

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA**Title: **Monday, July 24, 1989 8:00 p.m.**

Date: 89/07/24

[The House resumed at 8 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

head: **Main Estimates 1989-90****Family and Social Services**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, the item called for this evening is Family and Social Services. The estimates for that department are to be found at page 191 of the main estimates book, with the elements commencing at page 77 of the elements book.

The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased this evening to bring forward departmental estimates totaling some \$1.293 billion. This represents a 5.7 percent increase in funding for programs and services to those Albertans who need the support of a caring society and of a caring government.

Mr. Chairman, it is for the single mothers and their children who require our support. It's for the unemployed and their families, the mentally and physically handicapped, the abused women and battered children, the disadvantaged senior and the struggling widow for whom these estimates speak. It is for those people to whom our hands go out to provide dignity, for self-sufficiency, for safety and protection. It's to those people that we offer shelter or counseling or treatment, to all Albertans who are abused, downtrodden, helpless, mentally or physically challenged, for those who have suffered at the hands of fate and ill fortune. It's to these people that I bring forward estimates, again totaling \$1.293 billion. This is a clear statement from this government to all Albertans, indeed on behalf of all Albertans, that we stand together as a community of people ready to assist the least amongst us.

Mr. Chairman, this is a historic evening that I join with my colleague the Associate Minister of Family and Social Services to present to this Assembly for the first time the estimates of the new Department of Family and Social Services. I'd be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to, first of all, say how much I appreciate the friendship and support extended by the Member for Fort McMurray. But I'd also want to at this time acknowledge his commitment and dedication and tireless efforts on behalf of Albertans as we share together the immense responsibilities of the Department of Family and Social Services.

Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize the family aspect of this ministry, to begin with. What this portion of our ministry really speaks to is the determination of our Premier; it speaks to the determination of our government to strengthen Alberta families and Alberta family life-styles in every way that we can. So many of the challenges that we face in social services relate back to problems in the home, reflect back to severe family

pressures in society today, reflect back upon family breakup. Our Premier and this government clearly recognize the strength and value of healthy families in our province. We recognize that strong families mean strong communities, that strong communities mean strong municipalities, that strong municipalities mean strong provinces, which mean a strong nation.

Mr. Chairman, there is no question in my mind that the future of this province and this nation lies in the heart and soul of that very basic unit in society that we call the family. Our Premier has put it so well on many occasions in this Assembly in speaking of the need for government to strengthen the role of family, and his message has taken hold on a nationwide basis. Last year our Premier carried forward Alberta's focus on the family to the first ministers' meeting, where it was discussed, and it was decided to hold a National Symposium on the Family. It was also a further commitment to place the family back on the first ministers' meeting at the next conference.

I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I had the opportunity of joining with four other ministers from across Canada in attending that National Symposium on the Family held earlier this month. It was cosponsored by the federal government, by 10 provinces, by two territories, and what it did is, again, allow us to focus on the family and increase the awareness around the importance of family. But what that conference really spoke about was commitment. It spoke about the commitment of the Governor General of this nation, who was the honorary chairman. It spoke about the commitment of our Prime Minister and the 10 Premiers. I might note, Mr. Chairman, that it crossed all party lines, that all the mainline parties were represented by those Premiers.

It spoke about the commitment of 750 delegates from all walks of life. There were certainly social care workers there. There were medical people there. There were clergy; the church was represented, families, single parents: all walks of life, Mr. Chairman. What was really interesting for me to note and what I really saw as the emphasis of the whole conference, besides the increased focus and awareness on the family, was the emphasis that it wasn't up to government alone, that the initiative had to start with the individuals, that all of us had a role to play, that community agencies had a role to play, that municipalities had a role to play, and yes, provincial and federal governments had a role and responsibilities to play as well.

I'd like to talk about some of the initiatives now of the ministry of the family here in Alberta. I would first want to mention, of course, the proposed legislation to establish the third Monday in February as a holiday in this province. Again, Mr. Chairman, it's going to help to focus and increase the awareness of family, but it'll also be, of course, a day of reflection. I'm looking forward to being able to join with my family on February 19 next year. I would also want to mention the establishment of the Premier's council on the family. I'm really looking forward to seeing that in place; I'm looking forward to working with the council. I know that one of the first things that we're going to ask them to do is to get out and consult with Albertans right across this province. This government puts a great deal of heed into consultation, and we know that it's important to stay in tune with what Albertans are thinking, and I can't think of a better way than utilizing the Premier's council on the family to help us establish our early initiatives as it relates to the family.

Then lastly, Mr. Chairman, we've made a commitment to the Lieutenant Governor's Conference on the Family. I'm looking

forward to that I might add that Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor is very excited and enthused about this particular conference as well. She, of course, has a particular interest as a former minister of social services and is behind the conference a hundred percent. I'm looking forward to the results of that conference. I might add that I would certainly open the invitation to some of the members opposite as well as my other colleagues in the Assembly to attend this particular conference, and I hope they'll bring with them some excellent ideas and suggestions. I really see this as being a building block for the ministry of the family.

Then last thing, Mr. Chairman, as it relates to the family, I would like to just mention how overwhelmed I've been with letters of support for this particular ministry and also suggestions and ideas and concepts and thoughts that individuals have taken the time to share with me, and I want to acknowledge that and say how much I appreciate it.

Mr. Chairman, it was just over three short months ago that I assumed the responsibilities of Minister of Family and Social Services, and as you might appreciate and anticipate, I've learned a lot these last three months, and I've discovered a number of things about this particular ministry that I'd like to share at this time. One of the first things I grew to appreciate was that we have a tremendous management team here in Edmonton. So often we're quick to criticize the bureaucrats. I can only say that the deputy we have in this ministry and the assistant deputy ministers and all the senior management are a very committed team of Albertans. I've really enjoyed working with them these past three months, and I look forward to the years ahead. I've also had the opportunity of getting out and visiting with some of our regional operations. Our province is divided into six regions. I had the opportunity prior to session to visit five of the regions, and I again discovered that we have just excellent people in place out there in our various regional offices.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to acknowledge the frontline workers whom I had the opportunity of visiting with. In this particular portfolio they have some very demanding and challenging responsibilities, and they face some very difficult decisions on a day-by-day basis. Too often in this Assembly we only hear about those situations that happen to fall through the cracks. We don't hear about all the success stories that are out there, and there are many. We don't hear about all the good things that are happening out there, and there are many as well. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge some of the community agencies and the thousands upon thousands of volunteers who work with this department in extending services to those Albertans who need them.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to come back more specifically now to some of the estimates in front of us. In providing an overview to our 1989-90 budget estimates, I'd like to begin with Social Allowance, which is contained within vote 2 of the department's estimates. The 1989-90 budget calls for a 7.5 percent increase in social allowance. This represents an increase in budget from \$569.4 million last year to \$612.3 million in 1989-90. Clearly this government stands firm in its commitment to provide the necessary means to continue to assist those in need. I'd want to say that it is the intent of this minister to put even a greater focus on helping clients on social allowance to become independent. I'm looking forward to working closely with my colleagues the hon. ministers of Career Development and Employment and of Advanced Education to be able to provide services and programs to improve competitiveness of social

allowance clients in the labour force. I think this is going to allow us to come forward with some very significant initiatives in the future.

Mr. Chairman, in order to reduce caseloads further, my department is implementing a revised delivery system which will focus both on the specialization of staff to provide accurate calculation of benefit and social workers to assist clients to move back into the work force. A further initiative, now in its second year, is the use of specialized staff to ensure that only those persons entitled to benefits will receive them. A report describing their work in this area of client verification will be available hopefully within the next month. My department is also in the process of implementing a network of minicomputers, which will assist workers in the automatic calculation of benefits to clients.

Mr. Chairman, I have already had an opportunity to speak on numerous occasions about a program called assured income for the severely handicapped. In terms of those on assured income I am pleased to announce a commitment of \$138.1 million, or a .5 percent increase, in the amount of money available to recipients under the Alberta assured income for the severely handicapped program. Again, I don't think I need to at this time expound any further on the merits of that particular program.

Mr. Chairman, I'd now like to announce some major initiatives reflecting this government's deep concern for children. In global terms the overall budget to serve children in care will increase 6.7 percent to \$132.6 million, and this is in vote 3 of the budget. I should note that in 1985 my department cared for approximately 11,000 wards. Now, in 1989 with a concerted effort to provide appropriate family supports and by introducing a practice of least intervention, I'm pleased to report that the number has dropped to 8,200, and only 25 percent of those children are in the permanent custody of the Department of Family and Social Services. However, it must be recognized that while real numbers of children coming into government care have been reduced dramatically, those now coming into care are generally more disturbed and require more intensive therapy and counseling. While my department has been most successful in its efforts to keep families together by removing only those children in desperate circumstances, this has put tremendous pressure on both foster families and the institutional system.

My department determined several years ago, Mr. Chairman, that the costly, somewhat impersonal, and in some minds potentially dehumanizing institutional care could in a significant majority of cases be offered in a family atmosphere using trained and nurturing foster parents. Few people object to or challenge this practice. I am pleased now to confirm that \$1 million in additional funding will be available to double the number of treatment-oriented foster homes.

As well, Mr. Chairman, Alberta's 1,100 foster families providing both long- and short-term care to 2,200 children will receive a 10 percent increase in basic maintenance rates, to a new maximum per diem of \$15.51. This reflects a 14 percent increase in rates paid to foster parents since 1987. In addition to this, a new program costing approximately \$160,000 will be implemented to allow foster parents to obtain respite care. This program was requested, I might add, by the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I'm most pleased to introduce it at this time. I would also want to note that I've had an opportunity of meeting with the executive of the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I'm looking forward to working together with them in the years ahead as well.

In terms of all children receiving care or support from this department, I'm also pleased to confirm that an additional \$2.6 million has been added as part of the \$41.8 million budget allocation for child intervention services. Those additional moneys will be used to provide on a timely basis fee-for-service assessments, psychological and similar supportive services. Further, as members of this House will no doubt recall, my predecessor, the Hon. Connie Osterman, took the unusual step of seeking a special warrant to increase the staffing component of child welfare services by 59 positions earlier this year, when it became known that child abuse investigations were in some cases delayed due to high caseloads. I'm pleased to confirm at this time that these positions are now permanent, at an annual cost of \$2 million. I might point out that a project is currently under way in my department to establish a workload management system, including the development of workload standards and guidelines.

My department, Mr. Chairman, continues to work with the union through the joint consultation committee to ensure that frontline social workers are involved in developing manageable caseloads. Further to that, I'm happy to say that there have been 16 consultation sessions arranged directly with frontline workers throughout this province, because we recognize the importance of getting that direct input into this particular project. This project will provide the method to obtain better management information to allow us to focus our human resources more effectively and to ensure an equitable distribution of resources and workloads, understanding that cases are not numbers but children, each of whom suffers different problems and requires different degrees of intervention and treatment.

While it is always an imperative to keep before us the face and individual needs of each person who requires the services this department can provide, another specific area where it is an absolute imperative is in the area of special needs adoption. I cannot fully express my admiration and gratitude to those many loving and caring Alberta families who have opened their hearts and their homes to special needs children. Earlier today, Mr. Chairman, I was able to announce the creation of a three-part postadoption support program to assist those families who have adopted children who have those unique requirements. A budget of \$225,000 will be provided to assist community-based organizations, a further \$165,000 is to be allocated to allow for contracting of special support services, and finally, funds needed to meet the needs of the adopted child will be provided directly to the adoptive parents on a case-by-case and contract basis.

Mr. Chairman, only three years ago the department embarked on a major promotional effort, largely through the support and goodwill of the Alberta media, to raise the awareness of the need to adopt these children who have experienced neglect, abuse, and a lack of security. At that time approximately 50 children a year were placed. I'm heartened to say that this year we will likely place over 300 such children. If I may be allowed, I would like to repeat my acknowledgment and appreciation to those media outlets, rural and urban, who have greatly assisted this department in raising the awareness of this societal problem. The impact has been most greatly felt through the efforts of television, and I especially commend CFRN in Edmonton and CFCN in Calgary.

Mr. Chairman, I would like now to focus attention on child care programs. I propose to increase the child care program budget by 13.8 percent this year. Our 1989-90 expenditures will total \$75 million this year, up from the \$67 million spent last

year. Furthermore, I am pleased to confirm a 20 percent rise in subsidy rates available to low-income earners. To 13,000 Alberta families that means a subsidy up to \$240 per month for one child and an additional \$280 per month for the second and each subsequent child. This increased subsidy should provide an additional cushion for a low-income parent to continue working or to attend an educational institution. Other initiatives, Mr. Chairman, include the development this year of day care worker standards at a cost \$1 million, a commitment to the review of day care funding overall, including threshold limitations and evaluation of where the subsidies are going and how they can best be administered and who they should be directed to; further, the introduction of a computerized information system to streamline the administrative side of the program for both parents and operators, and an increase in the number of licensing staff at an annual cost of \$284,000 in order to ensure and maintain quality care for our children. I'm proud to say to members of this Assembly and to all Albertans that this government continues to spend the highest per capita funding on day care of any province in Canada, and that we continue to support the highest proportion of licensed child care spaces compared with our child population.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to take just a moment while I'm on this topic to acknowledge a couple of people: Rita Nyback from Camrose, who is the acting chairman of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, and I would like to congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury for taking on the chairmanship of that important committee effective at the beginning of June. The member has served on that committee for a number of years, and I'm looking forward to working with him in that capacity as well.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if I may, I'd like to speak to an issue that causes so much anguish and grief in our society: that of family violence. While abhorrent to every individual, family and wife abuse continues at an unacceptable rate in Alberta. While we do not yet have all the answers to stop this abomination, at least we can provide a safe haven for the terrorized women and children living in abusive conditions. My department will commit an overall increase of 24 percent to women's shelters throughout this province. The new funding base for 1989-90 will allow for the creation of a new women's shelter in Peace River and for the opening of six new satellite centres in northern communities. It will also allow the existing shelters in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Grand Centre, Lloydminster, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Camrose, Red Deer, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Hinton to increase salary levels and staff positions. Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, I have set aside \$200,000 for the development of community-based family violence prevention projects. This will enable communities to develop creative local responses to family abuse, as well as encourage innovative demonstration projects that can be applied in other areas of the province. This new money represents our desire to continue to work in partnership with communities to respond to this serious, serious social problem.

Mr. Chairman, there are many other exciting and excellent programs and initiatives which my department will undertake this year, but knowing my time is limited, I shall simply close by underscoring this government's commitment to the social needs of Albertans. The estimates represent, in part, tangible evidence of that commitment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am looking forward to the discussion this evening, and I am looking forward to some

helpful input from all members of this Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Associate Minister of Family and Social Services, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder, then Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. WEISS: Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to address the Assembly this evening to try and supplement information that's provided by my friend and colleague, the Hon. John Oldring, with whom I have the distinct and pleasurable duty of sharing responsibility for the portfolio of Family and Social Services. The cliché in this case might be double the measure, double your pleasure, but perhaps in half the time. Together, I believe that we will strive to live up to the trust placed in us by the people of Alberta and through the recognition by the Premier to continue to develop, enhance, and deliver the various programs. In order to best deliver the various programs, the minister and I have mutually agreed to break down the department into different areas of responsibilities. I'll try not to be repetitive but do share with my colleague the thanks to the staff and the department personnel along with the many volunteers who work so hard within the field to deliver the various programs. To the hon. members, they may refer to the June 14, 1989, release that does say, "Family and Social Services ministers announce division of responsibilities," if they have any direct questions relating to the various programs.

In regards to the various programs, Mr. Chairman, I would like to focus on a few of the programs. I'm pleased to bring to your attention the budget estimates dealing with services, in particular to the handicapped. Now, while the Department of Family and Social Services has a majority component of services and programs directed towards children at risk, I'm encouraged to note that 36 percent of all services to the children are, in fact, directed to the handicapped child. Now, an even more heartening statistic shows that 94 percent of these children remain at home, and I think that's a very, very important statistic, and I would hope all hon. members would remember that with regard to their questions as well. What we're trying to strive for is that only the most medically fragile need to be cared for in an institutional setting, and this is a goal that we're going to continue to work towards.

This government and I and, as my colleague has indicated, this minister remain firmly rooted in our commitment to support the some 4,400 families with handicapped children so that they remain at home and in the community and are able to take advantage of locally based alternatives. I have committed an increase of some 15 percent to this program, Mr. Chairman, which will increase our base funding to some \$8 million annually in this area alone. This percentage increase, I am pleased to say, is similar to the level of increase dedicated to the same program last year.

I am extremely pleased as well, Mr. Chairman, to announce the continuation of a pilot project to assist the brain-injured. In December of 1988 this government, through the efforts of my predecessor, the Hon. Connie Osterman, founded and funded the Head Injured Relearning Society in Calgary on a trial basis by way of a special warrant. This program, with a caseload at now 25, has proven invaluable in providing rehabilitation to those unfortunate individuals who have suffered irreparable brain injury as a result of accident or injury. I am now able to say that this program will be confirmed at an annual cost of some \$2.4 million,\* one that I don't believe anybody in this Assembly will

begrudge or deny. This innovative program has provided cost-effective services to help the head-injured redevelop lost skills, to either return to school or to re-enter the work force. I am also extremely pleased to announce that included in the budget are sufficient funds for expanded services to up to 80 head-injured individuals and their families. This sum will also allow for 3,000 respite days to allow parents and care givers an opportunity to be temporarily relieved of their demanding task of caring for postdischarged head-injured individuals. It's a very exciting project with which we are proud to be associated, Mr. Chairman. I'd also publicly like to commend the over 50 volunteers. Without their intensive involvement this program would not enjoy the success it has and the ongoing continued success it has been assured of by their overall involvement and participation.

Mr. Chairman, while speaking of volunteers, it provides a natural lead-in to the scores of agencies that provide residential and vocational services to persons with disabilities, one that most members will be familiar with. Without these agencies as a significant part of the department's service delivery, we would not be as successful as we are in maintaining family ties, as outlined by the Hon. John Oldring, providing for personal development, and providing for full community participation by the disabled and handicapped. To these agencies, sir, go an additional \$2.2 million, representing an average increase of some 5 percent over existing levels of funding. Now, one might say that's not enough, Mr. Chairman or members of the Assembly. I don't think it's all dollars that go to make a program work; it's the people and the need and the caring. I've said before that I don't think anybody has a monopoly on caring. We will try and deliver the best and get the most we can within the overall debt levels of expenditure.

I might point out that the dollars being directed to children's services in total, in total, Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly, is some \$132.6 million, or a 6.7 percent increase in expenditures over last year. Now, one might say that that isn't enough or that it sounds like a tremendous amount of money. Well, just earlier in the Assembly today I heard the hon. Minister of Tourism say that his total department represented some \$32 million. Reflect in this case here. In services alone in this area, for children's services, we are expending some \$100 million over that provincial minister's budget. So what I'm saying to members of the Assembly is that we do listen and we are trying. We may not deliver it exactly as they say, but we're certainly going to work collectively together to try and deliver and meet those goals.

Mr. Chairman, it's an honour for me to have been given cabinet responsibility for seniors. I don't know if it's that I'm close to being that level that I can qualify or not, but I certainly accept it. It's interesting to note . . . [interjection] Have to wait for a little while; thank you, hon. Member for Vegreville. My hairline doesn't indicate that, as I can reflect now though.

It's interesting to note that seniors now number one in 12 of Albertans. Just think: for every 12 persons, one is a senior. The '89-90 provincial budget lists more than \$1 billion in spending for programs and services to seniors, most of which allow them to maintain their independence. That's a goal I hope that we all never lose sight of and that we'll continue to work and hammer for, no matter what side of the House we represent or the views. Let's not lose sight of it, the word "independence," and what it means to all. Surely to God, there but for the grace of God go many of us in some of these situations.

Now, while not solely responsible for many of these expen-

\*see page 1187, left col., para 6, lines 4 to 8

ditures, I'm proud to play a role in planning, co-ordinating, and advocating services to seniors. I certainly wouldn't want to take that overall responsibility away, because there are many, many departments involved in the delivery of these programs, in the co-ordination, but it's certainly one where we're going to try and respond. I'm ably assisted, certainly, in the task as it relates to the seniors by the hon. Member for Bow Valley, the hon. member Tom Musgrove, who has recently agreed to assume the position of chairman of the Provincial Senior Citizens' Advisory Council. Mr. Musgrove succeeds Harry Alger, the former Member for Highwood, and I'd like to take the opportunity, Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly, to pay tribute and extend my thanks to Mr. Alger for his years of dedication to the cause of seniors and for the many innovations and initiatives that were a result of his efforts and commitment to this dynamic group of Albertans. [some applause] Thank you. I'm sure he'll be pleased.

I'd like to share a little story with you about Mr. Alger. We've also been known as a little bit of betting buddies, that we extended the odd wager between the north and south areas. He has been known to bet on a team called the Flames or something down in that area, and I've been very loyal, as a northerner, to the Edmonton Oilers. So over the past we've shared some good things. The other night I shared a very good thing with this hon. member. Just to show you his commitment and dedication, he hosted a dinner with a group from the gerontology association to try and encourage and support their overall aims and objectives. Do you know that I was very surprised, Mr. Chairman, when I asked who was covering the cost of this dinner? Do you know what the response was, Mr. Chairman? He was. He was covering the overall cost out of his pocket; there was nobody to reimburse or cover him for that. But he was doing it because he believed in it and because he was committed. It's that kind of commitment and dedication I'd like all hon. members to be aware of. It's not always what you get out of it; it's what you put into it. And he was prepared to put in and has continued to do so.

I've every confidence that the hon. Member for Bow Valley will continue to provide the leadership required to make this council a successful and viable entity in the community. I certainly look forward to working with him, as we've had the privilege at several meetings to this date already.

One final comment I'd like to make, if I may, as it relates to the previous commitments by my predecessor, the Hon. Connie Osterman, was that she'd made a commitment to the Assembly. All hon. members, I'm sure, are aware of it, but I'd like to recall it. In mid 1988 she committed a major review of present and future needs of the mentally handicapped. The purpose of the review is to fully examine the broad range of support services needed to promote independence again, as I referred to with the seniors, and integration into the community for citizens with mental handicaps. This task is being headed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury, Mr. Roy Brassard. This exhaustive review has now been completed, and I look forward to tabling Mr. Brassard's report in the near future. It will be, Mr. Chairman, I believe a major springboard which will provide guidelines to assist me and government in developing programs and services for the mentally handicapped in Alberta to see us many years into the future.

Speaking of the future, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to indicate to the hon. members of the Assembly along with my colleague here, the Hon. John Oldring, that it is my goal and his goal to try

and review all programs as they relate to the overall Family and Social Services to ensure that they've not become redundant and obsolete. There are many programs that have been implemented many years ago. Maybe they worked then; maybe they don't work now or are not as practical or feasible. We have instructed our department staff and officials to collectively sit down and say, "Hey, how are we best meeting the needs of everyday Albertans, their concerns and their issues as it relates to the responsibilities that we talk about in Family and Social Services?" I hope, all hon. members, that 12 months from now you'll honestly be able to reflect back and say that the minister responsible was able to review, build on those past programs and now is delivering the biggest bang for the buck. We have a responsibility of some \$1.3 billion to see and ensure that those programs are being delivered effectively, with the flexibility that will allow the social workers and the caseworkers to go out and meet the demands that are brought to them in the field and not just bureaucratically tied down so it doesn't meet those individual needs and concerns.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly, I'm sure each and every one of us has been involved in individual cases where maybe it was at 3 o'clock in the morning that somebody called and talked about the concern as it related to a child or to a parent or to a father or to a mother. Those are the concerns that those people in the field must be able to address with the care and the understanding that we all share here in the Assembly. And I say that we all care because I know we care and I know you care.

I emphasize that, Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly, because I was asked a question most recently, if I may, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in a discussion about how do I enjoy the new responsibilities. You know, I had to reflect for a minute, and I guess I could sum it up in making a comparison this way. In my former areas of responsibility as Minister of Recreation and Parks, boy, there were a lot of fun times and a lot of good times and a lot of good tilings. It is so different but it is so challenging to know that we have to meet the needs and concerns of so many Albertans, and the safety net, as the minister has reflected on, and the people that are in need and in care. So it's to those goals and objectives that we're going to try and respond. You know, I don't enjoy it in the same way, but it is certainly challenging to know that we have a direct responsibility and challenge to try and meet.

So please bear with us when you address those concerns as well, and just don't say, "Why isn't government doing this?" I would hope you would be constructive and say, "If government were able to correct or do this, together maybe we can make those changes that the minister talks about," and that I reflect about. So, no, Mr. Chairman, it isn't as much fun, but it sure as heck is going to be challenging, because we're going to ensure that our \$1.3 billion is giving the best for all Albertans. Then we'll know it's been effective in the programs that the minister also has referred to, in the social recipient areas and others. We're going to see some changes, yes, and we're going to make some mistakes. I would honestly say that they won't be at the expense of the recipients or the client users but at the expense of the minister and I in learning, and that we don't mind sharing, those mistakes.

So I certainly look forward to receiving any questions and concerns from hon. members and will try to answer them to the best of my ability within the time frame that's permitted this evening. If we don't have the answers for you, we'll undertake to respond back in writing so they will all be answered. But I

would hope that out of the exchange this evening as well, Mr. Chairman, it will not just be: what is government doing and why isn't government doing? I sincerely look forward to the recommendations, the suggestions and input that I've had the opportunity to share with some of the colleagues from the other sides of the House. When I say other sides, I'm making reference to the New Democrats and the Liberals. I would hope they would all share because it's an area that we all can work to improve and care for.

So thanks again to the hon. members for the opportunity and to you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward, as I say, to sharing with my colleagues.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased this evening to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on the budget for the Department of Family and Social Services. I can't help but feel a little bit that I've just had a lecture from the associate minister. But, at any rate, I would like to commence by saying that I'm very pleased that this minister in his new role has been very open, very accessible, and very responsive, as has the associate minister. I know that many members of the public and myself and my colleagues are very appreciative of that. I wish them both well in their new roles. The responsibility that goes with this department certainly is a huge one, and I think that when we've tacked the word "family" onto the beginning of the Department of Family and Social Services now, that is quite significant.

But, Mr. Chairman, if I was to think of a phrase, I guess, that would describe the department over the past few years and the former minister -- to describe this particular department, I would have to say that I don't feel they have responded to people's needs. Certainly in this particular budget we've seen some dollars allocated to certain areas where the money was badly needed and it was long overdue, but there are many, many areas where I don't think the government has responded, and I'll certainly be getting into this this evening. I think that the minister and the associate minister have an extremely tremendous responsibility with this department and indeed a challenge, as they've both alluded to this evening. I think their challenge becomes even greater, though, when we take a look at the right-wing agenda of this particular government. I think their job will be even more difficult in ensuring that this government meets the needs of those people in the social services area in the next fiscal year, because we all know we have a rising deficit; it's a very huge deficit. So we'll be watching very closely the performance, I guess you might say, of the minister and the associate minister in the years ahead. But I know and my colleagues know that they're two very talented individuals, and I think we can be optimistic that they will do their best to ensure that essential programs in this province aren't whittled away, especially within the next budget year.

Something I suppose I'd like to say at the beginning is that I know that in the speeches a lot of the members on the government side give, whether it's maiden speeches, whether it's budget speeches or it's in response to speeches from the throne, it's very seldom, Mr. Chairman, that we ever hear that there are any problems in the province. I think the only time we ever hear the government members allude to this is on a night like this when we're debating this particular department. It seems to me that they want to paint a beautiful picture of the province

and one that has absolutely no problems in it. I think it's wrong to do that, because if we're going to actually deal with problems that people are facing, we have to first of all admit that they're there, and then deal with them. I think it's very easy, Mr. Chairman, to just turn a blind eye, and I think very often this is what government members do.

It's a very, very comfortable thing to ignore the pain in our society that's happening around us, because it's a very uncomfortable thing to feel that pain that others are feeling, Mr. Chairman. But I think it's important to note that that pain will not go away simply by ignoring it. We must face it. We must deal with it, whether it be hungry children in our schools, whether it be battered women and children, families trying to survive on inadequate incomes, or even young people who are on our streets. Whatever the problem, Mr. Chairman, we must admit that there's a problem before we can begin to deal with it. And I know my colleagues on this side, we're not afraid to face that pain and we're not afraid to talk about these things in this particular Assembly because we need to deal with these things in a realistic way.

Now, for example, Mr. Chairman, I think a very serious issue that the government continues to shrug off is the number of families in this province who are living with low incomes or actually living in poverty. There are many initiatives that a government could take to start to deal with this problem. There are certain trends that are happening; I think we have to recognize that. It's not only on the provincial scene, of course; it's happening on the national scene in Canada, and it's a very serious problem. In 1986 there were more than one million children in Canada growing up in poverty. And according to the Edmonton Social Planning Council, they estimate that 93,600 children are living in poverty in this province. The Edmonton Food Bank reported just a couple of weeks ago that they are facing a 73 percent increase over last year in the number of children they feed from social assistance families. So this is very serious: a 73 percent increase, Mr. Chairman. There recently in Edmonton was a workshop on poverty put on by different organizations in the city of Edmonton. Several opposition members attended that workshop, but there was no one present from the government. I think they have to start taking an interest in these things because I think we have to start to deal with them.

I just don't see anywhere in this particular budget, and I know in the Budget Address that was given, where this particular issue was even mentioned. We're well aware of the effects a destitute child suffers: they fall behind in school; they have low self-esteem; their concentration span is low; they are sick more often. And the majority of children in the child welfare system come from low-income families. So we can see that the costs in education and health care and in the social services system simply from the low-income families is astronomical, yet we just can't seem to get a response from this government in any way.

Now, I realize that this whole issue of poverty is a very complex issue, but again I'm concerned because we just don't see any initiatives taking place in this particular budget. Now, we have brought up in the House the possibility of a school snack program. I know that this may be a very simple suggestion. It obviously doesn't deal with the whole complex issue of poverty, but that one lunch or that one snack in a child's life can make a big difference to that particular child. We know that a lunch program, if it was initiated in this province, could be cost shared with the federal government under the Canada Assistance Plan. I think we could save money in the long run, again, in educa-

tional and health care costs and also in social services as well just by feeding that child.

I know that in question period when the minister was responding to questions in this area, he was saying that we're meeting everyone's needs under social assistance. I know some members will come up to me and say, "You know, it's not our responsibility to feed hungry children." They can blame the parents or they can blame the neighbourhood or they can blame I don't know; they blame; they blame, blame, blame. But these children are still going to school hungry, and I think it's appalling that this government can justify and defend giving millions of dollars to Peter Pocklington, and we've heard this over and over again in the Assembly, but they will not assist in feeding thousands of hungry children in this province because it's not their problem. I find that really appalling. Now, I'm hoping that this minister, being a new minister with new ideas, would take a serious look and develop some initiatives to begin to deal with the kinds of problems that low-income families are facing in this province, particularly hungry children.

Under vote 2, Mr. Chairman, Income Support to Individuals and Families, altogether we see a \$49 million increase over last year under vote 2. This includes financial assistance to the aged, single parents, physically handicapped, single-parent families, mentally handicapped, employables, transients, and on and on. Now, this is a big increase in this area, and I would like to ask the minister: is this increase going to go to increasing and adjusting the rates for people on social assistance? I'm just not sure where the money that has been allocated under this particular vote will go. They've had no increase for several years. Single parents got one a couple of years ago, if I'm not -- but it wasn't very much. The cost of living has gone up. We know there's a 73 percent increase in children using the food bank from families on social assistance. I think it's time we made some adjustments in this area on the rates. I don't think this government -- as a matter of fact, I know that this government is not meeting the basic needs, contrary to what the minister might say. The rates in this province are set arbitrarily; there's no rhyme nor reason to them. Consequently, they are too low. They're not meeting the needs of people because they can't afford to buy what the market is charging for shelter, utilities, and on and on.

I would also ask the minister -- I would hope he would take a look at the discrimination that his department is placing against single employables on social assistance. Because they're single, Mr. Chairman, they are allowed no damage deposit whatsoever. I find this just -- well, it's blatant discrimination, and I think it's astounding that we can have a government discriminating against a group of people like this. They were also singled out a couple of years ago. Their rates were cut back for shelter allowance. Nobody else was, just this particular group. So again this is clear discrimination, and I would hope that this minister would take a look at that.

One concern that was brought to my attention, while we're on the area of social allowance, is that a lot of times the department will tell people, single employables or employables on welfare, that they must go out and they must do a certain amount of job searches every month; they must find a job. Many of these people, Mr. Chairman, have about a grade 5 reading level. Some have no math skills. I mean, their academic skills are very low. Now, it's very difficult for them to go and find a job; as a matter of fact, it's almost impossible. Who is going to hire someone who can barely read and they don't have

any other skills? Yet when we take a look -- and I know it's not within this department -- at courses for upgrading, there's about a 15-month waiting list. In particular, I'm talking about Alberta vocational. The person who did call me was saying that never does the department suggest that these people go back to school. That certainly should be a suggestion, because until they upgrade, there's just no way that they're going to -- well, chances are very slim, anyway, that they'll get a job.

Under vote 2, and I know the minister alluded to this, comes Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. A number of people very recently did a demonstration at the Legislature. They brought their concerns to the minister. I know that he met with those people, and he listened to them. Now, persons on AISH receive \$720 a month. I think it was in 1986 that they received a \$20 increase to their income. It's now 1989, and I would ask this minister how -- I know that there's an increase in this area of .5 percent, but I don't think that would be enough to increase or adjust their income levels either. I'm just wondering then -- he did mention the .5 percent increase, and I'd like to know what that money is allocated for.

We know that the cost of living has gone up. Many of these recipients of AISH are living in poverty. They are forced to go to the food bank, many of them. I know the minister might say that it's a unique program to Canada, AISH, and that's fine, but if we're forcing people to live in poverty and we're forcing them to go to the food bank and we're not meeting their needs, well, then I think it's not much of a program to brag about. I know that in 1988 in the throne speech the government made a commitment that people with disabilities in this province would live in dignity, so I think he should take a serious look at adjusting the rates for people on AISH. At least build in some kind of a mechanism so that they can get a cost of living increase each year. I mean, that certainly would be helpful.

Now, I also know another problem with people that are receiving AISH. Many are paying for their medical -- diabetic supplies, for example -- and because they can't afford them, they end up going to laboratories in the province. It's costing way more in the long run for them to go and get their testing done in labs. I think that again some of the medical supplies are paid for by Aids to Daily Living, which comes under the Department of Health; I know there's all this overlap. But this is a major concern to a lot of people. I know that that particular program got a decrease in the Department of Health, and I know it's not the responsibility of this minister, but it is a concern because it directly affects these people on AISH. They're spending their income, then, on the supplies that aren't covered under Aids to Daily Living.

Now, another issue is the fact that the government right now is deducting Canada Pension Plan disability benefits from the AISH recipients. They're not allowing them to keep those benefits. I think that again the money was targeted by the federal government to go to the poorest of the poor in this country. It's money that does not belong to the government; they should not be taking this money. They should be allowing the recipients on AISH to keep this money. And all they have to do, Mr. Chairman, is to earmark that money as retirement savings, and then they would not be deducting it. Simple as that. For some reason they're deducting it. I understand that as of January 1, 1989, they were allowed to keep their cost of living increases. So if they're allowed to keep their cost of living increase from the federal government, why can't they keep the whole amount that the federal government is giving them?

Now, I know that in the House the minister has said that there could be some implications under the Canada Assistance Plan if that happened. The federal government clearly has said, in letters to people here, that it's a provincial jurisdiction, this program, and there's no problem whatsoever. I would just ask the minister if he has had a chance to research this a bit further, talk to his federal counterparts, and maybe explain to the House what the situation is right now.

Under vote 3, Mr. Chairman, we get into Services for Children, and under that falls foster care. Now, I have met with a number of foster parents, and they have brought a number of concerns to my attention. These are ongoing, very serious concerns that they have. I guess the one thing that they brought to my attention over and over again was that they're not being heard by the department. At least, this is how they feel. They have concerns, but they either don't have access to people that will listen to them or once they do have a say it's just sort of like blowing in the wind. They are not being heard, and I think the frustration they feel is the direct result of the drastic decrease in the number of foster homes in this province. This is very unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, because to keep a child in a foster home costs about \$5,000 per year to care for one child. Put that child in a group home, and that price tag goes up to \$27,000. The annual cost is \$54,000 to put that child in a special treatment home. So very clearly, it's much more cost-effective to leave a child in a foster home if we can, although that of course doesn't take into consideration treatment programs if that child needs treatment.

Now, I think the Foster Parent Association, in my mind anyway, should not fall directly under the Department of Family and Social Services. There is a bit of a problem there with them expressing the concerns they might have because -- at least this is what I think anyway -- they feel stifled because they do come under the jurisdiction of the department. It's unfortunate they are not an independent body so they can speak up more and feel free to do that.

But the concerns the foster parents brought to my attention, the ones I met with -- they feel that training is a serious concern. There is a lack of training for foster parents. I understand that the Foster Parent Association gave a proposal to the government over two years ago, and maybe the minister can respond to that. To my knowledge, nothing has been done with that. The rates, of course -- again, there should be a mechanism there so they can get a cost-of-living increase each year so that they know that's in place and they can predict it's going to happen.

Caseloads is another one. They are very concerned about high caseloads; they don't have access to their social workers. And I guess the other one was just the general lack of support they feel from the department. Now, I was personally involved with one foster parent that lived in my constituency, and she was in need of some extra help. I'm very pleased that the minister tonight stated he would be looking at giving more respite assistance and support to foster parents. I think that's a really important step. But when this particular foster mom asked for some support -- she had a number of adolescent children in her home; she was a single parent -- she was told, and I was told personally by the department, that they would just remove some of the kids. I mean, that was their answer. She cared about those kids; she didn't want them leaving her home. So it's almost like a threat: "If you can't handle it, we'll just take those kids away from you." So I'm glad to hear that the minister is moving in that area.

I know that there are more seriously disturbed children moving into the system, as the minister has stated earlier this evening, and I truly believe that if we don't train foster parents to deal with these kids, we are putting foster parents at risk; we are putting the kids at risk that go into those homes, and this is a very serious, serious situation. Cheryl Wharton, who was the co-ordinator in St. Albert of This Kid is Driving Me Crazy, Colleen Sillip, a chartered psychologist, and myself met with the minister because we are concerned about children's mental health in the province, Mr. Chairman, and we really appreciated the fact that the minister was willing to meet with us. Now, I know that when we get into the whole area of children with mental health problems, it definitely is the Department of Health's responsibility, but because there is such a lack of facilities for these children, they are moving into the Department of Family and Social Services. So it becomes the social services department's problem, even if it shouldn't. Something that really concerns me is that in these two budgets from these two departments, there is no allocation for children's mental health services.

We must move in this area because it is a very serious one, Mr. Chairman. Unlike an abuse case, where a child is in need of protection so that they are apprehended from a home, when a child suffers from an emotional or a behavioural or a mental health problem, oftentimes their family is very willing to care for that child in their home. They don't want that child to leave their home. They want to nurture that child and care for that child and keep that child in their home. They don't have much alternative because if they want support, there isn't much out there. So what happens is that they have to surrender their child to the Department of Family and Social Services. As a matter of fact, they're forced to, because they just don't have an alternative.

Now, I realize that parents go into a joint custody agreement with the department as soon as the child goes into the department. But I know from experience with several parents in this particular situation that as soon as their child moves into the system, they are not treated as an equal partner any more and they lose control of that child. They're not a part of the decision-making process in the majority of cases. There have been a couple of instances where social workers have been very good and very responsive and have included the parents as much as they could, I think, but in many other cases the parents are cut off.

In one instance the natural mother was not even allowed to phone the foster home that her child was put in. It was very difficult for her to have access to see her child on the weekends. Because she was not allowed to go to the foster home, they had to get a driver to drive her child to her house. They couldn't guarantee that they could get a driver, and the problems went on and on and on. Then she was told that the foster parents had the right to say all these things because there was no other placement for that particular child. Nobody else wanted that child. I realize the department was caught in a catch-22. They needed a placement for that child, so they didn't have too much room to move. We have to really work, Mr. Chairman, on increasing specialized foster care for very troubled and disturbed children.

Another problem with them moving into the system if they have mental health problems is that they're only given two years before the parents either have to take that child back home or they have to give permanent custody of their child over to the department. I know many of these children are sick, and they can't get better in two years. They need more time. I'm not



sure what the minister can do in this whole area, but it certainly needs to be looked at, because it's a terrible dilemma for families to be faced with: giving up custody of their child, which they don't want to do, or taking the child back home when they know they can't deal with that child. I know through experience and talking to these families that they would love to have their kids at home if they could get some support there, if they could get some psychiatric help in the home or whatever other services they need. I'm not sure, but it certainly is an area we should look into. It would be much cheaper in the long run to keep these children in their homes.

There's also a very desperate need for crisis intervention. Children who have, for example, tried to commit suicide often are sent home the very same night they're brought into the hospital. I've also heard of cases where children are discharged from a hospital right back onto the streets. This is another area that's of concern. We desperately need 48- to 72-hour emergency care for these kids that are coming in with serious, serious problems and they're at a point in their home that the parents can't cope. They need some space to sort things out, perhaps get assessed, and then even returned home. But they just need that time period where they've got some place to go.

There are some very innovative ideas happening in Canada right now when it comes to children with severe emotional and mental problems. For example, there's the York Family Care Program that was developed in Ontario and is specialized foster care where foster parents work with foster parents. They give each other emotional support and also relief. So they help one another that way. It also includes psychiatric consultants and other professionals all working together to benefit that child. They also work with the natural parents so that eventually, Mr. Chairman, the child can go home again. It's a very innovative, very successful program. I learned about it through the executive director of the Youth Emergency Shelter, and I have some information if the minister would like to take a look at it.

In the Budget Address, we have \$1 million allocated to double the number of parent-counselor homes. I don't know, Mr. Chairman, how many exist right now, but I know that the foster homes in this province have drastically decreased. So I would say that if we're doubling -- I'm not sure how much that is, but I'm sure there would still be a shortage. I'm not sure, but maybe the minister could respond to that. But I feel strongly that the basic training given to parent counselors should be given to all foster parents now, considering the fact that more disturbed children are coming into the system. I would also say that I don't expect the parent counselors to provide treatment for these children. I know that when Mapleridge closed down, which was a treatment centre for kids, these kids ended up in receiving homes. They went to foster homes and the treatment just ended like that. So it was really a sad day for those kids actually.

I would ask the minister, though, also on this topic of parent counselors, if he could explain to me exactly what he means by a parent-counselor home, because I had a call from someone from the Calgary region who was very concerned that the allocation of money in the budget going to parent-counselor homes was simply to contract out to businesses that we now allow to offer services, because we've privatized. This money would be allocated to businesses involved in the social services field to contract out to homes. So maybe he could clarify that.

Under vote 3 we have child care. This is an ongoing issue, a very serious issue, and it was interesting this evening to hear the

minister say that he's very proud we spend the most money in all of Canada on day care. I would be proud too, Mr. Chairman, if in fact we had the highest standards in Canada. But I am absolutely ashamed and appalled that this government spends the most money on child care but we have the lowest standards in all of Canada. That, to me, is appalling. The fact is that we have no idea where that money is going to; we have no accountability for that money. Even the former Minister of Social Services admitted that the accountability needed to be improved because there isn't any accountability.

When we take a look at the subsidy program that was announced by this government, they're going to raise the subsidy to each child in a day care. If I'm wrong I would hope the minister would correct me, but I understand that money goes to the day care centre. So we have no guarantee whatsoever that that money is going to go to the program or that it's going to better the quality of care in that particular day care centre. We have no guarantee of that. The private operators -- and I'm sure everyone knows that in this province we have the highest percentage by far of commercial day cares in all of Canada -- nothing is to stop those private operators from taking that money and putting it in their pocket as profit. I would ask this minister: how can he guarantee that this increase in money will go to the programs in that particular day care, that it will go to benefit the children in those day cares? So I think again it's great for day care operators, but what about the kids? And what about the taxpayers that expect their money to be spent efficiently? So I think we need to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I would remind the hon. member that her time has expired.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I first of all want to congratulate the minister and the associate minister for their appointments, and I look forward to having the opportunity to work with them in trying to resolve some of the difficulties we see arise within the portfolio of Family and Social Services.

I should point out, Mr. Chairman, that normally the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would be leading off for our particular caucus, but an emergency came up and she was called away. Unfortunately, I haven't had the opportunity to review her particular notes, so the House will go without the benefit of her knowledge and expertise in this particular area. But I do have a few notes of my own.

I want to say first of all, Mr. Chairman, when I look at it from my constituency level, next to the Workers' Compensation Board, there were more complaints directed towards Family and Social Services than any other department. In other words, it's number two on the list. I guess there are a number of reasons for that; first of all, right off the bat, because it's dealing with so many programs that are aimed at the delivery of human services. That in itself would account for it. Plus it is an extremely large, large budget; that in itself would have some bearing on the matter.

Now, the minister and associate minister both gave indication that they would like us to voice our concerns to try and bring forward some constructive type thoughts, and at the same time they would like the opportunity to review those thoughts and to respond -- which is good, Mr. Chairman. Unfortunately, one of the difficulties in this type of budget process is that it really doesn't allow members on this particular side, within this

caucus and the New Democrat caucus, the opportunity to constructively make changes to a budget. In other words, the opportunity isn't there to make amendments. We can make suggestions, and possibly we may get a response. I'm not sure exactly how many of the cabinet ministers will, in fact, respond to the various questions that are raised during the budget process.

But referring specifically to the budget, when I look at vote 2, Income Support to Individuals and Families, the thing that is noticeable to me -- people on social assistance that are receiving services from social allowance, their biggest concern, in addition to the level it's set at, is the bureaucracy, the red tape that's encountered. I could give some particular examples where the amount of flexibility that should be built into the system isn't there. For example, I had a person come down to the constituency office the other day, and because their unemployment insurance cheque was \$23 more a month than the level that was allowed for her to get any social assistance, she could not get the availability of special medical coverage or medical prescriptions that she had to get for one of her children which were costing her \$200 a month. In other words, if it were not for that extra \$23 a month that she was getting from unemployment insurance, and if it was, say, \$24 less -- as long as she got \$1 in social assistance a month -- she would then be a recipient and she could then get her card, whatever the expression is, that would entitle her to access those medical expenses. It's that type of red tape that people have difficulty with.

Also, when we look at the question of the social allowance programs, another concern that comes out to us, Mr. Chairman, is the workload, the individual caseload, for social workers. It appears in the comments, in the feedback we get that they do have an extremely extensive caseload. They're handling a great number of cases, and it becomes questionable as to whether they can pay justice to the individual caseloads they're involved with. I'm not sure, when we look at vote 2, as to how much consideration has been given in planning to the impacts that we're going to see beginning January 1, 1990, with the proposed changes to the Unemployment Insurance Commission, to the UIC Act. I'm sure there is going to be some major impact, some substantial impact, on provincial governments in the sense that those persons that will find themselves no longer eligible for unemployment insurance and that can't gain employment are going to have to look at other alternatives, and one of those alternatives is going to be to apply for social allowance.

Under vote 2 when we look at the Income Benefits -- 2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.2.4 -- we see, for example, under 2.2.2 a decrease of 5.3 percent in terms of the expenditure; we see a .5 percent increase in 2.2.3; we see a 17.1 percent decrease in 2.2.4. I'm sure, particularly when we talk in terms of 2.2.4, there has to be some reason why there's that type of decrease in terms of expenditures in comparison to the previous year. Possibly portions of that program have been shifted to another program that would account for that.

In 2.2.3, Alberta Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, I'm of the belief that that particular program should be reviewed. It should be reviewed, trying to find a more compatible method, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, a more compatible arrangement or a more workable arrangement that would address the concern of the impact on the federal disability pension. There have been a number of presentations that have been made in that regard.

Mr. Chairman, when I look at vote 3, Social Support to Individuals and Families, the one item that sticks out to me is the

question of day care. Now, the question of day care is always being reviewed. There is always a need to review what's happening within the communities and the varying needs and such. But one of the areas, one of the suggestions that's being made more and more that I feel your department is going to have to look at, is going to have to study, is the question of a child tax credit. On the one hand, we're talking in terms of the emphasis towards family unity, towards the family. As to what the solution is, I'm not sure, but it has to be reviewed. We have a system now where we may have families where both parents choose to work; they can be eligible for subsidies under day care. On the other hand, by the same standards, if you have a two-parent family where one parent chooses to stay at home and raise the family, that person is penalized in the sense that they're not afforded that subsidy that they would be entitled to if both of them were working. So there's some natural or negative discouragement from allowing that opportunity for one parent to stay at home and raise children, if they choose to raise their children. I recognize that there are child tax credits on the income tax return at the federal level, but I'm talking provincially. There's got to be some method of determining a system where it's more equitable for all those concerned.

When we look at Services for the Handicapped and the classification 3.3.3, Agency Payments, I have to assume that that's referring specifically towards community agencies, those organizations working within the community trying to better the life-styles of the consumers they're representing. But that particular program gives me the opportunity to go a little beyond agency payments for services for the handicapped. Mr. Chairman, the one thing that I would point out to the minister and to the associate minister is that there is great opportunity to utilize even more so the expertise, the volunteer aspect, within the community. We can look at all types of community organizations that we see in the Edmonton area, for example, that contribute a great deal to the betterment of Edmontonians, to the betterment of Albertans, and doing it at a much lower cost, with a greater degree of expertise than the bureaucracy would be able to achieve. I could look, for example, at the Boyle Street co-op. I don't think that type of agency can be replaced by any government department. And there has to be more emphasis, there has to be a greater reliance, on those community agents to provide more of the programs within the community, because they're closer to it; they live within that particular community. They're experts by the very fact that they're involved on a day-to-day basis with the consumer, with the clientele that they're serving.

I could go on and on and refer to other agencies, the Social Planning Council, the Handicapped Housing Society of Alberta, but I think, Mr. Chairman, you'll get the idea of what I'm trying to point out. Even when we talk in terms of a family support program, the \$200 million the Premier had proposed at one time in terms of drug abuse, that rather than spend those types of dollars, if they are to be spent, through government departments, there are programs within the community that can be utilized. It's that same type of example that I'm trying to point out, that I'm trying to get across; that those agencies, those community groups that are there, do serve a valuable purpose, and I think at times there's a tendency not to rely on them as much as we can.

As I said earlier, Mr. Chairman, the critic for Family and Social Services had been prepared to respond in a number of different areas. Unfortunately, because she was called out as quickly as she was, I haven't had the opportunity to review her notes. I'm going to conclude for now on that particular portion.

Possibly as the evening goes on, I may have the opportunity to add some additional comments that she would have added had she been able to stay here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to discuss the estimates of this department this evening. I think the issue that we must recognize at the outset is the importance of this portfolio, and because of that, because it deals with those of us in our society who are least able to take care of themselves, it's particularly important that we have such competent and conscientious individuals in this ministry. Both Mr. Oldring and Mr. Weiss have proven to me through their sincerity and their interest in their department that this department can only get better. I say "only get better," because I think it has been very effectively run in the past.

Again we're dealing not with the happy situations in this portfolio, Mr. Chairman; we're dealing with gut-wrenching, emotional situations. It's very difficult for the social workers who work for the Department of Family and Social Services, just as it's very difficult emotionally on the ministers who are responsible for this department, and both the social workers and the two ministers are to be commended for their efforts.

I had the opportunity earlier on in my career to serve as a member of the preventative social services board which is now, as we all know, the family and community support services board. Therefore, I've had a hands-on dealing with the social workers and the other administrative people in the department. Albeit their job is a difficult one, and it's frustrating in many situations due to the complexity of the problems that they face, I'm particularly impressed -- have been and continue to be -- with the amount of effort these individuals put into their jobs.

It's amazing to me, Mr. Chairman, how society seems to have changed over the last 15 or 20 years. I grew up in the city of Edmonton as a normal, adventuresome lad. I must say that I traveled throughout the city on various methods of transportation to various and sundry parts of the city and various and sundry socio-economic groupings. I never feared for my personal safety. But in today's world that kind of attitude that you can go out and do your exploring and not fear for your livelihood just doesn't seem to be possible. I'm not criticizing the city of Edmonton or cities in general, because the problem exists as well in the countryside. So when we look at some of the programs this department is responsible for, I think we have to recognize the changing social climates that have occurred in the last 10 or 15 years in particular. I think our government is reflecting that change by the extent of the budget this department has.

As has been indicated, we're talking about almost \$1.3 billion, and I think that proves at the outset that the commitment of this government is not just smoke and mirrors. This is a commitment to try to assist those who can't take care of themselves in the best way possible. But it's not only, in my opinion, to just take care of them. It's also to allow those who do require assistance because they are, for whatever period of time, and it may be permanent, unable to take care of themselves -- programs are directed to give them an opportunity for self-reliance. I think that's an important part of this department. It's not just good enough to throw money at a problem. It's more important

that we try to focus on the opportunities that exist to allow those who are on the programs to either get off the programs in the shortest period of time or at least to maximize their opportunities in life. So we create a climate, Mr. Chairman, that allows them to work toward more self-reliance, personal integrity, and all the things the people of Alberta and this government stand for.

I would like to concentrate my comments mainly on the child care issues. I'll leave some of the comments concerning the social programs for seniors to some of the more senior, if you will, members of caucus. I would like to concentrate on the young people. Firstly, I was very encouraged to hear in the throne speech on the 17th of February of this year, Mr. Chairman, that our government was committing itself to various requirements and qualification standards for those individuals who work in the day care system in this province. I think that's particularly important in today's world. As all the members here are no doubt aware, we have not had basic requirements for staffing of these facilities. I think reflective of the importance of the role these individuals are playing, it's incumbent upon this government to have reasonable requirements for staffing of our day care facilities. I understand that we're considering a two-year program, and I know there is some negative comment, particularly from some of the private operators, because of the cost factor involved. I'd appreciate it if either the minister or the associate minister could maybe give some particulars about the time line for implementation of these requirements and, as well, some of the bare bones of what the qualification standards may well be.

Secondly, I'd like to maybe make a couple of comments about the foster home program that we have in the province. Again, as I've already mentioned, I'm absolutely flabbergasted at the numbers of examples of sexual abuse and physical abuse in whatever settings we have in this province. It's a problem, of course, as well in foster homes. I understand the budget has increased to allow more of the foster homes to come on stream and, as well, our government is committed to keeping children in the homes as long as they can, because to move them from those homes into institutional care is not, firstly, oftentimes in the child's best interests, but secondly, it's also a very costly matter. I think the money can certainly be better spent if it is spent on other programs rather than putting children into institutions. So perhaps we could have some comments as well about the particulars of the budget increase, which in this year's budget is in the neighbourhood of \$800,000, and how that's going to impact, what kind of additional facilities we can hope for, and what the long term is in terms of maybe a five-year plan, if that is available.

I'd like to speak for a couple of moments as well, Mr. Chairman, about increasing of administrative staff, in particular the licensing officers. I recognize that administration in this department is particularly important. There must be a very effective administration to relate between or be a go-between from the social worker and government departments. I'd appreciate any comments that either minister might care to give with respect to increase in budget for licensing officers.

The last point I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is with respect to the effect on Alberta of the federal government's decision to scrap its plans for the national child care Act. I know while I was out campaigning in Banff-Cochrane, I had a number of comments from individuals who were not in favour of universal day care because they were of the impression -- and I cer-

tainly understand the argument myself -- that universal day care would serve as nothing more or less than a disincentive to parents who choose to stay home. There are parents, of course, who would have qualified under the federal government program for subsidy regardless of their income level. That may have been argued as an administrative requirement to keep the costs of the program within reason, but unfortunately I think the people out in the street could not see that as a realistic rationale for allowing universality in that program and, because of that universality, resulting in this disincentive and really almost an insult to parents who choose to stay home, one parent who chooses to stay home to raise his or her child. Because that program has been scrapped, our provincial government and provincial governments throughout the Dominion of Canada have had to probably do a very quick review of their involvement, and I presume the figures are quite substantial as to the financial commitment that's had to be made because of that lack of federal assistance.

I'd appreciate some comments from the ministers if they do have any particulars on that and how that lack of a federal back-stop program is impacting Alberta and, in fact, if Alberta's position with respect to assistance for those who choose to have one of the members of the family stay at home -- what our government's position is with respect to those parents. Are we going to see some kind of assistance in the future for them, and what again are the long-term goals of this department with respect to those families?

In conclusion, I'd just like to again commend the two ministers on a very, very difficult portfolio which creates much burnout in terms of the individuals who are working so hard directly with the affected people, but I think it can also create some burnout with the ministers and they have to be able to keep things in perspective. These problems have gone on for a number of years. Unfortunately, because of some of the things the Member for Edmonton-Calder mentioned, education levels and things of this nature -- unless the education levels are all raised considerably, and you can't raise everyone's education level; there are people who are handicapped in one way or the other -- these problems are going to go on. I think we have to realize that what we are trying to do is make a stab at eliminating the problem, but likely not being able to eliminate it, just reduce it. I'd like to leave with that and hope that this department will continue in its best efforts to try to reduce that problem so Albertans can wake up with a smile on their faces.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, followed by Bow Valley.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to congratulate the minister and the associate minister on their appointments. I welcome the words of the associate minister, who was willing to look at each part of the department, and hopefully he will open and bring a new vision to that department and see the human face of the clients of the department of social services and have an understanding that it isn't the clients of social services that have failed; it is society that has failed to provide the kind of opportunities they need to reach their full potential. We welcome that kind of willingness to look at and see what is happening. I think when we hear a focus on individual initiative, we are again focusing on victims rather than seeing how a society in fact does fail to provide opportunities that

address the individual and unique needs of people, to recognize that we are not all equal in our opportunities of birth and our abilities of birth. I would say in answer to the member opposite who just talked about differing education levels: one of the ways of dealing with differing levels of education in work is to ensure that all paid labour is paid a living and decent wage, and we certainly do have some control over that.

In addressing some of the issues this ministry would look at, I'd like to first speak to the family. We've heard a great deal about strengthening the family and how important it is that we have strong families in this province, but I haven't heard anything but rhetoric about acceptance of the diversity of families. That is, when I look at the kinds of policies and programs that are being brought forward, I have a sense that the vision held is of the traditional family of mom and dad and two children, and a failure to address how greatly changed our society is and that this cuts across issues not only in social services but in education and economic development, recreation, in all areas of our endeavours. We have to recognize how much our society has changed, and it doesn't do any good to look to the past. We need to look at what is happening now. So I see a bit of hypocrisy in the commitment to the diversity of families, as the policies do not address the real needs of real families as they exist in our communities.

I think, for instance, of the community enhancement program that much was made of, in which recreational facilities would be improved with aid from government subsidies, but we heard nothing of the families that could not afford to participate in the programs offered in those facilities. We see an increasing reliance in education on user fees, that means that some children, the children of the working poor, of people on social assistance, aren't able to fully participate in the educational process. So if we're talking about all families, then we must include all families, and those are the ones not only at middle- and upper-income levels but at lower-income levels, because they feel as second-class citizens as they are excluded from programs that really should be available to all.

We hear also that a strong family makes a strong society. I don't think anybody would deny that. But what we often don't hear reference to is: how is it that we make a society that helps create strong families? How does our society make it possible that families be strong? Again, I would just look to a recent initiative of the government, the Family Day Act, which does not call for retail closing. That means, whether we like it or not, that some families will not be able to get together on that day because one member of the family will be in the retail sector working. For the most part, that will be women. So if we hear about strengthening families, one of the ways we strengthen families is making sure they have times to be together. Now, that doesn't mean we say, "You have to go home and be with your family today," but we give them a choice. I think that's what it's all about. It is a case of giving families choices, because families want to create, people want to create strong families. What we have to do is create the environment in which that can happen. So it's a reciprocal relationship: a strong family and strong society, a society that provides the environment in which families can be strong.

I think of the many policies of transferring people from one community to another, a policy in place by many large companies, that means families are uprooted from systems of support, have children that never have friendships that last throughout their school years -- this kind of readjustment -- that don't

have participation in a community, in a church, over a long period of time. But these are the very systems that support families and help strengthen them. So when we have policies that say families can be uprooted, we in fact have an environment that weakens families.

I think another way we strengthen families is by not allowing a 7 or 8 percent unemployment rate, because unemployment is devastating to family life. We have to have economic policies that focus on the needs of families, that allow for child care leave, paternity and maternity leave, that have flexible hours so people can be with their families. Allowing overtime that in some cases forces people to work 12 hours a day means that they have no time with their family, or at least the time they have with their family is time when they feel exhausted. I think strengthening families means that we do not allow one in six families to live in poverty, with their 93,600 children. I think it is by not allowing workplace policies that do not recognize or are not responsive to family needs. Because workers are members of families, and if we're going to have a strong workplace, we have to have strong families. The only way we can have a strong workplace that is founded on strong families is to have that workplace responsive to the needs of those families.

The minister has talked much about a conference on the family, that unfortunately I couldn't attend but I read everything I could. The thing I heard from that conference was: will the governments face the real issues that families face today, the different family structures, the poverty in families, the violence in families? Those are painful. It's easier to say, "Oh, well, if they just try harder." It's harder to say, "What are the solutions; what is it in our society that allows that to go on?" As I said, we have to recognize that the majority of families do not have a parent at home full-time; they are working families, single-parent or two-parent working families. How do we ensure that those parents have access to quality, affordable child care that will facilitate their children's growth and development physically, emotionally, and intellectually? Child care is not custodial care. It is in the years that children learn at a higher rate than they do at any other time in their lives. We can't just stick them someplace with untrained people who cannot stimulate them intellectually and emotionally and make sure that their physical development is maximized also.

What I heard then from the conference was the unwillingness of Conservative governments to hear what is really happening in families and the real needs of families. Instead, we have a harking back to the times past, calling for self-sufficiency in family and the community and for the community to be responsible for the family in a time when there are increasing numbers of single-parent families -- 13 percent -- almost as many families where we have one parent, usually the father, working and the mother home with children, one-income families, and increasing numbers of families in which there are two parents who work. The demographics, I would suggest then, of our society have radically changed as have the demographics of our families, and the government cannot rely on old solutions. We can hear that community-based agencies can be most sensitive to the needs of the families in the communities, and I agree with that 100 percent, having worked extensively with two volunteer sector community programs. I thought they were excellent. But volunteer hours and, more importantly, volunteer dollars and the amount of hours to be spent writing grant applications to the government are limited, let me tell you. That's why I'm here; I got fed up with writing them. We have increasing numbers of women in

the paid labour force and we can no longer rely on them to deliver social services. We cannot build a social service delivery system based on their unpaid volunteer labour. Thus the unending rhetoric about commitment, community responsibility, fails to recognize how changed the demographics of our society are.

Now, I would like to become more specific. I would direct attention to vote 2, the widows' pension, and look at the discrimination built into this Act. Women who are never married or who have been divorced and have often raised children on their own are often truly impoverished. Such a program as the widows' pension discriminates against these women. I would suggest that we bring in a program that would be available on the basis of need rather than marital status.

I would also look to the programs for families in which there is violence. And quite frankly, these estimates leave a great deal to be desired in terms of specifics, because I can't tell from the estimates books which vote it is under. I assume it's vote 3. But whatever, I'm talking about support services to families in which there is violence. In opening my remarks in this, I would suggest that violence is learned behaviour and that children who see and experience violence used against them to shape them up and make them do what they are supposed to do, learn that might is right and big people have the right to beat up little people. In fact, children that are treated violently and see violence used against others when they are children learn to become violent people as adults. I would therefore say that the government must change its policy of allowing corporal punishment in our child care centres. We know the message is: if you're big, you get to beat up little people. And that's what happens in families where there's violence. Front-line we can make a move in this point. Primary prevention is early intervention. Not allowing the modeling of violent behaviour against children is a form of prevention of adult violent behaviour.

Violence in the home is a serious problem in this province, in this country. I'd like to read a few statistics. Forty percent of homicides in Canada were domestic homicides.

MR. WEISS: Where do your stats come from?

MS M. LAING: Stats Canada, 1986. The book is *Second Opinion*.

Thirty-seven percent of that 40 percent were wives who were murdered by their husbands. Ten percent were husbands murdered by their wives, usually in self-defense. Twenty-nine percent were parents murdered by their child, usually their son. I think the most shocking one is that 10 percent were children murdered usually by their father, and in fact it is the fourth major cause of death of children, never mind the serious and permanent psychological injuries children and adults experience as a result of violence in the family. So it is a serious problem, probably the most serious social problem we face. We often talk about violence and crime in the streets, but it does not come near in incidence to what occurs in homes, homes were people are to be safe, homes that are seen to be a place of sanctuary.

So I welcome the 24 percent increase in funding to shelters. But in the context of that increase, I am worried about caseloads child care workers have, because they're often working with children who have experienced violence. I used to work with children who experienced violence. The one thing we noted about these children was that if they had been apprehended from a home in which they had been abused or which posed a danger to them, often the only ongoing, continuous support they re-

ceived was from the social worker because they were separated from their family. And if the social workers were changed all the time because they burned out or were transferred or couldn't handle the cases, the child went through periods and sometimes years where there was no one they knew in a real way. Social workers who did have ongoing contact with these children did not have time to build a relationship with them.

We hear of a high incidence of mental health problems in children who are in the child welfare system. I daresay there is not an adult in this room who could survive the kind of disruption in personal relationships that children in care experience. One of the ways we can work against that is to ensure there are enough child care workers that there can be continuity of care by a worker and enough time for each worker to work with the child and to get to know the child and to be an advocate for the child not only in relation to maybe parents but in relation to the system and the school and the therapists they may need to see. So it is so crucial to the outcome of these cases that there be adequate staffing, properly trained adequate staffing, for people to provide a continuity of emotional attachment for these children. I feel very strongly about that, obviously. But I think if any of us think of how we would live through that experience, we can understand the great need there.

As I said, I welcome the increase in funding for shelters, but again we need not only new shelters, which we welcome, satellite shelters; we need a provincewide crisis line. The shelters have called for that, the Northern Alberta Development Council has called for that, because we need people in rural areas to be assured of confidentiality. They cannot phone a local crisis line and have their neighbour recognize their voice. It just doesn't work.

We need treatment programs for children who have witnessed violence. They have learned that being violent is a way you live together, and that cycle has to be broken. We need ongoing support for mothers so they can move out of the violent situation and move into another way of living. Having worked with women who are battered, I've seen that when they come out of the battering situation with support, someone who listens to them, acknowledges their pain, often they grow like a flower opening up. They just blossom under some nurturing. Too often they are forced to go back into the abusive situation because for economic reasons or emotional reasons they have no support systems. We need support for these mothers so they can break out of the cycle of violence. We need support for children, and counseling, so they do not enter into a cycle of violence. We have to have counseling for offenders so they don't continue to batter and offend. Because, in fact, if they don't get treatment, they go on and find another woman and children to beat and abuse. So we need to see the whole part of the program. I hear the commitment, I believe, of \$200,000 for prevention programs. I really hope that when you set those up, you speak to the people that run the shelters and work with the offenders and work for the children. I was quite appalled at the kind of machinations that went on with the Lions Club a couple of years ago. We need people that know what has to be done, and they are the people that are front line, and they need to be involved.

In the area of sexual abuse of children in the family we hear of waiting lists, times before there is an investigation, when the child first discloses . . . That is a crisis as one cannot imagine, because the child has broken the secret. So it is absolutely crucial that there be an investigation. We then hear of long waiting lists before the child can get into a treatment program, the child

in the family. Eight weeks, I hear. It's like having a diseased appendix, having it burst, and then having to wait eight weeks for surgery. The pain that permeates the child's psychological system is hardly to be borne without assistance, and to wait eight weeks, I believe, is criminal. So I think we have to get investigations immediately. Under the old Child Welfare Act, when I was working in the system, it was within 48 hours and treatment immediately.

The other issue that isn't addressed is the abuse of children by people that are not family members. Because the offender is not a member of the family, the child is not considered to be at risk and, therefore, does not come under the auspices of the Child Welfare Act, but these children and their families need treatment. Often their families really need treatment because they believe their child has been permanently ruined or damaged by the abuse. We certainly have been witnessing in the paper the extent of abuse by trusted people outside of the family. Probably 40 to 50 percent of children that are abused in fact are abused by trusted people -- no, probably not that many but a significant number are people trusted but outside of the family. Sometimes you almost have to restrain the father from getting a gun and going out and shooting somebody because he goes into such shock and pain. Let me tell you, I've heard that too. So we need to address this issue also.

Another area that I would like to address is income assistance workers. I'm very concerned if their primary goal to increase them is to make sure that the system isn't being ripped off, because the real need . . . And nobody would deny that 2 to 3 percent of income assistance recipients try to rip off the system. At least, that's sort of the level of criminality among the general population. But what these assistance workers really need is to have time to relate to the recipients, because they're frontline, to pick up on when families are getting into trouble. They need to be well trained, and there needs to be enough of them, because they can pick up on depression, and sometimes depression in a mother leads to mother/child murder. They can pick up on the possibility of child abuse occurring in the family, and they can pick up on the possibility that spousal abuse is in the family, because they may be the one person outside the family that the mother or the recipient may be relating to on an ongoing basis. So I think that cutting back on social assistance workers, the numbers and the qualifications, was a really bad move. They may help these people and guide the social assistance recipients into acquiring the services they need and may be the ones to help them get off welfare, direct them into appropriate training programs, appropriate opportunities for upgrading.

I guess this is my chance to make my pitch for, probably, the few dozen people in Alberta who are on social assistance who might want to go to university and get a university degree. It just shocks me that after . . . When I was at university, some of the women I knew there were on social assistance. They borrowed the money from Students Finance Board to pay for their child care and their books and their tuition, and they came out as, in some cases, lawyers, probation officers, teachers. Then there was me; I came out as a psychologist. Those kinds of opportunities should not be denied. There aren't that many people who want to go to university. Many find it a big drag. So the ones that do I think should be encouraged, because then they can contribute to their full ability. It's not easy going to university and raising a bunch of children. So instead of making it harder for them, how about making it easier?

I think the notion that people are always cheating if they can get away with it is a bit of a negative view on human nature. It's really important that when we look at social assistance allowances, we see that poverty is not only a social problem but it has implications for health and education as well and that it is a system's failure, not an individual's failure. Poverty is a health issue, because we know that twice as many children are likely to die if they are born to poor parents than if they're born to middle or upper income families. [interjections] They are more likely to be born prematurely or underweight, with all the demands that this then puts on our neonatal units and our health care system. We see school failure. Shush.

AN HON. MEMBER: Why don't you?

MS M. LAING: I have the floor.

We have school failure because hungry children cannot learn. We have ongoing health problems, respiratory problems. But more importantly poverty is assault on self-esteem and the hope that arises out of self-esteem and the initiative that arises out of healthy self-esteem.

I think we also need to look at the needs of the working poor, particularly those with children. We need to look at the level of day care subsidies. The rate was set seven years ago, in 1982, and the subsidy levels are so low that mothers sometimes quit work because they can't afford to pay child care, or they have to refuse wage increases which would place them above the cutoff to get the subsidy and they wouldn't gain anything. They can't afford to work. We've heard that the minister is going to announce an increase in the fall. We await it with great anticipation.

I'm also concerned about privatization, including private adoptions. This is a major concern because it may mean that only the rich can afford to adopt healthy babies, because I understand that the government will continue to place hard-to-place babies. When I hear about private adoptions, I have to think in my mind: who is the agency's client? Is it the potential adoptive parents? They're paying the shot. What if the agency finds out that they're incompetent, that they are prone to abuse, that they can't raise a child properly? What if questions like that are raised? Who will monitor that? If the client is the parents, then is their obligation not to find a child for the couple? What are they to do with the information that they get if serious cause for alarm is raised?

We have heard great concerns tonight about private, for-profit day care. I think it's interesting to note that in this province we hear that we have the greatest amount of money paid for child care, even though we have no or poor standards. We have the highest rate of private, for-profit day care. Perhaps the reason is that private, for-profit day care costs more on a per capita basis than does nonprofit, good quality child care. I would like to say that as a mother when I hear people saying about universality in day care that it becomes an incentive to go into the work force, that is nonsense. Mothers need to have choices, and if mothers want to be at home with their children and feel they can afford it, then nothing will drive them -- and certainly not day care -- into the paid labour force. It shows a fundamental lack of understanding of mothering and what mothering is about.

I guess in line with this, I didn't mention this earlier, but I am appalled -- the minister knows this, but I'll say it again anyway -- at the department's requirement that the healthy mother

of a healthy four-month-old infant seek employment in the paid labour force when there is so much that we know about the need for bonding and child development.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Bow Valley.

MR. MUSGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a few remarks as the chairman of the Senior Citizens' Advisory Council, and I would like to say what a pleasure it is to be working with the Minister of Family and Social Services, and particularly the Associate Minister of Family and Social Services.

Although the seniors' advisory council comes under the Department of Family and Social Services, we do work with a lot of other government departments in that we work with the Department of Health as it pertains to home care, to extended care, and to family and community support services. So we do get quite involved with that department, also the minister of housing as it pertains to lodges and self-contained units, and the new medical alert system and the proposed garden suite systems. All of those are involved with housing. Then we do have things that pertain to Parks and Recreation and several other departments in the Alberta government. So that's a challenge that I look forward to and certainly have been doing what I can during the busy time when the House is sitting.

I've visited quite a few different organizations during the little over a month and a half that I've been the chairman of the council, and I have to say that I've found the staff to be very co-operative and actually excellent in the way they have tried to work with me in getting organized in this position. I was appointed to the position on June 1, and there was a Senior Citizens' Advisory Council already taking place, so I did attend some of those meetings and was invited to a production that was called *A Way of Life*. It was from a lady from the United States that set out the way seniors are and the way they should be treated. Meeting with the Deputy Minister of the Department of Health, we had a very lengthy discussion about single point of entry and changes in home care and where we could use day hospital beds and senior day care situations.

There's a lot of volunteer work that goes on with the seniors for themselves, and we visited a place called the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. I was amazed by the amount of volunteer work that was being done by seniors for seniors. This goes on in quite a few different other places. There are a lot of organizations. I've met with some of them, such as the Alberta Council on Aging, and of course there's a Canadian organization called the council on aging. I've talked to those people. One of the things we have -- I think it's the duty of myself and the council to watch and try and see that there are no parallels being offered. Whatever an organization does, we should try and encourage other volunteer organizations to do something different, because that's a problem that we have in a lot of volunteer organizations in Alberta today, that they offer parallel services and are competing for that kind of service.

I was very happy to be included in the supper that the associate minister mentioned, with the people from the Centre for Gerontology. That was hosted by Harry Alger, who is a member of that committee of the seniors' advisory council. They are very interested in research in gerontology and even setting up a faculty that deals with gerontology. They are now in the process of trying to raise some funds for research, and they were discussing with us the possibility of a foundation that they could

use interest from to support their research. There are a lot of possibilities out there. What we have to do is try and promote and support those, particularly in research, because the era of seniors is upon us. As the associate minister said, 13 out of every 100 people right now is a senior, and that's only the tip of the iceberg. When the baby boomers -- that is, the people from 1946 to 1964 -- become seniors, it's estimated that over 20 percent of the population of Alberta and Canada will be senior citizens. So we have to be prepared to look after those people and allow them to live respectfully without undue cost to the young people of that date.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one of the other organizations I've met with is the Alberta Hospital Association. We did have a member on the council who has since resigned, but we're at the point of appointing another member to the council to represent the Alberta Hospital Association. I met with the managing director of the Health Unit Association of Alberta. There's another organization that started out, called the long-term care association, which at the beginning only represented private nursing home and extended care services. However, now they are representing all nursing homes in Alberta that want to join the association, and I think they're doing a terrific job. Their managing director is a very brilliant type of person, and I think they're doing a great job of representing long-term care units in Alberta.

I was fortunate enough to be asked to the sixth birthday of St. Michael's long-term care association and at that time ran into a new concept of seniors' housing. They had a nursing home floor in St. Michael's, and they also had an auxiliary hospital floor. Now they're building a lodge in conjunction with those two units, and they feel that they can have a third level of care there that could be interchanged back and forth from the severe medical needs back to the lodge type of thing, with only daily nursing care. I believe that's something we should be looking at in a lot of our institutions, because someone that for medical reasons is put into an auxiliary hospital generally at the present time in our system stays there. Now, in a lot of cases that I'm aware of, these people certainly need medical attention every day, but that medical attention could be offered to them in a lodge setting, which is a lot less costly to themselves and to the Alberta government. So I think we should be looking at the triple level of care in our long-term care needs for seniors.

One of the other things we've done is that we've been discussing the communications problems with the federal government as far as seniors phoning and asking questions about their old age security program or their Canada pension. We went over to Canada centre and went through the system to see what improvements they had made. I would be remiss if I didn't say that they still could use some improvements in the communications with seniors over those issues.

I've also been talking to people from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Certainly there's some overlapping of benefits that are offered by the Alberta government and by the Department of Veterans Affairs, so I've asked them to come to our next council meeting and discuss where we could improve by working together on benefits to seniors.

The Health Unit Association of Alberta has invited us to their fall conference and asked us to take part in the discussions. Certainly we're very happy to accept that challenge.

Mr. Chairman, I've been invited to visit a lot of different seniors' lodges, auxiliary hospitals, nursing homes, and drop-in centres, and I'm looking forward to the time after the session when I'll be able to accept some of those invitations.

With those remarks, I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would want to begin by acknowledging and thanking all the members who participated in the discussion and debate this evening. I thought it was very helpful for myself and the associate minister. I particularly appreciated the tone of comments received this evening, the spirit of co-operation that they were shared in, and I can say that some very helpful suggestions came forward.

I jotted down some 17 pages of questions, Mr. Chairman, and I'm going to quickly try to respond to as many of the questions raised as I was able to take note of. I would only say to the members in the Assembly that if I haven't responded to your questions here this evening, I'll make sure that I follow up with *Hansard* tomorrow and respond to the balance of questions just as quickly as I can.

I want to begin by responding to some of the issues raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. She began, of course, by bringing up the matter of families living in poverty. She quite rightly pointed out that this is a problem that's facing our nation today, that it isn't unique to Alberta, and that perhaps in Alberta it isn't as bad as it is in other provinces. Having said that again, and I've said it before in this Assembly, I don't think any of us here in Alberta nor in Canada take any pride in seeing the numbers of individuals that find themselves living below the poverty line. I think, though, that we always have to be careful when we talk about the poverty line because it means a lot of different things to different people. My understanding of poverty line and the definition that I've been provided with is anyone that finds themselves spending more than 70 percent of their income on food, shelter, and clothing and those essential services that we all require. Of course, that encompasses a lot of Canadians.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Calder raised some concerns as it relates to the food bank and the requirements that have been placed upon them. In particular she singled out social allowance recipients and children that are having to turn to the food bank for services. I would only say that the most recent statistics and information that I received indicated that in the city of Calgary less than 2 percent of our social allowance clients were finding themselves turning to the food bank for food. In the city of Edmonton close to 4 percent of our clients are finding themselves turning to the bank bank. So I guess, Mr. Chairman, what I'm saying is that in Calgary 98 percent of our clients are able to live on the allowances that we provide them with without turning to the food bank; in Edmonton 96 percent are able to do that. Obviously, I share the member's concern for those of our clientele that do find themselves turning to the food bank. We've taken the initiative of placing a representative from our department on location at the food banks in both Edmonton and Calgary, and we're wanting, obviously, to work with those individuals to help them in their budgeting and help them meet the needs of providing for their family.

The member quite rightly pointed out that the solutions to poverty aren't obvious. She felt that perhaps there were a number of initiatives that we could be looking at, and although she didn't have the opportunity perhaps to expound on them this evening, I'd be interested in hearing further from her on that.



She did mention specifically, though, a school snack program or a school lunch program. I guess I would be more concerned about just providing lunches. What about breakfasts and dinners? I mean, we need to be addressing all three meals, although having said that, we have made provisions -- or the Minister of Education has made provisions -- for working with some of those inner-core schools in particular as it relates to addressing this particular problem, and some of the school jurisdictions themselves have introduced some initiatives to address this. But I think we have to be very careful, because I don't think any of us would want to start singling out children in these schools either. In other words, I don't think we would want to see it reach the point where we're saying, "Well, you're poor, so we're going to take care of your lunch and you go to this room." I think peer pressure in the school environment is very important, and I don't think we'd want to see them singled out in that fashion.

Mr. Chairman, there was a question mark about our government's commitment to resolving this problem. I can assure the hon. member that we are concerned that we're doing everything within our mandate to be able to address these concerns. A 7.5 percent increase in social allowance amounts, some \$612.3 million being spent on addressing poverty. Where will the increase go? I know that was one of the specific questions that was raised. Some of it, of course, will go to higher caseload costs. As it relates to increments, Mr. Chairman, I've indicated in this Assembly on numerous occasions that social allowance benefits are something that we evaluate and we monitor on an ongoing basis, and we'll continue to do that.

I was interested, Mr. Chairman, in hearing the member critique a requirement that we have for single employable individuals to go out and search for a job. I find that very perplexing. I don't think there's anything wrong with people looking for jobs. I think, as I indicated in my opening comments, that one of the things we are going to stress on the social allowance side is independence. We want to help these individuals become independent again, we want to help them back into the work force, and I think it's safe to say that we are going to continue to have single employables out there looking for jobs. Obviously, we want to help them, and we will do that.

I was also concerned when the member suggested that our department never suggests going back to school. Certainly I'll want to take that up with the department, because obviously that's a very viable alternative in a number of situations, and if we can help these individuals upgrade their skills and get back into the workplace that way, we'll want to do that. I did mention in my opening comments that I was looking forward to working with the Minister of Career Development and Employment and the Minister of Advanced Education to be able to do just that.

Mr. Chairman, a couple of the members raised some concerns as it relates to the Alberta income for the severely handicapped program. I can only say, and again I've said it before in this Assembly, that it's one of the most generous programs of its kind in Canada. There are only three provinces that even have such a program. The province of Ontario is slightly ahead of us in funding as it relates to individuals or singles on AISH, but we are ahead of them as it relates to couples. The province of British Columbia is considerably behind us in AISH. But also our program is unique in that we are the only province that doesn't have an assets test related to qualification, and we aren't nearly as restrictive as the province of Ontario or the province of

British Columbia. I would also point out that AISH benefits can be supplemented by social allowance, that if there are specific problems as it relates to medical supplies or prescriptions or diabetic supplies, I would hope those individuals would get in contact with their social allowance offices.

Some questions as it relates to CPP and both the base deductions and the increments: two separate issues. I can only reaffirm the member's comments that yes, as of January '89 we've been able to make provisions where the increments have been deducted, and that is the result of a letter that we received from our federal counterpart. As it relates to base funding, it's still being queried at this time. There are discussions going on with Ottawa as it relates to that. But I can only say again that I am not prepared to jeopardize the considerable funding that we receive under the Canada assistance program. So until that matter has been totally clarified between our province and our federal counterparts, I won't be able to do anything further.

Mr. Chairman, I was interested in hearing some of the concerns as it relates to foster care, and I have to say I was somewhat taken aback. There was a suggestion that foster parents weren't being heard, that they didn't have enough say, that we weren't listening. I can only say that in the short three months that I've been minister, I've had the opportunity, first of all, of speaking at an annual meeting of foster parents in my own constituency. I've had the opportunity of meeting with the president of the Alberta Foster Parent Association, Norm Brownell, and a number of members of his executive. I've had a number of discussions with Mr. Brownell since then, and I personally have had very close contact with the Foster Parent Association. I feel that the spirit of co-operation between my office and their association is excellent. I feel that we've responded to a number of their concerns already. I pointed out again in my estimates a 10 percent increase in foster care allowances this year alone. It was interesting to note that the member opposite herself said that it costs \$5,000 a year to provide care for these foster care children. I can only say that at \$15 per day that works out to \$5,475 per year, so we've exceeded the amount that the member herself has raised.

She raised some concerns that relate to custodial agreements, and I appreciated her raising those concerns. I can only say that joint custodial agreements should always include the parent or parents, and if there are instances under those joint custodial agreements that that's not happening, I would want to hear about it. I can only again point out the statistics that in 1985 there were 11,000 wards of this province. Today there are only 8,200 wards, and out of that only 25 percent are under permanent custodial arrangements, so we're obviously seeing a substantial decrease in the number of children under the guardianship of this province.

The member also mentioned the York Family Care Program. It sounded very interesting, and I'd welcome seeing the additional information that she offered to provide there. We're always looking for new initiatives and new suggestions, and we know that we can certainly learn from the experience of other provinces and the experience from all members in this Assembly, and I would welcome that kind of input.

There was a question as it related to a parent/counselor home. What we're talking about here is specialized foster care for children with mental and behavioural problems in which foster parents have undergone specialized training to be able to deal with those kinds of problems. The Member for Banff-Cochrane, I think, also raised that question.

I think I'm missing a question there, and I think it related to the increase in specialized foster care. I don't think you were familiar with the number of foster care parents that we have in that situation already. It's approximately a hundred, and we'll be increasing it to 200 as a result of the additional million dollars that we're able to put in place in this year's budget.

Mr. Chairman, the member opposite also made references to the lowest day care standards in all of Canada. I don't accept that. There's no question that we don't have day care standards as it relates to training requirements, but we have very high day care standards. In fact, one of the reasons that the operating allowances were put in place in this province was because of the substantial regulations that we required both private and public day care operators to meet. Again, in my opening comments I pointed out my commitment to review day care funding overall. That relates to both operating allowances and user subsidies. I'm looking forward to the report and recommendations of the people that are reviewing it at this time. Again, I think that's in response as well to the Member for Banff-Cochrane. I would also point out a substantive increase in licensing staff. The member opposite expressed some concern about control and regulation, and do we know where these dollars are going? I can only say that I intend to monitor very closely where those dollars are going, and I also intend to monitor very closely the substantive day care standards that we have put in place in this province. They are going to be regulated and enforced on a very consistent basis.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud -- and I want to thank him for his input. I know that he had to do it; he was pitch hitting on very short notice, and he did an admirable job there. One of the first concerns that he raised was the number of complaints addressed by the Ombudsman, and I would only say that I, too, of course, was initially concerned. I think that in part the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud acknowledged the size of the department, the magnitude of the problems that we're dealing with, and the number of clientele that we're dealing with would contribute to that. What I was impressed about when I went through the complaints was the number of times the Ombudsman said that there was no administrative error and there really wasn't a remedy available to this government. On other occasions where there were administrative errors found, he pointed out that the errors had been corrected. I would just want to say that we very much appreciate the co-operation that we received from the office of the Ombudsman, and we work very closely with him in remedying any situations that are brought to his attention as quickly as we can.

The member also did raise a specific case, and I would certainly be interested in following that up with the member. If he can provide me a little more information, we can perhaps see if it can be resolved. I would only say that we try to extend as much flexibility within the system as we can. Again, what we're striving for is certainly to help those individuals in that situation, both on an interim basis but more importantly on a long-term basis, to help them get back into the mainstream of society. I would also point out that there is an appeal mechanism in place, and each individual has the right to appeal any decisions that are handed down by the department.

He also raised a question on the impact of the changes to the unemployment insurance system in this country. I can only say that we're very fortunate in Alberta that as a result of our sharp decline in unemployment, perhaps it won't impact us as much as it will other provinces. I can only again say that, as well, we're

monitoring it very closely. Certainly any impact that it has on us as province will also impact the federal government's budget, because it is cost shared on a 50-50 basis through the Canada assistance program.

You have also raised some concerns with AISH, which I've commented on earlier. Your suggestions as they relate to day care: I think really what you are asking for is more equitable day care provisions and fairness within the system, recognizing two-income families where one parent or another chooses to be at home with children. I can only say again that as I mentioned earlier, I am reviewing day care operating allowances and day care subsidies and threshold limits, and we'll certainly try to address that through that process.

I also appreciated your comments as they relate to community agencies. This department works very closely with a number of community agencies throughout the province on a contractual basis. We're very pleased with the extended level of services that we're able to provide as a result of that. The member's quite right that those frontline agencies, those grass-root agencies, I think are able to do a very effective and efficient job of delivering services here in the province.

The Member for Banff-Cochrane. I commented on a number of the concerns that you raised already. The only one that I didn't comment on at this point was the national child care Act and the cost of the changes there to the province. I would want to say a number of things there. I think all of us were waiting with great anticipation to see what our federal counterparts were going to do as it relates to child care in this province. We certainly had every indication that our private day care funding was also going to be eligible for cost sharing with our federal counterparts as a result of this Act. With the Act dying on the Order Paper, it means a loss of potential income of some \$33 million. Obviously, we're going to continue to address this with our federal counterparts. I'll be attending a meeting in September. One of the items for discussion at that meeting is child care, and I will certainly be pursuing it at that point.

I would want to say, though, in the interim we are not prepared to wait any longer. I've discussed at length a number of the initiatives that we have in place as it relates to child care. I can only say that this minister intends to move full speed ahead, and we're not going to wait any longer to see what they're going to do.

Member for Edmonton-Avonmore. Again, I'd want to thank her for her comments and a number of helpful suggestions. I think one of the first points she raised was that we really need to be working with clients to help them reach full potential, and I can only say that I concur totally that one of the saddest things I see as the new minister responsible in this area is some 69,000 caseloads in the province today. What that represents to me is just a tremendous waste of the greatest resource we have, and that's people.

I must say, Mr. Chairman, that I was somewhat taken aback at the suggestion that our comments on the family are purely rhetoric. I wish all the cabinet ministers were here this evening, because if they were here and if they had the time to stand up, I think every one of them could stand up and talk about some of their initiatives and the positive impact they are having on the family in Alberta today; every one of them. I say that very confidently, Mr. Chairman, because I know that this government does care about family. It isn't just rhetoric; there is substance to it.

The other thing she pointed out right at the beginning was

that we didn't recognize the diversity of family. I know the member is familiar with a document that was tabled in this House called Caring & Responsibility, and I'd want to point out that one of the first principles states very clearly:

Government policies and programs must recognize the paramount importance of the family as the basic unit of our society and the diversity of family structures.

Mr. Chairman, our Premier and this government have clearly recognized that the family is changing, and I think that's why we are introducing the initiatives that we are. We want to be able to help the family cope with the changes that we are all facing in society today.

I was interested, and I again concur with the member when she commented that it is up to us to create an environment that supports family. I think that, again, we are implementing a number of initiatives that focus in that direction. I was curious, though, when she indicated not allowing a 7 or 8 percent unemployment rate. Well, Mr. Chairman, this government is not allowing unemployment. We are doing everything we can to fight unemployment -- very successfully, I might add. We've seen considerable drops here in the city of Edmonton, and indeed provincewide.

Mr. Chairman, the member raised a concern that she shares with this Assembly on numerous occasions, and something that I comment on in my comments, and that's family violence. She did relate to it in the context of the symposium on the family and mentioned the unwillingness of Conservative governments to listen. That symposium, Mr. Chairman -- and again, I commented on that earlier -- was supported by 11 governments across this nation, as well as the two territorial governments. It crossed all party lines, and we were listening, and family violence was addressed. The member knows that the solutions are not easy, nor are they obvious. But, as I've said earlier in this Assembly, we as one province are certainly trying to address it in our way. There is \$200,000 worth of additional funding in this year's budget to see if we can't come up with some innovative concepts, and I might add that I have had the opportunity of okaying some very interesting proposals and some very positive initiatives that are being taken throughout this province already as it relates to family violence. I know that in the past two years alone there has been an increase of some 24 percent as it relates to community groups that are trying to deal with this problem.

Mr. Chairman, I can't accept the suggestion that corporal punishment in any sense of the word be related to child abuse or family violence. Corporal punishment, as the member again alluded to, is an option. It's an alternative that we make available to day care operators in this province. We make it available to the school jurisdictions too, and we leave it up to them to decide in consultation with the parents. Really what we're talking about here -- and I didn't hear a lot of reference to it -- is parental choice. All we're saying is that if day care operators -- and I don't believe very many of them, by the way, have a policy that even makes provisions for corporal punishment -- desire that it's appropriate and if they've consulted with the parents and the parents agree that it's appropriate, then I support that parental choice, and I'll continue to support that parental choice.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore also raised some questions as they relate to day care subsidies, day care standards, operating allowances, and I think that I've addressed those in my earlier comments. Again, I can only say that I'm looking forward to being able to really sit down and

have an objective review and assessment of the programs that we have in place and see if we can't make them more efficient and provide for more fairness and equity as raised by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as well.

The member raised some concerns as they relate to private adoption, and I would only say that, first of all, private agencies will be licensed and expected to adhere to very substantive standards. Really what we're trying to do there is again provide choice to both adoptive parents as well as choice to the individual that's wanting to give that child up for adoption. Home studies will still have to be completed, and the courts will still have the final mandate to decide whether that placement is appropriate or not. The member questioned: who do these agencies represent, the parent or the adoptive couple? I would say, Mr. Chairman, that they represent the child, and it's the interest of the child that will always come first and foremost.

Mr. Chairman, again the hour is late. I believe that the associate minister would have some comments and would want to address a few of the questions that were specifically related to his department. I would only want to conclude again by saying thank you to the members who did participate. It's been very helpful for me as a new minister, and I look forward to hopefully the ongoing co-operation of all members in this Assembly as we address concerns that we all share. I look forward to receiving input and suggestions throughout the year and not just at estimates time.

So thank you.

MR. WEISS: Well, Mr. Chairman, in my opening remarks I made reference to "double the measure, double your pleasure" but in "half the time." Now, my colleague has prepared some 17 pages of responses. I've only prepared eight and a half, so I could say make yourself comfortable and be prepared to enjoy, but in view of the hour, I will undertake to provide a response in writing to all hon. members who have raised concerns in my areas of responsibility.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the report, those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion carries.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, by way of advice to the members, tomorrow evening the business of the House will be Committee of Supply, when the estimates of the Department of Education will be before the committee.

[At 10:55 p.m. the House adjourned to Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.]

