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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 14, 2008

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2008-09

Children and Youth Services

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I get started, I would like to introduce the ministry staff that are with me today. On the floor we have Fay Orr, deputy minister; Shehnaz Hutchinson, senior financial officer; Gord Johnston, ADM, ministry support services; Niki Wosnack, ADM, community strategies and support. Up in the gallery we have Lori Cooper, executive director, human resource management; Sheryl Fricke, executive director, prevention of family violence and bullying; Lynn Jerchel, director, child development; Karen Ferguson, director, family support for children with disabilities; Susan Taylor, director, policy and community practice branch, prevention of family violence and bullying; Tyler Lawrason, executive assistant; Christine Ferbey, special adviser to the minister; and Elizabeth Jeffray, manager, strategic support. These are just a few of the thousands of our dedicated staff who work to support strong children, youth, and families in Alberta.

Safe, healthy families are the building blocks of a successful society and a strong Alberta, and in 2008-09 we are investing a total of \$1.1 billion in Alberta's children, youth, and families. This budget is critical to help us build on our core businesses: supporting the development of children, youth, and families; keeping them safe and protected; and promoting strong and vibrant communities for Albertans.

It will also help us achieve our ministry's mandated priorities: expanding support to aboriginal peoples and immigrants and improving access to existing programs for Albertans affected by family violence; ensuring Alberta families have access to quality, affordable child care by supporting the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces by 2011, including out of school care, family day homes, and daycares; and providing low- and middle-income families with a subsidy to help cover the costs of out of school child care. These are ambitious but achievable goals. Our budget gives us the tools to accomplish them, and I think we have a great opportunity to build on the excellent services we provide Albertans and to make a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and families.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to share some of the highlights from our budget with you. It's no secret that the biggest reason for our province's success and prosperity is the hard work, talent, and innovation of Albertans. There are now more than 2 million working Albertans contributing to our growing economy. We're also seeing more and more parents joining Alberta's workforce: 95 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women with children under the age of six participate in the workforce. With our unemployment rate at 3.3 per cent and an extremely tight labour market working parents are an essential part of our workforce in Alberta's thriving economy. We know that one of the biggest issues these parents face is finding access to quality child care for their children.

In order to support families and accommodate Alberta's changing workforce, our projected child care expenditures are increasing by \$76 million for a total of \$197 million. This is part of our three-year, made-in-Alberta plan called creating child care choices: a plan to support our families. It provides the tools to help operators recruit and retain quality child care staff, support low- and middle-income families, and assist communities in the creation of 14,000 spaces over the next three years. As part of our investment we'll also launch an out of school care program to support quality care and respond to staffing challenges. Our plan is based on what we know is already working and on the feedback we've heard from parents, operators, communities, and businesses. In essence, it will support Alberta families and strengthen opportunities for Albertans to participate in the workforce. We know that nothing is more important to a child than the opportunity for a good start in life to help them reach their potential. We will continue to work with communities to ensure that parents have child care choices that meet the needs of their families and help them stay in the workforce.

Mr. Chair, strong and vibrant communities start with supportive and loving homes. Unfortunately, thousands of Albertans are affected by family violence and bullying and need rebuilding in their lives. Alberta continues to lead the country in taking action through the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative. Since 2005 joint spending across nine partnering ministries involved in the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative has increased to approximately \$49 million. This year Children and Youth Services will spend \$39 million to prevent family violence and bullying and support those affected. This includes \$1.7 million to fund new women's shelters, beds, in Alberta.

Our \$2.8 million increase to the government's safe communities initiative is important and will be directed to preventing longer term issues. With this investment we'll enhance support to aboriginal people and immigrants, expand mentoring opportunities to provide youth with positive role models, and increase resources for parents of at-risk children and youth.

Raising a family with a disability can be challenging. That's why our family support for children with disabilities program is so important. It helps offset some of the extraordinary costs of caring for a child with a disability, from respite care to assistance with costs associated with attending medical appointments. No other jurisdiction in the country offers a comparable level of support. Since the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act was enacted in 2004, the budget has increased from \$77.5 million to \$107 million. That's a 38 per cent increase. In fact, about 10 per cent of our ministry's operating budget is devoted to helping around 8,200 children and their families under our FSCD program. This year the program's budget is increasing by \$1.7 million to address the anticipated caseload. This will help us provide services to new families that join the program and ensure that they get the support that they need to care for their children with special needs.

Mr. Chair, an estimated 23,000 Albertans are living with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, a preventable, lifelong disability with no cure. A significant number of individuals in the criminal justice, child protection, health, and disability systems have been diagnosed with FASD. But there is hope. Our government has made a commitment with a 10-year plan involving nine ministries to reduce the incidence of the disorder and improve the quality of life and productivity of those already affected. This year a new investment of \$8.5 million for a total of \$18 million will support this ministry's efforts to reduce the number of babies born with FASD and support those living with FASD and their caregivers. We are expanding on what we know is working, making it available to more Albertans and continuing to work together to help those affected to prevent future incidents.

The heart of our business is ensuring the safety of Alberta's children and youth. Budget 2008-09 invests a total of \$536 million for child intervention services, a \$21 million increase over last year, to help us develop a long-term solution for Alberta's children. At the leading edge of social work practice Alberta's intervention services, through the new casework practice model, focus on collaboration with children and their families through assessment of the circumstances that brought them to our attention and community engagement to find solutions that last. When we reach families before a crisis strikes, we can help them find and develop their strengths through family enhancement.

Sadly, some families are unable or unwilling to care for and nurture their children, and child protection allows us to find safe, loving, permanent homes where children at risk can start to establish roots. We do this in partnership with an excellent community of foster families, who open their homes and their hearts to children at risk who need them. Our projected foster care expenditures will increase by \$10 million, bringing funding in this area to \$157 million; \$4.1 million of this significant investment will help foster parents continue their incredible work and will encourage families to join this community of caregivers.

We also rely on partnerships with social service agencies to provide support to children and families. In meetings with agencies they have told us that if they could attract and keep more qualified staff, they would be in a better position to continue to offer high-quality services for Albertans. To help social service agencies remain competitive in a tight labour market, Children and Youth Services provided \$10 million last year, and with Budget 2008 we are providing an additional \$11 million this year, with a similar increase planned for 2009-10. We will continue to work with agencies to find long-term solutions and ensure that Albertans are able to access the services that they need.

Family and community support services is a very successful partnership between the province, municipalities, and Métis settlements. This year funding to FCSS will increase by \$3.5 million to \$74.7 million. For more than 40 years FCSS has helped communities provide preventative social services for children and families based on local community needs. Today FCSS-related programs and services reach more than 99 per cent of Albertans. Examples of programs include youth mentoring initiatives, Meals on Wheels, and Roots of Empathy, an innovative classroom parenting program which fosters the development of empathy in elementary school children. The reason why this partnership has been so successful is because it empowers communities with the responsibility to decide how funding should be spent to meet the needs of their resident children and families.

Mr. Chair, partnerships help us to ensure that children and youth have positive influences wherever they go. Our foster families, contracted agencies, and municipalities all create a sense of hope. So do our partners in the corporate community. Thanks to the leadership of Alberta's Promise corporations have been contributing their dollars and their volunteer time to support children of this province. Since 2003 Alberta's Promise has helped to develop relationships with over 1,100 business, agency, and community partnerships, all focused on creating better futures for Alberta's children and youth. We are proud to support Alberta's Promise with funding of nearly \$1.6 million for the 2008-09 fiscal year. Thank you. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

7:40

Mr. Chase: May I allow the minister to finish, and then I'll participate?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Being a parent is one of the toughest jobs in the world. While parents have the primary responsibility for raising their children, the community plays an important supporting role. I truly believe that solutions are found in communities. By providing support to a family raising a child with a disability, helping at-risk youth, preventing family violence and bullying, and increasing child care choices, we help parents and communities provide safe, nurturing environments for children.

I would like to recognize our outstanding ministry staff for the incredible work they do, inspiring hope in the children, youth, and families they work with. The dedication of our staff and partners will help us achieve our mandated priorities and build on the tremendous work we do supporting strong children, youth, and families in Alberta.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about our ministry's budget highlights. I'll be pleased to answer any questions related to our 2008-09 budget.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I realize how hard it is to try to fit the material into 10 minutes. I find members' statements a tremendous challenge, trying to get it all into two minutes, so I understand the machine gun approach and the necessity.

I want to just provide a little bit of background in response to the minister, and then I think we'll take, as I mentioned, what I'd call almost the gopher or the Whac-A-Mole approach of up and down, question and answer, question and answer to get as many questions and answers in as possible.

I just want to provide a very brief resumé and indicate that I consider it a tremendous honour and a tremendous responsibility to be the shadow minister for Children and Youth Services and also to have the responsibility for Education. To me there's no defined line of demarcation where Children's Services begins and Education ends. The two are inextricably interlinked, and therefore it's my pleasure and responsibility to connect the two.

With regard to Children's Services and Education obviously at the centre is the child, and as such that has to always be our main focus. From what is best for the child comes what is best for the child care worker, what is best for the parents of the child, what is best for the foster parents, what is best for the teachers, what is best for the aides. Always it starts with the child, and whether that child has the luxury of being looked after within the home or by a member of the family, the extended family, a grandma, an aunt, or whether it's through a daycare program, always the child's values and importance must be recognized.

Now, with regard to what I would consider to be almost a resumé, ad infinitum this House has heard me proudly proclaim my 34 years as a teacher. I think that that has given me a terrific perspective on what children's needs are. Beginning with elementary, moving on to junior high, where there are a lot of troubled students but there is an unbelievable amount of motivating energy within those years, and then moving on and experiencing a little over a year and a half of substitute teaching, which ranged from a grade 1 behavioural adaption class to grade 12 baccalaureate French immersion classes, provided me with a background for appreciating the needs of children and youth.

Throughout my teaching career and through my service to the community I also have been very involved in coaching. While I

taught primarily academics, having majored in French and art, I spent a tremendous amount of time coaching; for example, 25 years coaching wrestling. I found that the best way to connect with kids is to meet them where they are. In order to receive respect, you give it, and I'm sure that that is where the minister comes from as well. With wrestling the students who were most successful were those who thought through three moves ahead. That's something that the ministry, to be successful, has to do, plan three moves ahead and anticipate the problems and solve them with pre-emptive support before they become even greater.

I also had an opportunity to coach soccer, gymnastics, volleyball, a wide variety of sports during my time, but I believe that what qualifies me most to shadow the children's ministry is the fact that I became a grandparent four years ago. For those of you who have not reached that grandparent status, I want to explain that something almost magical, a transformation, takes place. The loving and caring that you always thought were there and in abundance all of a sudden come flooding to the surface. That love you have for your own grandchild is not limited to that grandchild. It expands to all children. Therefore, in my role as a grandparent for my four-year-old, Kiran, and my 15-month-old, Rohan, soon to be 16 months old, I see through their eyes.

In looking after them and standing up for them and in supporting them, I see the needs in the lives of all children. As I say, this transformation to grandparenthood is an amazing situation. Love and a sense of protectiveness becomes all-consuming. I've mentioned in this House before my desire to help to leave a legacy not only for my two grandchildren but for all the children of Alberta. In my mind probably the most important ministry in terms of looking to the future is Children and Youth Services, of course combined with Education.

There are numerous opportunities for the ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services to work together. For example, previously I brought up a question stemming from the Learning Commission's recommendations of establishing not only full-day funded kindergartens but also half-day junior kindergartens. The beauty of funding those programs is twofold. One, not only are children cared for, but they receive a government-directed curriculum, which provides an education component as well as a caring component. Of course, in all child care activities, whether they be external, whether they be preschool or after school or infant care, there has to be an educational component.

With regard to the reference to the junior and full-day kindergartens, the number of places that would be freed up in terms of child care spaces by simply adopting what the Learning Commission recommended five years ago would be a tremendous benefit for parents and for child care operators because they would have the space that they currently don't have, and parents would know that their child was being supervised if they had the luxury of the option of sending them to full-day kindergarten. Having been a teacher and having taught elementary, primarily division 2, I've watched the enthusiasm that kindergarten students bring. My own grandson is involved in preschool, and I'm very aware of the socialization that preschool and junior kindergarten programs offer. So I would encourage the minister to work with her counterpart the Minister of Education in achieving the desires and recommendations of the Learning Commission in terms of providing junior and full-day kindergarten, especially for those special-needs children.

Speaking of special-needs children, I consider it an absolute crime that we have 64,000 children living below the poverty line in Alberta. We are the wealthiest per capita province, and we have the opportunity to tremendously improve the security and support for children.

7:50

Here is where I'll begin. I want to thank the minister for recognizing the needs of children, for having encouraged her colleagues, for having worked with my former colleague Weslyn Mather and having incorporated a number of the collaborative suggestions that Wes Mather made with regard to increased funding and the directions that programming should go. This 47 per cent increase is very much needed and very much welcomed, and I thank the minister for pushing her colleagues in that direction.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. You made lots and lots of comments there, and I see not too many questions, but I'm sure we're going to get to those. Just a comment on your comments. I really appreciate what you have to say about the importance of this ministry, and I fully agree with you. As well, your comments about the importance of being child focused: I think you're dead on. I can tell you that that's one of the things that impressed me with the ministry staff and department. When we sit around and talk about anything – policies, initiatives – that is what the focus is: what is best for the child. It doesn't matter if we're talking foster care, FSCD, whatever, so I totally agree with that.

Also, your comments about attacking problems before they become great. I think that that is critical and exceptionally important. Really, that is the premise behind the Alberta response model, as you know, to get help to families before they reach crisis. It is what is backing and promoting the casework practice model: get out there and help families, make sure we do spend the time and the energy and much of our resources on the front end, the assessment.

The INAC agreement as well, the historical agreement that last year we helped negotiate with the federal government. The Auditor General referred a couple of weeks ago to how the funding for services on reserves is quite outdated except for Alberta, that we have actually accomplished modernizing that formula and are the first in the country to negotiate some additional dollars to get onto the reserve for the very same thing, to get into more preventative services.

Child care. Just a point. You didn't ask a question about this, but I think it's worth pointing out because I know that you've been very interested and involved with the announcements on child care. You mentioned that quality child care is what's important, and I think that's true. Whether we're talking about our initiatives that have to do with affordability or accessibility or staffing, so many of our announcements are tied to accreditation, and I'm sure that you're a huge supporter of that. We're the only province in Canada to have an accreditation program to ensure quality, and I find it quite promising that 95 per cent of our programs are working towards that and that over 50 per cent have achieved that. So I think that's important. Quite often we hear talk about operating grants and why don't we just offer operating grants to daycares regardless of what program they're offering. I think it's really important – I like the history here – and I can thank, you know, some former ministers in this House that made sure that as we fund our program, we also tie it to quality. So I appreciate your comments there.

Children in poverty. I know that that's a concern for everyone in this House. You've raised it before. What I've said in the past is that I think it's quite phenomenal and I think we should all be proud of the fact that we have just over 3 million people in this province and we spend a billion dollars on the health and the safety of our children. I've pointed out a number of things that we do to help improve the situation for those less fortunate, and I've also said and

I firmly believe that we will be judged as a government, as a society by how we take care of the less fortunate. So I'm exceptionally proud of a number of our initiatives that are targeting those with the highest need, whether it be our parent link centres, the FCSS programs, all of our early intervention programs, our FSCD, one of the best programs in the country offering support to families with children with disabilities, and even some of the subsidies that we've just recently announced.

Lastly, I appreciate your comments about Weslyn Mather. She was wonderful to work with and a great advocate for the children and families in this province.

With your comments about early childhood development you're really getting into wraparound services. I had mentioned last week that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health and Wellness and I are working to take a look at whether we can better deliver an integrated service that will involve everything preschool. We do have a working group that has started to meet regularly, and they'll take a look at what barriers exist in legislation or policy or funding that prevents any of our authorities and organizations from working together. Anyway, I'll keep you up to date and posted on that, but I certainly appreciate those comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to have this back-and-forth discussion. The minister has announced a very bold plan to achieve 14,000 new daycare spaces in a space of three years. Obviously, for that to occur, there have to be people in place to provide the care for the children in those spaces, and that's been a challenge. This is something we brought up before in the House: the low salary, even though it has been raised somewhat not only for childcare workers but for youth service workers in group homes and working towards the people who have their social work degrees. In order to make the program successful, we're going to have to provide wages and we're going to have to provide incentives for people to move up the levels to encourage them to stay within the child care programming.

Child care is the department's first priority, linked to improving Albertans' quality of life, and new spending is dedicated to increasing access to affordable quality child care. Two questions under child care. What is the status of new and revised Bill 4 regulations? How much of the funding in this budget will go towards implementing the Child Care Licensing Act?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Thank you. Okay. Two things that you've mentioned there. You're right; that mandate to create 14,000 spaces over the course of three years is exceptionally aggressive and ambitious, and we will not get anywhere near that if, when we were developing the plan, we didn't come up with ways to attract the staff. I know that you were there the other night when we were celebrating the child care awards. We've got a number of incentives that I think are worth stating this evening to show the seriousness of our approach to making sure that we can attract and retain staff. We announced last Friday that we would increase the wage top-up 60 per cent, and that's whether or not staff is working in daycare programs or family day homes.

Also, for the first time – and this is rather critical because this is an area, the out-of-school program, where I see a huge growth in the number of spaces – we will offer a wage supplement of \$144 for each staff member. We'll take a look at developing an accreditation program for next year that will also include wage top-ups.

8:00

We're going to continue with the \$1,000 professional development. That bursary, that we implemented last year, has been highly successful and is one way to – I mean, it's not all about wages. We're also trying to increase the child care profession as a choice. The bursary that we had implemented last year has been quite successful. We're also doing two staff attraction funds: one will be targeting people that have been in the child care industry in the past and are returning to it, and the other is to provide \$2,500 for people that are entering the field for the first time. As well, we talked about all kinds of orientation courses at high school to help with scholarships for high school students that take the orientation and proceed with postsecondary education in early childhood development.

I think the commitment is there. We've done a number of things where we are focusing on staff. We know that when you take a look at creating spaces, there are three factors that you have to consider, and they all have to move forward together, or nothing is going to happen. One is physical space, the other is staffing, and then you've got the third component, which is the affordability for parents. I think the beauty of creating child care spaces is considering all of those.

We know that all across the province we do have some challenges, but every community's issues are quite different. We might have a community that has a facility, but they don't have the staff. Staffing is probably the number one issue, but we do have that situation. We have others that have the staff, and they don't have the facilities. I think the benefit of the plan is that it really is kind of all inclusive. It considers those three pillars, and it really is offering a tool box of all kinds of options for communities to access regardless of what their strengths or weaknesses are or what their needs are. So you're right about that focus. I think we do have the right focus, and it will stay. I'm going to be focused on the target, on the goal. We'll see where the uptake is. We'll see what's working, and we can adjust along the way. I am quite confident that we can be quite successful at that.

The other part of staffing is that we'll be taking a look at the equivalencies. You touched on that. That's very important. I think the combination of the benefits and the wage top-ups – we really want to get that sector, you know, comparable to other sectors – really is lagging.

With respect to the regulations. First of all, I would like to thank the I think over 1,200 Albertans that participated in that. I know that you and I had talked a couple of weeks ago, and I had given you an update on the first consultation. We had a number of recommendations that we had consensus on. It was easy to move forward on those. There were other ones that people had where there were differing views. We pulled out the ones that were easy to proceed with and took those more contentious ones, revised them a little bit, took it back out for consultation, had a great response again. The results of that consultation are now on my desk, and I think we've pretty much narrowed down and have full support for most of what we'll go forward with.

At this point it will be going through the decision-making process, and I'll keep you updated on it. But one thing I can tell you is that the regulations will go hand in hand with our space creation. They will work together and will help us achieve our targets without compromising quality, and I think you would agree that that's rather critical.

Oh, and I don't have a breakdown here – I don't know if we could get that – but I'll follow up and get the cost of the regulations and the act.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'd appreciate the follow-up.

Getting back to paying professional salaries for the highly valued

provision of child care, it was pointed out a couple of weeks ago that Grant MacEwan students were going past the two-year child care instruction and going for their education degrees because the salaries weren't sufficient to motivate them. Of course, the idea of having more teachers in the province – obviously, we have that need as well. But I would be interested in knowing how many new child care workers have been attracted by the bursary program that you announced.

I also would appreciate a little bit of an explanation of the value of a child. This past Friday in Calgary awards were given out for a whole variety of methods of child care. Some were three children with an individual in a home. An individual – I'm embarrassed to say that I've forgotten their first name – from Calgary-Varsity received a day home award and recognition. Unfortunately, she's experiencing difficulties with the city of Calgary in renewing her license.

However child care is delivered, through the varieties of methods, whether it be preschool or after school, whether it's in the child's own home or at a parent's or a neighbour's, the value of the child should remain the same. I'm wondering if the minister in the next round of explanations can explain why there is a discrepancy in how much a child is worth in their home or in the home of a family member versus how much they're worth in a daycare. Both forms of child care are extremely important. I don't quite understand how at home in the family there is less support provided than if they're in an external child care circumstance. Not to take away from either, but I'm just wondering about the difference in value.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. I should say – because I just haven't said it – that if I miss any of your questions, we will go through the *Hansard*, and I'll make sure that you have a full response.

When we moved forward on creating child care spaces, one thing we did was took a look at, well, particularly the last year because it was the last year that we really got into more creating spaces kinds of initiatives. We took a look at the last couple of years and built on what was working. What was working was the creating spaces funding, at \$1,500 a space, and we saw that last year. We had applications just in the last probably nine months of the year for 3,500 spaces, so that's one thing that we wanted to continue because we could see that that was an effective way to offset some start-up costs for new operators or operators that were adding spaces.

The other thing was that the staff attraction incentive brought back 160, so that's quite significant. Some of this we had made the decision at the beginning of the summer, and some of it took a couple of months to actually get rolling. In terms of the bursaries – and I think I mentioned that last week – 190 have taken advantage of that bursary. You know, those are all positive, and they were the indicators that we wanted to continue with that.

I'll get back if we have more. I can probe this a little bit further. In terms of, I guess, the level of subsidies, support, I would think that some of it is just tied to the cost of delivering the services, not tied to the value of the child.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll move along to foster care. Funding increased by 9 per cent, up by almost \$13 million, and this comes from the estimates, page 78, line 3.0.2. Additional funding is earmarked for enhanced training support for foster parents, recruitment of foster families. We have repeatedly heard from social services staff that there aren't enough families to accommodate the

number of children in need of safe care. Strategy 2.5 suggests that the government will work to improve the availability of care options, including foster care and kinship care: business plan, page 52. When will this strategy be implemented, and how many new foster families need to be recruited to meet demand? What specific measures will the ministry take to ensure recruitment is successful? How many placements must be created in order to achieve desired levels?

8:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. I think I've got lots of good information to share here, so I'll try to sort through it as quickly as I can. Again, I'll follow up if I miss anything. The first thing I want to say is that, as you know, I've got nothing but admiration for people that come forward and are willing to put their names forward as foster care. They take care of the most vulnerable children that we have in this province. Right now we have just under 2,300 foster parents in the province taking care of approximately, I think, on average around 4,600 foster kids.

I just want to highlight a few things. You're right that last year we talked about starting a campaign. We know that we have a reducing number of foster care homes for a whole variety of reasons. Part of it is the economy. We have more working couples as opposed to one in the home, you know, taking on fostering as an interest, and one working outside of the home. We have people that are retiring. We have – and this is a success story – foster parents that decide to adopt. [Ms Tarchuk's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If the minister could continue with her responses, and I'll continue with more questions, looking forward to answers.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you. Our campaign goal. We started doing part of the campaign last year. We're going to get into it more intensely this year. Our campaign goal is to recruit 400 additional foster parents and 46 additional aboriginal caregivers. Now, what I thought was interesting, a couple of stats, is just based on some of the public awareness that has been done to date. Right now going through the approval process we have 233 foster parents that have shown an interest and are taking a look at going through that process. Now, that's not to say that all of them will become foster parents, but that's a good indication of interest.

The other very interesting thing is the success story behind the use of kinship care. When we take a look at child intervention, one of the focuses for us – well, there are two main ones. One is to get help to families before they reach crisis. The other part is to find permanency. I mean, if you do have a situation where families are unable or unwilling to take care of their children, then as soon as possible you want to get those kids into a permanent situation. In the interim we need foster parents and kinship. Kinship is ideal for a number of kids because what you're talking about is a significant person to that child or a relative. It's particularly helpful with the aboriginal families. So while we've seen a decline in foster homes and are starting the campaign and seeing that we're getting some interest there, we have seen a fairly significant increase in kinship homes. In fact, the number that I've got here is that compared to three years ago our kinship care homes have increased by 37 per cent, so it's quite significant. I think that is good news.

The other comment I'd like to make. You know, in recent weeks you've heard the comment that anybody can become a foster parent. That is so not true. I think it kind of relates to the number of approvals that we have pending. Just to share some information on part of the process because we take this rather seriously. When you're screening foster parents, we have home studies that have to be done, criminal record checks, child intervention checks. There are personal references, medical references, training sessions, orientation for caregivers, environmental safety checks, and compliance with health and safety legislation. It's a rather intensive screening process, a rigorous process that we go through.

Just to make a comment. When you do hear the odd statement that people do it for money or that it's really easy to be or whatever, that's just not the case, nor should it be.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I will note that Alberta has received national recognition for its program with First Nations foster families, and that's heartening to hear because all children deserve a loving and caring home.

We've heard from Alberta foster families that the government does not offer enough support to foster families who are struggling to assist children that often have extensive needs. Strategy 2.5 from the business plan, page 52, suggests that the government will work to improve supports for foster and kinship families. Will there be new training and supports available to foster parents and kinship families in order to improve their numbers and to assure children of optimum care?

The 2001-2004 children's services business plan noted on page 74 the shortage of foster families, overburdened foster parents, and challenges in quality placements, yet to date we have seen lagging improvements. If this knowledge was available seven years ago, why didn't the government act decisively to alleviate the shortage back then? How much longer will it be before we can anticipate decisive action?

Following the death of a foster child in care in January of 2007, it was revealed that the practice of overloading, placing more children with a family than they should be eligible to care for, is increasing. How common is this practice, and what supports are in place to ensure that foster parents do not become overwhelmed?

We've heard that foster children are sometimes being housed in hotels to wait until a foster family is available. Is this practice continuing? Are the rates of its usage increasing?

Strategy 2.6 of the business plan, page 52, mentions implementation of recommendations from the foster care review. What were some of the recommendations that the minister thinks are a priority? May all members of this House have a copy of those recommendations?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Thank you. In terms of the supports for foster parents I can tell you that we negotiate that on an annual basis with the Alberta Foster Parent Association. We will be shortly, in the next couple of weeks, making an announcement on what the results of that are. I can tell you that the relationship is very positive and, I think, a very good one. I think the things that you raise in terms of what's important to compensate for are dead on. For that, I would say that in a couple of weeks we'll know more, but we have I think negotiated well with the foster care association.

The foster care review. Just in case anybody in the House is not aware of what you're referring to, last January we had a tragic death

of a foster child in a foster home. Again, I would extend my sorrow to the family members and the friends of that child. At the time, I had asked for a special case review, and the special case review was to do two things. One was to take a look at the specific situation and see if there was anything that we could do to not see another situation or occurrence like that. The other part was to take a look at the broader foster care system and see if there were any improvements. At the time, I committed to sharing everything that I legally could without compromising privacy issues and legal proceedings. I still plan on doing that. I have recently received that report. It's a good review. It has some recommendations. I've directed the staff to come up with an action plan. I'm hoping, again, to release that or at least report on it in the next couple of weeks.

Just to comment on it, I think it's a good, comprehensive report. It took a fair amount of time, but it takes time to convene the panel and conduct interviews. They also took a look at what jurisdictions across the country are doing and assessed our practices and standards. I'm confident that it's a fairly good, complete review. With that, I'll say that my intentions are to share that information.

8:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Now moving on to child intervention services, funding increased by \$22.374 million for a total of \$377.825 million, or basically a 6 per cent increase. That comes from the estimates, page 78, line 3.0.1.

A new service delivery model will be piloted in 13 sites and then implemented across the province. Last year's business plan showed that there was a far higher rate of hospitalization as a result of injury or death for aboriginal children in care than nonaboriginal children in care. This comes from 3(a) on page 94 and 4(a) on page 95. Were there initiatives last year to address this imbalance and improve safety for aboriginal children? Why are there not similar statistics available in this year's business plan? Have the statistics improved?

Ms Tarchuk: You know what? I'll get back to you with that information. Thanks.

Mr. Chase: Continuing on with child intervention services, then. Strategy 3.1 from the business plan, page 53, outlines the intention to implement the new casework practice model. It is supposed to ensure quality services that promote children's development and shorten the time they spend in quality care. Which specific measures in the model will address these goals, and how will those goals be accomplished? How are caseworkers going to cope with the tighter timelines aimed at expediting caseload processing given how short-staffed the social services are already? Are there maximum numbers of caseloads outlined in this new model?

Again, under the caseload model and the discussion of social workers will the ministry review the discrepancy between services provided directly by government-employed social services workers and contracted-out social services workers? We heard salary differences of \$55,000 if you're working directly out of college for the government, yet if you're contracted out, it can be as low as \$35,000, and therefore these contracted-out agencies can't possibly compete.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. These are a lot of questions that come out in one minute, but I'll work backwards. In terms of the contracted

agencies we've talked about that here in the House. We are aware that they have some issues facing them, mostly having to do with recruiting and retaining their staff. We've also recognized the gap that you're referring to. As you're aware, in the fall we had meetings with them. We had an injection of \$10 million for the contracted agencies. Just for children's services it was \$26 million for contracted agencies across the three departments, which would be Children and Youth Services, a little bit in Health, and then Seniors. We also, as you know, put another \$11 million in this budget and committed going into the future, which is something that they've never had. One thing that they're asking for is stability in being able to plan into the future. So we have made that commitment, which is the first time ever.

We know that there are still issues. I mentioned to the House when we came out with the budget that I've set up May 27 as a planning day for our authorities, as the bodies that contract with contracted agencies, and contracted agencies to get together for the day, take a look at all of the issues – not all of them are financial – and come up with an action plan, both short-term solutions and long-term solutions.

Again, I'm just working backwards. Regarding staff workloads – I know that I've mentioned this before – workload is always a consideration when planning and managing services, and issues related to that are addressed through the provincial committee, consisting of our management and the union. There are appeals processes.

The casework practice model. You're right: first of all, I'd like to thank the front-line workers who have been out there testing the model. The 13 champion sites were in place last year. Our goal is to have the casework practice model across the province I think by June. As well, the delegated First Nations agencies have it in their business plans to have it in place by next year, so that's good news.

The casework practice model builds on leading practices in social work. It really focuses on, again, that front-end assessment that's so important and is tied with the Alberta response model. It's also focused on collaboration and making sure that we provide the right services to children and youth and families at the right time. It really is about intervening earlier in a case and focusing on the family's strengths during the assessment as well as involving the families in the assessment.

Actually, by April about 80 to 90 per cent of the CFSA child intervention services sites will be using the model, and it looks like we are on track to meet the August 1 provincial rollout date. As we implement the model – and we said this last year and in preparation for the budget – we will make sure that it's resourced. I think that out of our 116 FTEs that will be added in the next year, 90 will be for the casework practice model. So that gives you an indication of that commitment and support there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I do appreciate the minister's willingness to provide me with more detailed, written answers. I realize this is pretty much a barrage, and I appreciate what answers you are able to give me tonight, and I look forward to the written responses.

According to the Child Welfare League of America child welfare work is labour intensive. Caseworkers must be able to engage families through face-to-face contacts, assess the safety of children at risk of harm, monitor case progress, ensure that essential services and supports are provided, and facilitate the attainment of the desired permanency plan. This cannot be done if workers are unable to spend quality time with children, families, and caregivers.

This is echoed by many experts in the field. Why were maximums, then, excluded from the new model?

We've heard from union reps that unreasonable workloads are causing experienced staff members to leave and that not enough new people are entering the field. This is making it nearly impossible for remaining staff to keep up. How will the government attract the necessary staff to this profession to ensure that Alberta families receive the services they need? How will they work to retain current staff?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. I'm not aware that we have any problem recruiting staff into these positions. Last year on a few occasions when I met with individuals from the Child Welfare League, I can tell you that they speak very highly of our child intervention services in this province.

Just to go back to that comment about case workload. I mean, there are mechanisms. We will make sure that it's well resourced. We will make sure that there are appropriate workloads. If there is more information to give you, I will get it, but I can only imagine that it depends on the cases that you have and that having a maximum or a minimum might not make any sense.

8:30

Going back to the casework practice model, just to mention a few of the principles of the model. Particularly for some of our new members, too, I think I'll just go through the importance of the casework practice model and the principles that the model is based on. Safety is first: assessing safety concerns remains a priority for the ministry to make sure that's number one; make sure that the kids are protected. The assessment: thorough, ongoing assessment of family strengths and needs in order to plan and deliver appropriate supplies and services. Intervening earlier: that's part of getting supports into the families before they have risk. Promoting permanency: I've mentioned that. Achieving a safe, stable environment earlier for children can lead to their long-term success. Strong practice: caseworkers will be supported in developing the skill set and the capability to engage in helping relationships with families and children to ensure the safety, security, and development of children in collaboration with parents in the least disruptive manner.

Here are some other interesting points. The current workload model that's used in Children and Youth Services dates from 1991 and sets the standard of 101 hours per worker per month for the delivery of services. This model does not fit the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The new casework practice model is expected to affect workloads in a more positive way, enabling workers to provide more effective services to children within the framework of the new legislation. Members of the workload assessment working group have recently travelled the province to confirm the factors that affect workload and continue to work in partnership with AUPE representatives to develop the workload assessment process. It's the same group that I had mentioned, but recognition about the different kind of workload that goes along with that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. Like with the last speaker it is a pleasure to be able to get up today and also try to engage in a bit of a back-and-forth discussion with the minister. I only have a much shorter period of time, so I won't spend a lot of time talking about my resumé, which is probably good because it mostly involves

parenting, and that would be boring for everyone else. Nonetheless, I do want to say that it is an opportunity, you know, particularly with this minister, to do some of the back and forth. I know we've spent a lot of time, perhaps more than my nine shadow critic areas would lead you to believe. I've spent a bit more time in your area. So it's an opportunity to have a more, hopefully, fruitful discussion about some of the issues that are of concern.

Just, I guess, to echo very briefly the previous comments by both the minister and my colleague in the Official Opposition, a good reason that we spend so much time talking about these issues is because, you know, we also very much appreciate the importance of the work that this ministry does and the importance that it has on the future of not only children but ultimately all Alberta because, of course, everyone needs to have a good start.

You know, I think maybe I'd like to start by making some positive comments. I mean, I know it's kind of rare from this side. Nonetheless, I'm going to mostly go through the estimate line items to try and organize my questions. So that sort of starts me in the area of family support for children with disabilities. I do want to give credit where credit is due in that there's no question that in certain areas this government has done quite a good job in terms of their funding levels. We do know that. We know that Alberta is basically a mecca for all families who have children with autism, and I think the government deserves some compliments for that fact.

I would add, of course, that I think ultimately that particular service would be better provided through the ministry of health rather than through children and family services just in order to ensure that it's provided in a more seamless way and more appropriately reflects the nature of the service that's provided. Nonetheless, I definitely think that it's something for which the government deserves some compliments.

In that line item, in 2.0.1 – and you did mention in your opening statements that you are looking at about a \$1.7 million increase, which I think works out to about one and a half per cent, although my math could be wrong. I'm just wondering – and this is going to be a theme that sort of flows through a lot of my comments – how much of that money is dedicated to addressing the staffing problem that we're seeing in the nonprofit sector. Of course, that nonprofit sector is throughout your ministry, and we have some key nonprofit agencies which are offering front-line services to children with disabilities. We're hearing a lot of, you know, very horrific stories of group homes that are closing beds, that can't offer services.

You may or may not have heard of the anecdote that I told the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports about the autistic child who was left outside for an afternoon when it was minus 25 degrees at a group home where the staff were incapable of dealing with his rather complex needs. The idea of paying \$12 or \$13 or \$14 an hour to somebody who has to deal with the severe, complex needs of that kind of ward, shall we say, in a group home setting to me is just shocking. I don't know how we can ever expect to keep these homes properly staffed with those kinds of demands on one hand and those kinds of wages on the other. I just want to know what we're looking at in terms of trying to deal with that big gap between the skill set that we're needing and the rate of pay that is currently being offered.

As well, in that area we've heard about group homes and missing shifts and all that kind of stuff. I'm just wondering if you can provide me with an up-to-date number for maybe this month of how many cases your ministry is aware of where children have had to be housed in motels or hotels or sent back to their families because group homes or the residential places where they would be provided care through the nonprofit sector have been unable to provide that care because of a staffing shortage or any shortage, frankly. Just

how many of them are in that setting? That's my first question.

My second question – I think this is my second one – again in this area, sort of flows from this. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports had previously made statements about wanting to do a service review and discuss how we provide services in these areas. I'm wondering if you could provide me with information about what your ministry's role is in that and whether you see services being cut or the scope of the services being cut in order to deal with the crisis in this respect or what type of service review you're anticipating, if any.

The third question, finally, as it relates to services for children with disabilities. As I said, you know, we do have a fairly comparatively rich system in some regards – and, again, lots of kudos to you guys on that – in terms of providing services to children with disabilities, but one area that is a problem is the integration, in particular the integration between services provided through your ministry and the PUF services provided through the Ministry of Education. In some cases you find that there's a real lack of focus and a lack of therapeutic consistency between the two services, and parents need to be experts themselves in order to insist upon that consistency. Alternatively, unfortunately what happens is that you have children who need quite extensive services being offered services through one model for half the day and then being moved over to another place for a different model for the other half of the day. The two really make no therapeutic sense in terms of them coming together properly.

So that will be my first set of questions.

8:40

Ms Tarchuk: First, I appreciate your comments about the family support for children with disabilities program and your willingness to give credit where credit is due. I think this an incredible program, and we know it's fairly unique across this country. We also know that for families that have children with disabilities, it can be very challenging, and I think that as a government and as a ministry we do need to provide them with help.

Your comments about autism. Just to share some interesting information that I came across recently. Autism, of course, is 24 per cent of the FSCD workload and about 40 per cent of the cost, so it's a significant area for us. We now have about 1 in 165 children with the autism spectrum disorder, and that's a national standard. In Alberta the number of children with the autism spectrum disorder served through the FSCD program is 2,202, and that number increased this past year by 113. That number actually has been stabilizing over time. There was a huge amount of growth.

The other thing I found interesting is that many of the children with autism spectrum disorder receive our specialized services, and the average level of specialized services available to families in this province is \$54,000 a year. So it's pretty significant. Quite often in other provinces you'd get a certain diagnosis, and then you're just capped. I think the strength of what we do here in Alberta really is based on what the child needs and what the family needs. So I appreciate that.

The contracted agencies you're not going to find in a line item because it's spread out. It worked out to about a 5 per cent increase. It would be in different line items that would have contracted services.

The situation that you're talking about: I'm not sure what it is. That sounds rather serious. I would urge you, if you would like me to look into it, to share the information.

Two things. We will never ever put a child at risk. If one of our contracted agencies cannot deliver services, we will make sure that there is another option. Also, contracted agencies, your question

about: how many are we aware of? None. Contracted agencies have an obligation to tell us when they cannot provide a service that they've been contracted for, like I said, and then we will find other options. So if you are aware of anything that you think I should look into, I would ask you to provide that information.

Just a comment. Actually, the hotel question usually comes up early in the fall because that's when hotels are used most, which is actually very rare, but when they are used, it tends to be, I think, more often in the summer, when we have foster parents on holidays, and it's harder to sometimes make those placements. But I can tell you that hotel use is only when the children's safety and well-being is at risk, and if there's not another placement that's immediately available, sometimes that's the safest place that they can go. But there is always 24-hour supervision, so they certainly aren't left there.

Just to give you an indication – and I think this would be across last year. I remember we looked into this issue in the fall, and it turned out at that time that it had been raised in Edmonton, so I was looking into the numbers. It turned out that in Calgary, for whatever reason, it was not an issue and certainly I don't think outside of Edmonton either. Just to give you numbers. July 2007 would have been a peak. Actually, six children used hotels in January; April, 8; like I said, July was 20; and then back down to 13 in January of 2008. Just to point out that it's not common and it is not done without planning and thought and supervision and all of that stuff, and it's only if there is not another option.

Your last comments just about integration of services. I think those are all great comments and great questions to ask, and I would just refer again to the early child development cross-ministry initiative that I'd spoken about earlier, with the minister of health and the Minister of Education. That's exactly what we need to take a look at, how we're integrating the services preschool and, as well, taking a look at what barriers exist – whether it's legislation, policy, or funding – that are getting in the way of us delivering a better service.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, thank you for some of those answers. As you know, last week – I believe it was last week – there was discussion and some media report and stuff from the Who Cares? group. You'd indicated at some point that you might be meeting with them, I believe, or there were some meetings going ahead. So in terms of following up on the kinds of examples I'm talking about with the group homes having to close beds, I would suggest that you ask when you're in those meetings because those are the anecdotes that I'm hearing about. The example of the child who was left outside when it was minus 25 is actually about a year and a half old, but what it says to me is that – in that case it wasn't a lack of staffing; it was a lack of training of the staffing in the group home. To me that's, you know, a huge problem that you've got. Again, asking people to do exceptionally complex work for \$14, \$15 an hour is just sort of dreaming in technicolour in today's labour market.

The next area that I want to go into really quickly – I just am very concerned I'm not going to get close to anywhere near all my questions – is just on the staffing issue overall. I know that one group – and I can't remember the acronym now because there are just so many of them. But I'm sure you're familiar with the Hay report, of the assessment that's been done comparing the pay differential between those in the nonprofit sector and those who are employed in direct government service. I'm curious as to what the government's view is of the Hay report, whether you perceive it to

be a very accurate document and, regardless of what the answer is there, whether you have information at your disposal about what it would cost to bring parity to workers in the nonprofit service sector, bringing them up to the level of those who work for direct government.

While I appreciate that they all got 5 per cent, you know, last year and this year coming up, as did those who work for the government, obviously if you give 5 per cent to someone making \$45,000 a year and you give 5 per cent to someone making \$25,000 a year, the gap between them grows. So there needs to be a much greater level of funding in the nonprofit sector to close that gap. Frankly, I think probably your direct government workers may also be on the low end at this point, but that's a different conversation for another time. I'm just wondering if you've got an assessment of what that cost would be. My understanding is that you'd still be looking at about a \$150 million injection of cash on an annual basis to your budget. That's my understanding of what it would be, a rough estimate, so I'd be curious as to what your numbers are.

As well, I think some of those groups are asking – and you mentioned that they're asking – for stability. You mentioned that the \$11 million has sort of been built in and will be given repeatedly. I think they're looking for stability in terms of a much greater amount of funding as well as sort of their operating funding. They were looking at questions around whether the ministry would be prepared to engage in a three-year cross-ministry plan that, you know, established sort of consistent funding and sort of a cross-ministry, cross-service organization pay grid as well as a long-term investment in the learning process for all those people that are in the social services nonprofit sector. So my question to you is whether there would be some willingness to consider that kind of discussion.

Finally, you mentioned that there was a meeting being planned for May 27, and I'm just wondering if, as part of this process, we could be provided with a copy of the action plan that comes out of that meeting.

I'll leave those questions at that point.

8:50

Ms Tarchuk: I'll start out by saying that I'll share what I can when I can. You know, with a lot of your individual questions I would just say that the purpose of May 27 is actually to explore all of the issues. I'm not going to stand up today and try to make some blanket statements about what the gap is. Again, for other members in the House, when we're talking contracted agencies, we are talking – I think we've got 25 per cent of our budget that deals with contracted agencies. So it's pretty significant, the number that we contract with.

I am so impressed when I go across this province and meet these people. They are the people that are working in women's shelters, sexual assault centres, group homes, foster care homes. The thing that amazes me is that in this economy, when you can get a job pretty much doing anything, these people choose – they choose – to help these kids. I am just amazed by their commitment and their sense of purpose and how they're all motivated to make a difference. Just to make that statement.

In terms of trying to tell you exactly what the differences are between ministry staff and what some of these positions are, I wouldn't want to hazard a guess. I know it's no secret that the contracted agencies and the Who Cares? have mentioned figures of 20 per cent in terms of the gap, but again the purpose of May 27 is really to explore the issues. I am working with the ministers of Seniors and Community Supports and Health on just taking a look at whether there is a way that we can treat them the same at the same time over a longer period of time than what's been done, you know, ad hoc in the past.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the minister for all of the comments that have already been made. I appreciate the openness and the clarity and depth of the answers that are coming back. You didn't think you were that good, right?

One of the things I would really like to see – this government's thrust is toward privatization, yet I don't really see the conversation going towards the privatization of child care. What I'm talking about is why some of these companies, particularly, say, a large law firm in downtown Calgary, Edmonton, or wherever, huge, big oil companies, et cetera – why aren't we encouraging them to create their own daycare spaces? I really think that it's something that should be pushed in terms of the word "privatization" or "choice," which is a big word with this government, too. So that's just a thought I would like to leave.

One of the other things is the conversation about stay-at-home moms because it really does become a catch-22. The mom that does want to stay at home, which is probably better for the kids in the long run, is penalized later on in her life because she hasn't contributed to a pension plan. With divorce at almost 50 per cent in this province women have to take that into consideration because by this time they don't have the income-sharing power with a spouse. So it's something that I would like to see the government perhaps take a look at in terms of tax credits or – I don't know – some kind of ability to be able to put into a pension plan for moms that stay at home. In the long run probably society wins.

However, the statistics lean themselves towards families that are intact; i.e., a mom and a dad. I know that you've talked about prevention ahead of time, but I'd like to know what your department does in terms of really solidly trying to keep families together. Sometimes all it requires is some really good intervention and really good counselling because in the end, as I've said, statistics really lean towards the fact that the kids that do have the two-parent families tend to do better.

In terms of the FASD I do have some experience with working with those children, and I'm not really sure that this is, perhaps, a politically correct way of saying things, but do we have the number of children per family? How many children do families have at different levels of the socioeconomic ladder? I'm finding that the lower incomes tend to have more, and some of these young teens that come out of these families haven't got the education, and often they're pregnant, and they don't even know it. In the meantime, they have continued to drink, and it's the first trimester that is the most important. Even if they've done heavy drinking in the first six to seven weeks before they really are sure that they're pregnant, the damage is done.

Again, it falls under: how do we prevent? How do we get that knowledge to kids about just how dangerous it is to drink when there's a possibility that you're pregnant? And I guess my other question would be: how much of this knowledge do we try to get through to young teen females in the school system, perhaps through the CALM program? I know that there are some good sex ed programs. However, they don't appear to be particularly helpful because there are a lot of young women out there getting pregnant, birth control or no birth control. It really is tragic when you see a little baby born and you know that there's nothing that can be done to help this little child. They may well end up being in care until they're 18, and then where do they go? In a way you sometimes hope that they're so violent that they'll be put away because it's very, very difficult to house the violence that sometimes is produced by these kids with FAS.

The crystal meth task force recommended 300 new additional

beds, and one of the things that I actually spoke about in this House that I was quite pleased – I'm sort of sounding like Kent from this afternoon. He said something, and it happened. I had suggested that our remand centre that wasn't being used in Lethbridge should be turned into a crystal meth treatment centre. What happened, to my disappointment, was that there actually were 20 beds in there. They remodelled the whole thing, and now they've only got seven beds, yet we're so desperate for beds. So I'm not sure what the thinking was behind that.

I realize that it's very, very fresh, and I'm not sure that the statistics would be, perhaps, that accurate, but do we actually have any statistics? What ability do we have or does your department have to actually follow up on the success rate of kids that come through the program? How many are repeats? I guess it's a little too soon to actually know. Sometimes, I know, it takes two and three and four times, particularly with crystal meth, but it would be interesting to see if you actually can follow through.

I know that with AA, in terms of alcoholism, there is no way of tracking how successful the AA program is. I think we all agree how successful it is and that it probably is one of the more successful programs in terms of any kind of an addiction, but there's really no way, partly due to privacy issues, to follow up, so it would be interesting to know if you've managed to be able to do that.

9:00

I'm just going to make mention of autism, and then I'll sit down. Through my office I've had some dealings with parents with autistic children. I agree with my colleague from the third party that there is some tremendous work being done with autism in this province. I know that it's expensive, but it has to be done at a very early age, and it has to be consistent. The ABA program, the behavioural analysis program, is very, very expensive to deliver, but if it isn't delivered at an early age and in a very, very consistent manner, it sometimes doesn't work. When we realize how much we've saved in terms of health dollars, social dollars, policing dollars, and just the benefit to society as a whole, in the long run I think that those are probably dollars well spent.

One of the things that crossed my desk in my office with these parents of autistic children was the question of whether, for the parent who actually had been trained in this system of ABA, there was some way that the funds could go to her so that she could stay at home and actually do her own training. I mean, I imagine there would have to be some kind of certification and that type of thing, but it's not a bad idea because, again, we're back to sort of that idea of the kin care, where the relatives are doing it. In the end often families are the best ones to be able to deliver that.

Having said that, there has to still be some kind of method for respite for these parents, particularly one family that I'm working with that have two children: very, very high, complex needs and very erratic behaviour on the part of the children. So it's perhaps one way of looking at the staffing problem and perhaps looking at maybe training more parents to actually be able to work with their children with autism.

I know that there are not that many questions, but I guess I would like your comments on some of my comments.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, I thank you for your clarity and openness.

Okay. I will do my best and again make the commitment to follow up with anything that I miss. You started out with encouraging businesses. I think that's exactly what we're doing with the creating child care spaces plan. I think it is set up in such a way that it will be as interesting and enticing for employers, businesses, to get involved with as nonprofits, churches, school jurisdictions, and

municipalities. I think that, you know, one of the strengths of the plan is that it really is based on future choice, individual community needs. I know that we've had businesses that have been interested, needed some incentives. I think that this will be appealing to businesses as well as those other groups that I mentioned. I agree with you that they are a likely candidate to be part of the solution here because so much of the basis behind the target is the workforce issue, so they have a vested interest in our being successful with this target.

With respect to your comments about tax incentives for stay-at-home moms and that kind of stuff, I'll certainly pass those on to the minister of finance. I think you're right that that is likely how it should be done: through tax incentives. Of course, our announcements in the last couple of days were focused on the creation of child care spaces, not so much the aspect of staying at home. The original five-point plan and improvements that we have made since then and then going forward with this plan have all been based on supporting parental choice.

Again, I have made it clear that last week's plan is not about creating a bunch of day care centres. We're talking nursery school. We're talking out-of-school programs for two hours. We're talking parents that need respite. We're talking, you know, part-time or full-time, leaving the choice up to parents. But we also recognize the importance of the stay-at-home funding that we have for parents of low- to middle-income status that access funds to help support the cost of their kids going to nursery school or early childhood development. So we didn't miss that, but admittedly last week was focused on creating spaces with other alternatives. But I appreciate your comments about how important it is for government to pay attention to our families that stay home and take care of their kids.

Your comments about, you know, the necessity of good intervention and good counselling. Again, I would say that's exactly why we should all be proud of the work that's been done in this province with the Alberta response model and, moving forward, on the casework practice model because that is what it's all about. It really is to ensure that children and youth in need of intervention services and their families receive appropriate supports when they need it. Anyway, I thank you for your supportive comments there.

You made some comments about preventative. I don't think we should overlook the importance of our FCSS. I think that that is probably the best example of partnerships that we have in this province. Just to highlight the good work that they do, of course, first of all, the strength is that it's community-based, and it's preventative work that is based on the unique needs of the community.

Also, just to mention the parent links. You were talking about young parents and getting good advice. I think the parent link centres have been hugely successful. I don't have it at my fingertips here, but we had a goal of implementing 60 of them. We're at 46. If I'm not mistaken, there is a review under way just to evaluate the success and the effectiveness, and the information that I've got so far is that we would be quite wise to continue with that goal and implement them because they've been good for communities, they've been good for families, and it's a great way to get information out there for young parents and to get new residents in Alberta connected with other families.

Here we go. Just between '06 and '07 the client utilization has gone up significantly. It has more than doubled, from 14,000 to 30,000, so I think this is good news. The youth that are being served through the parent links have gone from 3,600 to 10,000, and a lot of those parent link centres are recent additions. The other thing is a survey of the parents who have used parent links: 95 per cent plan on continuing to use them, and 85 per cent of parents are aware of

the services – that's fairly significant considering how recent they are – and feel that they get the family support that they need. So just to make that comment that it's worth mentioning the good work that's being done on the preventative side.

FASD. I think one of our better news stories in this budget is the money that's going to the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder strategy. We know that we have around 23,000 Albertans that are living with FASD. That's staggering, considering that it's preventable and not curable.

9:10

You're probably aware that we have an international conference that's coming to Banff at the end of this month. In fact, all of you, actually, might want to take a look at it. We have 800 delegates that are coming. Alberta is hosting it. I think it's the third weekend in May. It's a two and a half day conference that's just focused on FASD. Then on the Saturday I'll be meeting with ministers from across the country to talk about our FASD programs and what we can learn from each other and how we can move forward and collaborate. I do know that across the provinces we are seen as leaders in this area, and I think that's something that we can all be quite proud of.

Just a reminder about the service networks that we have. Last year we started the strategy and started the seven networks. They target prevention programs. We're increasing access to FASD diagnostic and assessment services and increasing support across the lifespan for those living with FASD as well as the caregivers. I appreciate your comments, and I think that that's an important initiative to point out in the budget. It's an additional \$12 million going to that initiative, so that's a good-news story.

Your comments about autism. Some of your ideas are kind of interesting, and again I'll get back to you.

I think it was raised during estimates that there are some concerns about the multidisciplinary team process being a little bit slow, getting backed up. I think we have to continue staying focused on that. You're right that the services have to be timely and that will be based on timely assessment. So, you know, we'll continue to focus on that area.

Your idea, again, the one about parents being . . . [Ms Tarchuk's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. Okay. I'd like to move on to another area of questions that I have. I think this may be my last opportunity to ask questions. I'm not sure. So I may be just sort of shooting a whole bunch of questions over at you really quickly because I want to get them all answered, and I think this may be my last chance. I'm going to move into the area of child care. I'll be very limited in my editorial comments. I think you know a fair amount about where we stand on the issue.

I appreciate that the level of child care funding has gone up significantly over the last four or five years. That's great. But just sort of as an overarching statement, until such time as the average family doesn't have to look towards spending anywhere between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a month for child care, the job isn't done, and unfortunately that still is the case right now. Like you, I believe in quality child care, and I believe in accredited child care. I think that that's the standard that we should be looking at, and that's the cost that we should be looking at when we're measuring how affordable it is. We shouldn't be looking at, you know, how affordable Jolene's basement suite daycare is. We should be looking solely at what a proper, high-quality, accredited child care centre costs. These days

for infant care we're looking at roughly a thousand dollars per child. Having said that, I've got a bunch of questions just generally in the area.

There has been talk, of course, about the previous creation of 3,500 spaces, using the same formula that you're planning on using to expand that to the 14,000. I'm just wondering: in that period of time that the 3,500 spaces were created, can you provide me, if not now then in writing, with the number of spaces that were lost in that same period so that we can look at what our overall net number of spaces is? If it's 3,500, that's great, but I understand that that's not entirely clear.

As well, of those 3,500 how many, if any – and I could be misinformed here – can be accounted for by existing centres moving to new facilities? That's my question.

My third question, on the issue of spaces. I'm just wondering if you can provide me with the calculations that were used by the ministry to come up with the cost for each space. I understand a reasonable start-up cost to be between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for each space. I'm wondering if I can be provided those calculations, and again I anticipate that that would be in writing.

A second sort of area of questioning, which you may have a chance to answer, is simply that I see that this year we are forecasting to underspend from last year's budget, and I believe that happened previously as well. I'm just wondering: what areas of the program didn't have enough uptake so that we are underspending? I'm wondering what efforts will be made to ensure that the same problem doesn't arise again in this budget.

With respect to the staff incentive program in child care I had been aware of the 160 new staff members who had joined as a result of your April press release. I'm also aware through a report that was done by the child resource and research unit that as of 2006 the ministry had identified roughly 8,700 child care workers working in the province. I'm using as the source the Childcare Resource and Research Unit numbers that were based on 2006. I'm wondering what the current number of working child care employees is. I'm also wondering whether you're able to identify whether there has been a change in that number in the last two months. The reason I say that is because a lot of people have said that they were looking to see what happened with the budget and that if salaries weren't going up significantly, they weren't planning on sticking around a lot longer. In any event, that's kind of anecdotal. If I could just get a sense of how often you measure the numbers and how they're measured and if we could maybe get a sense of how that was tracked over the last two years, whether they've been going up or going down overall.

In terms of the funding for staff incentives I'm just wondering: as far as administration goes, what safeguards are in place to ensure that that money actually goes to the staff? I mean, if it's given to the child care centre, do we know that it goes dollar for dollar to the staff? I just don't know the answer to that.

Finally, in terms of the issue of affordability – and, again, this information may be out there. I was relying mostly on the Childcare Resource and Research Unit report. What is the information out there around fees: the average fees in the fully accredited nonprofit, the fully accredited private, and then the day home setting? What is the average estimate of current fees? How often is that assessed, and how often does it change?

Okay. I just wanted those on the record. I don't expect you to be able to answer them right now.

Then I'll move into my next area, which is family violence. This is on page 78, line item 2.0.4, prevention of family violence and bullying. I see that the budget has been increased to \$39,051,000. I'm wondering if you could provide me with the breakdown between

how much of that global figure, that \$39 million, goes to departmental budget items versus directly to the shelters. How much of that actually ends up in the hands of the shelters? Here again, are we still looking at the 5 per cent only being devoted to the wage increases in this area?

9:20

I understand that there has been conversation about meeting with some of these groups who've raised concerns about their staffing. I'm wondering if the minister may be able to advise whether she will be committing to meet with the shelter groups as well around the issues of the staffing crisis, if they're included in the groups that are planned for meetings. I don't think that's entirely clear.

I understand that there's a \$1.7 million increase in funding to women's shelters. I'm wondering how many new beds that's expected to create. Based on that, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters reports that roughly for every woman or child that found shelter in their shelters across the province last year, there was a woman and/or child that was turned away due to lack of available beds. I'm wondering if you take any issue with those statistics, that basically 13,000 were given shelter and 13,000 were turned away as a result of lack of beds, and how far that \$1.7 million is going to go towards dealing with that extreme shortage in beds.

I'll stop there. I have one more set.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Again, I'll get back to you. You've got a lot of questions there.

On your comment about the space creation fund we know that we had 3,500 spaces that applied for that funding. I'll get the numbers for the closures, but one thing I'll say. I do know that a lot of the closures, at least according to my recollection of hearing about different programs closing, were out of school. We had heard lots last year, which had led up to the announcement last week, on how difficult it was for out of school programs because they didn't have access to provincial funding. They didn't have access to any wage top-ups or start-up funds or any of the accreditation/quality funding or whatnot. So just to make that comment. We knew that they were having difficulty. It's an area that's quite important and probably one where we will likely see some incredible increases in spaces because of the need. I'll see if we can get that information to you.

In terms of the underspent, I think that if I'm correct, most of the underspending was that we had fewer people apply for subsidies than was predicted. The thing that is difficult with the entire program is that because it is based on choice, we do not by any means place any value on or direct parents to use kinship care over family day homes over daycares or even the stay-at-home subsidy. We put the program in place, and what we can't know with complete certainty is how families will access the program. But if I'm not mistaken, I think the underfunding was that we did have fewer parents applying for the subsidy, for the most part. It will be a bit of everything, but for the most part it will be that.

I'll get for you the number of child care staff. I don't think I've got that here.

A comment I made earlier with another member, and I would again point out, is that we are quite stringent in that most of our grants are tied to quality. I think that's important. Because of the regulations that are in place and how seriously we take the licensing and the inspection, if they have a licence and they've been approved, then they're reaching a quality standard. I think that we can be quite proud as a province that we have so many of our child care programs that are exceeding that standard.

The average costs. Now, I don't have the breakdown. I think what you're asking is the difference between the average cost of a

daycare versus a family day home. I don't have that. I do know that the average cost is I think about \$650, somewhere around there, for child care and that the range is between \$500 a month and a thousand. I don't think you mentioned it here, but I know that you've mentioned in the House the comparison with Manitoba. Just to point out that when someone says, "Well, why not cap?" first of all, in this province we have a different history, for sure, than Manitoba and probably quite a different philosophy. The reality here is that over half of our child care programs are private. I don't think anybody in this House would suggest that the mom-and-pop business at the end of the street that's private and doing a fabulous job of taking care of neighbourhood children should not be treated the same as our approach to nonprofits coming forward.

The other thing I would point out is that if you take Manitoba as an example and the capping that they have, well, because of our subsidy program and the way that we approach who it is that gets help with child care costs in this province, the low- to middle-income families that we do support – let's start with the families that we fully support – are not even paying the capped amount. In this province if someone is getting a full subsidy, I think it would equate to \$628 a month. Basically, what that means is that we are providing the child care costs for them for free, so in the end for some families in this province it's cheaper than being in a position with capped prices. Anyway, you didn't raise that.

The women's shelter. You had asked whether they're part of the contract. They did get 5 per cent, the same. I can tell you that we work very closely with the Council of Women's Shelters. If I'm not mistaken, there's a meeting tomorrow with the women's council to consult with them – the amount of money that we have going into beds would equate into about 58 beds, so that's, I think, quite responsive to the needs – about where those locations would be and, as well, on the other funding that's in that line item.

I just wanted to comment, too – and I'd mentioned it in my opening comments – that just on family violence in general, we know that we have a high reported incidence of family violence in this province, but we also are known for taking action on it, as we should.

One of the mandates that I was given for this year was really to focus on extra support for aboriginal and immigrant families in the province and to make sure that they have access to and support for family violence generally. We have started consultations with aboriginal co-chairs to get advice on the aboriginal component of that and, as well, with the immigrant community. We are moving forward on that. We'll have more information in the future.

You'd asked a question about what percentage goes towards women's shelters: 69.4 per cent of the budget is going directly to them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much.

Ms Notley: No, I still have a minute.

Mr. Chase: Oh, sorry. You are my Edmonton MLA; I must respect you.

9:30

Ms Notley: Yeah. Just a couple of follow-up questions to some of what you answered there. I do appreciate it.

Just on the child care issue, I'd wanted to make a note of this before, and I forgot. Just an idea. You like to throw these things out every now and then and see if someone follows up on it. Of course,

this is not in consultation with any of my former employers, but I really think that if you were to take some of that empty space in the Mazankowski centre right now and create a world-class, accredited, 100-space child care centre, you'd probably find yourself with a hundred extra FTEs there in terms of nurses and LPNs. So I'm just throwing it out. It's a win-win kind of situation, and I think it'd be a great model for the future.

Anyway, going back to Manitoba, just to sort of clarify your point there, Manitoba does, in fact, also have a subsidy. The \$500 cap is for the person making \$90,000 a year or the family making \$90,000 a year. The family making \$38,000 a year pays nothing, just as they do here. So, in fact, there's no big bonus that way.

I actually just wanted to clarify because I was asking questions, and I forgot what it was, one of the pieces of information I was asking for in terms of the costing. I was looking at the average cost for infant care in the accredited daycare setting and then the average cost for toddler care in the accredited daycare setting. I meant to distinguish between infant and toddler. So that is what I'd missed last time.

With respect to the questions on the family violence you didn't get a chance to answer this, so I just want to quickly ask about it again. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters does talk about the 13,000 people, women and children, who were not able to find spaces. I just wanted to find out if that was a number that you were reasonably comfortable with.

Then there was also a provincially funded review of the women's shelter program about a year ago. I don't have a copy of that document. I understand that there were a number of recommendations that came from it. I don't know if the document is public or not. If it is or could be, could we get a copy of it? That's my own research that I don't know if it's available or not, but I'd like a copy of it. Then, I'm just wondering, in terms of those recommendations, to what extent do we see those recommendations and the cost associated with them reflected in the increased funding.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I was going to brag about the fact that I had removed the cranial rust, but obviously the bell that I heard previously was internal, so we'll work on that part of it.

During the interval while I was waiting to have another opportunity to speak, I remembered the name of the lady who runs the day home, the before-school care and after-school care. Her name is Rose, and she comes from Ireland. I had the opportunity to meet her at the Dalhousie Community Association AGM this past spring. Rose lives three doors down from St. Dominic school. She has basically provided care for a generation of children that have attended St. Dominic. During the campaign I had the opportunity to knock on Rose's door, and of course, as we all know here, during the campaign we're trying to go to as many doors as we can and spread the message of our wonderfulness. But in Rose's case she took me in, and I did a tour of her three-storey house, which is absolutely child focused. While it was a Friday night and it was about 8:30 when I knocked on her door, there were several families gathered around her kitchen table. These were the moms and dads of the children she looked after. The children were downstairs busy playing and having a ball. It just shows the connection that Rose has not only with her parents and her community.

It's regrettable that Rose's organization is potentially facing a problem with rezoning. Rose is working through this. It may be that she'll end up having to sell her home and the care that she provides to her daughter. Hopefully, the rezoning will allow for it. But it's a wonderful example of a before- and after-school program that the kids and the parents just absolutely love, so credit to Rose.

The minister previously mentioned programs over a three-year period like the 14,000 spaces over three years. It seems to me that if you provided a wage top-up for social service workers, you could provide that kind of stability that would keep them in the program. For example, if you followed the method that we've just recently arrived at with teachers, who are following the same methodology that we receive for our annual increases, based on a weekly earning average figure, then that stability could be achieved. Top them up to the point where they're sufficiently above at least the Tim Hortons and the McDonald's to recognize the quality of the child care services they provide, and then provide them with the knowledge that next year it'll be this amount and so on, tied into the weekly rates. I think that would attract more individuals.

Likewise I think it would keep people working in the shelter areas because as my hon. MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, where I reside while I'm in the Legislature, mentioned, the number of spaces at the shelters not only is insufficient, but there is a turnover of caregivers and service providers at these shelters, which is a rather sad circumstance. When families are under that much stress that a woman is forced to flee with her children to a shelter knowing that that stay can only be for a very limited time, then the people who are providing that love and care and trying to re-establish a degree of normalcy for the children and for the mother for that temporary moment need all the support they can get. So those shelters as well as the people that work in the shelters need to know that they're going to have sustainable, predictable funding over at least a three-year period so that they can plan for it. Of course, obviously, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona mentioned, with as many as half of the individuals being turned away as are being housed, women are forced to go back into abusive relationships. Families and children are basically the victims of that violence.

Over the weekend I had an opportunity to attend a forum, that I tabled information from on Monday, talking about spiritual solutions to homelessness. I talked to a man who pointed out to me that while it may seem surprising, there is a growing number of fathers who have been abused by their spouses, yet there are no corresponding shelters for men. I know the numbers are not nearly as significant as women, but we need to, as we go forward in terms of providing equal treatment, recognize that men are sometimes unjustly removed from their residences. They lose contact with their children, and there is no backup shelter for them other than, for example, at the Mustard Seed or the drop-in centres. So on behalf of men who have been the victims of violence and have lost their homes and have lost their contacts with their children, I would encourage support for them.

The hon. Edmonton-Strathcona MLA referenced family violence, and I'm going to refer to the same page, although a slightly different paragraph, that she referenced. Funding for prevention of family violence and bullying increased by \$2.8 million, and that comes from the estimates, page 78, line 2.0.4. The business plan shows that while there was a reasonable increase to funding for prevention of family violence and bullying this year, there will be very small increases in the years that follow. This is reinforced by business plan, page 58. Does the minister believe that these increases are enough to turn around Alberta's dismal rates of family violence? Again, speaking to the need to increase percentages based on market-basket measures and also weekly earning averages.

9:40

Currently 21 per cent of emergency shelter bed capacity and 81 per cent and 77 per cent of second-stage and seniors' shelters respectively remain unfunded by the provincial government. What this means is that only four of the 28 provincially funded emergency

shelters in Alberta are fully funded. Why are so few shelters receiving full funding from this government?

Research shows that most children who are involved with prostitution have experienced previous sexual abuse. What steps is the department taking to address sexual abuse experienced by children who are not involved in prostitution?

Again, Mr. Chair, if that can be the first part of the sort of toaster pop-up 20 minutes. I would like to go back and forth with the minister and continue on with the questioning.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. If I can go back, just make a few comments on some if that's okay. With respect to the women's shelter, it is public, so I'll get you a copy of that. With respect to wage top-ups, they do have to go to staff. That has to be reported and audited, so there are guarantees that that happens, that it has to go to staff wages. I appreciate your clarification on Manitoba, but I can't help myself pointing out: they have a \$10 billion debt and horrific tax rates there.

Spaces for men. I mean, you're right, not a lot. But I know that we do have some spaces for men, and I'll get that information for you. Just to comment on our prevention of family violence and bullying, I'm glad to see that it's still a priority this year. It's still tied to my mandate, which I think is awfully important. It was last year as well, and this year, I think, given our growth and our population, it's very important to take a look at whether we are offering the right services and enough services for the immigrant and aboriginal families.

When I look at the highlights of the initiative, we amended the family violence act to include stalking and protection orders. I don't have it right in front of me, but I can say – and if anybody is interested, I can follow up – that the results of doing that have been quite phenomenal, the number of families, and particularly females in this case, that are taking advantage of the protection orders so that they're able to stay in place in their own homes.

We continue with the community projects that address family violence and bullying. The amount of money that's going directly to women's shelter is \$22 million.

Just going back to that protection order, I thought this was rather interesting. It was just about a year and a half ago that we had amended the Protection Against Family Violence Act to hit further. It included stalking and other forms of family violence. I don't know if it's still the only one in the country. It certainly was the first. But since doing the amendments, we've seen an increase in protection orders, indicating a real awareness of the legislation by community and victims of family violence: 1,600 emergency protection orders have been sought between April 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008. Now, part of that is sad, that we actually need that, but part of it is good in that the intention of the act is starting to work and actually allowing women and their children to stay in their own homes.

I think you both mentioned the turnarounds. I can say that we do continue to work with the women's council on their review. A lot of things that we do generally – implementing the safe visitation sites, the funding for the sexual assault centres, a lot of work that we have done, money that's going towards bursaries and professional development, money that is going towards some child care needs in women's shelters – all have been part of the work that was done with the review and working with the council through those recommendations.

Another one is second stage, which you had mentioned. We do

just have one second stage facility in Edmonton and Calgary. We're not in the business of building housing, but I have had some conversations with our Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs to just make sure that we are making sure that consideration is there for that kind of secure housing, to meet those kinds of needs when we're talking about affordable housing complexes and making sure that there's a consideration there in terms of priority.

There's one other thing I wanted to say on the numbers. It is concerning when you hear of turnaways. The part that's difficult about those numbers is that we know that people can be counted several times depending on how many phone calls were made trying to place a family in a certain facility. Not to take away from that, I can tell you – and I've had this confirmed with the tours that I've done with women's shelters – that they will always get help. The people that work in women's shelters are so dedicated and focused on what they're doing – now, we're talking of the females and children that are at risk – that they will make sure that they're taken care of when they arrive at that door. If that facility can't take them, they make the calls to other facilities.

When I tour women's shelters, they will tell you that. I always find it interesting. I toured one last week that's a very busy women's shelter in Edmonton, well used the morning that I went for the tour. I went to visit the staff there. All rooms were being used except for one. We had a conversation about just what happens. I mean, obviously, it's a very busy facility. You know, how many red flag evenings do you have? What they said was: yeah, we're full, and we'll make the calls until we have a place for that family to go. They also told me that it was very rare. When Edmonton fills up, they then go to some rural women's shelter in the proximity of Edmonton, and they told me that that's actually rare. But none of those comments are to take away the importance and the fact that we want to make sure, which is one of the reasons why we have the additional money this year, to put some additional beds. We know that there are pressures there.

Like I said, I know that our staff is meeting with the women's council tomorrow to go through their priorities and how they'd like to see that funding spent.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm pleased to hear that you've spoken with the minister of municipal affairs and housing and also talking to the housing secretariat. Poverty doesn't fit handily or neatly into one ministry, so a multidisciplinary, multiminsty approach is absolutely essential.

Inn from the Cold, for example, which is primarily operated by multid denominational churches, frequently sees children being bused to outlying churches, sleeping for the night in that church basement. The only stability the children have is that there are designated schools that they go to so that there isn't the pressure associated with knowing that they're poor and don't have a regular home to come from. But I notice that Inn from the Cold needs about \$2 million more in order to finish the renovations for their facility on 11th Avenue, which they purchased from the Mustard Seed, so if the ministry has \$2 million kicking around somewhere, that would be a great place to expend it.

9:50

Another problem with Inn from the Cold is that it's only available in the evening. Mothers with young children during the day, particularly when it's cold outside, basically have the malls if they can get to them and they have the +15s. A number of individuals that I talked to were afraid to go to places like CUPS sometimes because of the drinking associated with people on the streets outside. Likewise with the Mustard Seed location; it's not necessarily the

best location for families, but it sure beats church basements and a variety of church basements.

Now, my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East touched on youth addictions, and she also referenced not only young mothers consuming too much alcohol while pregnant and children born with FAS, but she also referenced crystal meth. I know the hon. Member for Red Deer-North had a proposal that would have seen youths suffering from crystal meth receive a 90-day detox. I very much remember how we pushed the legislation very quickly through the Assembly based on the agreement of all parties to bring it forward, but when that legislation was finished, 90 days went out the window, and it became a five-day voluntary detox. So this is something that, I guess, working with the ministry of health and so on, needs to be addressed.

Now, one of the sad circumstances that I see – it's sad in two ways – is that after oil and gas revenue, the highest amount of revenue we get from any major source is from gambling revenue, whether it be slots, VLTs, casinos, or lotteries. But only 3 per cent of the funding that we receive from that gambling revenue goes to AADAC, so if you have any persuasive opportunities to talk with individuals who run the AADAC program – I know it was formerly the Member for Calgary-Lougheed who was in charge of that program – I would certainly recommend increasing that 3 per cent to a higher amount, recognizing the number of youth who are addicted as well.

One of the best parts of the AADAC program in terms of the preventative . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. This really will be my last time, so I can't help but start with a little further comment on the whole Manitoba issue. It is true that there is a debt there, and it's a debt that was inherited from the previous Tory government, first off. And in terms of taxes, I'm pretty sure that a family in Alberta paying anywhere from \$500 to \$600 per child per month more in child care would probably call that a tax, but notwithstanding that there is still a debt, which is responsibly being paid down in a thoughtful, not rip-the-province-apart kind of way, they're still able to provide a very good child care system with a \$500 cap, so I say that they have something from which we can learn. Anyway, that's enough of that. Couldn't help myself.

Going back just quickly to the child care area in terms of a genuine question, I'm pretty sure we figured out the answer to this, but in terms of the wage top-up that you're budgeting for the out of school care, it appears on the face of it to be a smaller amount. Now, I'm assuming that that smaller amount reflects the smaller number of hours that people in the out of school care sector would be working and not actually a different rate of top-up. The reason I ask this is because when I think, for instance, of my own fabulous, wonderful, nonprofit child care centre at King Edward elementary school, we have both an out of school care program and a kindercare program and preschool program, or toddler program, and the staff move around throughout the day as is required and as is needed. You'd hate to see them in a situation where their rate of pay is changing if they're moving into the out of school care. I'm assuming that that's not what your plan would have happen, but if I could get clarification on that, that would be very helpful. I think that's it, finally, for child care for tonight only.

If I could move on just to the area of child protection. I guess it would be under item 3 in the estimates. My colleague from the Official Opposition has made a number of comments and asked some questions in that area already, but I wanted to just throw a few more out because I'm not a hundred per cent sure where we are in

terms of the questions being responded to. On the issue of caseload I pretty much mirror almost all of his comments in terms of the import of ensuring that caseworkers can have a proper caseload to do the job that they need to do. I'm wondering if we could be provided with information about what the average caseload is for your staff working in the child protection area.

I appreciate that the complexity of the cases will change, and it's sometimes hard to come up with a hard-and-fast rule for what's a max and what's a minimum. But if we could just start by getting a sense of what the average is within the ministry, that would help give us a sense of where we are in terms of commonly understood best practices. As well, if this information is available, we'd be interested in getting information about the caseload range. What's the low end; what's the high end? Bearing in mind that in some cases you're dealing with less complex cases on the high end, nonetheless just to get that range.

You had sort of gotten at this in the last round when you were discussing it previously, but I wasn't quite sure if there was an answer: whether the minister or the ministry – I'm not sure if it was asked exactly this way, let me put it that way – actually has a number in mind, whether it's a range or whether it's one number, that is a best practice as far as caseload numbers go? So that would be that set of questions on that issue.

Then in terms of child protection I note that on page 54 of the business plan there's just a little footnote which talks about the number of children – and I believe it was 2007 – who had either been killed or injured while receiving protective services. I want to know what exactly that category means: receiving protective services. What level of intervention is included in that group?

I got the next phrase off your website, and I don't know if this is the right term or not: receiving family enhancement. Is that the next level of intervention, or are there other levels of intervention within those two? Then, of course, you probably know where my next question is going with respect to that: if we could get a list of what the different levels of intervention are. Then for each one are there statistics kept for each different level in terms of the number of children who may have been killed or injured vis-à-vis each of those different levels of intervention? As much as I'd like to think that there have only been 12 children who were injured – and I guess that trivializes that – I suspect that the number is quite a bit higher. But I'd like to know because I don't know what those numbers mean. So that was the next sort of set of questions I had.

Then I wanted to ask you quickly about the Child and Youth Advocate, line item 3.0.4. As a starting point, again I went onto the website to try and find a little bit of information about the child advocate, and I see that there doesn't appear to be an annual report filed since 2005 for this advocate. I'm a little concerned about that, and I'm wondering what the rationale for that might be in terms of the type of work that's being done there.

10:00

Under the act the child advocate has to provide quarterly reports to the minister. I'm wondering if those reports have been received and in the absence of the annual reports whether those reports might be made public or made available to members of the Assembly. So two questions, then: have those been provided in a timely fashion, and if so, can we see them?

Then the third question is in relation to that. My understanding is that the child advocate can in certain cases under I guess it's the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act engage in reviews of complaints respecting individual children and can also at the request of a child or the minister or person acting on behalf of a child review and make recommendations regarding any matter relating to the

provision of services to a child. I'm wondering how many types of reports have been produced by the child advocate in that way, where basically we're reviewing things that are happening with particular children, and whether recommendations have come from those and, again, whether those are publicly available to us in the Assembly or in the general public.

Final questions in this area. I understand that there is some legal action going on in relation to the ministry in relation to a number of children who had been in care in the past. I'm just wondering if there are any reserve funds set aside anywhere for the possible outcome of this litigation. It seems to have some fairly large potential outcomes if there is success or even settlement. So I'm wondering if that is found anywhere in the budget.

I know this is through the Public Trustee, which is not your office, but I'm wondering, as well, if we can get information on the number of lawsuits that have been filed by the Public Trustee on behalf of children who were injured either in care or not in care but who were subsequently brought under the parenting role – I don't have the right phrase – who are now in care of the government but who had previously suffered injury and who might otherwise, then, have a cause of action as a result of that. I understand that the Public Trustee now deals with those issues, and I'm wondering if we have any numbers on whether they've pursued any legal action in those areas either through a lawsuit or through a criminal injuries compensation.

I think those are all my questions. It may even be all my questions for the night, so there you go.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you. Once again, I'll stress that I'll get back because I know that there will be some unanswered here. With respect to the out-of-school the announcement was a wage supplement of \$144 a month, and that would reflect less hours. Along with that we also indicated that we would look at an accreditation program for out-of-school that would include wage top-ups. As far as I know at this stage, we would be talking, you know, similar wage top-ups.

Actually, your comment about staff moving around. That has been one of the problems. In fact, earlier when I made the comment about out-of-school programs closing, that's one of the reasons. We had people that were straddling both programs – zero to six, six to 12 – and having two different paycheques. It was very obvious and very clear which side you wanted to be on there.

Again, with the average caseload. I mentioned earlier that the current workload model is dated on a 1991 model and that we are taking a look, assessing the appropriate workloads for that, so that work is under way. If there's any information on those, you know, the range and the average and all that that you asked, I'll check that out.

The injuries or death. That includes anybody that's in our care. We have three categories, really: adopted, child intervention, and family enhancement. So that would include all of that. I'll have to get more information on the litigation funds.

I'm not sure if actually you asked this or if it was before. I just wanted to comment on the PCHAD. I think that those were good comments in terms of where we probably all want to go and where we would like to see us at with the PCHAD. There was something interesting that I'd come across recently when asking the question about the success of that act. I thought it was interesting, and just for people that don't know, the legislation actually falls under the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Under it parents can seek a court order to have a child under 18 placed in a five-day mandatory detox,

and parents can also request an apprehension order so a child can be picked up off the street, a drug house, or another place. As of December 31, 2007, 881 youth have been admitted into the program, and over 50 per cent of them have voluntarily chosen to continue with AADAC's treatment and services. I just thought that that was an interesting fact.

I'll check about the advocate in terms of other reports that he has available. With respect to the quarterly it is an internal document. I do get it. I appreciate your comments about the annual report. That has been brought to my attention. I have had a discussion with the parent advocate to see if we can have those in a more timely manner. When they do get presented to the minister, then it is tabled in the House. But you're right, and I understand that we'll have the last two in the next couple of weeks. I think those are good comments.

I just want to make a comment about the advocate because it comes up now and then, just about the effectiveness of it. My observation since being in this position is that he does a very, very good job of representing youth in care and that the way that we do things now works quite well for kids. Back to the very first comment of the night about the importance of being child focused, I think in this case that's as important as other any other area. What I have seen that works very well with the way we have it set up now is that he has the ability to provide continuous feedback. He sits at the table, he gets to influence policy, and issues can be dealt with quite quickly, and always the views of the kid are represented. I just think it's a collaborative relationship that gets results.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of more questions that I would like to ask, but I'd like to make a couple of comments, too, backtracking on what I talked about before. In terms of the FAS one of the things that I think would really be important in the \$12 million that you've got for that program is to somehow get early pregnancy tests. Perhaps they should be free. They should maybe go through school nurses or through the street workers that work with the kids. More often than not young people who become pregnant, when they know that, can easily be helped in terms of wanting to protect their babies. It may help, because it's that first six weeks that's so crucial, that they know that they're pregnant and they wouldn't drink or do drugs.

Now, I know that there was a case in Manitoba – and it was fought right through, I think, to the Supreme Court – about a girl who was actually taken against her will because she was pregnant and doing drugs. It was sort of that program that we have, where we can take youth off the streets and give them that five days, and then they have the choice, that you've pointed out has been fairly successful in them wanting to actually voluntarily go forward. So I would like to see something like that at least considered because many of these young girls aren't thinking straight. If we could just help them, then we'd also cut down on the number of babies with FAS.

10:10

The minister's office is going to get a budget increase of about \$33 million, I think, and it's not so much the money that I'm interested in; it's how much of this money actually would be going towards administration versus going directly to front-line staff, that we need so crucially in almost all of the programs and all of the areas in this particular ministry to bring forward some of the good programs that are going through.

Another thing. I'm not sure what you called it, but it was about casework and how to divide that casework amongst the workers,

amongst your social workers and other people that work within that program. I often equate my skill as a geriatric specialist to someone who works with children. I think that they're both vulnerable and that they need trained people and people who care, and I can remember always speaking and arguing about: how do you really allocate money? Because a goodly portion of what I learned as a geriatric specialist – and believe it or not, I learned this as a constituency manager for the constituency I'm actually the MLA for, that it was very important to listen. So how do we in a budget allocate perhaps that extra 10 minutes that is so crucial in terms of listening, because listening, of course, denotes respect to these people. It's very difficult to put a dollar figure on the time it takes for respect, but I believe that that is very important.

I don't know whether that's a part of the conversation about how they allocate time for caseloads. I would hope that somewhere along the line that conversation could take place because it's easy to go in and just have your clipboard and, you know, flick off all your little boxes and you're out of there, but you've left the people behind you not necessarily that much better. You may have got them money, you may have done something, but what have you really done for them as a person?

It's that Child Welfare League of Alberta, and they are talking about careful timelines conducted within individual agencies, so again it's sort of that time study. I'm wondering how many time studies are actually being done within your department. Is that part of the assessment on how they decide how many cases somebody actually can handle? I realize that it's exactly the same as working with seniors or people that need help. It is so individualized that it's impossible to pigeonhole every person when everyone needs, you know, so many different things.

One other thing on the kin child care. Again, I'm going to fall back on my experience as a geriatric specialist. Often elder abuse is actually perpetrated by family members. Often it's because they've, you know, put them in a nursing home and sold the house and gone to Hawaii or whatever, but there is certainly abuse of the elderly, in particular financial areas, by the family. When a family member is involved in this kin child care program, are the houses actually checked out? Is there any sort of supervision of people, even if they are looking after their grandchild or whatever? If they're receiving public dollars, is there any kind of a manner of check that the house is good and the kids are getting good care?

I think that's probably it for now, and then my colleague from Calgary-Varsity can finish up.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate your comments about the early pregnancy tests. I'll come back with some more information about that.

Just to remind the House what the 10-year strategy is about and what the intended objectives or outcomes are, our targets are for 900 assessments annually. Eighty per cent of caregivers report that services are available to meet identified needs of those individuals in their care affected by FASD, 90 per cent of programs and services are congruent with current research and evidence-based practice, 95 per cent – and this is somewhat related to what you're talking about – of Albertans understand that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to FASD and lifelong disabilities, 75 per cent of Albertans agree that supporting women during their pregnancy to prevent FASD is a shared responsibility between the woman and her inner circle of support, and 100 per cent of our networks provide the full range of services. Anyway, I appreciate your comments there.

I remember going to the FASD conference that was in Edmonton

last year. I was astounded. I think it was the same thing: 700 or 800 people all involved in FASD. It was just a real eye-opener. It's a travesty. It's terrible.

I'll never forget a story of an aboriginal woman who just told a very quick story about finding out. It was about seven years ago. She had never heard of FASD. She was off reserve, and she was going to school. She heard about FASD, what it was, had no idea that it existed. She went back to the reserve, and she had done some homework. She was trying to calculate how many people she knew, how many relatives and how many generations, that perhaps had FASD. I think this was about four or five years ago. I found her story quite moving, really. She went and met with the elders, and she had a conversation with them, informed them what FASD was. They decided as a council that every woman on the reserve that was pregnant would be surrounded by this inner circle of friends, and they would have a support system that would not only teach them about not drinking but would almost not allow them to, give them the supports that there was just no reason to. It was phenomenal. I can't remember now; it was a year ago, but the instant results were absolutely amazing.

That aspect of the education portion of it is – not to take away from the fact that we do have 23,000 living with FASD and we have a responsibility and obligation to continue to provide supports for them, but that front end and trying to do something different, you know, or make a difference in the number that is born takes so little effort and has such large, large results. Again, I appreciate your comments.

The workload. You know, we've had so much discussion here, and I can see that the assessment that we're doing is quite critical. You've all raised it. Again, I would just say that we know that we have outdated standards. I don't think "standards" is the word we're calling it, but the work of the workload assessment committee is going to be critical.

The kin child. I guess we do not do an inspection. Yeah. Interesting question. Now I'm just interested to find out why that is and if it is an oversight or if we have had any problems. But I appreciate that question.

10:20

Mr. Chase: Time, please? How much time is remaining? Approximately 10. Great.

For those insomniacs hanging on to my every word, wanting to know how the AADAC story ends, I'll briefly bring you back to where I was before I left off, continue the chapter. As a grade 9 teacher my students had a chance to go to AADAC sessions at the Calgary Foothills hospital, where they talked to individuals who had had major accidents due to either alcohol or drugs, and it was a powerful deterrent for those students to talk to those individuals.

I move on to family and community support services. Last Friday Andre Chabot, the alderman from Calgary, talked to me along with two other FCSS representatives regarding insufficient funding. That leads me into my second set, family and community support services. FCSS received an additional \$3.5 million for a total of \$74.7 million, a 5 per cent increase. That comes from the estimates, page 78, line 2.0.2. I realize that the minister won't have time to respond, so I look forward to those written answers.

I was disappointed to see that once again FCSS did not receive a more substantial increase this year. Also, I'd like to know: why is the funding slated to barely increase at all in the next three years? According to page 58 of the ministry's statement of operations: for 2008-09, \$74.674 million; 2009-10, \$74.685 million; 2010-11, \$74.685 million. It's not as though the demand isn't growing exponentially larger than the increases.

FCSS is a crucial organization that helps to improve Alberta's social infrastructure. A more significant financial commitment from this government would help to improve the already incredible preventative social service network that FCSS supports and contributes to in the province. I would point out that FCSS can leverage a lot of extra funding from the government seed money. The government provides about a third of what FCSS can then turn that money into in terms of benefits.

A question about child and youth sexual exploitation. Funding for protection of children from sexual exploitation has increased by \$200,000, a 3 per cent increase. That comes from the estimates, page 78, line 3.0.3. How many children and youth are apprehended or receive services through PCHIP annually? In other words, is the program working?

With regard to services for children with disabilities, family support for children with disabilities received a \$5.284 million increase for a total funding of \$107.052 million. That comes from the estimates, page 78, line 2.0.1. We've heard that there are shortages of professionals to deal with autism in this province, as referred to by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. Is this the case, and how severe are these shortages? I have heard that a number of parents come to Alberta based on the support for autism. Are we able to keep up? Funding for children with autism is reportedly decided by a multidisciplinary team. Not all members have the experience needed to diagnose and prescribe the necessary supports for these children. What reviews has the minister done regarding these multidisciplinary teams to ensure that they are making the best decision in the cases they review?

I move on very quickly to the Child and Youth Advocate. The Child and Youth Advocate is receiving a \$600,000 increase, or 11 per cent, from \$5.781 million to \$6.552 million. That comes from the estimates, page 78, line 3.0.4. The Child and Youth Advocate may have an increased workload due to the changes to PCHIP requiring that apprehended youth be directed to legal representation for children and youth for legal advice. Will this increase in funding be enough to cover this expanded role as well as the increasing demands for assistance? In other provinces the children's advocate has an expanded role that includes monitoring and offering constructive suggestions regarding how the system can be more accommodating to children and youth. Does the minister believe that a similar expanded role would improve the child welfare system in Alberta, and are there any plans to expand the role of Alberta's advocate? Neither the 2005-2006 nor the 2006-2007 Child and Youth Advocate annual reports have to date been released. Can the minister please explain the cause of this delay and inform us as to when the reports will be issued?

Going back to comments about addictions and youth specifically, the crystal meth task force recommended that 300 additional beds be made available for addictions, detox, and treatment. Will this budget do anything to increase the number of beds available to youth for these purposes?

Representatives from the group Parents Empowering Parents have expressed concerns that families are not involved enough in the process when children are apprehended through PCHAD. We had one parent talk to our caucus group two years ago about the devastating effects of the horrible addictions of crystal meth and the effect it had on their family and the breakups. Parents Empowering Parents have also told us that there are problems for those living in remote communities who would like to access services. There is seemingly no transportation option dedicated to transporting children apprehended through the PCHAD program. This can put a strain on other community resources not designed for this purpose.

With regard to increases to the minister's and the deputy minister's offices. The minister's office is receiving a budget increase of

\$33 million. That's an 8 per cent increase from last year's budget. The year before the same area received a 33 per cent increase. What is the cause of this increase, and how will the increase improve dedicated services to children? The deputy minister's office also received a large budget increase this year. Funding was increased by \$53 million, a 9 per cent increase. This is in addition to last year's substantial budget increase of 49 per cent. What is the cause of this increase, and how will the increase improve services to children?

As I began, I noted that there is a 47 per cent overall increase. Hopefully, as both the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona noted, this money will get to the front-line workers. I would hope that that is the case.

I realize, Madam Minister, that there's very little time left. I appreciate the efforts of your staff and yourself in answering questions. I look forward, as do all members, to written responses.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a comment. With the minister's office the budget was \$422,000, not \$422 million, and the increase is \$33,000, not \$33 million. Just to make that clarification. And, actually, the same with the deputy minister's office: it's \$628,000. Those numbers aren't in the millions.

Anyway, to all three of you, I really appreciate all your comments. I think it's clear, and I think I can say that for everybody in the House, that we care strongly about the health and welfare of our children and our families in this province. Again, just to go back to the original comments, I think we're pretty fortunate to be in a province with just over 3 million people and we spend this amount of resource, time, energy, and dollars on our families.

A lot of your questions I will get back to you on.

I appreciate your comments on FCSS. I know I said earlier that I do think that that's probably one of the best examples of partnership that we have in this province. Their work is absolutely incredible. If I had no other priorities and no other issues, there would be no end to what you'd want to contribute to that program.

One comment I would make: our FCSS are getting about 5 per cent. The other benefit will be the out of school funding because our initial interest in taking a look at moving into the out of school area and providing for extended provincial funding was as a result of the FCSS review that was done. We have moved forward on all of the recommendations. There's only one outstanding. The last two were on out of school, for us to get involved in that area, on which I think our FCSS were spending about \$11 million. So our moving in allows those dollars to go to some other preventative work.

The other one was on some transportation issues, which we have a multiministry committee . . . [Ms Tarchuk's speaking time expired]

10:30

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services, but I would like to invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee can rise and report progress.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(5) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Transportation and Children and Youth Services relating to the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue

fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: On the report as presented by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

14. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that a Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Prins, chair; Mr. McFarland, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Campbell; Mr. Horne; Mr. Lund; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; and Ms Notley, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Ethics Commissioner and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The effect of this motion would be to approve the appointment of a Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee for the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Do any members wish to speak?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Renner: Question.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 2
Travel Alberta Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered in respect of this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I won't go into the detail that I did previously in second reading, but I did reference the idea of a billboard: driving along the highway, seeing a billboard advertising all the promises. I suggested that I wanted those promises to be fulfilled. I didn't want the ad campaign to be a bill of goods that we couldn't necessarily support. I'm looking for a true promotional experience and a preservation of the wonders of this province so that we can actually promote it.

I'm pleased to have another opportunity related to the bill, if I can make that connection, and talk specifically about the parks portion of the tourist bill. One of the things we want to attract tourists to Alberta with is the notion that this is a very safe province to visit, that we have over 500 parks and protected areas, and that people will have very enjoyable experiences because we will be there to preserve, support, and protect. If it appears that some of this material has been heard before, it isn't really déjà vu; it is reality. I will ask the hon. Minister for Tourism, Parks and Recreation if she can provide me with a little bit of an update on the concerns that I have going into this weekend.

I noted this afternoon the drastic toll taken on conservation officers and field offices due to cutbacks over the past 14 years, and I expressed concerns as to whether there were sufficient officers to provide the necessary support and enforcement services in Alberta parks. The minister, in reference to a later question, indicated the figure of 150 officers, I think. Divided in half, there are only 75 who work a day shift and 75 who work a night shift. I was questioning whether that would be enough. So if the minister can inform me. We know the number of conservation officers at any given day or nighttime will be 75 out at any one go. They will be apparently backed by RCMP and sheriffs who will also be out this week to inform, support, and protect outdoor enthusiasts in Alberta's 500-plus provincial parks and protected areas. So if the minister can give me a cumulative potential approximate number, that would be great.

After evaluating the enforcement challenges experienced in the parks after this long weekend, is it the minister's plan to work together with Sustainable Resource Development and the Solicitor General to consider extending not only the liquor ban but the possibility of needing more seasonal conservation officers for patrolling and protecting purposes?

We had a discussion earlier, I think it was during the second go-round possibly in the budget debates, about communication difficulties in the wilderness. Therefore, I offered the suggestion: because conservation officers primarily are normally patrolling at night because of their lack of numbers and the large distances they have to cover, would the minister consider for the safety of the officers the idea of having two officers to one vehicle during the graveyard shift hours so that that support could be there?

I look forward to the minister's answers, and she'll be delighted with how quickly this will rush through Committee of the Whole.

The Deputy Chair: Do any further members wish to speak?
Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, Travel Alberta Act?

Mr. Chase: I was looking for the answers, and maybe I can just ask: are you able to provide approximations at this time or give me some hope that liquor bans will be extended and communications in the

backwoods will improve and there will be a doubling of support for officers? That's what I'm looking for, and then I'll very gladly conclude.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that we're in committee, and I'll just be really brief. The hon. member has his finger on a very important issue. He talks about how many conservation officers versus how many parks, but I just want him to know that we're deploying those in what we'll call some of the more crowded areas, where we know there will be the most. We have some areas very much in the backcountry wilderness, so it's not required that we have conservation officers. We think we've deployed them appropriately for this weekend. Obviously, we will know after the weekend is over.

On the liquor bans, as I said before, we'll look to see if there are problems in other parks in other areas and see if we need to expand those in the future. We will be watching that.

As far as communication, I do think we've come a long way on that, and we are feeling pretty confident as we head into this weekend. Again, we'll have to monitor. We'll see how it goes after the weekend, and then we'll make some further decisions.

10:40

I just want to say that with this legislation I think it will be taking Alberta's tourism industry to the next level. I think we have a great product. You're right that we can always improve upon it, but this is a beautiful province. I know that people want to come here. I know that we want to show them how beautiful the country is that we live in. I think this legislation will go a long way in helping us promote what we do have here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, the Travel Alberta Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Renner: This time I think I have it right, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 2.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 2.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report from the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, do you concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? That's carried.

**Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 3

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate May 13: Ms Blakeman]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to rapidly go through a P3 primer, summarizing why I and my colleagues in the Liberal caucus have concerns about the P3 aspects of this bill. Number one, when we have a sustainability fund approaching \$8 billion, why are we going to private lenders? It's not necessary.

Number two, the promise that P3s will deliver services faster for a variety of reasons – because they can be bundled, et cetera – is a fallacy. If we look at the projects, the 18 schools that are now the 32 schools, very little work has been done other than some preplanning and a degree of surveying. It's been a year since those first 18 P3 schools were introduced. Nothing has happened of any significance in this past year. We're still waiting for the final bids to be made.

I have concerns about the public comparator process which would suggest that P3s come in cheaper than the traditional building of schools. I've already mentioned how a number of traditional school builders have turned away from even bothering to bid on the P3 process because they believe that it's not a functional or economically viable process, and they don't want to have anything to do with it. There is no doubt that we need the schools, and the modular schools are a great way to start, but the current company that is building those modular schools can't keep up. Therefore, I have suggested before that rather than doing it through a P3 method, we should extend the number of builders of these modulars. As long as they follow a set plan, we'll be in business.

Probably one of the most offensive things about the P3s is that it incurs debt for another 30 years. I've mentioned before that the children who are currently in those schools will be paying for them. There is no guarantee that 30 years from now we will have the general revenue necessary to pay for the debt that has been run up in the name of P3s. We have the wonderful fortune at this time of being in a province with resource revenue, but it's of the nonrenewable type, so we need to use the money strategically. Studies have

shown that for every two P3 schools you can have a third traditional.

We need to get on with the process of building it. The financing currently exists within the government, or it can borrow at a much better rate than the financing that is involved. Therefore, I would encourage the government to get off its passion for P3s, go back to traditional pay-as-you-go methods, have the accountability up front and the liability not pushed off for another 30 years.

Thus ends the P3 primer.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just really want to make sure that I can get my objections to this bill on the record. I've always thought that P3s were a misnomer. They really should be P4s, and that is public dollars and private profit partnerships.

I think my biggest problem with them, of course, is that there is a debt over 20 to 30 years. My question would be: where is the cushion for when the economy changes? Yes, it would be nice to think that we're going to continue as we are over the next 30 years, but who really knows what could happen? I mean, oil is king right now, but I sincerely believe that before 20 years is up, we're going to have huge problems in terms of water. I think that we will be short of water in 20 years, and I think it's going to change the way that we have to function in our economy.

The other thing is that I think that alternative methods of creating energy will come more and more to the forefront. Technology in the green areas: I think all we have to do is look at Europe to see exactly how the economy in the green areas has been growing by leaps and bounds, certainly, and it will come to North America before very long. Will we be depending on oil as much as we are? Who knows? However, I just don't see that cushion, so I'd rather be safe than sorry. I absolutely cannot support what I call P4s.

At this point I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 10:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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