

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta****Title: Tuesday, April 10, 1990 8:00 p.m.****Date: 90/04/10**

[The Committee of Supply met at 8 p.m.]

**head: Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, it is 8 o'clock.

**head: Main Estimates 1990-91****Family and Social Services**

MR. CHAIRMAN: In the main estimates book the estimates are to be found at page 193, with the details commencing at page 81 of the elements book.

The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to join with my colleague and friend the Hon. Roy Brassard, Associate Minister of Family and Social Services, to present the 1990-91 departmental estimates. I would want to begin by acknowledging my appreciation for the expertise and the experience and the dedication and sense of commitment that the Member for Olds-Didsbury brings forward to this portfolio. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to share these responsibilities with him.

Mr. Chairman, let me begin by saying that this government reaches out to Albertans in need to ensure that they can live with dignity and enjoy well-being and an adequate quality of life. We reach out to support personal responsibility and independence. We reach out to Albertans, respecting their freedoms and their rights to make choices about their own lives and their own futures. My department reaches out to Albertans with services based on the essential principles of compassion and humanitarianism. Our programs and services are provided in such a way as to preserve the individual's capacity to be independent and self-sufficient. Our goal, quite simply, is to enable Albertans to become stronger and more confident in their own abilities and to encourage them to move away from a financial reliance on our programs.

Tens of thousands of Albertans seek and receive direct assistance from my department each and every year, while many more thousands receive assistance indirectly. Mr. Chairman, 5,400 staff members, from program planners to frontline social workers, develop, deliver, and administer the services of my department, which, again, builds on the strengths of individual Albertans and their families: 5,400 staff members whose compassion and dedication have touched the lives of many Albertans with a deep commitment to quality services and an ardent belief in the importance of strong families and responsive communities.

In fact, a great deal of our efforts in meeting the needs of Albertans is through preventative measures and services at the community level. Working with Alberta communities to encourage the development and delivery of services which are tailored to respond to local needs is a top priority of our government. In this regard we've been very successful through partnerships developed with towns, cities, and districts, through family and community social services and other community

agencies. I am committed, Mr. Chairman, committed to championing co-operative efforts throughout Alberta which together form a strong and enduring response to diverse needs and pressing social problems.

Mr. Chairman, the services of my department are truly threads of compassion which extend into the far corners of our province, into our towns and cities and into our rural areas. They come together weaving themselves into a strong and responsive lifeline to the single mothers of our province and their children, to the unemployed and their families, to the mentally and physically disabled, to the abused and the battered, and to the aged. It is for them that I bring forward estimates of \$1365 billion, a 3.1 percent increase over last year in funding for programs and services to the needy and disadvantaged of this province. These estimates represent an increase of over \$40 million and make clear this government's continuing commitment to the vitality and well-being of Albertans, especially those amongst us who are less fortunate. Our commitment is to offer shelter and assistance to those struggling to feed and house their families, to offer help to dysfunctional families and troubled individuals, and to offer safety and protection to those abused or battered.

Mr. Chairman, in providing an overview of our 1990-91 budget, I would like to begin with day care, which is contained within vote 3 of the department's estimates. At the beginning of March the government of Alberta released a white paper on reforms to Alberta's day care program entitled Meeting the Need. The reforms are an important part of this government's response to family needs, especially, again, the needs of single mothers and lower income families. They result in a fairer and better system for all Albertans: better in that it will provide assistance to a larger number of families and increased subsidies for those with low incomes and fairer because Albertans' tax dollars will be focused where they are most needed within the day care system, to lower income parents requiring day care for their children. The reforms are preventative and proactive measures which will benefit our province both economically, with more parents working or improving their education, and socially, by increasing a family's ability to be self-sufficient and encouraging increased self-esteem. The result will be fewer parents having to rely on social allowance assistance and shorter claim periods by families through greater opportunities available for parents.

In addition, through reforms to the subsidy and operating allowance programs parents will exercise more choice in the kind of care that best suits their child. The reforms to the qualifications for day care staff will result in an even higher quality of care. Eligible annual income levels for subsidies will peak at about \$40,000, making Alberta's day care subsidies the most generous in Canada. Mr. Chairman, these innovative and exciting reforms to the day care program are coupled with an additional \$5.3 million in funding to programs, again, aimed at caring for children in both commercial and noncommercial day care centres as well as family day homes. This 7.1 percent increase added to the 13.8 percent directed to the programs last year makes clear this government's unflinching efforts to meet the needs of single mothers and lower income families for quality and accessible day care for their children. I am very pleased to report to this Assembly that the Alberta government continues to spend amongst the highest per capita funding on day care of any province in Canada and that we continue to support the highest proportion of licensed spaces compared with our preschool population.

Mr. Chairman, the estimates are forwarded also based on our commitment to strong families and thriving communities. In fact, \$340,000 has been allocated for the establishment of the office of family initiatives. The government's approach to strengthening families has been forward looking and multifaceted. The Lieutenant Governor's conference celebrating Alberta families was an important symposium sponsored by this government. The conference, involving over 500 community leaders and representatives from a diverse spectrum of organizations, was about asking questions and about finding new and co-operative solutions to the stresses our families are facing today. The conference's recommendations will be forwarded shortly to the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, chaired by my colleague the Member for Red Deer-North, Stockwell Day. These recommendations are a part of this government's commitment to developing strategies aimed at helping Alberta's families meet the challenges of the '90s and beyond.

Mr. Chairman, together with those attending the conference, hundreds of thousands of Alberta families celebrated their first ever Alberta Family Day. This government's commitment to strengthening families is rooted in the strong family traditions of Albertans throughout our history. It is also progressive and based on our belief in the integrity and importance of strong families to a strong province. Keeping families together is a top priority of this government. Providing support to families in hardship and helping them find ways to resolve differences is the important work of the family support services of my department.

Referring again to vote 3, Mr. Chairman, an additional \$13 million will be spent on Family Relations, a substantial 48.5 percent increase over last year. Family relations personnel help families resolve legal issues related to marital breakdown, including disputes over custody and access to children and maintenance issues. But parents have a legal and moral obligation to take financial responsibility for supporting their children through maintenance agreements. This increased commitment will be aimed at ensuring higher compliance and will result in fewer mothers having to rely on social allowance to take care of their children.

Mr. Chairman, \$2.8 million additional dollars will be directed to In-home Family Support services, and as part of this, an additional \$200,000 will be directed to community agency funding. This government recognizes and has responded to the increased family support demands of our citizens with a 21.4 percent increase over last year. This additional funding strengthens my department's ability to support parents and children in their homes through homemaker, psychological, and counseling services. This increase reflects this government's commitment to strengthening families and developing a safety net for families in crises at the community level.

Mr. Chairman, funding for adoption services will increase by 4.7 percent, and two additional full-time equivalents will be applied to processing parent applications, home studies, appraisals, and associated placement costs for children. Over \$1.9 million will be directed to funding for Foster Care. This 83 percent increase brings the government's financial commitment to ensuring quality for children to \$24.8 million. Family-based foster care is recognized as the best alternative for meeting the needs of children in care, and an additional \$330,000 will be directed to the approximately 1,100 families who provide foster homes in our province today. Last year foster care rates were increased by 10 percent, and I'm pleased to announce that they will be increased by an additional 3 percent this year.

Mr. Chairman, my department has extended the eligibility criteria for child welfare services so that children in special cases can benefit from support past their 18th birthday. This will be done at a cost of \$593,000. The reality is that not all children are prepared or ready for independence when they turn 18, and this will allow them time to perhaps finish their schooling and become more able to succeed independently.

Mr. Chairman, these estimates are also forwarded based on this government's strong belief that community-based services, those designed by the community in response to the community's specific needs, are often the most effective and efficient way of meeting the needs of Albertans throughout the province. In fact, these estimates earmark an additional \$3.3 million to community-based agencies and programs. Through the family and community support services program, which received an additional 3 percent in program funding, and the numerous community-based initiatives under way by my department, this government is actively promoting an atmosphere in which a lasting partnership between Albertans can be developed, for over 1.9 million hours of service are provided yearly by over 40,000 Alberta volunteers in this province. The level of contribution by volunteers in Alberta is the highest in Canada and is a natural resource that must be encouraged to flourish.

My department has been very successful in meeting the needs of an increasing multicultural society, for Alberta is now a province of immense diversity: diverse in its peoples and in its needs. Nearly half of all immigrants are between 24 and 44 years of age, young and energetic people starting families and planning for the future. Meeting the needs of immigrant families in their own languages and respectful of their particular beliefs and customs is a high priority for my department, as are our services to Alberta's aboriginal people. In fact, Mr. Chairman, we have responded with a multilanguage information series on family violence, day care services, and cultural and native awareness programs for frontline staff.

I will be unveiling a major reform package to Albertans in the months ahead which will bring Alberta's social allowance programs in line with the province's existing social and economic environment. The present benefit structure – how benefits are provided, how the services are delivered, and the adequacy of food and shelter rates – will be closely examined in order to develop a more responsive and responsible social allowance program.

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I am somewhat disappointed that social allowance caseloads remain around the 67,000 mark throughout the province. I am, however, very encouraged by a reduction in the number of employables seeking assistance. This reduction has allowed us to present a 6 percent decrease in funding for financial assistance for employables in this budget. This clearly shows that the economic policies of this government are working. There is an upswing in the mood of Albertans and confidence in the future due in large part to the government's job creation and economic diversification strategies. Over a net of 2,000 single employable recipients in the past year have been able to leave the social allowance rolls and become self-sufficient, fully contributing members of society. I am proud to report that this is the third consecutive year in which we expect a reduction.

Mr. Chairman, let me make it clear that this reduction in funding is not a punitive action but only reflects the fact that this government's fiscal management has been effective. It's a good-news story and allows us to redirect much-needed funding to other priorities. One of these priorities is financial assistance

For single-parent families, which receives an increase of \$4.9 million. As the vast majority of single-parent families are headed by mothers, these funds will help to respond to the growing needs of single mothers and their children.

Mr. Chairman, I now refer to financial assistance programs under Social Allowance funding in vote 2. Total government spending on financial assistance to the disabled will increase by \$12.6 million. Specifically, I am pleased to announce adjustments to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped which reflect changes in the financial requirements of the profoundly disabled. An additional \$15 million is being directed to the Alberta Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. This is a 10.8 percent increase to funding, totaling over \$153 million to AISH. This increase is in response to a projected increase of 1,000 cases and a \$31 increase in cost per case. In addition, over \$440,000 will be provided to offset increased costs for nursing home and auxiliary hospital care.

Another priority program is the prevention of family violence, especially violence towards women and child abuse. The office for the prevention of family violence will receive an 8.1 percent increase in funding, bringing this government's total commitment to \$6.3 million. Mr. Chairman, family violence continues to occur at an unacceptable rate in Alberta, and while the answers to stopping this devastating and repugnant social illness have yet to be found, we in this government believe that our two top priorities must be in providing safe havens for the abused and education for all Albertans in an attempt to prevent family violence.

Mr. Chairman, an additional \$265,000 has been earmarked for the Peace River women's emergency shelter. Opening in September, this new shelter joins existing shelters in Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Grand Centre, Lloydminster, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Camrose, Red Deer, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Hinton. This government's commitment to providing shelter and safety to women has resulted in the most realistic funding model in Canada today. The model gives community programs and agencies the stability they need to effectively meet the needs of battered women and their families.

The women's shelter information system is another special feature of my department's efforts in this matter. The system has enabled us to increase efficiency and ensure that funding is available and monitored.

Mr. Chairman, assisting communities to develop creative local responses to family abuse is a key undertaking of my department's efforts in this area. On that basis \$200,000 has been set aside for the ongoing work of community-based family violence prevention projects for this fiscal year. The effectiveness of our partnership with communities in responding to this serious social problem has been very encouraging and is a priority of my department in this upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the Associate Minister of Family and Social Services, the Hon. Roy Brassard, will discuss progress and budget estimates for programs for seniors and the disabled. Together with the estimates that I have just addressed, they represent clear and tangible evidence of this Alberta government's commitment to Albertans in need.

Thank you very much, and I'm looking forward to the questions afterwards.

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

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the first time I've had the opportunity to address estimates in this House, and I see it's just going to be fine with all the support I've got.

I'd like to spend just a few moments, perhaps, to discuss the programs I'm directly responsible for in my role as associate minister of social services, and in this way I'll be able to supplement the comments that have already been made by my friend and colleague the Hon. John Oldring, with whom I share this very complex department.

It truly is an honour to share this responsibility of effectively meeting the needs of Albertans through this very important and dynamic department. I have never before had an opportunity to work with so many caring and concerned individuals in my life. This is truly a department that works with people and cares for people, perhaps more so than others – with no reflection on the others, Mr. Chairman.

I can't help but start with a subject that's become very close to my heart and occupied a great deal of my time lately. It's a document entitled *Claiming my Future*. It deals with people with mental disabilities. Some time ago, Mr. Chairman, I was asked to chair a committee to review services to people with mental disabilities in this province. I was asked by the former Minister of Social Services, the Member for Three Hills, and it was deemed necessary not because of what was not happening in this province but rather because of what was happening. There were so many initiatives going on in the province at the time, much more so than one could ever imagine on the surface, and it was felt that we needed to take a look at this very important area and make certain that all programs were heading in the same direction and that all initiatives were consistent. I had the advantage in chairing this committee, Mr. Chairman, because I said at the front of our report that I really "didn't know what I didn't know" about this subject.

I recall the first young man I met, who was in a wheelchair. The only controllable movements this young man had were in his head. He could move it from the left to the right. He was working with a rehabilitation officer, and they had hooked his wheelchair up to a closed-circuit television. The movement of his head to his left activated a lever that indicated a positive response, and when he moved his head to the right, it indicated a negative. They had him seated in front of a closed-circuit television, and they were running programs past this young man. Every time he got a right answer, this Pac-Man type individual would jump up on the screen and do a funny little dance, and that would be his reward.

I couldn't help but wonder at the time just why they were putting this young man through this when he already had more problems to deal with on a daily basis than you and I encounter, probably, in a month or a year. It suddenly occurred to me that for the first time in his life this young man was a participant and not a spectator and had some degree or measure of control in his life. By putting a menu in front of him, he could order his breakfast. He could tell someone, finally, that he wanted orange juice instead of apple juice. For the first time in his 24 years he could tell people that he hated turnips, and they'd been shoving them down his throat all his life. It was a tremendous breakthrough for this young man, and I couldn't help but realize how much we had taken for granted in this whole area.

You know, Rick Hansen probably did more to make us aware of what people with disabilities are capable of. What a lot of us have just recently become aware of is the fact that Rick Hansen

got married not too long ago. In fact, he just had a baby girl, I believe it was.

MR. WEISS: No, he didn't. His wife did.

MR. BRASSARD: Pardon me, member. His wife had a baby girl. A lot of people were really surprised at this. They were amazed that someone like Rick Hansen, who's spent all of his life in a wheelchair, would indeed have a baby girl. What that tells me is that we too often stop and fail to acknowledge the 85 percent of the Rick Hansens of this world whose needs are the same as yours and mine. We see the wheelchair. We see them somehow as being a hundred percent different. What is in this report, that the committee talks about, is much of that whole philosophy. There's a lot of challenges outlined in that report, and I hope we are all of us challenged by what's in the report, because it calls to question where we are today – not necessarily where we have been but where we're going. It is a philosophical direction manual, not a how-to manual. It embodies much of the directions that people who have worked with people with disabilities and people who have disabilities themselves have told us that they want to move in.

We talk about integrated education. I have met with educators, and they have challenged me with the fact that we don't have enough money to implement integrated education. No one has told me we don't have enough money for grade 3. Nobody has told me we don't have enough money for grade 7. What that indicates to me, Mr. Chairman, is that perhaps it's a matter of priorities. Perhaps we're going to have to take a look at where our first priority lies and if, indeed, it really rests with the education of all Albertans regardless of whether they have a disability or not. If so, perhaps we're going to have to call into question some of the programs that we have come to hold very dear to us. I have nothing against band, but is band more important than the obligation to education of all Albertans? I think those are the kind of challenges we're going to be faced with in our quest to address the true citizenship aspect of the report that we talk about.

We talk about vocational rehabilitation in the report and how that indeed should very clearly perhaps rest with other job-creation initiatives. Maybe I can approach my friend the Minister of Career Development and Employment to take a look at a further responsibility that he and his department may have in this role of rehabilitation and job creation and training people with mental disabilities. We talk in the report about deinstitutionalized, and that is scary to most people. Somehow we see this bulldozer just over the brow of a hill, sitting there at idle, waiting for someone to give the signal for it to take off. But that's not what deinstitutionalization is all about, Mr. Chairman. Deinstitutionalization has been going on for a number of years as we have learned that there are alternatives, and very viable alternatives, to housing of people with disabilities. As a matter of fact, it's important to note that in our budgets institutional care and treatment for handicapped Albertans will increase by over \$2.1 million this year.

But the book talks about individuals, putting individuals first and recognizing their ability before we acknowledge their disability. For too long now we have created programs and fitted individuals into the programs. This review that is out right now before all Albertans says that we should reverse that, we should start with the individual and build a program around the individual. We recognize that there are housing alternatives now that were not even considered before, and so we address

individualized life-style planning, because we can do it more effectively now. We recognize that there are going to be risks. We know that in our dairy lives there are risks in growth.

I recall climbing the Ptarmigan Cirque. My wife and I go down to Kananaskis Country quite a bit, and we like to hike a great deal. There's this place, this one trail called the Ptarmigan Cirque. It starts about 7,200 feet and climbs – it's a hike really – for another thousand or 1,200 feet, and when you get to the top, there's really nothing there. There's just a pile of broken rock. The only sense of accomplishment in the whole effort is to find a big, flat rock where you can kind of stretch out and soak up the sun a little bit and have a bite to eat before you head down. We were up there this one day, my wife and I, and a young family came up about 20 minutes behind us. The little boy, who was about 10, was walking very stiff-legged. His father was walking sideways alongside him, not supporting him really but making certain that he didn't fall and talking with him and joking and laughing. When they came to this broken pile of rock at the top, they stopped. I almost could imagine the conversation, because they wanted to achieve the same satisfaction that I had, to find a flat piece of rock. Sure enough, they did, and they started across this rock. Again this little boy was on his own, and the father was doing it sideways, trying to make absolutely certain that the young fellow didn't fall. I thought: my goodness, why is he putting him through that? I said to my wife: "Why doesn't he pick him up and carry him? Perhaps he's got a bad back; maybe I should go over and give him a hand." I tend to be a rescuer; it's something that I have to fight with. I tend to be a rescuer more than a helper, and that's a weakness of mine. They finally found a flat rock, by the way, and the father helped him lie down because the fellow's back was quite stiff.

That evening I was at one of those gatherings where they tell you about all the bugs that crawl around at night while you're sleeping, and I ran into the father, and I said, "I saw you on the mountain today." He said, yes, and I said, "I was really impressed at how well your son did." He said, yes. I said, "What's his problem?" He said, "Well, he has cerebral palsy and, you know, it was his idea to come up here today, because two years ago he couldn't walk without a walker, and he graduated from there to crutches, to canes, and now he walks without anything, and it was his idea, as I say, to come up on that mountain today." I said, "Well, I owe you an apology, because I was going to go over and carry him over the broken rocks." He said, "Yes, I can understand that, because a lot of people do offer to help." I said, "You must love your son a very great deal to allow him to grow and develop and work through the risk-taking that is involved in those kind of exercises."

The fundamental basic of that whole thing was that if his father had prevented him from climbing the mountain simply because he might fall and hurt himself, he would deny him the achievement of ever reaching the top. I don't think we have the right to do that to people, people with disabilities or otherwise. We do as a society have a responsibility to balance out the abnormal risk. That's for certain. But there are going to be risks in some of the initiatives that are talked about in that report.

While we were wrapping it up, I remember wondering what an ideal life would be like, and we talked about that. Of course, the conclusion was: where everyone was accepted for who they were and not based on a disability of any kind. The next question, of course, that came was: is this possible? Is it possible that in the world today we can accept each other for

who we really are and not necessarily what we see or seem to be? The conclusion was yes, we can. It's going to take work, and it's going to take a lot of work mostly by people in communities. If we are ever to come to that level, we're going to have to come to a greater awareness and a greater level of acceptance. So the challenge really is more to the community at large rather than the government in this instance. There's no question we'll be implicated, but I look forward to growing with that report. We're just in the process right now of assessing the results of it.

This has been supplemented with the Premier's council on the status of the disabled that was formed when Rick Hansen came through and asked the Premier if he would set up such a commission. I worked very closely with Gary McPherson and look to working closely with him in the future. This all is consistent, Mr. Chairman, with our commitment to develop a strong community-based service for the disabled, and approximately \$1.2 million in additional funding is being allocated to community-based individual service agencies. With a strong and growing agency network, disabled Albertans are encouraged to maintain family ties and provide for personal development and full community participation.

Mr. Chairman, it's always difficult to alleviate public perception that the dollars are not getting out to the people who need them most. Well, this department is and will continue to try to address this concern, and tonight I'm proud to announce that program administration costs for services to persons with disabilities have been reduced by 12 percent, due in large part to the department's ongoing efforts to increase efficiency and reduce operational costs.

The handicapped children's service program was initiated to assist families of handicapped children who experience the extraordinary demands and costs resulting from the handicapping conditions to maintain their children within the family home or in as normal a community setting as possible. Mr. Chairman, an additional 13.3 percent in funding will be directed to handicapped children's services in the upcoming fiscal year. A total of just less than \$10.5 million will be directed to challenged children living in their homes and in their communities. This is, I might add for the hon. members, in addition to the 16.7 percent increase last year announced by my predecessor, the Hon. Mr. Norm Weiss. This is a significant increase in the government's ongoing commitment to support families with disabled children and reflects our deeply held belief that disabled children benefit from living with their loved ones and growing within their family unit.

Another area of my responsibility that I see as a growing and exciting field is Alberta's senior citizens. I liken this portion of the portfolio to that of a facilitator/administrator. The government as a whole provides something like \$1.2 billion to seniors and to seniors' programs. Everyone here recognizes that this population is growing at an unprecedented rate, and tremendous pressures will be put on this government to address this area not only with dollars but with policies and innovation. This government was the first in Alberta to form a Senior Citizens Advisory Council and Secretariat. Overall, this year the council and secretariat will receive an increase of 11.7 percent for the 1990-91 fiscal year. Special emphasis will be given to the activities of the seniors' advisory council chaired by my colleague from Little Bow and will receive an increase of 116 percent over the 1989-90 budget. This additional commitment is essential for the advisory council to interact effectively with senior Albertans to identify issues of concern and suggestions for action. The

advisory council has been a major source of influence in the development of policies, programs, and service delivery for seniors, and this can be exhibited by the excellent report that was tabled in this Assembly on Monday. The services to seniors division is responsible for advising me on policies and programs that are developed within the government. A new director for this division will be named on April 17, and I look forward to a very exciting year ahead.

There are certainly challenges in the area of services to seniors. Numerous departments, as I say, provide services, and the seniors' division will be looked upon to provide co-ordination and consistency resulting in better services and increased efficiency. We all recognize this growing population called seniors. The decline of the birth rate in this country reminds me of a tree, Mr. Chairman. I can see this tree getting larger and larger at the top and smaller and smaller at the trunk. So it behooves all of us to spend our money wisely and fairly and address the true needs where they exist.

I'm responsible for the office of the public guardian, who has a statutory obligation to provide substitute decision-making for adults who are unable to care for themselves and/or manage their financial affairs. These persons are dependent adults, and their decision-makers are private or public guardians or trustees. Fortunately, the majority of guardians are private, family members. The public guardian is appointed only as a last resort. As a result of travel reductions and operational realignments, we are able to reduce our budget in this area by 63 percent for the coming year.

Widows' pension is another program that falls within my jurisdiction, Mr. Chairman. You will note that we report a reduction in this program also, and I would like to assure all hon. members that this in no way reflects a diminishing commitment to this unique program. I say unique because we are one of the very few governments anywhere that has such a program. It is available to widows and widowers aged 55 to 65 who have limited or no income. Average costs of this program were calculated at \$236 per month and have proven to be somewhat less than that at \$228 per month. We had also allowed for a caseload of 3,640 people, and indeed this turned out to be about 1,600 too many. It seems that more and more people are becoming insurance conscious, and the need for this coverage was somewhat lower than expected, resulting in a savings of somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$729,000.

The Alberta Assured Income Plan for Senior Citizens also falls within my purview, Mr. Chairman, and serves over 93,200 Albertans. We estimate we will spend \$4380,000 on this program. It, too, seems to be benefiting from a wider proliferation of private pension plans. This plan, as you know, is designed to top up all Albertans who receive the federal guaranteed income plan. The monthly amount depends on your marital status and your income from all sources.

And that is it, Mr. Chairman. I am honoured indeed to have been appointed by the Premier and my colleagues to represent this department, and the estimates I have brought forward clearly indicate that the government of Alberta remains deeply committed to supporting families with disabled members. Further, Mr. Chairman, it makes clear our commitment to providing support which ensures the well-being and quality of life of our senior citizens.

I thank you for this opportunity, and I look forward to the questions.

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

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased tonight to participate in the budget for the Department of Family and Social Services. At the outset I'd like to say that my colleague from Edmonton-Avonmore will be supplementing some of my remarks this evening.

This minister and the associate minister are asking us this evening to endorse this budget, which has a very direct influence on this government's ability to ensure a healthy future for thousands of adults and children in this province. Despite the well-intentioned remarks of both the minister and the associate minister this evening, I have some very serious concerns with this department and with this particular budget.

Before I get into specific areas, I would like to raise just a general concern that I have with the attitude of this particular Conservative government, and of all conservative governments for that matter, because whenever we talk about social programs, we talk about the fact that we're spending too much, and then these governments try and blame the deficit on social spending. Mr. Chairman, the deficits that these governments create themselves are clearly through their own mismanagement. I think that people are wising up to this argument, and they're no longer being fooled by it. People are recognizing that a good government can place people as a priority and can adequately fund social programs and still not have a deficit.

Many New Democrat governments have proven this. I can go back to the days when Tommy Douglas became Premier of the province of Saskatchewan at a time when it was deeply in debt. Not only did his government pay off the debts and bring in a surplus every single year, but they implemented at the same time the most comprehensive social welfare system in this country. So, clearly, Mr. Chairman, deficits are not caused by people who are abused, who are sick, who are unemployed, or who are hungry; they're caused by governments who are inefficient and incompetent. In the case of this particular government, I'd also like to add the word uncaring, because I feel very strongly about this, Mr. Chairman.

In this province we have over 93,000 children living in poverty. We have thousands of families struggling without adequate incomes. We have people who suffer mental illnesses who are getting sicker because their incomes cannot provide them with even the basic necessities like food, clothing, and a decent place to sleep. Every day, Mr. Chairman, when we pick up a paper, there are articles that remind us of the seriousness of this issue.

Inner-city schools need more help

Poverty is real in the lives of many Edmonton school children and it presents special difficulties for teachers.

One headline. Another one:

Government neglect being felt. . .

Near-crisis situation predicted in poverty among children

"Still Hungry in Alberta," "Food bank shortfall tied to government restraint," "Welfare pay below poverty line, report says," "It's time to speak out about hunger," "Swamped food bank pares hours." And we can go on, Mr. Chairman, because there are always headlines every day in the newspaper about this serious issue.

In this great province of ours thousands of children are hungry, and we should be ashamed of this, Mr. Chairman. Thousands of families are being fed in an unacceptable and inappropriate way. The Edmonton Food Bank had an increase of 73 percent in the number of families with children using the food bank between June of '88 and May of '89. Now, food banks can never guarantee a healthy, balanced diet for adults and children, and they should not be used as an extension of this particular minister's department, because this is what's happen-

ing. I have never heard this minister actually come out and condemn the food banks in this province. So I'd like to ask the minister, Mr. Chairman: where is the action?

Now, we know that the minister has stated that he will be bringing forward a comprehensive social reform package, but the concern I have with that is that when it was first mentioned, I thought it would be in a couple of weeks, because people are very desperate out there. Then we heard that it would be sometime this session, and now we hear it will be sometime this year, and now we hear that the minister is consulting because it's such a complex issue, such a complex problem. Well, Mr. Chairman, he's right; it is a complex problem. But at the same time, people need some action.

Mr. Chairman, some things are very simple. We know that rents have increased. We know that utilities have increased. We know that clothing costs have risen. We know that food costs have risen. Now, some action must be taken immediately. We know that social allowance rates must increase to reflect realistically what people have to pay in order to meet their basic necessities. Now, we've heard from the minister this evening about the AISH program, and I'll speak about that later, because that's also a problem.

This budget sees a \$12 million decrease in the money going to employables. Now, that's a concern, Mr. Chairman, because in 1987 when the government cut social allowance rates to single employables, the result was that the utilization of the food bank was second highest in its history, and they attributed it to this. Now, I know that the minister has stated that the decrease is due to the fact that people are getting jobs, but I would like to ask the minister how many of these jobs are simply six-month jobs, and then these people have to go on unemployment insurance? How many are short-term jobs? I think we have to take a look at that.

We see that under vote 2, Financial Assistance for Single Parent Families has increased by 1.8 percent. Again, Mr. Chairman, I would say that the cost of living has risen much beyond that, and I would like to ask the minister: how are people supposed to cope? It's quite obvious that the budget does not improve the quality of life for people on social assistance, even though the problems that result from adults and children living below the poverty line are overwhelming and horrendous.

I think it's very alarming that this budget does not allow for money to lower caseloads of income security workers. They are complaining that they can no longer make any home visits, they can no longer work with individuals on a personalized basis, and that clients get no contact with their social workers. I think if this government truly believed in prevention, they would ensure that the income security workers could do their jobs properly and that people would receive the services they deserve. I know the minister has stated that he has spent time on the front lines with frontline workers, Mr. Chairman, and I'm really wondering – if he did spend time and he heard from these people – if in fact he learned anything, because the budget does not reflect this. I believe that he would have heard loud and clear the kind of serious concerns that are out there due to the high caseloads. There's low morale, Mr. Chairman. There's high burnout, income security workers are saying that they can't do an effective job, they're hiring unskilled workers to do the job, and the list goes on of all the concerns in that department.

Mr. Chairman, we see that Family and Community Support Services has been transferred from the Department of Health to this particular department. I think that's a positive move.

However, last year FCSS received a .9 percent increase; this year it's a 2.5 percent increase. So over the last two years it averages out to about a 1.7 percent increase. Now, FCSS provides funding for many agencies throughout this province, agencies that are providing excellent services and very vital services to our communities. FCSS provides cost-effective preventative social services. Now, what in the world could be more important or make more sense than preventative social services? Even the Minister of Education the other night when he was speaking on his estimates mentioned FCSS.

But certain realities must be faced, and for many of the municipalities the funding has simply not been adequate to meet the needs of the people in their communities. Funding must get back to a 20 percent-80 percent split, because many municipalities have had to increase their share of funding because this government has not kept up with their own commitment to this particular program. When you take a look at the lists of the kinds of agencies that FCSS fund, Mr. Chairman, you know that 1.7 percent won't begin to address the kinds of needs of these agencies and the people that they're trying to serve. So if this government believes in community-based support services, this budget definitely does not show it. It's definitely not a priority.

What's so disturbing is the fact that as this government dumps more and more of the responsibility onto communities, at the same time they continually withdraw the support for these services. Consequently, Mr. Chairman, every single agency that I know of has got to go out and fund-raise to cover basic program costs. They're delivering vital services to people of this province, and yet they're spending hours at bingo and casinos trying to get enough money together just to cover their basic costs for programs that are so badly needed. Agencies are really struggling to try and cover their costs, and we're not talking about the frills. So this I believe is a result of the government just not placing people first. I think they're clearly shirking their responsibility when they're not funding in these areas.

Mr. Chairman, many nonprofit agencies in the province are delivering services now. As well, we have commercial businesses providing services. This I think is shameful but is due to the government's philosophy of privatization. But I am concerned that there does not seem to be a mechanism in place to deal with problems that may arise within an agency delivering certain services. I wrote the minister about this issue; he did write me back. He expressed concern about the matter and stated that he felt that the regional director could look into things if in fact there was a problem. Now, I feel that if an agency is receiving government funding, we need to have some type of independent group or committee, a credible committee that could investigate any complaints that were alleged against a certain agency. The concern is great because when we have so many children being cared for within the system who are virtually voiceless, I think it's imperative that we have some type of mechanism in place that can investigate concerns, and it's for the protection of the agency as well.

Under vote 3 we have the whole area of child welfare, Mr. Chairman. Now, what's being allowed to happen in child welfare I find extremely frightening. We have such high caseloads per worker that children are clearly being placed at risk in this province by this government. Now, high caseloads have been an issue for a long time, but there has been absolutely no improvement in this area. As long as we have a system that cannot respond to a child's needs and to their cry for help, we have failed drastically. Children are virtually powerless human beings, and we must make a commitment to them. When a

child discloses some type of abuse, whether it be physical, sexual, or even a mental abuse, that disclosure is a very difficult thing for that child to do. I know of adults that have been abused as children, and they haven't even admitted this until their 40s or their 50s or sometimes they never do. So it's a very difficult thing to do, and we must be able to respond immediately if any child discloses.

What's happening – and I mentioned this in the House previously – is that there is, I am told, a three-week delay on investigations. Now, I know that the minister has said that he disputes that; he says that any serious case will be looked into immediately. But what's happening, Mr. Chairman, is that child welfare workers, child welfare investigators, are having to prioritize their calls. In other words, they can't handle all of them. They know that, so they have to make a decision: which one sounds more serious than another? And they all have the potential of being extremely serious. They're not in a position until they do the investigation to make that decision, but they just can't do it, because they've got too many caseloads.

So as long as children are not being responded to immediately, I would say to this minister that we are placing these children at risk. The first stage of any child welfare case is intake and investigation, Mr. Chairman. Now, again we are telling children that they have to wait; they have to wait to get an investigation done. Many professionals, many teachers, psychologists, parents, foster parents, social workers – there are various agencies and committees that have been formed that are very disturbed about the delays because it's having devastating effects on many of these children. Yet what disturbs me a great deal under vote 3 is that this minister has cut funding for Intake and Investigations. I would ask the minister to justify how in the world he can do this. He's given an increase to In-Home Family Support under vote 3, and I hope the minister recognizes that even if more children are able to be at home with their families, the first stage in any child welfare case is the investigation, and we've got to make sure that we fund that properly.

Mr. Chairman, we have children in this province entering the child welfare system who don't belong there. Children who have been diagnosed, for example, as having a mental illness like schizophrenia do not qualify under Handicapped Children Services. So consequently families are forced into giving up custody of their children to the child welfare system. They only have two years before they have to either sign over permanent custody of that child or take the child back home. Now, when we're dealing with a mental illness, we know that things perhaps won't be better in two years, so a lot of times parents are forced to sign over permanent custody. Many times these children are placed in foster homes with foster parents who can't deal with their particular problems. The minister may say that these children belong under Health because they have health problems, which is true; they do belong under Health. But as long as there's nothing equivalent to the handicapped children's services under the Health department, this minister is going to continue to get these children in the child welfare system. So I would urge this minister to pressure the Minister of Health so that some of these problems can be addressed, because until he does that, these children are going to continue to come into the child welfare system and they're not going to be treated fairly or get the kinds of services they need.

Another issue with child welfare, Mr. Chairman, is that most of the children entering the child welfare system these days, I think it's very safe to say, are experiencing severe mental health problems. Many of these children have been abused or ne-

glected in some way, and I feel very strongly that foster parents have got to have the skills and the supports more than ever before to deal with these children, many of whom have severe emotional and behavioural problems. I think that training is absolutely crucial in order for the foster parent to have an understanding of the symptoms of abuse and other mental health issues. We have to have very tight screening procedures so that we ensure the well-being of the children who are taken into care. We must lower the caseloads so that child welfare workers can develop a relationship with these children who are coming into care and also develop a relationship with the foster parent.

I think this government is long overdue in making a statement against violence against children. I understand that we're the only province in Canada that allows foster parents to use corporal punishment in foster homes. I know we're the only province that allows it to happen in day cares as well. It should not be allowed, Mr. Chairman, especially when so many abused children are coming into the system. So again I would ask the minister to show some leadership in this area, because I think when we allow these kinds of things to happen, we are placing children at risk.

I think it's very safe to say, Mr. Chairman, that services for kids in this province are severely lacking. I have a lot of foster parents telling me that they've tried for weeks to get children into counseling services or to get treatment, and it's just not available. One group I think we really have to take some notice of are 16- and 17-year-olds who have left home. Many of them end up on the streets and are not getting the services that they deserve by this government. Now, whether it be the Education department, the Health department, or social services, they all have to start working together in some co-ordinated fashion to start addressing the needs of this particular age group.

Mr. Chairman, the overall observation for the section on child welfare under vote 3 I would say is: where is the plan for the 1990s? Where's the co-ordination between the departments? The budget shows that we're cutting a little bit of money here, we're throwing a little bit of money there. But where's the long-term plan? Because it's very clear to me that this present system is not working. We have special concerns when it comes to native children within the child welfare system. We have children in the system right now that continue to disappear. They continue to kill themselves. I know personally of cases where foster parents come to me and say that children they have cared for have committed suicide. We continue to have severe mental health problems with children that are in the child welfare system, and these issues are just not being addressed.

What happens, Mr. Chairman, is that all these children grow up and perhaps become dysfunctional adults. They move into the Solicitor General's department. They may continue to suffer from mental health illnesses and end up in the hospital, or they may end up on social assistance because they don't have the proper education because they've dropped out of school, or they just don't have the training to get proper employment. I feel very strongly that this department has got to start addressing the needs of these children, because the problems will not go away. I'm very encouraged to see that more and more advocates are getting together, more and more committees are being formed to address these kinds of needs, because, quite frankly, people are saying that enough is enough, and something has got to be done.

Under vote 3 we see day care funding. Now, child care in this province, Mr. Chairman, is an essential service. This government has a responsibility to ensure that child care in this

province for families is affordable, that it's of high quality; in other words, that we have formalized training standards. It does not mean just an orientation course, or one out of every six workers. I believe that every group of children in a child care centre should have some trained worker. Workers want to be recognized as professionals. They do not want to be thought of as just strictly babysitters.

Child care also must be accessible. Now, I know that in Alberta we have a lot of spaces, but we don't have a lot of high quality spaces. They're not always available. Parents very definitely need choices of what kind of care they want for their children. I also feel they have a right to obtain information about a particular centre. Currently this information is not available to them.

I know the minister introduced a white paper on child care. A lot of things about this white paper disturb me, Mr. Chairman. This white paper does not make child care more affordable, despite what the minister might say, because the amount of money that was given to the operating allowance to fund that particular space does not equal the money that's going to be available for subsidies. Although I know we don't have a heck of a lot of information when it comes to the subsidy levels, we know that the money is not equal there. Now, I recognize that for years the operating allowance was given to operators with no strings attached; there was no guarantee that taxpayers' money was being spent wisely, and that was a concern. But the principle of funding each space so that child care is affordable to all families is a very important principle.

The white paper is very vague in explaining exactly what the subsidy rates will be, and I think Albertans deserve a lot more information. We did figure out, though, Mr. Chairman, that the figures we were given on page 23 of the white paper, despite what the minister says when he says we're bringing in all these low-income families — they will now be eligible for subsidies. This sounds great, but when we look closely at his graph in the white paper, something that was startling was that a single parent with one infant making \$30,000 a year currently does not qualify under the current system that's in place; under the new system that parent would qualify but would end up paying about \$100 more. So, in fact, because she qualifies, she's worse off. It doesn't make any sense, Mr. Chairman. Another concern is the fact that many families who earn below the average income in Alberta won't qualify, and we have no commitment by this minister that subsidies will rise each year. It's a three-year plan, so obviously they're not going to rise for three years. So again we'll fall behind, and fees will have to go up.

Again, I'm concerned about the lowering of quality of care for infants in this white paper, and I would just hope that the minister is listening to those Albertans that have brought these concerns forward. Again, we're the only province that allows corporal punishment in day cares, and I would hope that this minister would take leadership in this area.

Mr. Chairman, I have never received so many letters in my time as an MLA as I have in relation to this white paper, and I know my colleagues have been getting letters as well. The thing that concerns me, too, is that this minister continues to say that he had consulted with Albertans, which simply was not the case. I understand that the day he announced his white paper, he had called in some parents. He'd invited some special guests to come to be consulted, in his words. They sat in a room and visited with a bureaucrat while he was in another room at the very same moment introducing this white paper. That was his idea of consultation. But now people are consulting with the

minister, and I would hope that he would listen to what he is hearing from parents across this province and make the necessary changes to that particular white paper, although I know he stated on March 20 that he is "committed to the thrust of the report." That concerns me, Mr. Chairman, because obviously there are many, many people that have a lot of problems with this particular white paper.

While we're on the topic of his white paper and day care, I'd like to just mention that there are some special concerns. Some centres that I'm aware of in the inner city that cater to low-income families do not charge parents a fee at all. It's on a drop-in basis. Now, by them losing the operating allowance, Mr. Chairman, this is going to be very devastating for these centres, and I would just like to ask the minister how he will accommodate centres like the Bissell Centre in the inner city in Edmonton, for example, that do not charge any fees.

Under the area of assured income for the severely handicapped, Mr. Chairman, in the government's throne speech it stated that we can all rest easy because this government is assisting those who become disabled or disadvantaged in our society. We have more than 16,000 individuals in this province who are receiving the AISH, and those people, most of them, are living well below the poverty line. In the last few months I have received many letters from people very concerned about their situations on AISH. They were hoping that this minister would raise their income so that they could pay their rents, which we know are increasing, and pay for all of the rising costs that people are facing. There's been no increase in the AISH program for four years. This evening the minister stated that the increase in the funding in his budget for AISH would be to bring more people into the program. But I would like to say to the minister: how are people who are living on AISH — it's their sole income — supposed to pay for increasing costs?

When the program was first implemented years ago, every year there were one or two increases to the AISH program. That has not been done for over four years now. This is a concern for many people, because we have made a commitment, Mr. Chairman, to ensure that people who happen to have disabilities live with dignity and participate in our society, and it's very difficult for them to do this when they are living well below the poverty line.

There's been talk recently, a lot of people are concerned, that people suffering from mental illness, for example, are getting sicker from the fact that they don't know if they'll be able to pay for their rent. So I think this minister has got to address this issue. I'm also under the impression from various sources that the minister is purposely letting the program deteriorate so that more people can be moved off the program and onto social assistance. I did write him again on this issue, and he did respond to me. I came across an interesting quote, Mr. Chairman, that I think is worth repeating here, because when we're talking about programs for people who happen to have disabilities, I think we have got to make a commitment to give them support. This was from the World Institute of Disability, and it states:

Independence is not measured by the quantity of tasks we can perform without assistance but the quality of life we can have with help.

Basically what it's saying, Mr. Chairman, is that we've got to help people; we have a responsibility to help people.

I recognize that there are some problems with the AISH program. People need to be encouraged to do things, and there are many policies in place right now that penalize people for

being independent. For example, if a person with a disability does happen to find employment, they lose their medical benefits once they're off AISH. In other words, Mr. Chairman, they can't afford to work, so this is having a negative effect on people that could go out and perhaps seek some employment. Unemployment amongst people with disabilities is four to six times greater than with other people, and I think this is a very serious concern.

Now, we have had recently the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities present an action plan to us. They went into many areas: training, employment, education, recreation, transportation, housing, accessibility, personal supports, and financial supports. There are some excellent recommendations in this report, but the major concern I'm hearing now is: when will this government act? Because we know that we're always doing reports, we're always receiving reports, and yet, you know, they get shelved and then that's it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is. I guess it is.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to make a few comments and ask quite a lot of questions tonight of the Minister of Family and Social Services and the associate minister.

Mr. Chairman, environment's the current buzzword, and it's the item we're all interested in and anxious about. In this case I expect this minister to be in charge of the social environment, and I hope that's what he believes his responsibilities consist of. He's the person that has to set that stage, that social environment that creates healthy and progressive communities; that makes an investment in people wherever we find them and whatever circumstances we find them, in the creative ability of people and their energies; that builds on the strengths, as the associate minister said; that doesn't concern itself unnecessarily with the pathology or the inadequacy but builds on the strengths of individuals; that is not punitive and doesn't provide just adequate support for people but really offers them some opportunity for upward mobility. Because, Mr. Chairman, we're talking here about people that are normally very powerless. They don't have political clout. They don't have political power. They don't have economic power. They are, in many cases, alone and frightened.

We're talking about families that are in stress. We're talking about people who are very, very poor, poor in spirit as well as poor in pocketbook, who may have lost their motivation a couple of decades ago, who live in soul-destroying circumstances. We're talking, Mr. Chairman, about how we give back to those people control over their lives, how we allow them some self-determination, how we allow them to develop self-esteem. Whether they're women who've been abused or neglected, whether they're children who are hungry and alone, whether they're people who are psychologically disabled by poverty and neglect and mental illness, I expect this ministry to deal with all of those people and to make an investment in those people: not just an expenditure to keep them safe, not just an expenditure to keep them clothed and in a decent house but an investment in the person for some mobility. Mr. Chairman, I expect this department to be an advocate for those people, not giving money only to programs but a champion with the colleagues on the front bench to make sure that whenever programs are developed, those particular powerless people are always kept in mind and are up front and our need to make an investment in them is always in your mind.

Mr. Chairman, nobody expects the government to go it alone in these programs. I believe our communities stand there willing and ready, and business and industry is willing and ready to help. I've always felt that, and I think we've had ample proof of that in Alberta, not just in the voluntary sector but in the corporate sector as well. But they need leadership from this government, leadership in how we can give these powerless people back control of their own lives.

Mr. Chairman, the depths of poverty in Alberta have unfortunately deepened. The Canadian Council on Social Development's recent statistics show that Alberta, which in all categories was near the bottom, is now third or fourth and creeping up. I think that's a serious statistic that we have to look carefully at. There is, I believe, a crisis looming in terms of the clients that are being served by this department, the people that I've just talked about, and also with the staff who are employed in the department. I think that's evident this week by the things that the minister is trying to deal with. There are growing numbers of people in crisis. In 1981 the crisis line logged 24,000 calls; last year it was 60,000, almost triple. I think that's a social indicator that we cannot lose sight of.

Mr. Chairman, we don't see an awful lot of action by the department right now. The minister has promised us that he's going to bring in major social reforms. Now, we look forward to that, but that promise on the one hand is something that's out there; on the other hand, it adds to the anxiety. Nothing seems to happen until that's there. Now, I don't know when that special moment is going to arrive, but in the meantime we wait for increases in food, clothing, and shelter. We've asked for that since 1982, and they haven't materialized.

Another thing that worries me, Mr. Chairman, is the kind of general attitude that it's the client's fault. I think the eligibility and verification studies showed us some interesting facts. The project found only 15 percent of the files were up to date and complete, and I think that's an indicator, too, of the workload of the people who are employed in the department who simply cannot keep up with the day-to-day work. To find the reported 22 percent of overpayments, the verification workers were allowed to go back to 1972, but to find the 17 percent in underpayments, workers could only go back six months, as I understand it. I wonder about the validity of that kind of a study with those kinds of comparisons. Mr. Chairman, by failing to implement the needed changes, it's my view that the minister is in contravention or breach of the spirit of the Social Development Act, which states it's his responsibility to ensure that basic needs are met.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the budget itself doesn't reveal an awful lot. We can't get much in the way of numbers, and I've resorted to putting questions on the Order Paper, which I'm grateful the minister has indicated in most cases he's going to answer. So perhaps in a month or so I'll have a better understanding of what these numbers are, because the budget really doesn't tell me enough to make any kind of educated decision about whether the department is really fulfilling its mandate or not.

If I could just turn, Mr. Chairman, and make a few comments and ask some questions about each one of the votes. In vote 1 we see that the largest increase is in Public Communications, and I wonder what that consists of. There's another one: Information Resource Services has gone down. I don't know if those two have been combined. Perhaps the minister will tell us. I hope it's not to buy a whole bunch of TV and newspaper ads or any more fancy invitations to enjoy Family Day. I hope it's not going for those kinds of things, Mr. Chairman and Mr.

Minister, but I think that we need an answer on that one. I'd like also to know what the function of those two programs is and how they, in fact, relate to one another.

I note that Regional Operations is down by 73 percent. It was also cut by almost 14 percent last year. I don't know what's in this program. The subprogram is not broken down any further. I have had a number of complaints, Mr. Chairman, about regional offices that, in the view of clients and community people, are not well located for access. The Argyll office in the city of Edmonton comes to mind. It's not in the district that it is purported to serve, it is not on a bus line, it's inaccessible by public transport, and the washrooms for it are located outside. So if you're a mom with one or two children waiting, you have to go outside to get to the washroom. I just wonder about the kinds of decisions where we locate district offices in places where people can't get at them, people who have little or no transportation funds as well.

If I can go on to vote 2, Mr. Chairman, on Income Support to Individuals and Families, I note that this vote is up. Program Support is up 12.2 percent, and financial assistance is up, as the minister has indicated to us. Perhaps the minister could tell us what is in the subprogram called Program Support, the one that's increased by 24 percent. Also, I'd like to know if there are any particular details about the increased support for physically and mentally handicapped.

Mr. Chairman, part of the difficulty of reading this budget is that I don't know whether we are simply increasing the amount because we have more demand on the program or whether the amount to the individual is being increased, or both. You know, it's one thing to say, "Well, we've increased it by a million or two million dollars." It sounds marvelous, but maybe that's only because we have more people in it, and the individual in it is not any better off than they were this time last year. So perhaps the minister can give me the details on that. I also want to know if this increased support in those categories will in any way address the critical problems that were noted in the excellent report that the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities released; if, in fact, these are intended to go to meet some of the needs that were described in that particular report. The associate minister may want to answer that.

I note that an estimated 63 percent of people with disabilities in Alberta reported income from employment below \$10,000 a year in '86-87, and they also indicate the reasons for low levels of employment. I didn't hear from the minister any particular programs that were aimed at increasing their capacity to get employment, employment being one of the major problems that they have attested to in the report.

Mr. Chairman, vote 2.13, assistance to single-parent families, up only 1.8 percent, and vote 2.1.6, Financial Assistance for Employables, of course, is down. I need to know how the minister can possibly justify cutting support for single-parent families during a time when the Premier has suddenly confirmed his support and commitment to families. Single-parent families, I think, are among the poorest and the most stressed in our province. We hear that from the minister, and I think the numbers are growing in Alberta as the divorce rate grows. So we need to know what the justification is here. I also need the minister to explain if the 5.9 percent decrease for employables is in keeping with the throne speech reference for encouraging people to become more independent. What is the sense in giving an increase one year if you take it away the next? I'm not sure that I understand that discrepancy.

Mr. Chairman, it all seems to relate to the minister's kind of hints or messages about social reform along with the Minister of Career Development and Employment. We've heard that there's some collaboration going on here, and people out in the communities, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister, have asked me and I'm sure other members of the House: what is it that the ministers are talking about? What have they got in mind? Are they going to resuscitate the work-for-welfare program? What is it? There is some rather major concern out there that I believe needs to be put to rest. There are fears out there about what it is you're talking about. We've heard some of these indicators in the House, and we need the details on the program, yesterday not tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman, also I think it's incumbent on the minister, if there is a major change being contemplated, to consult with people. The Member for Edmonton-Calder has already indicated her dismay with the day care white paper. We need to consult before some of these programs happen, and I would hope that the minister is going to assure us on that.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

The food, clothing, and shelter allowances. When are they going to come into effect, the increases? Just when? Next month? We need to know, because people out there cannot manage with what they have now.

There again is no increased financial support for transients, a concern when the recent study on homeless indicates that as many as 7,000 people in Calgary are living with no fixed address, people living permanently on the streets. I don't understand the rationale for cutting that one. I expect that the idea is to send those people to Ontario or some other province. Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister has asked his department to look at the report *On the Outside Looking In* – that's the report on homelessness in Calgary – and if he is taking any steps to address that crisis.

Mr. Chairman, the rate of Albertans living below the poverty line is growing dramatically, as I indicated from the Canadian statistics. In Edmonton alone, 41,000 children; 7,000 of them are preschoolers. That's a quarter of all city residents living below the poverty line; one in six Alberta children in poverty. Twenty-three percent of students at local schools miss at least one meal a day. I want to know tonight if the minister will commit his department to fund more school snack programs and work with the highly successful Head Start program – there are a hundred spaces only in the city of Edmonton – so that we could give those 7,000 preschoolers a chance to improve their performance before they get finally to school. The Head Start program has proved itself successful in other parts of the country. It's clear that it's working here in Edmonton. It needs to be supported. The community is working hard to keep it going; the community is committed to it. They need some leadership, some investment from the government.

Mr. Chairman, while we're waiting for the reforms, I wonder if the minister would take some immediate action in the interim regarding the food vouchers. My understanding is that food vouchers for an adult are \$22 a month and something like \$13 or \$14 for children; to process that voucher costs \$5. It's also our understanding that, at least in the urban centres, one food voucher is issued per case per month. Now, I think the minister can easily see the logistics here. Why not just give the family the \$22 plus the \$5? That would provide them a couple of hot meals, at least, in any given week and would save a lot of

paperwork, save a lot of headaches on the part of the departments. Why not just increase that food allowance today by that amount? Why are we continuing with this system that wastes people's time and probably wastes tax dollars as well? It seems to me that that can be done tomorrow without it costing another cent. I think that's the kind of creative thinking that I would like to see from this minister.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a vain hope.

MRS. HEWES: A vain hope? Hope is always with me.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hope springs eternal.

MRS. HEWES: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, food banks: the Member for Edmonton-Calder indicated that. Are we just going to have them as a permanent fixture in our communities? Recently they've had to open in other communities in Alberta where they didn't exist before: Cold Lake and Athabasca. We now have a total of 31 food banks in Alberta. It's unthinkable in this day and age. I mean, people are very generous. Then in other parts of the country, in Halifax, for instance, we see the food bank giving notice that it is going to stop. It is going to go out of business because it believes that as long as it continues, the government will not fulfill their legal mandate to provide food, clothing, and shelter, and they have other important things that they can and should be doing. I think the minister needs to tell the people of Alberta: does he think that food banks and food lines should become a permanent fixture in the province of Alberta in 1990?

The staff turnovers in the department, 50 percent in the northwest region last year and 85 percent in one district office, I think prove that there's unbelievable stress on excellent workers. I do want to tell the minister and the associate minister that the people I work with and that my constituency office work with in your department have been wonderful. They give us great support. They do their level best, but they are worked right to the limit, right to the edge. They're pushed right to the edge with huge caseloads and immense stress. The minister hasn't mentioned whether there's a contingency plan in place this week. I would hope there's something, and perhaps he will reveal that to us.

Another point I should mention is that – I did tell you that we've had an immense increase in the social service crisis unit, in the number of calls, attributed I think in large part to the fact not only that crisis is out there in Alberta families and individuals but also that they can't get through to the workers. They can't get on the line, and so they call the crisis line.

If I can just turn to vote 2.2., Income Benefits is up by 4.9 percent. The greatest increase is a 25.9 percent jump, with a 10.8 percent increase to AISH. Mr. Chairman, again the Alberta Assured Income Plan for Senior Citizens is down 7.3 – it was cut last year as well – and the Widows' Allowance was cut. The minister did allude to this in his opening remarks, and again I need to know if we're talking more people, fewer people, or less money to individuals already in the program. The statistics do not reveal that in the budget documents.

Mr. Minister, I need answers to my questions that I've asked you regarding AISH. People out there are calling all members of the House, I'm sure, to know if there is going to be an increase in individual payments. If there is not, perhaps the minister could talk with the Premier, who recently was on an open-line show and told someone that AISH was currently being

reviewed and would be adjusted upward to reflect today's market, particularly in terms of shelter.

The Assured Income Plan for Senior Citizens: perhaps the minister would speak again about that. That, I gather, is related – and maybe you could correct me – to trying to provide some support relative to the nursing home hike, so that would balance that one out. The widows' pension has again been cut. I note, Mr. Chairman – the associate minister also spoke about it – recommendation 6 of the Senior Citizens Advisory Council. The council recommends that the government consider an extension of the Alberta widows' pension program to other low-income groups and then goes on to attest to the reasons for it. I compliment the member and his council for bringing in that excellent recommendation. I'd like to ask: is that going to happen this year? And perhaps the associate minister can describe to us the terms of reference for it.

Mr. Chairman, just to go on to vote 3, Child Welfare Services. The total subprogram is up 5.4 percent, and the largest increase is 3.13, In-Home Family Support, up 21 percent. There was no such program listed last year. The problem that I see here in this part of it, Mr. Chairman, is that the system is not really child centred; it's still system centred. Perhaps the minister can give us a few more details on the in-home family support program, how that is managed and what it consists of.

One of the real indicators that I keep asking questions about in the House, and to my sorrow have never really felt that I've had satisfactory answers to, is that related to the tragic suicide of native foster children. I think that has revealed some of the frailties in our capacity to serve children with special needs in the province, Mr. Minister. The department still, in my view, has not fully put into practice the many I thought very rational and sensible recommendations that have come in over the past decade from Judge White, Dr. Thomlison, Judge Porter, and now the Ombudsman. The minister keeps insisting that yes, they've been done, but my research doesn't indicate that there's really been any comprehensive attack on that problem. It reoccurs with sufficient regularity that I think it really puts in doubt whether or not we've ever addressed ourselves thoroughly to it. I don't see in the budget increased resources to help train workers in native culture and suicide prevention. I gather that only a hundred workers per year can take the program. I don't see anyplace in the budget any particular initiatives to stop this very critical problem of native suicide.

Mr. Chairman, I've often mentioned, too, the problem of children with serious mental health difficulties. I know this probably comes into the Department of Health, but I'd like the minister to comment as to where his department relates to the Department of Health in providing mental health programs. In a recent visit to some of the northern communities, this was the number one difficulty that they described to me. Whether I was talking with local councillors, with school board members, with the chamber of commerce, everyone had problems providing services to children with mental health difficulties. Mr. Chairman, I'd remind the minister that many of these are his children. He is the parent, and I think he does feel that very strongly, and I expect he will describe to us what his intentions are in this regard. I don't think this is any surprise to the minister.

Mr. Chairman, the minister has spoken about adoptions, and only a 4 percent increase here. Perhaps the minister will talk about the need for down-the-road subsidized adoptions as well as special rates for adoptions of special needs children. And when will the regulations be in place for the Child Welfare Act? We need to know: where is the support for families who need

to secure special treatment for children? What happens today when a parent, as the Member for Edmonton-Calder spoke about, is forced to release a child to Family and Social Services under guardianship? The way the law reads, the parent is really forced to abandon the child so they can get the treatment needed. There doesn't seem to be any logic to that. It doesn't strengthen families.

In Family Support Services, Mr. Chairman, I see Day Care Programs and Family and Community Support Services. The day care: I've asked the minister for the subsidy schedule. People cannot move without it, and they cannot plan without it. I cannot understand how the department could have written the white paper and written the amounts unless they had at least some idea. Surely there's a plan A, plan B, plan C. Let us see those so people can begin to think through whether they're going to go back to school, whether they can get a job, whether they can keep the job they have. We also need to know what the turning point is anticipated to be. We need to know how many new families the minister anticipates will now be eligible. I think the minister has been somewhat ambivalent, if I may use the term, on the staff to infant ratio, and perhaps he can clarify that. Is it going to be 4 to 1, or 3 to 1? People are asking that question.

Mr. Chairman, we've had no indicators about the minister's consultation with educational institutions about training programs. He's made some allowances for training for staff in day care, and the staff people are very concerned about it. They don't know if they're going to be able to get in-house training, whether or not they will have to take a year off or whether they will get a subsidy to be able to take off a few months at a time, and where those programs will be available. Those, too, need to happen very quickly, and I'm sure the minister has the answer to those.

FCSS: my favourite program, Mr. Chairman. I think this is the best value for the money of almost anything we do, yet it's very much held back. In Calgary programs are going to be shut down because of it, and I think that's contradictory. It's false economy, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister. This is one place you really get a bargain, and I think that's the place we should be investing a lot more money. I don't know whether there's any contingency plan in place to help services and agencies that are going to be cut off from FCSS, but I expect they'll be beating a path to your door, complaining and concerned, as will their clients. It's a very critical and serious situation, and I don't believe it's economically sound to cut off those agencies that provide us with nonprofit services that multiply that dollar.

Family violence. The 8.1 percent increase: the minister has described where that's going. The women's shelters have requested an additional million to keep pace with the demand. I don't know whether the minister feels that this program cannot compete with some others. I think it has proved itself over and over, and we're not going to be able to serve the women, particularly the women in isolated communities, unless we can keep this one going. Calgary's YWCA, the Sheriff King shelter, turned 500 women and children away last year. We don't know where they are, and that should give us all some pause for thought. Mr. Chairman, the complexity of violence against women, children, and the elderly is well documented, but until we have some comprehensive holistic treatment that includes counseling and service to the abuser, the circle will continue. Now, we've asked for this, but any programs that did exist have now been discontinued. I want to know if the minister intends

to fund family violence clinics that will provide counseling to the abuser as well as the victim.

Mr. Chairman, Shelters for Homeless Adults increased 12.4 percent. Is that for existing shelters, please, or new facilities? Are any of them in rural areas of the province where they are also needed? Perhaps we could have a comment on the status of single men's hostels.

Mr. Chairman, I'll take the liberty of sending the rest of the questions on to the minister.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm also pleased to participate in the budget estimates of Family and Social Services. I commend this government, the minister and the associate minister, and their staff for the fine work they are doing in providing the many programs for the less fortunate of this province. A special thanks to the deputy minister who, I believe, is sitting in the members' gallery, Stan Remple, and a person from my constituency, Clint Lawrie, who traveled all the way from Lac La Biche to be here to listen to the estimates.

Although I'm proud to be part of this government because I feel that this government provides the best programs in Canada for people in need, as a native MLA I can't say that I'm proud of these statistics, because too many of those dependent on social assistance are native people. Our own country, our own home, and for hundreds of years, thousands of years, we were completely self-sufficient. Somehow welfare has become our life-style in less than 40 years, Mr. Chairman. The Athabasca-Lac La Biche constituency, which is my constituency, has the highest rate of welfare per capita in the province; 80 percent of those people, 1,600 or so individuals, are of native ancestry. We have communities in northern Alberta, some in my colleagues' ridings in the north, some communities up to 4,000 population, where we have 70 to 80 percent unemployment and under-employment. We have alcoholism problems, marriage breakups, complete family breakdowns, loss of language and culture. Mr. Chairman, I alone in my home community in the past 30 years have lost 45 friends. I can't say I'm proud.

Mr. Chairman, the native people are no longer satisfied to be dependent on welfare and government handouts. The native people want an alternative, and I would hope the proposed welfare reform addresses this issue. Motion 201, which I introduced this spring, outlines in detail how welfare reform may change the delivery of the welfare system in northern Alberta. I would hope that both Family and Social Services and Career Development and Employment review this motion thoroughly and do some research to see how this program may fit in the overall program of the department's proposed welfare reform. The program I proposed in Motion 201 is not an experiment anymore. It is proven that this program works. I was personally involved in running a program of this nature in a number of communities in northern Alberta, and it works very, very well. I challenge these two ministers to review that carefully and initiate these programs wherever possible.

But, Mr. Chairman, in order to have successful welfare reform, we must have processes in place that will assist people to make the transition from being on welfare and government handouts to being fully productive again. We will require training programs. We will require, no doubt, additional staff to help in the process. We will require, no doubt, a lot more native staff in the department, especially in rural and northern Alberta. But,

most of all, the most important thing in having successful welfare reform, I feel, is that we must have meaningful jobs for the people. Mr. Chairman, that is why I am constantly pressing this government to continue with a plan of economic diversification for this province, especially in the forestry sector, because this means thousands of jobs for northern Albertans and people on welfare, the very jobs both the Official Opposition members and the Liberals on a day-to-day basis work very, very hard to delay and cancel, if possible. The Liberals always say, "Put a moratorium on the pulp mills," and yet they're not ashamed to stand here and ask to increase the welfare for people on welfare. I feel they're heading in the wrong direction. I agree that the people that have to be on welfare should have an increase so they can maintain a reasonable life-style, but people that are employable should not be on welfare. The jobs should be provided and the opportunity given to them to get off welfare and be productive once again.

Mr. Chairman, in northern Alberta we are losing one of our most valuable resources, and that's our youth. We can't hold our youth in northern Alberta, because the job opportunities are not there for our young people. The majority of our youth have to move to the growth centres, where the jobs are, and I feel it is very, very important wherever possible that we provide job opportunities where the people are so that people may get off welfare. Unemployment and welfare affect the whole life-style of people. Our schools are not running at full capacity; our property taxes are too high because we don't have industries; we can't afford many of the options that are taken for granted in growth centres like Edmonton and Calgary. Where in some jurisdictions school children have an opportunity to take up to 120 options, in some of our northern areas you're lucky if you can get up to 60 options. I feel this is an area our government should address, Mr. Chairman, and I hope our Minister of Family and Social Services and the associate minister, jointly with Career Development and Employment, can address this in the very near future.

Again, I feel we are heading in the right direction. I feel we have a Premier that cares for rural Albertans. He definitely cares for native people, and with him leading us, I think we can definitely address the issue.

The question I would have to the minister tonight is in the area of joint delivery between Career Development and Employment and his department, how this delivery system may fit in with his overall plan of welfare reform.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome the opportunity to speak to these estimates. I've heard the minister and the associate minister speak with passion and compassion tonight, and I often hear them in this Assembly accuse us on this side of the House of being self-righteous about caring, as if we don't think they care. I do believe the minister and the associate minister are concerned about people, and care, and I've talked to other people, nonpartisan people, about how caring and concerned individual MLAs are about their constituents. So one has to say, wherein the contradiction there?, because many of their policies seem to reflect a lack of caring.

I think the problem is that their policies and solutions are for individuals experiencing difficulties, and they fail to see the systemic causes of the difficulties so many people in our society

suffer. They fail to see how their policies really impact on how people live their lives, what it means for them on a daily basis. For example, we're still hearing promises of a review of social assistance allowances. In the meantime people are suffering. In the wake of rising rents, they have to take more food money to pay the rent; they have to go to the food bank so they can feed their children. So people on social assistance have difficulty surviving. They do survive, but at what cost? The cost to their physical health.

We know the research that says people that live in poverty do not have proper nutrition. What does that mean for their children's ability to learn in school, their children's physical health. We know that people that live in poverty die at a younger age, that they suffer more serious diseases. So there are health costs to poverty, in some cases irreversible.

We see the emotional and psychological cost of poverty in terms of depression, despair, and hopelessness, hopelessness that is often passed on to children. Those who are barely able to survive are consumed by the struggle to survive. The struggle to survive is stressful and exhausting; they don't have anything left over to move beyond where they are. We hear of the occasional heroic struggles and successes, told as if everyone can achieve. They fail to acknowledge those who are overwhelmed by odds that would overwhelm the best of us, and they fail to recognize that we are all different in our levels of intelligence, energy, health, sense of self: all things necessary if we are going to be able to overcome incredible odds. The stories that are not told are those people that just barely survive in the face of incredible odds, for their survival at all is heroic. We only hear of those who fail, as if somehow they are deficient.

I'd like to now address specific issues. The issue of staffing. The minister spoke proudly of 5,400 compassionate and dedicated staff who are overburdened by high caseloads. Social assistance workers cannot adequately assess the need of a person or a family. In addition, they could be a link to pick up early indicators of stress, family difficulties, or violence in the family, but they are too overworked and are not trained or mandated to serve this most important function, which is frontline intervention.

Child care workers: again, huge caseloads. When I hear about the caseloads and pressures these workers are under, I am reminded of the Richard Cardinal case and the Cavanagh Board of Review. The report is still in my bookcase. I don't think very much has changed. I remember the children I worked with: one social worker after another, one foster home after another. How could any one of us survive not having anyone in our lives that we have known for more than five months, not having a bed of our own, not having the familiarity of routines, of rituals such as Christmas and Easter and birthdays, not even having the familiarity of food that we have enjoyed throughout our lives? How can these children cope with so much change and remain healthy? I would suggest, Mr. Minister, that they cannot and they will be the real deficit of the future, a future in which we will need a healthy population, a healthy work force. In that future, if we continue as we are now, we will have a significant number of adults who have been permanently damaged by this government's failure to care for them in a real way, to address the systemic deficiencies that mean children will grow into adults who cannot participate fully in society. In the present we see these children running away from foster homes; we see these children committing suicide, and I have known more than one of them. This government will have much to answer for in its misguided philosophy and obsession with a monetary deficit that

will mean in the future a deficit in the develop of so many of our future citizens.

We hear also of this department's commitment to battered women and their children. I had to think back, when I read the throne speech this year and last year, and when I see the priorities of this government, battered women and their children, I remember the first time I spoke of battered women and their children in this House. You remember. It was as if I had said something that was not allowed to be said in public, and I received calls of derision. In spite of the rhetoric about commitment to women and children, they are still being turned away from our shelters. Shelters still do not have 100 percent core funding.

We hear very little of the need for treatment for children who have witnessed or have been victims of physical and psychological abuse. We hear little of this government's commitment to the treatment of children who have been sexually abused, whether that abuse has been within or external to the family. We hear of delays in responding, a three weeks' delay in some cases. The minister says serious ones are investigated immediately. How do you assess how serious a case is? One, two, three cigarette burns on the child's back or buttock? What kind of disclosure? How many bruises? Care givers who note evidence of abuse are sickened by delays. In some cases they have to call public health nurses to investigate. There was a time when crisis calls and reports of abuse were required by law to be investigated within 48 hours. Three weeks: for shame. How many children continue to be subject to abuse because of these delays? How many are permanently damaged? How many die? We need treatment for child sexual abuse victims both, as I say, in and outside the family. This is a primary form of prevention.

I would also note the need for treatment for young offenders, children offending against other children when they're 10, 12, and 14 years old. Anyone that works with adult sex offenders in their 20s, 30s, and 40s will discover a history of abusing that started when they were in puberty and early teens. Far too often these young offenders themselves were victims of abuse.

Awareness programs are necessary, but they are not to be seen as an alternative to shelters or to treatment. Awareness does not protect women and children; they know when they're being beaten. They need shelter. They need alternatives. They need second-stage housing. They need social assistance allowances that allow them to have dignity. They need child care. They need job-training programs. They need to be helped to step back into the paid labour force or to have the dignity of caring for their children through a period of transition and trauma. Awareness does not stop the abuser. And let me tell you, I've worked with abusers; they never believe they're abusers. They need treatment at the very least. They usually need to have a bit of time in jail; it certainly gives a strong message that we won't accept this behaviour. I would note the minister's commitment to community-based prevention programs. I would have to ask: where is the follow-up in the evaluation of these programs?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. Order please.

MS M. LAING: If the program is successful, is further funding available?

I would also like to comment on the family conference which I attended. I was really impressed by some of the excellent resource people who spoke very clearly and eloquently about the

changes in society and in our families and the diversity of families and that the '50s idealized family is something to which we cannot return and how we have to make the workplace and the marketplace more responsive to the needs of families. However, many groups and individuals were not invited to attend, and their absence was noted. They were either not there or under-represented. I talk about frontline workers from shelters, representatives of child abuse treatment programs, people living in poverty, people from the corrections field, members of the gay and lesbian community, members of the single parents.

We hear the minister has a primary commitment to keeping families together. Where is this commitment to the single mother of a healthy infant who is required to seek paid employment? What about her family's need for her to mother in the way that is best for her and her infant? What about these horrible child care staff/child ratios for infants, being raised to four infants to one worker? I cannot express too strongly the outrage I feel at such an initiative.

I would note the minister's reference to the widows' pension. Why the discriminatory nature of this program? Are people who have never married or have divorced less valued members of society? Have they made fewer contributions? What is the basis of this discriminatory requirement? The further question I have – and I would note vote 2.2.4 – how is it that the funds allocated to this program have been reduced by 7.1 percent?

I note the increase in funding to Adoptions, vote 3.1.4. Why is this necessary? Is it a result of the privatization of this service? The minister has spoken tonight of extending child welfare support to individuals beyond the age of 18, and I welcome that. I used to work with kids who turned 18, and they were still children; they needed support. But I would ask the minister on what basis? What criteria will be applied, and for how long?

We hear the minister's commitment to community-based programs and the incredible involvement in volunteers, and I support that. I worked in a volunteer sector agency, and I often felt humbled by the dedication and commitment of those volunteers. The minister hopes they will continue to flourish. But what we often hear in talking to the volunteer sector is how overburdened they are and how they have to spend far too much time raising money, working bingos and casinos. Will the minister commit to not increasing the financial burden the volunteer sector already bears? Many of the services these community-based agencies provide are essential services. They should not be a matter of charity or how successful you are at the casino.

We've heard about the minister's day care funding initiatives, that they will increase choice, but all I have been hearing from parents is that it will mean a loss of choice, that some women will be legislated back into the home. An analysis of taxation systems shows that single-income, two-parent families do not subsidize at any but the lowest, poverty level two-income, two-parent families.

Mr. Chairman, we have heard how people have become dependent on welfare, particularly in the native community. This problem is not the availability of welfare but a dominant society that has not allowed those people to retain what has been important to them – I think of their cultures and customs and ways of life – and has not offered to them real alternatives of training for jobs that exist, that pay a living wage and have a sense of future. People are destroyed not by welfare but by a welfare system that entraps them by stripping them of dignity

and of hope. Punitive welfare systems do that. Welfare reform must mean not cutbacks but real opportunities with a level of assistance that maintains dignity, that allows choices, that provides hope. The choice must never be between jobs and protecting the environment. That is a false choice. Economic diversification can mean protection of the environment and the creation of jobs provided there is a political will to seek a solution that incorporates the need for employment and the need to protect the environment. We must not sell out our future with short-term goals. We must not sell out the well-being of our children and our disadvantaged people now by saying we must balance the budget at all costs.

Thank you.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Chairman, let me begin by thanking all the members that have participated so far this evening. I particularly appreciate the spirit of goodwill and co-operation as together we try to address some very important issues and concerns to this province. I think that throughout my comments I tried to emphasize the need for Albertans to be able to work together if we're going to make some meaningful progress. So I appreciated that tone in the Assembly this evening.

I'd like to begin by going in reverse order, if I can, Mr. Chairman, so some of the thoughts are fresher in my mind. An awful lot of suggestions and recommendations and a number of questions. I'll try to respond to as many as I can at this point. Certainly for those I miss, we'll make sure we get back to those members with the detail and the information they did request.

I want to begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore for the sincere concerns she's raised and expressed. She talked about the costs of poverty, and I think we're all only too familiar with some of the problems related to it. She also talked about the heroics of some individuals that have worked their way through the poverty system and indeed have become success stories. I think it's important, Mr. Chairman, that we reflect on those as well. There are success stories out there, and it's up to us to make sure there are even more.

A number of members made reference to caseloads. I know this is a sensitive time because we are in negotiations, but I still want to at least add a few comments in response to the caseloads of both income security and child welfare workers. I want to assure members that we are prepared to work with caseworkers. I personally have gone out and met with caseworkers and understand very well some of the situations they face on a day-to-day basis. We're wanting to work with them to address those concerns. There are a number of ways we can address caseloads. Certainly increasing workers is one; decreasing caseloads is another. How we deliver services is yet another. I guess I want to say it's a very, very complex problem, and obviously it's not easy to say what the magic number of caseloads might be, particularly as it relates to child welfare, because we all know that every case is unique. Some require great demands of caseworkers, and others require less time. So I would only say that we certainly want to resolve the issue and want to work with our caseworkers in doing that.

Mr. Chairman, a number of members raised a concern about child welfare, in particular foster care. I would only want to say that I'm working very closely with the Alberta Foster Parent Association. I have had many occasions to meet with the past president, Norm Brownell, and the current president, Frits Wortman. We're making some very significant progress as we address the needs of foster parents and, again, the foster parent model that includes more training for foster parents. Last year,

some of you will recall, we were able to add a significant number of additional special needs foster homes, additional training for foster parents in that particular area.

The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, as always, Mr. Chairman – and I appreciate it – expressed her concerns over family violence. Certainly we share that concern. It's absolutely deplorable; it's beyond comprehension. I can only say that I am encouraged to see that it is finally coming into the open, that society is at least willing to recognize that we have a problem there and that we have a role to play. I would want to point out, though, that again this year we were able to increase funding at a time of restraint by over 8 percent, that last year it was 24 percent, that in the last few years alone we have seen funding doubled in terms of our commitment to women's shelters in this province. We were able to introduce last year funding for demonstration projects, educational projects. We've seen it dealt with on a national agenda, and again, recognizing that it really is a multidimensional problem and does require a multidimensional solution, I'm certainly working closely with the Solicitor General, the Attorney General, my cabinet colleagues, and community agencies. We're all looking for some meaningful answers.

I would say that I am encouraged as well by some of the innovation that is coming out of the community. I just want to share with you one particular project that you might or might not be familiar with. It was a project that was initiated by some of our child caseworkers out of Calgary, and it involved a number of departments: the Solicitor General, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Attorney General, the Department of Family and Social Services. It involved the business community, the Calgary city police, the RCMP, Crown prosecutors, community agencies. Through this co-operative effort they were able to develop a film called *For the Kids*. It's a training film to help professionals deal in particular with child abuse. I had the opportunity of seeing it, and I know that it's a film that will be shared right across Canada and the United States. We can take a great deal of pride in the leadership and the self-initiative that those participants displayed in making this film a reality. In particular, a great deal of credit to the child care workers involved down in Calgary: they did it, I might note, as a self-initiative, on their own time and well beyond the call of their duty. I think that just exemplifies the kind of dedication and commitment that these workers bring to their job.

The other things I would want to say at this time about child welfare: again, Mr. Chairman, I'd want to point out that we have amongst the most progressive legislation, for starters, in all of Canada. In the short time that I've been in office, I know that I've had inquiries from a number of other provinces and states because they've heard about the progressive child welfare legislation that we have in Alberta, and they're interested in it. They want to borrow some ideas from us, and we're certainly willing to provide them with that kind of information.

Mr. Chairman, the Children's Advocate, which was implemented this past year. I've received many letters already complimenting the Children's Advocate and his staff on the work they're doing already, and it's only just the beginning there. I know that they're going to be there to make sure that young people's interests are being protected.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore for taking the time to participate in our Lieutenant Governor's conference here in Edmonton. It was well attended. I'm surprised that she would point out that many groups were not invited to attend or were not invited to represent. We went to

exhaustive efforts, Mr. Chairman, to make sure that as broad a spectrum, as broad a diversity of Albertans could be represented there, and we had representation from all levels of government. We had representations from chambers of commerce, school boards, and hospital boards. We had single mothers on social allowance there. We had educators. We had the clergy. We had many, many of the community agencies and groups represented there. Just a tremendous cross-section of Albertans, and they came and devoted a lot of time and attention. I know that the Member for Red Deer-North is looking forward to working with the new Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families in reviewing and going through those recommendations as a result of their efforts.

I'm going to comment a little further on the child care initiatives perhaps when I address some of the concerns raised by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. The member also spoke about welfare entrapment. I certainly share her concerns there, and I'm looking forward to bringing forward my social reforms at an appropriate time.

I want to thank the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche for his contribution. As always, he brings forward a strong and compassionate plea on behalf of his constituency, which he represents so well and so effectively in this Assembly. I want to say that I listened carefully, and I think he brought the statistics on welfare that we often talk about down to a very real situation in terms of how it's impacting his communities. I appreciate the challenge that he's issued to my colleague and myself as it relates to the Calling Lake project and his Motion 201, and I want to say that I'm looking forward to visiting Calling Lake with him and having a firsthand look at some of the progress that they've been able to make there. I'm sure those are the kinds of things we're going to be looking at as we bring forward our social reform. With specific reference to his suggestion of joint delivery with Career Development and Employment, I want to assure you that I'm working very closely with my colleague the Minister of Career Development and Employment, and obviously they're going to be a part of the social reform as well.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, thank you; I got your note with your additional questions as well, and I'd be happy to respond to those. Again, I particularly appreciate the tone of her comments, I think some very helpful, very good suggestions and certainly concerns that I share. She talked about our social allowance clientele in the sense of the powerlessness they feel at times, and I certainly recognize that. She also shared, I think, our commitment to the importance of working with the volunteer and corporate sectors. I think I gave an example a few moments ago of how the corporate sector has a role to play, and as I say, I was encouraged to see members of the chamber of commerce attending the Lieutenant Governor's Conference on the Family, so it is important that all of us work together at all levels of government and with community agencies.

She talked about the depth of poverty. I can only say that none of us in Alberta takes any pride in seeing people living below the poverty line. It's not a problem unique to Albertans. It's not a problem unique to Canada. I noted through some of my reading that John F. Kennedy in the United States back in 1962 declared war on poverty. At that time there were massive cash infusions into the system, but regrettably, it failed miserably. Poverty, if anything, has gotten worse on the States' side. So we know that dollars alone can't be the answer, but certainly it's part of it.

In reference to the single parents and only a 1.8 percent increase, that of course is assuming there isn't going to be any

reduced caseload. I'm still hopeful that we're going to be able to start to see some turnaround in those trends and that, indeed, at some point we can start to see a decrease in caseload.

The decrease in employables is just simply a fact. There are 2,000 fewer employables in our caseload today than there were last year, and I think that's indicative of what I am anticipating will be a continued downward trend. We've seen it for two years, and we're projecting that we're going to see it for three. [interjections] Some of these folks are getting anxious to go home, Mr. Chairman, but I do quickly want to respond. We've seen some very good input, and I think it's appropriate that we take at least a few moments to respond to some of these things.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made reference to the lunch programs in the schools. Yes, the Minister of Education in part is addressing that, particularly in the inner city, but I would say that the real question isn't about providing that one meal per day but about providing three meals per day. I think that again is going to mean that we're going to have to look at the delivery of our programs and assess how we can, again, help some of our clientele with some of their needs directly.

Food banks: 31 in Alberta. The Halifax experience: should they become permanent? I guess I could ask the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Calder the same thing. Are you telling me that we should close food banks down? From our perspective and as we evaluate them – I know in Calgary the information that I've been provided with is that 98 percent of our clientele are able to manage without food banks. In Edmonton they tell me that closer to 95 percent are able to manage without food banks. I certainly met with food bank representatives, and they tell me they're meeting an important need. There's also the working poor out there. There are people in interim situations that are able to receive some assistance from food banks, and at times this can keep them from having to turn to social allowance. But I'd be interested in their viewpoints. If they're telling me that we should close food banks, then I think they should perhaps tell the food banks that as well.

You talked about staff turnover rates of 50 and 85 percent. I'd be interested in knowing where those numbers came from. I certainly recognize that there are turnovers, although recognizing that when you look at statistics like that, in some instances it's because individuals have changed roles within the departments. In some instances it's because they've gone home to have families. In some instances it's because they've gone out into the same work but in the private sector. In some instances it's because they've chosen another career path. All of those are contributing factors, and, yes, in some instances it's stress and caseload. All are factors, Mr. Chairman.

A number of questions on the assured income for the severely handicapped. I can only say that it is being looked at. There are a number of recommendations within the action plan that need to be taken into consideration as it relates to the AISH program, and we intend to do that. We're obviously working very closely with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and with the colleague responsible for services to the disabled, and we're going to look at it in a very comprehensive way. I think that's what Albertans would expect and want us to do.

Native suicides. Some of the reports again referenced: I can only say that we are making considerable progress. Again, we're working with the native community. I'm working with some of my colleagues, and I'm particularly pleased to have the input

from the Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche and the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and the kind of insight and experience and knowledge that they can share with us. But I just want to quickly outline some of the things, again, that we're doing there. The establishment of a bursary fund for native Albertans to help them with their secondary education. A year ago we modified our standards for recruitment of child welfare workers so we could ensure that we could attract and hire native people with appropriate experience. We've had in place now the advisory committee on native child welfare, and they're playing a very important role in advising this office. We fund the Indian Association of Alberta, one staff member to particularly work with native child welfare.

We have a native services unit established that, again, works and consults with the native community and with the department to ensure that our policies and programs do take into consideration the needs of native Albertans. The administration reform project, which is there to clarify the role and responsibilities of both the province and the federal government in response to on- and off-reserve natives, was something that I initiated upon coming into this portfolio. Ongoing discussions with the Metis Association and the establishment of the framework agreement, a number of tripartite agreements with bands here in the province of Alberta. So considerable progress, a lot of helpful input. We're trying to respond to them as quickly as we can, and we're going to continue to do that. Native awareness training, suicide training: we've put hundreds of our social workers through those programs already, but we're going to have to step it up, and we're going to have to do better. I acknowledge that, and we're going to continue to make progress in that area.

Mr. Chairman, I know I'm pushing my luck, but I want to respond, finally, to the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'm having a little harder time being quite as charitable. I do have to say that I take exception to some of the comments. The Member for Edmonton-Norwood often talks about rhetoric. But she started off by saying it's not right for the government to blame the deficit on the poor. Well, I take total exception to that. This government has never done that. We've never for one moment suggested that the deficit is the responsibility of the poor. We've never for one moment suggested that we're going to balance the budget on the backs of the poor. Just the contrary, Mr. Chairman, just the contrary: again, a 3.1 percent increase in this budget at a time of restraint.

I hear this member, Mr. Chairman, describe us an uncaring government. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. You'd better believe this government cares. You'd better believe this government cares: not just words, action. I could go down these front lines, and I could cite initiatives by every individual minister in this cabinet towards helping Albertans in this province. Right off the top I think of the Provincial Treasurer, who's reduced if not taken thousands of Albertans right off the tax roll. The Minister of Health protecting 250,000 low-income Albertans from health care premiums as well as providing an excellent health care service; 260,000 seniors protected from health care premiums. The Minister of Career Development and Employment and all the initiatives that he's introduced on behalf of low-income Albertans. The Minister of Education and the Minister of Advanced Education and the initiatives that they're bringing forward. You better believe, Mr. Chairman, that this is a caring government, and we are committed to addressing these societal needs.

Mr. Chairman, the member again commented on my social reforms, and she talked about a simple situation. It's not a simple situation. It's a very complex situation, and yes, we're going to take the time to react appropriately, not the knee-jerk approach as suggested by the member opposite. Albertans expect that kind of approach from the NDP, but they expect more of the government. They expect the government to take the appropriate time to consult with Albertans, to work with Albertans, to talk to user groups.

MR. McEACHERN: [Inaudible] gave yourself a 30 percent raise.

MR. OLDRING: Mr. Chairman, I would assume from that comment that the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway has done the honourable thing with his 30 percent raise. [interjection]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. minister. Order please. [interjection] Order, Edmonton-Kingsway. If there's some need to go outside and discuss with each other, please do so, but the minister should have the opportunity to speak. Please proceed.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, the member referenced the cutback in single employables, and again the response is good news, Mr. Chairman. It's indicative of the drop in caseload, 2,000 less this year, and I'm delighted to see that trend. There was reference in terms of how many are short-term jobs. I don't know. I can only say that the trend is 2,000 less on a consistent basis. So I'm assuming that a good number of those are long-term jobs.

FCSS funding was raised I think by two or three members. I certainly share the same sense of commitment that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised, and that is that we recognize the very significant contribution of FCSS. I think it is exceptional value for the dollars that we invest. I can only say that since '82-83 the funding has grown from \$11.6 million to \$32 million. That's a 300 percent increase over a very short period of time. But having said that, I'm looking forward to working with FCSS boards right across this province and working with my colleagues to assure them of the necessary and appropriate support.

I've already touched briefly on the role of child welfare, foster children, so I'm not going to expand on that any further.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pressing my luck. I do want to say to the Member for Edmonton-Calder that she did have some good suggestions in there as well, and I acknowledge and appreciate that. I would hope that would be the kind of approach she would want to take in the future rather than trying to introduce and suggest things that aren't necessarily totally accurate. I don't think it becomes the member because I know she means well and I know she does share our sense of caring and commitment.

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I thank again the members who contributed so meaningfully to the Department of Family and Social Services.

I move that we adjourn debate at this time.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion by the minister to adjourn debate, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried. The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[At 10:44 p.m. the House adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]