appropriate fashion. Although there has been a question raised about them, I would be more than pleased once again to discuss those services and that history with the hon. member. I know that he would be prepared to do so as well if another occasion provides that opportunity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, and thanks to the minister for her responses.

I have some specific questions about the programs. I would like to go back to the question about the \$1.2 million increase in corporate administration. If we could get some indication of what that involves. The second item: under program 1, ministry support services, there was a \$1 million decrease in expenditures on financial support to child and family research. I wonder if the minister could give us some information, some background on those two items.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, could I just beg the hon. member to give me that last item one more time, please?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thanks. Sure. The decrease in expenditures on financial support to child and family research. This is program 1, page 49, and it's the last item.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, we established, as the member would remember, last year some monies to be spent on a centre for family research. In fact, we had \$5 million set aside, and they are currently exploring the ways in which we can put out an RFP, establish an appropriate mechanism. This is all related to that. The original amount of money was considerably more. If I'm not mistaken, it was an assignment of \$5 million.

Now with the centre for family research this is to assist in the solicitation of proposals to fit with the fetal alcohol initiatives. The expectation that we have is that we will award some state of evidence reviews in the area of intervention to improve outcomes for children and youth affected by FASD. We are looking at a project right now, for example, in Lethbridge with the University of Lethbridge and

looking at how we provide funding to look at comparisons and performance measures in Success by Six programs both on the Blood reserve and with the community of Lethbridge.

The research centre, being an arm's-length establishment from government, is in receipt of some administrative funding, which is a million dollars, but beyond that has an additional endowment of \$5 million. They have not yet come back with the completed business plan for the sustainable development of those programs.

So until we really get a good look at what the dollars will be for each of the programs, this research centre – let me give you a little bit of the background on it. The research centre, which will be a part of our ministry but also a part of the broader government prospectus, will start by identifying programs for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, early intervention for children with autism, family and community capacity building, and identifying the needs of rural and urban First Nations and Métis communities. The work they've been doing currently is to try and solicit proposals that might assure that there's adequate prevention in place and respite quite specifically for Kids Kottage.

So rather than a reduction in the research money, this is an amount of money to assure that there's an administrative fund in place while they are looking at the proposals for the \$5 million. Ultimately they will be raising some funds, either through federal contacts or through national and international foundations that will hopefully help.

You asked about the \$1.2 million in corporate administration. This represents the legal services protocol that I mentioned briefly in one of my opening remarks, including increased legal representation and supports for justice. You might later talk to the Minister of Justice, but we're accounting differently for the management of legal cases that are received under the auspices of child welfare, everything from claims that have been made, liabilities that have been claimed against our ministry, and this gives a way of accounting for how we serve those costs in government and how we represent the costs, more clearly exhibiting them under Children's Services.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, you talked about the research projects – I suppose the research being done on FASD in Lethbridge – and you made some reference to things that are being done in Edmonton. I have a question in regard to rural Alberta and what initiatives you have that would affect rural Alberta as far as FASD.

I tried to ask it in one question, but a supplemental to that would be: how do you co-operate or partner with other ministries in that direction? It is a serious problem – at least I see it as a serious problem – and it is a very preventable problem.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. minister to respond, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

4:10head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour today to introduce a constituent from Vermilion. The Webb family is one of the longest inhabitants of the town. The family are the biggest private employers in Vermilion. It's been a real treat to spend an afternoon with Scott in some meetings. I would ask Scott Webb to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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Children's Services (continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the hon. member may be aware, the original composition of local community FASD program delivery systems had representation from Health, from Learning, from Children's Services, and the initiative was built on the basis of a collaborative framework where we would see a tremendous amount of partnership. The difficulty, obviously, arises when one partner chooses to withdraw and solicit other initiatives.

The fetal alcohol initiative has an amount in this year's budget added over last year, a 21 per cent increase to \$2.85 million, along with the estimates of work that will be done through the FASD research. So there's a tremendous, I would say, increase in monies that are spent here. The frustration level for people in some of our outlying rural communities is when partners make other assignments for their funds and don't always follow through with initiatives that had been promised, with FASD for example.

We've been working to bridge that gap, have opportunities for local child and family service authorities to help bridge the gap and make sure that programs are in place. There's an excellent program in the hon. member's area. That is the Lakeland program that he's valiantly championed. We're doing our best to see that we can link in and continue with their excellent public education program. They are probably a leading light in Alberta. Perhaps through the research program that's being done with Lethbridge and the Blood reserve – we have actually mentioned to them that this may be another linkage with Lakeland so that we are assured that that rural partnership will not diminish.

Overall we believe that this year because of the additional grants for the FASD pilot projects and the initiatives, there will be some fruition, I think a better collaborative framework for understanding where the dollars go, and hopefully a little bit more prevention as well.

I thank the hon. member for his question. The research framework and capacity that will come under the research funding will give us, I would suspect, a very significant amount of extra money in this initiative by the time that projects are awarded. We'll assure and we'll make sure that the hon. member's issues of rural supports are kept front and centre of that group. I believe that Dr. Sutherland at the University of Lethbridge was very sensitive to the fact that that was a most needed item.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A supplemental to the question.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the chair is recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to, if I may, move to program 2 with some specific questions. My question is: how much of the \$12 million increase across the regions is going to be used to help pay for the new licensing laws by agencies?

I have a couple of questions. Why is there a \$6 million increase, more being spent for accreditation services? How much of that \$6 million, if any, will be going out of country? Will it be going to American companies?

The final one with respect to that accreditation: is the \$6 million going to be given to the agencies and then passed on to the accrediting bodies, or is it going to go directly to the new and existing accrediting agencies?

Ms Evans: It's actually, in this coming year's budget, about \$9.5 million that will be given, 80 per cent of which will be given for supports for salaries for the daycares themselves; as you know, the ones that have applied to be a part of the accreditation model, about 95 per cent of the daycares, about 98 per cent of the day homes. Eighty per cent of the monies that come directly to those daycares and day homes will be provided for supplements to staff salaries and training so that those daycare providers can't, as it were, take up those things for themselves.

So we're not charging more for the licensing. We're still in the consultation process. I haven't yet been satisfied that I've seen the final framework for what it really should look like to make sure that we're getting the quality of delivery standards. I mean, today the daycares have licences that are protecting the child, giving the child safe toys, safe food, safe environment, but the issues of enhanced quality development of the child are what we want to put the focus on in the accreditation process.

Whether this should be an arm's-length body represented by the people and arm's length from Children's Services and government or whether it should be under the auspices of the ministry, what the final form will be is as yet an undecided point, but what I think is most crucial to get is a proper accreditation framework or proper quality outcome delivery measures and then make sure that those monies get to the front line with a minimum amount of money spent on the administrative supports for accreditation.

Now, you asked originally in the House a question about contracts for outside agencies and people from out of country that might apply. The collaborative that's currently working on the accreditation project represents a number of different groups, even the Child Welfare League of Canada and other groups, that have come together to sit at the table and wrestle with the problem of defining an accreditation model that'll work for Alberta. We are somewhat hamstrung by the fact that nobody else in Canada, nobody in North America has an accreditation model for child care delivery services. But I believe that if our children are as important to us as our patients are in hospitals, we should have that type of a modelling and that we should be able to publish the ones that are accredited and the ones that aren't so that people can make educated choices about where their children should attend.

Ultimately, I'll go one step further on this gangplank. It's my belief that the government should support subsidies to quality care delivery systems at all costs and that someday we may be so well equipped with accredited facilities that that type of standard should apply before subsidies to parents would be provided. In other words, nonaccredited would not be given subsidies unless it was a situation of kin care or some other kinds of care provided to children that made it reasonable to assume that it was quality care.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A bit of a supplemental going back to FASD. Madam Minister, excuse my ignorance, but, you know, what I want to say is that I think that the programs that we do have are very, very important, and I think that we end up in a situation sometimes in budget restraint times of some of these programs not being adequately funded. When I say inadequately funded, it does give me concern when some of the funding or some of the programs go through health authorities and the health authorities get themselves in some tight situations and the possibility of FASD being reduced or cut back. I guess I would just like to know your comments about: when this funding takes place, could it be a direct funding or at least a designated funding as

opposed to into the general revenues of health authorities? Could you comment on that, please?

4:20

Ms Evans: Well, without the minister of health present, I would be loath to get too much into the actual mechanics of how Health supports programs like FASD. Suffice it to say that with our cross-ministry initiatives, the one Alberta children and youth initiative that we deal with, Health is a partner, and the member has given food for thought for our collaboration. I know that we're all trying to assure some type of co-operation, and perhaps the way that we can best address this in a cross-ministry framework is to provide members an opportunity to disengage in program delivery if there's been due notice.

Health authorities are relatively independent in the distribution of their own funds and priorities, and as you know, the child and family services authorities don't have quite that level of independence although they're very representative of the community initiatives.

So we'll take that up as a challenge and look at that. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Wamer.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to commend the Minister of Children's Services for her commitment to families and to children. I firmly believe that children are our most important resource that we have in this province and that we have to do all we can to help them to grow up to be responsible, accountable adults. I happen to be of the philosophy that families are the best way to do this and that the best thing we can do for children is to encourage the continuance of viable, functional families to raise children.

I think it's unfortunate that in our society we have gotten away from that a little bit, and therefore I realize the role the Ministry of Children's Services has to play, and I commend the minister for her philosophy in what she's doing. I know that she agrees that families are important and does what she can to keep the family intact.

My specific question to the minister this afternoon has to do with the current Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, which I believe the minister has underway at the present time. A few weeks ago she had a seminar in Lethbridge on this session, and I want to ask a couple of questions for the minister to respond to.

First of all, following the seminar in Lethbridge, I did have some contacts from one or two people who were at the round-table, and they felt like the representation at the round-table was too much weighted towards government people who were there versus people who would speak from the grassroots of the community. I wasn't there, so I'm not sure of the validity of this statement, but their point was that we needed to have more representation from grassroots at the round-table. So if the minister could comment on that and what her thoughts are on that.

Secondly, on the expectation that the minister has from the round-table: the results, how she would expect to implement the suggestions and ideas that come forth, and will that create an expectation in society that perhaps will be a challenge to meet?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the hon. member for the question. In the first instance, one of the things that we found very challenging in organizing the round-tables in communities was that there were varied expectations when we first sought points across the map for Albertans to come and become involved. Many

of the providers of service immediately signed up. There was no doubt about it that people who worked in justice, police, people who were counsellors in schools, social workers, a number of those folks, came and were almost first up to the plate. So in the 13 regional round-tables we had a significant number of people that were practitioners for social change, who delivered essential change and support services and were accountable at the community level either through agencies or delivery systems.

What we have found in our other focus groups is that we have been able to engage regular community people. Let me give you the list: the aboriginal community; the youth services and youth in two separate groups identifying youth across the province for bullying; elder abuse best-practice groups; faith community leaders; I mentioned previously the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered victims; immigrant women victims; male victims; the military community, which has been a mixture; older adult victims; perpetrators; persons with disabilities victims; women exploited by prostitution; women in emergency shelters; obviously, the male victims group; I mentioned the youth; and so on. What we have now in the final gathering of the guests for the May 7 round-table is a session that's being held on May 6 that's wide open to anybody.

Now, I say that advisedly because as soon as we advertised – Mr. Chairman, you're going to hardly believe this – that we were bringing in experts to talk about violence and bullying, we had 800 people registered at the Calgary Roundup Centre. Unbelievable. It's like they all knew that there had been five deaths since Christmas relative to family violence.

I don't know who all of these people are, but I do know that these people want to come forward and listen to what we've discovered in the round-table, fill out questionnaires, react to the issues that they see, listen to experts talk about bullying and how communities can build capacity and resiliency, and finally to make sure that the final product that we have will be a framework that the community will see fit to commit to, that the person and individual will see fit to commit to, that the province will see fit to commit to, and so on.

There are actually nine other ministries that are involved, and you could ask the Minister of Gaming, if you wish, because he so frequently funds shelter replacement and shelter programs through lottery dollars and has a very big stake in this as well. We have got almost half of the government ministries that are involved in hosting this round-table. I am simply the co-ordinator. I can assure you from the passion and compassion that I've seen in getting all the deputies and ministers together at least for meetings, sometimes two a month, that we've got people who are willing to take up the causes that come as a result of that dialogue and bring forward meaningful change.

Now, when this happened in Ontario, Ontario developed a three and a half to five-year plan with 140 recommendations, and I'm expecting no less in Alberta, recommendations that cover the gamut from what happens to the elder that's abused in a seniors' place or left by neglect to starve alone to what happens to the baby that might be unwittingly a participant or a victim in a family violence case. So the recommendations that will come back will come both to government and to the community level.

I'll make just one final promo on this. When we did one of our very first round-tables, at Fort McMurray, they told us at that centre: do you know that if nothing else happened as a result of this family violence round-table, the very fact that we've got all of these people in one room talking to each other is probably the first step towards making this community a safer place? So although there were some that were disappointed that at the local level the spots were predominantly filled by practitioners or people integrally involved in delivery of some form of service, what we will get on the 6th and 7th of May

is a much broader spectrum of Albertans that will be considerate of all of those impressions from across Alberta. We'll consider as well the questionnaires, that we've received literally hundreds of.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask the minister if she would talk a little bit about the changes to the regional boundaries and if she sees the present boundaries now being in place holding for the next few years or whether there is going to have to be some further adjustment.

A couple of other specifics, Mr. Chairman. How much will the new regulation of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act cost to implement?

4:30

A third question: with the goal of the ministry being the enhancement of aboriginal children, why did the Métis settlements receive less than a hundred thousand dollars of the \$12 million increase?

I guess those are a few questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you. In terms of the implementation of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act the implementation supports in the estimates this year are \$4.3 million. They relate almost exclusively to training and to providing a lot of staff training. It's not simple to train the staff, because there have to be staff in place on the front lines. Removing those staff, talking to them about how they represent the legislative framework, how they respond on that is an important element, how they respond in court, how they work as multidisciplinary teams in assessments, and so on. But this particular amount of money is predominantly for training. It's an amount over and above last year's by about \$1.8 million to make sure that we have adequate resources in place to make sure that that training is sufficient.

Now, in terms of the reduced amount of money for the Métis settlements I'll attempt to get you a response on that shortly. But let me just talk a bit about the number of regions. As you know, nine regions plus Métis settlements is really the 10th region. When you look at the way the dollars have been apportioned, it tries to account for both the demographics as well as the unique needs of each region.

In the Edmonton and area region, the newly created region 6, there are a considerable number of people that are a part of this region that may originate from other regions, predominantly from northern Alberta. There are a significant number of people that come from northern Alberta points, stay here for several months of the year and become part of our child welfare case rolls, either off-reserve in some instances or people along with families that have located here to be a part of the oil sands development, the military as a group who have located here. Ten years ago we didn't have that, so there are additional pressures as families who have been more transient than others try to find new systems of support.

So I hope that these will be, roughly speaking, the correct amounts of dollars for each one of these regions. Thus far with the business plans that I've received, I think that those supports should be there. There are not as many additional dollars being profiled in the regions, but that's predominantly because some of those dollars are in place in other places; for example, in the family violence initiative and in other initiatives that we have provided.

But as to the specifics of the reduction of dollars for the Métis settlements I don't note that on program 2, for example. In the

operating expense I have, it looks to me like an increase of \$300,000 over last year, so I might be missing the place. Could the hon. member clarify again?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The question was that the Métis settlements received less than a hundred thousand dollars of the \$12 million increase.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, give me a moment or two, and I'm sure that one of my angels will make sure that I get that amount clear.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, if you so wish, you may provide a response in writing as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to make a few observations on the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services and to ask a question or two of the minister. Most of the specific questions that I had have already been raised, so I won't waste the time of the House in repeating those.

By way of general comments, Mr. Chairman, I first want to commend the minister for attempting to address the questions with some useful information coming out and trying to do the best job that she can. She may want to respond to some other questions in writing so that the House gets the benefit of more detailed information on the questions that have been asked. Some answers that the minister attempted may have addressed some of those questions only in part, so she might want to look at those answers and then see if she wants to supplement them in writing.

Mr. Chairman, I was looking at a couple of news releases from the department from last year and this year. I'll start perhaps with one of the more recent news releases concerning the minister's travel to San Diego in January to attend a conference dealing with maltreatment of children. The conference was designed to "increase professional skills and knowledge in the prevention, recognition, assessment and treatment of all forms of maltreatment including those related to family violence and substance abuse."

Then in the next paragraph the minister is quoted as saying, "I am looking forward to hearing from the experts in the area of child protection and family violence prevention." I'm sure the minister benefited from being at that conference and brought back some ideas. I'd like to ask the minister if some of those were reflected in the budget decisions that the minister has made since and if she would draw my attention to it.

I have one specific question in terms of needed improvements perhaps. I'm interested in asking the minister to respond to the training of child and youth welfare workers who provide services to children and families who are in the care of the government or are supported by the government while they remain with their families. Are there some changes or improvements being sought and made in the training of the service providers in order to both enhance the quality of service and to ensure that the measures that we take are directed as much to the level of prevention as are needed for the protection of children who are in need of those services? Has the minister made provisions in the budget to encourage professional development of these service providers? If so, what kinds of steps are being taken to enhance and encourage and increase access to professional development? So that's the one specific question related to training and professional development, if you wish.

I was looking at another news release from the minister's department in September of 2003, Mr. Chairman. This deals with the

annual report for 2002-2003 from the Department of Children's Services. The minister refers there to "a child care initiative that will improve the quality of child care settings and help families select quality child care that meets their child's developmental needs."

4:40

In this budget what changes or what particular allocations reflect that continuing commitment, I guess, of the minister and of the minister's department? How are the child care facilities in the province going to receive more attention both in terms of the level of training required of child care workers and the accreditation of either agencies or families who provide that child care in their homes for, I think, four to six, eight children? So the question of requiring certain standards in terms of the quality of care to be delivered is what's begged by this particular commitment, and I want to ask the minister what kinds of budget decisions reflect concrete actions, to match the words with concrete actions.

Another item that's mentioned in the same September 30 news release is the publicly accessible adoptions web site to "promote the need for families of specific children in the permanent care of government." I'd like to ask the minister to perhaps give us some update on how that web site is working. It wasn't in use for a while, and some improvements have been made to it, I know, to make sure that private information on children is secure and appropriately protected. How is it working? What are the costs of it, if there are any costs associated with it? Where are they reflected in the budget if the program is to continue? So that's yet another question.

Now, I was looking at the budgets of regions in particular, taking a quick look at them, and noticed that, unless I'm mistaken, there's a pattern there more or less with respect to the budgets of each of the regions with the exception of one, I think. I think it was region 5. This was under expenditure programs dealing with child care and early intervention. Both of these programs, in my view, are exceedingly important to prevent harm to children, to make sure that they get very early on appropriate care and that early intervention is available when problems are diagnosed and detected.

The pattern that I notice, Mr. Chairman, and to which I want to draw the minister's attention and invite her comments is as follows. In the case of both child care and early intervention there's a reduction in the budget allocations for these regions. The only exception is region 5. In some cases the budget allocations are less than last year's for both cases, early intervention and child care. In other regions it may be that for child care there's a reduction and for early intervention there may be either stagnant funding, same as the last year's, or only nominally increased this year.

If I'm right in seeing a certain pattern of a general decline in the budgetary allocations, how does it square with the budget figures here in the Budget 2004 document where there's a \$5 million increase with respect to child care, for example, from the forecast for 2003-2004 to the current budget, which is \$68 million something? So there's close to a \$6 million, \$7 million increase on the child care side, yet I see systematic reductions in the allocations to that particular item in the budgets of most of the regions, if not all of the regions.

These are some of the questions for the minister to address.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to try and succinctly capture the essence of most, and if I miss any, I will submit them in writing. I realize that we have only a few minutes left.

With the indulgence of the hon. member that just spoke,

Edmonton-Strathcona, I'd like to just provide that the Métis settlements that was referenced by one of the previous speakers from the opposition, page 67, was to remove the variances in the removal of matching funds from the federal government. There's a minimal increase, and there's a low child welfare caseload, low resources for children with disabilities caseload, and provision has been made for community collaboration and delivery of service. So it's predominantly a reconfiguration of the federal funding there that's caused the change.

In the conference in San Diego – and I'm so glad you mentioned it. I actually could spend hours talking to the hon. member about what I learned there. I reacquainted myself with Judge Milliken and talked about the things that are fundamental in our Child Welfare Act that relate to what we really did develop, and that is a reduced time for families to be separated. You know, if you keep a child away, you can risk developmental detachment, a number of other pathologies in terms of the psychological profile of a child.

In California they work very closely with their courts to try and put families together as quickly as possible, so they've got a pretty stringent guideline to a reunification process. We talked about that, and we talked a lot there about bullying.

The additional dollars here in two areas, both in the parenting resource initiative as well as the additional dollars for family violence, relate in part to things experienced after our discussion with the experts in San Diego in child welfare, and hopefully after the round-table on family violence, the other ministries' profiled supports for those areas will show the hon. member opposite that we made some significant difference.

The training for the child welfare legislation I had mentioned previously was in excess of \$4 million this year, and there are significant training dollars there for not only the service providers that are our staff but for those that are on contract to the ministry. So I can assure the hon. member that we believe that sufficient provision for this new legislation in the area of training has been made as well as some support for the advocate, as well, in terms of developing community-based mentors. There are significantly more dollars in this budget for that.

4:50

In terms of child care accreditation and the extra dollars provided there, I mentioned just a few moments ago that we have been looking at an elevated quality status for those dollars that are expected. The overall increase there is approximately \$9.8 million, looking at early childhood development programs and increased respite for families and in the child care area more funds to provide supports to the staff so that they will be able to complete additional training.

In terms of parenting resources there's \$2 million that wasn't in the . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Children's Services, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(4), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration for a department's proposed estimates, and after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, I must now put the question.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Equipment/Inventory

Purchases

\$735,801,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of the Department of Children's Services and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Maskell: 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, 2005, for the following department: Children's Services, operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$735,801,000.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that the Assembly adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:52 p.m.]

