

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Wednesday, May 8, 1991**

2:30 p.m.

Date: 91/05/08

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head:

Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving both our province and our country.

Amen.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place filed a letter, which he wrote to me. I've now been able to see the letter, and I am filing my reply.

MR. ANDERSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to file the report of the Funeral Services Working Committee on the funeral services business, with recommendations designed to ensure an honest and fair marketplace. As well, included is a news release and a questionnaire that will go to funeral services businesses and consumers interested in the topic.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table two reports today. The first is the 1990 annual report of the Alberta Association of Architects, and the second is the Gas Alberta Operating Fund report of fund operations for the year ended March 31, 1990.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Legislature Library copies of the national Management Plan for Nitrogen Oxides and Volatile Organic Compounds and the summary report of that plan. These documents were released yesterday in conjunction with the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment's semi-annual meeting in Halifax.

Also, I would like to file Motion for a Return 298.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, in the interest of providing full and complete information to all members of the Assembly, I am tabling today the response to Written Question 276.

As well, I am tabling three reports: one is Update on Teacher Supply and Demand in Alberta, 1990-91; a series of questions and answers on year-round education, a subject that has been of some interest to all members; and two different reports related to the Special Education Review, one dated May of 1990 and another dated January of 1991.

head:

Introduction of Special Guests

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly approximately 140 students from our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan. The Jubilee school from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, normally comes to visit our Legislature every second year. They are split into two groups at the moment: one group is on tour; the other group is located mostly in the members' gallery. I'd like to present to you first of all 70 students from Jubilee school in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, accompanied by teachers Miss Senga, Mrs. Paley, Mrs. Buchko, Mr. Arraf, bus drivers Mrs.

Rhonda Mathisen, Mr. Keith Flanagan, and Mr. Arnold Gower. I'd request permission to present the other half at the end of question period. I'd ask that they rise in the gallery and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the Minister of Education.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature 12 members of the Friends of the West Country. They are here today with the president of the group, Mr. Henry Collins. They are here requesting that the proposed Sunpine wood treatment plant receive a proper environmental impact assessment. I would ask that they rise in the gallery and receive the welcome of the members of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of the class of 1986, it's an honour for me today to have a friend and colleague in the members' gallery. Mrs. Ute Davies is a constituent in the Calgary-Shaw constituency, serves on the Social Care Facilities Review Committee for our government, and I'd ask her to stand and receive a very warm welcome from all members of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Drayton-Valley.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege on behalf of my colleague from Highwood to introduce 37 bright students from the Cayley school. They're seated in the public gallery, and they're accompanied today by teachers Mr. Nugent and Mr. Brazier and parents Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Poncsak, Mr. Eaglesham, Mr. Brownridge, and Mrs. Young. I would ask that they stand and receive the cordial welcome of this House.

MR. MAIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce some out-of-town guests as well, a couple who are most vitally interested in the workings of the Alberta Legislature and its goings on. They're also vitally interested in finding out what their son does for part of his work day. I'd like my parents, Claude and Lillian Main, from Victoria, B.C., to stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. members, it's only fitting that today we should congratulate 32 of you on the fifth anniversary of your election, May 8, 1986.

head:

Oral Question Period**Rochon Sands Provincial Park**

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Every so often an issue arises that rolls everything that's wrong with this Conservative government into one big ball: its unfairness, its paranoid secrecy; its lack of understanding about ethics, and its secret deals with its friends. Two years ago the Premier bought land to build his house in Stettler from the MacDonalds, a family who we now understand are good friends of the Premier. At that time Mrs. MacDonald and her family were fortunate enough to hold the government contract to maintain the Rochon Sands public campground, just down the road from the Premier's house. Funny enough, we now hear charges from the former park manager as well as another local Stettler couple that the MacDonalds have won renewal of the contract without allowing

these other people the opportunity to offer competitive bids; in other words, the contract has been awarded without tender. My question to the Premier. Since the Premier's own constituents can't seem to get the Premier to answer the question, I'll ask it for them: will the Premier confirm that this contract has been awarded to his friends without tender?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I follow the hon. member's question. I believe he's talking about a contract that was awarded to somebody before I ever knew the person and that the person has continued to have a contract with the government. I would never get involved in those matters. It must be the Minister of Recreation and Parks, and I'd ask him to deal with the matter.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, we do have a contract at Rochon Sands. The contract people there have done an excellent job. As part of the policy of Recreation and Parks we look at the individual people who have the contracts, and if they have done a good job, they have first option to the next contract that goes forward. We have some 300-plus contracts in the province. We have eight provincial parks that are privatized at the present time, and we will be looking to privatize eight more parks this year. That is consistent with our policy as it relates to our contracts.

MR. MARTIN: Just coincidences, Mr. Speaker. Just coincidences, and for the Premier to say he doesn't know anything about it is ridiculous.

I'll go to the minister he wants to shuffle it onto. The minister refuses to provide any details whatsoever about this public contract awarded to the MacDonalds, paid with public money, by saying this is private information. What nonsense. Since the MacDonalds have received \$40,000 in government grants and are receiving public money to run a public campground through a public contract, why won't the minister make this contract public? What has he got to hide?

2:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the individuals running this campground have received no grants through Recreation and Parks. Their contract, I repeat, is consistent with the policy of Recreation and Parks on the extension of contracts throughout this province.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, and we'll talk about it in a more general way. At the same time that the MacDonalds are maintaining the Rochon Sands public campground, they're also operating their own private campsite, called Ol' MacDonald's RV resort, just a couple of miles away. Funny enough, Mr. Speaker, the attendance at Rochon Sands is dropping but the attendance at the MacDonald's campsite is rising. I'm sure it's just a coincidence. Will the Premier tell us if he thinks there is any problem at all with this apparent conflict of interest, and if not, why not?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to come back to his question at the beginning. The family had this contract, I gather, before I ever met them. They've fulfilled the responsibilities that Recreation and Parks have asked them to, and Recreation and Parks have continued their contract because of that. I don't know what the hon. member is trying to get at, but I suggest that he is the leader of a party in this province

that has had some history of having some pride in their leaders. Would he get up out of the gutter on this matter? [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order [interjections] Order. Before the second question proceeds, members do need to refer to *Beauchesne* 410(16). Thank you.

Second main question, Leader of the Opposition.

NovAtel Communications Ltd.

MR. MARTIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications. Yesterday we revealed that NovAtel made a \$43.3 million payment to the Telus Corporation on January 17 and asked the minister why he never revealed this at the time. The minister responded with some mumbo jumbo about cash flow or something or other and also by saying, and I quote: this loan repayment didn't cost taxpayers a cent. Today NovAtel's vice-president and chief controlling officer directly contradicted the minister by indicating that this \$43 million was repaid with the \$131 million the government paid to NovAtel to cover its 1990 second half losses. It can't be both ways. My question to the minister is: can he explain why he said this repayment didn't cost the taxpayers a cent when NovAtel's chief controller says it was made from taxpayers' money contributed in March?

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, the reason I said that, and it's certainly true, is that the advances were made by Telus Corporation. A public corporation acting in the private sector advanced moneys after the privatization to NovAtel, and NovAtel merely returned Telus's moneys to them. That does not cost, in the bottom line, the taxpayer.

MR. MARTIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess we want to know who owns this company then. If they hand out \$43 million, that's not a loss to the taxpayers of Alberta? Let's get serious about this.

MR. STEWART: In answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, no, it isn't.

MR. MARTIN: I'd sure hate to have this man running my personal finances. We'd be in a lot of trouble.

Let me just ask this question then: because we get different, conflicting statements from this minister, from his department, from NovAtel, from Telus, and from the Auditor General, will the minister now come clean and put his money where his mouth is and lay out the financial statements of NovAtel? He has them, Mr. Speaker.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Speaker, we will indeed table the audited financial statements of NovAtel as soon as they have had an opportunity to be reviewed. We've always tabled and been forthcoming with respect to the information on NovAtel, just as we did with respect to the losses when they came forward.

As for me looking after the hon. leader's finances, the gentleman opposite cannot even get his own party out of debt, so I don't know why he would take exception to that.

Rochon Sands Provincial Park (continued)

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are interested in openness and fairness, particularly in the awarding of contracts. I want to pursue an issue that was raised by the Leader of the

Opposition. My questions are to the Minister of Recreation and Parks. This is a \$67,000 contract that was awarded by the province of Alberta to the MacDonald entrepreneur without public notice, without any kind of public advertising, and with no tendering process that was open, as it usually is. This isn't a matter of extending a contract; this is the original contract that I'm talking about. Mr. Speaker, other Albertans were interested in tendering on this project: \$67,000 for that, \$53,500 in special grants to the MacDonald's RV park. My question to the minister is this: given that it is a policy to advertise and to publicly tender and given that this policy is a good policy because it ensures value for the taxpayers' dollar, will the minister tell this Assembly why that policy was breached and ignored and a contract was awarded without the publication and public tendering that usually goes with contracts like these?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, two things in answer to that question. One, there was no grant given with respect to the contract on Rochon Sands from Recreation and Parks, and any insinuation on this question must be directed to some location other than Recreation and Parks. Number two, to answer his second part, the procedures that are normally put in place by Recreation and Parks on issuing and following through with their contracts were done in this case.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, given that the department has advertised within the Stettler constituency for maintenance contracts in other parks but not this particular one, I want to know why this one was excluded and a separate, secret deal was made with the MacDonald family. Why was that the case?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat once again in reference to this question: throughout this province we have a policy as it relates to contracts given out in provincial parks, and when the contractor is doing an excellent job, we follow through with first option on the renewal of those contracts. That has been done consistently throughout this province. There is nothing in this case that's exceptional from other parks in the province.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister continues to deflect the matter being raised. He hasn't answered the question.

My last question to the minister is this: given that contracts that are properly tendered are usually tabled and the public can view those tendered documents, those public documents, will the minister commit to tabling in this Assembly the maintenance contract and any documentation that relates to the maintenance contract between the government and the MacDonald entrepreneur?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there is a section within the legislative process called Motions for Returns, and I would ask the member to respect that.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.
Smoky River.

Reforestation

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the Forum for Young Albertans held yesterday the opposition forestry critic alleged that 40 percent of all land that has been harvested for forestry operations today is not reforested. To the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife: is this allegation true?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely false. In fact, the truth of the matter is that less than 5 percent of the area that's been forested in Alberta over the last 25 years has not been treated – by treated, I mean reforested – and that area was purposely left that way because natural regeneration was the proper course of action. There are some areas in the province where there has been aspen competition that has reduced conifer regeneration, but today it's an asset to have aspen. It's certainly a very valuable resource. In addition, Mr. Speaker, I might say that for every conifer cut in this province, we plant three.

2:50

MR. SPEAKER: Supplementary.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the advent of the new forestry development in Alberta, we'll have a tremendous need for additional seedling and nursery stock. What action is the minister taking to see that the needs of the province are adequately addressed?

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: It's true that with the expansion of the forest industry we're going to need more seedlings. We've been doing a review of how it would be best to achieve the about a hundred million seedlings we're going to need in the future. We've looked at the opportunities to do it as a government by putting a container facility somewhere in the province, and we've looked also at the private sector. I might say, Mr. Speaker, that we're leaning towards the private sector, and in the course of the next two weeks or so I'll be able to outline clearly the opportunity there will be for Albertans in growing seedlings in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: There's a 38 percent shortfall, and I can prove it.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. We're getting on with the questions.

Sunpine Forest Products Ltd.

MR. McINNIS: On Monday I asked the Premier, unsuccessfully, if he would denounce the effort of Sunpine Forest Products to get out from under an environmental impact assessment by threatening to withdraw the project. Today I'd like to ask the Minister of the Environment, who is responsible for this area, why he apparently asked Sunpine to release this superficial and, I would say, shoddy disclosure statement that is supposed to be in lieu of an environmental impact assessment, which the company is trying to pass off as being sufficient to meet the need. Why has he failed to this date in his clear responsibility to secure a proper environmental impact assessment on behalf of all the people of Alberta for this important project?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not failing; I think I'm doing an adequate job, a more than adequate job. I think I'm doing a pretty good job, as a matter of fact. Nor did I have any discussions relative to the company releasing any kind of statement whatsoever. What I asked the company to do and what the department has asked the company to do is what any company would be asked to do under a normal environmental impact assessment process: that is, one, prepare an environmental impact statement; two, put that statement out for public discussion in an informal sense; three, do a deficiency review;

four, have all that information brought together so that even the hon. member can understand it; and five, do an adjudication as to the formality of a public hearing or what further steps should be taken relative to the environmental impact assessment process. That is what is evolving at this particular stage.

MR. McINNIS: Well, before he breaks his arm patting himself on the back, this is not an environmental impact statement, and that's the whole issue. The department has not required the proponent to prepare an environmental impact assessment. I wonder when he's going to get it straight and order Sunpine Forest Products to begin and commence an environmental impact assessment on this project? When?

MR. KLEIN: It's not a matter of me getting it straight; as usual, it's a matter of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place getting it straight. He's consistently been unable to do that.

If there are deficiencies in that document, then through the course of a normal deficiency review those will be identified, those will be communicated to the company. They will then have to address all those problems to make the project environmentally right. If they don't, the project won't go ahead.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is denying its own Natural Resources Conservation Board legislation by failing to insist that the Sunpine wood treatment project be subjected to a proper environmental impact assessment and a proper review by the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Instead, what we have is this document called, whatever this is, a project . . . [interjections] Why don't you cut them off, Mr. Speaker?

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark, now the question.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead what we have is something called a project disclosure document, whatever that is, masquerading as an environmental impact assessment, and a few public hearings, which this minister has to admit are nothing more than coffee parties stacked by Sunpine Forest Products Ltd. My question is to the Minister of the Environment. What does it take for this minister not only to call for a proper environmental impact assessment but also to demand and expect a proper Natural Resources Conservation Board review of that project before he ever considers allowing it to proceed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, obviously Chip hasn't been listening to the answers provided to Dale. Mr. Speaker, all I can do is repeat what I said before; that is, the company is obliged to prepare an environmental impact statement. Now, the hon. member obviously has an opinion of that statement. After we have done a deficiency review, we might have the same opinion, and we'll go back to the company and say: "Look, there are things in here that are right; there are some things in here that perhaps are wrong. What you will have to do is address all the deficiencies." At that point we will decide whether the project – and it's not a mandatory project, as I've been able to determine thus far under the NRCB. We will then make the determination as to whether that project will go to the NRCB or some other form of public hearing.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, it's deficient because it's not an environmental impact assessment; it's a project disclosure document, whatever that is, new terminology.

My second question is to the Minister of Tourism. In the absence of any kind of proper environmental impact assessment, in the absence of any kind of proper cost/benefit analysis, any kind of economic trade-off analysis, how can he assure the people of Alberta and the people of that area of the province that we're not going to lose a great deal more in potential tourism economic development benefits than we're ever going to gain from this proposed Sunpine wood treatment project?

MR. SPARROW: Mr. Speaker, there's good co-ordination between our Department of Tourism and the minister's staff in Environment. Communication does take place, and they do excellent co-ordination of possible opportunities for tourism projects right throughout this province. I'd like to bring it to all members' attention that we have over a thousand active files of development proposals within the province right now and over 328 communities that are very actively promoting tourism in their area. The co-operation between our department and all the other departments of government, including the Department of the Environment, is going very, very well.

Kananaskis Ski Proposal

MR. PAYNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope I won't be lumped in with Chip and Dale today.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans who are acquainted with the splendour and the beauty of Mount Sparrowhawk in Kananaskis Country were concerned recently to learn of a possible heli-ski recreational proposal for that mountain. I'm wondering: can the Minister of the Environment advise the Assembly what environmental impact assessment procedures will be put in place to ensure that this province's very high environmental standards will be incorporated in that project should it proceed.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important, first of all, to understand the process relative to environmental impact assessments, including the new process of referring projects to the NRCB, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, or having projects automatically go to that board. First of all, it's up to the proponent to prepare a document, a document that's called an environmental impact assessment statement. It could be a two-page document; it could be a 30-page document; it could be a pile of documents that high. That document is then submitted to the public for review in an informal sense. The public's comments as well as the department's comments as well as the comments of various other departments are all taken into consideration, and at that point a determination is made as to whether that project goes to some form of public hearing. The process for public hearing has now been set up as the Natural Resources Conservation Board. There are certain projects that will automatically go to that board because they're of sufficient size, and there are certain projects that will go to that board on the minister's recommendation.

Where we are with respect to the Sparrowhawk project is that we're doing an initial screening of their basic environmental impact assessment statement. That statement will then have to go out for public input, there will be a deficiency review, and we will decide at that point as to what further steps will be taken.

3:00

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Speaker, for those of our constituents who aren't familiar with these new environmental assessment

procedures, can the minister indicate to the Assembly approximately when he expects to make his Mount Sparrowhawk decision?

MR. KLEIN: The decision relative to how much further this will go in terms of a formalized public hearing process will probably take about a month to a month and a half to complete by the time we do have the public input stage and the deficiency review.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

West Yellowhead, followed by Edmonton-Avonmore, then Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Fuel Contamination Incident

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The poisoning of more than 100 people by contaminated diesel fuel in Hinton remains a mystery after a full year, largely due to the delay caused by the buck-passing of government departments trying to decide who should handle this issue. Sadly, when the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs says that somebody should be inspecting for contaminated fuel but adds that it should be Health, Environment, or Occupational Health instead of his department, it seems this government has not learned from its mistakes. I'd like to ask the Minister of the Environment: since the minister must surely agree that bureaucratic buck-passing is not an acceptable way to deal with environmental health problems, will the minister share with Albertans his plans to ensure effective responses and any interdepartmental liaison in the future so that tragedies like the Hinton poisoning can be avoided?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that was a good question from the opposition for a change. It was a good question, and it offers us the opportunity to provide the answer in the form of new legislation that is going to be tabled. Certainly this was brought up, as the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane led a series of public hearings throughout the province on new environmental law, that indeed there needs to be tougher and better co-ordination between various departments involved in these matters: Occupational Health and Safety, Health, Consumer Affairs, and Environment. Indeed, we're now considering the panel's recommendation that we legislate some kind of formal arrangement where we can bring these jurisdictions together to deal with problems such as that just described by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Speaker, Albertans still have more questions than answers about this incident. We don't know how the contamination got into the fuel, who was responsible, how much blame lies with the government for mishandling the situation, and whether or not this could happen again. We don't even have a satisfactory explanation for the odd coincidence that the most important evidence, two 50,000 litre tanks, were stolen before they could be analyzed. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order on both sides. Let's get to the question.

MR. DOYLE: I'd like to ask the Premier. The Premier must surely agree that this is a matter of public health and public concern and Albertans deserve an answer to this mystery. Will the Premier undertake to hold a public inquiry into this incident

and get to the bottom of it once and for all and not laugh about the situation?

MR. GETTY: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment has already dealt with the matter. The hon. member is now calling for an inquiry. Is that what I understand? Well, I would ask him to provide to the Attorney General more information that he feels would call for an inquiry. Inquiries are very important decisions. They cost tremendous amounts of money. I know that the opposition members like to spend, spend, spend taxpayers' dollars, but I would appreciate the hon. member justifying the request he's making.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Avonmore.

Women's Issues

MS M. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are outraged at the callous disregard of a screaming woman's cry for help because an emergency operator thought it was a domestic dispute. Clearly the Solicitor General's poster campaign and directives stressing that family violence is a serious crime are not working. To the Solicitor General: will he now commit to evaluating and making necessary improvements and training available to ensure effective and sensitive delivery of services to battered women by police and emergency services throughout the province?

MR. FOWLER: Mr. Speaker, I too believe that it approaches an outrage and a tragedy that 20 minutes would elapse between the advice of a call and the dispatch of a car to that situation, where there were actually screams heard over the telephone. I am very, very concerned about it. I do not believe, though, that that is indicative of a total failure of the program that we have put in place. As a matter of fact, we have ample figures to show that our program is succeeding. This does not take away by any means our concern about what occurred in Calgary at that time. I don't think the operator that took the call initially can be faulted. That person, in fact, passed the call on to the Calgary police force and indicated that it sounded like a family dispute, which was a perfectly valid comment, incorrect though it was. It was right for the person to make the comment and give an opinion as to what was going on there. What was not correct, of course, was the slow response, and I do plan on having a further look into this.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Speaker, we are further shocked today by the dismissal of charges against a doctor accused of sexually assaulting female patients. In view of statements by Supreme Court Justices Bertha Smith and Beverly McLachlin that our justice system has a long way to go to overcome gender biases, will the Solicitor General now commit to establishing a task force on the administration of justice to determine the extent of gender bias in Alberta courts as a first step to remedying that bias?

MR. FOWLER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that the question would be directed to me rather than the Attorney General, because surely the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore knows that the whole matter of the administration of justice is under the Attorney General of this province. My game is one of cops and robbers. We catch them, and when the justice system is done with them, we keep them. Insofar as the ability

of my department to call for any commissions of inquiry, it is an absolute impossibility for me to do.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Heart Surgery

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the critical situation facing our health care system in Alberta today, and every day there's a new example of how the government's budget policies affect the lives of Albertans. One of the most critical and tragic situations is in pediatric cardiology, where almost 80 Alberta children are waiting for heart surgery, a waiting period that's grown from three months to nine months in just a year. Because of these delays, a child's heart gets much weaker and damaged by the time the operation can happen, hardly an indication of a caring or responsible government. My questions to the Minister of Health are: will the minister respond to the request by the parent support group Heartbeat of Calgary and provide funding to the Calgary children's hospital so we can have two centres in this province performing open heart surgery on these very vulnerable and helpless children?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, there is certainly no question that there is pressure on cardiovascular services in the province, and it was for that reason, because of that pressure, that I established the Provincial Advisory Committee on Cardiovascular Services in September of 1989. Since then, a new subcommittee of that group has been established on pediatric cardiac surgery, including representation from the Alberta Children's hospital. That group recommended that we increase and provide additional services for pediatric cardiology in September of '90, which was done, and right now we are holding additional resources pending recommendations from that provincial advisory committee.

3:10

While I agree with the hon. member that the parents awaiting surgery for their children have a very difficult wait, I do not agree with her that a wait is necessarily in every instance a medical emergency. Often people that are waiting for pediatric cardiology services have been told to have the surgery later rather than right now, and in that sense they're not a true emergency. Nonetheless, there is a pressure, but I'm certainly not prepared to recommend that we establish a new program before that pediatric cardiovascular committee makes recommendations to me.

MRS. HEWES: Mr. Speaker, there is one important thing that can be done in the meantime. Will the minister provide funding for the step-down unit at the University hospital, which would immediately help to relieve the pressure on pediatric intensive care, would relieve the situation now?

MS BETKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, within the budget of the Department of Health are some reserves that we will let flow when we have the recommendations from the Provincial Advisory Committee on Cardiovascular Services. I am certainly not willing – particularly when we've set up these mechanisms which involve the hospitals and the medical staff and the administration in looking at the best use of resources – to come in and make a decision singularly or in isolation from the recommendations of that committee. So I will await those recommendations, and I believe they will be in the best interests of Albertans and their health.

MR. SPEAKER: Cypress-Redcliff, followed by Edmonton-Beverly.

Alberta Intermodal Services Limited

MR. HYLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the minister of economic development. I remember a number of years ago in this Legislature when the hon. Hugh Planche rose and made the announcement of the formation of Alberta Intermodal Services Limited. He said at that time that when the service got working and the freight got moving where it assisted Alberta manufacturers in achieving cheaper freight rates, it would be sold to the public. Now, I understand we're in that position today. My question to the minister is: can he assure the Assembly that the sale will be fair and nobody will have any unfair advantage toward purchasing those shares?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted we have the opportunity to reinforce with the hon. member. As he indicated, when Alberta Intermodal Services was first established, it was done so on the basis that it would be turned over to the private sector. It was also established on the basis of reducing rates for container traffic. It was also introduced on the basis of injecting greater stability as it related to the exportation of Alberta products. Those goals have been met. In meeting with the truckers' association, we left them with the assurance that we would privatize Alberta Intermodal Services on the basis that we would have the return come back to the provincial government.

I'm happy to leave the hon. member with the assurance that bids are open for everybody to participate, contrary to the misinformation that is coming again from the New Democratic Party. We have a third party that is going to analyze the bids without any interference from ourselves, which again is contrary to the misinformation that consistently comes from the New Democratic Party. We're doing so to make sure that there is no perceived misinformation as it relates to this. We're also going to make sure that all individuals who wish to bid have an opportunity, because bids are open until June 28. We've also got an information package available to all those who request it.

MR. HYLAND: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question. I find it strange that the opposition would be laughing at actions to create cheaper freight rates in this province so that people in the manufacturing sector can have jobs here. Can the minister assure the Assembly that the government will recover its investment in that sale of Intermodal?

MR. ELZINGA: Mr. Speaker, we're very confident that we can recover our investment, recognizing that that investment has already paid off many full benefits for exporters within the province of Alberta. We are confident that we will see a return of the \$32 million, acknowledging that this company is sitting on some \$13 million-plus worth of cash assets. In addition to that, there are stationary assets in excess of some \$19 million. We've had indications of interest. Notwithstanding that fact, there's nothing binding on our part. In the event that we find the return is not there, there's nothing binding on our part to sell it, contrary again to the misinformation that comes from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Beverly. [interjections] Order. Edmonton-Beverly.

Senior Citizens Programs

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Premier. Yesterday representatives of Alberta seniors' groups finally met with three ministers to let them know how they felt about the cutbacks imposed on them in the recent budget. Sort of after the fact consultation, I'd call it. The ministers admitted that they had failed to consult with the seniors, and they finally admitted that the programs had been cut and would not be rolled back. Considering that this government has admitted that it has made a mistake, will the Premier agree to immediately withdraw the program cuts to seniors?

MR. BRASSARD: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should be the one to address this since the seniors were here at my invitation. First of all, I'd like to take exception to the remark the member made. We never at any time said we failed to consult, because we did. What we did say was that we could have consulted better and that we are going to make that a priority. We feel that the budget that has been struck is a good one. It certainly benefits the seniors to the amount of 75 million additional dollars to that program. It's a good one. I don't know what the member would like us to roll back.

MR. EWASIUK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was no consultation with the seniors, and the minister knows that.

We know from a cabinet document, which was received by us a couple of weeks ago, that this government is going even further and is considering means testing for all senior citizens receiving benefits from the programs. Again to the Premier: will he promise to abandon this secret plan outlined in the cabinet document and pledge never to launch a secret attack on seniors again?

MR. BRASSARD: If this member is suggesting, Mr. Speaker, that we stop considering the development of seniors programs in this province, then I can't make that promise. Certainly we are going to be on top of not only the changing demands the seniors bring forward but also our reaction to those demands. That's going to require some consultation process that's going to be ongoing, and that's a pledge we have made to the seniors of this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

Energy Industry Fees

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. The oil and gas industry wants an explanation of why it's being nicked and dined by increased fees at a time when the industry is going through serious stress requiring the layoff of hundreds of workers. Effective May 1, without advance notice or discussion, surface lease rentals for oil and gas wells on Crown lands were increased by 50 percent and a new rental of \$1,000 per well was imposed in respect of grazing reserves. These can't be considered in isolation, because they're on top of government levies in respect to bonuses, Crown lease rentals which were increased 40 percent last year, and heavy royalties. I'm wondering whether the Minister of Energy agrees with these rental increases and, if not, what he's going to do about it.

MR. ORMAN: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that falls under the purview of the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, and I'd ask him to respond to the question.

MR. FJORDBOTTEN: Mr. Speaker, we do reviews annually of fees that we charge. In the case of the energy sector, it's on five-year intervals. This year the increase was from \$240 to \$360, which is still a nominal fee. I believe that through the process we use to review our fees on an ongoing basis, it was a very fair decision.

3:20

MR. CHUMIR: Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Energy was on the Treasury Board, which had to approve the increase, he has to take some responsibility. I'm wondering whether he at least knows how much of an increase in fees is being levied on the oil industry at this very difficult time for the industry.

MR. SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

Children's Rights

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 28, 1990, Canada signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with the intention of ratifying the convention in consultation with the provinces and with the territories. I realize that this government is in the process of making changes to legislation in order that this province can in fact ratify the convention. I would like to ask the Minister of Labour, who is responsible for this process, I understand: will the minister commit to Albertans that the province will ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child before this session adjourns?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, as you are probably aware, there's a great deal of interest in this Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly since it's the very first convention ever written by the United Nations that explicitly recognizes both the rights and the responsibilities of parents in ensuring that their children receive all due consideration.

MS MJOLSNESS: Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the minister. I did not hear any commitment at all to signing that convention. I would ask her once again then: will this government make a commitment to signing the convention before this session adjourns?

MS McCOY: Mr. Speaker, as we know, of course, the Prime Minister of Canada chaired the meeting that brought this convention to the stage at which it is. It is now being discussed all across Canada and particularly here in Alberta. We will be following the course of its legalities with great interest.

head:

Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?
Minister of Agriculture.

head:

Introduction of Special Guests (reversion)

MR. ISLEY: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the other half of our group of visitors from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. Located in both the members' and the public galleries are 69

students from the Jubilee school in our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Dale Holtby, Mr. Bill Meger, Mrs. Lorna Grismer, and Mr. Ed Taylor. I'd ask that they stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Government Motions

Adjournment for Victoria Day Weekend

16. Moved by Mr. Horsman:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Friday, May 17, 1991, at the regular hour of 1 p.m., it shall stand adjourned to Wednesday, May 22, 1991, at 2:30 p.m.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, Motion 16 standing in my name on the Order Paper will provide for the long weekend associated with Victoria Day.

[Motion carried]

Adjournment for Constitutional Hearings

17. Moved by Mr. Horsman:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Friday, May 24, 1991, at the regular hour of 1 p.m., it shall stand adjourned to Monday, June 3, 1991, at 2:30 p.m.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, Motion 17 standing in my name will provide for an adjournment of the Assembly for the purpose of the Select Special Committee on Constitutional Reform to conduct its public hearings throughout the province and for all members of the Legislature to be in their constituencies consulting with their constituents on that very important issue as well.

[Motion carried]

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Committee of Supply will come to order.

head:

Main Estimates 1991-92

Family and Social Services

MR. CHAIRMAN: These estimates are found commencing at page 189 of the main estimates book with the elements commencing at page 75 of the elements book.

The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

MR. OLDRING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's with pleasure that I present the 1991-92 estimates for the Department of Family and Social Services. My hon. colleague the associate minister will address estimates for programs and support to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, with my colleague today I am introducing a budget that is based on three key principles guiding the evolution of social services in this province: support for Albertans in need, partnership with community and government agencies in meeting those needs, and accountability to the people we serve and to the taxpayers of Alberta. Our programs and services are aimed at ensuring that Albertans in need can live with dignity,

supporting them to become as independent as possible and ensuring that their rights and responsibilities as citizens are recognized. Through the strengthening of our partnerships with communities across Alberta and indeed with Albertans themselves, we are responding to individual needs in a way that promotes the well-being of our province while encouraging the independence and self-sufficiency that characteristically is Albertan. It builds on the prosperity of our province and augments the tremendous opportunities available here today.

As my hon. colleague the Provincial Treasurer outlined in his Budget Address of April 4, Alberta continues to have the strongest economy in Canada. For six consecutive years Albertans' unemployment rate has declined, and when you consider the large number of people moving to Alberta, that is surely a sign of economic stability. Last year more than 29,000 jobs were created, and 12,000 new ones are expected this fiscal year. Alberta continues to lead the country in labour force participation. Mr. Chairman, these figures are directly relevant to my department's supports for independence and day care programs, but they're also significant when you consider other social concerns, such as divorce, family violence, child abuse, and underachievement. Economic hardships and barriers to independence are the root of so many social problems that we find ourselves needing to address today, and we must eliminate both if we are to support and maintain a healthy environment for Alberta families. Our programs and policies must be developed in a way that promotes economic independence and removes barriers so that future generations of Albertans can grow free of government support and costly intervention efforts.

This government believes in supporting Albertans but always in balance with the obligations of citizens to contribute to their society. Building on this, Mr. Chairman, my department and our 5,400 staff members have set in motion a new focus for social services in our province. The Alberta government has responded with a budget that is committed to Albertans and their future. We have responded with a fair, compassionate, and balanced budget. Demonstrating this government's commitment to strengthening Alberta, I bring forward the total estimate for Alberta Family and Social Services of \$1.473 billion, representing 12.8 percent of the Alberta government's 1991-92 overall budget.

Mr. Chairman, we have made careful decisions about where we are going as a service-oriented department and have allocated funding to get there. This government made up-front investments that will provide long-term cost savings through reduced caseloads, cost avoidance, and more effective and efficient service delivery, and we made the up-front investments which will lead to more Albertans gaining personal and economic independence. These estimates clearly demonstrate the Alberta government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and to being accountable to Albertans in the way we spend and invest their tax dollars.

3:30

I'd like to start my discussion of the department's 1991-92 estimates with vote 1, found on page 191 of the blue book, which funds the department's overhead support services and shows a \$2.1 million or 6.2 percent increase. The major expenditure in this vote is for human resources, primarily reflecting the increased cost of negotiated settlements over the last 24 months. Hon. members will note that we have reduced the number of full-time equivalents in this vote by 34, which will be redirected to frontline delivery positions. In other elements negotiated settlements and reallocations have affected the percentages noted in the blue book. I would be pleased, Mr.

Chairman, to answer any specific questions members may have on this particular issue following my comments.

Mr. Chairman, I would now direct your attention to vote 2, a budget summary by element for Income Support to Individuals and Families, found on page 76 in the blue book. I'm pleased to note a 7.2 percent overall increase to this vote, representing an 8.4 percent omnibus increase for Supports for Independence and a 3 percent increase to Income Benefits.

Last November I announced significant reforms to Alberta's income support program. Supports for independence replaced an outdated and strained social allowance with a new program designed for the '90s and beyond. It was a bold step forward in providing a more equitable, active, and simpler support system for Albertans in need. We've changed the focus and the very principles on which the program rests, shifting its philosophy away from a system that rewards failure to a system which is designed to prepare for and reward success. The new program will focus on encouraging clients to access resources to help them gain employment skills and better training as quickly as possible, and if a client is able to work, the program places a clear expectation to prepare themselves for self-sufficiency. If people can work, Mr. Chairman, income support cannot be considered a way of life, and we cannot condone any abuse of the system.

Mr. Chairman, supports for independence will help Albertans get on their feet and become independent. Our clients want to be self-sufficient and self-supporting, and they want to benefit from the fruits of Canada's strongest economy right here in Alberta. Our clients need support which will help them gain long-term security through employment and increased opportunities so that they can gain a degree of independence that allows them to set their own goals and to live with dignity. I believe that the new program goes a long way to addressing these requirements.

This government has increased staffing to assist clients, increased food and shelter allowances, and made other changes to basic allowances so that they are fairer, easier to understand. I'm encouraged that the economic strength of our province has also contributed to a small decrease in caseloads, which, Mr. Chairman, is in opposition to the national trend. I believe that the reforms that are being made to our income support program will help a larger number of Albertans gain independence and self-sufficiency. We are hopeful that these initiatives will result in a total decrease of nearly 2,000 or 8 percent of employable clients. This, I might add, again is unique in Canada and reflects on both the program itself and the excellent performance of the provincial economy. Without these reforms Alberta's caseload might be much higher, possibly falling somewhere between the net increase in British Columbia of 9.2 percent and Ontario's 32.8 percent rise.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

I must caution members that, as is the case in other programs offered by the department, income support is impacted by factors that are uncontrollable, such as migration, seasonal shifts in our economy, and the rate of family breakdown, but no matter what, Mr. Chairman, this government is dedicated to providing Albertans the supports that they need so that they can become strong, can become independent, and become self-sufficient as Alberta citizens.

We are expecting to save approximately \$20 million by assisting individuals to access the training and work opportunities necessary for them to become self-sufficient. These savings are expected to accrue in Employment and Training Support, which

shows a 6 percent decrease. In co-operation with my colleagues the ministers of Advanced Education and Career Development and Employment, supports for independence clients will have improved access to provincial employment and training options. In addition, clients will benefit from increased frontline personnel and the 55 new employment and client support services workers.

As well, Mr. Chairman, I draw your attention to the substantial increases in other program areas. Albertans who can work but are temporarily not available for employment will benefit from an additional \$33 million allocated to the transitional support program, representing an 18.6 percent increase. Lower income families who receive assistance through the supplement to earnings program will benefit from a 15.4 percent increase or \$16.9 million in funding. Finally, Albertans who can never work due to permanent and severe disability can access assistance through the assured support program, which received an additional \$18.2 million or 18.8 percent increase over 1990-91.

Funding for Program Administration, which includes FCSS staffing increases and fraud and error investigations, will receive a 13.2 percent increase of more than \$6.7 million. I'm pleased to note, Mr. Chairman, that the fraud and error initiative has been successful, resulting in a reduction of just under \$24 million in overpayments between 1986-87 and 1989-90. Concurrent with the introduction of supports for independence, I announced increased income benefits to assist Albertans receiving the assured income for the severely handicapped program and the widows' pension program. My colleague the associate minister will elaborate on these benefit increases in his estimate remarks.

In vote 2.2.1 you will note a significant increase of 56.5 percent in funding for Income Benefits, Program Administration. This increase is to provide for additional frontline delivery staff for the AISH program. I would remind members that these staff, as was the case with supports for independence workers, were funded from a reallocation of management and administrative support staff.

Vote 3, Social Support to Individuals and Families, encompasses Child Welfare Services, Family Support Services, and Services to Persons with Disabilities. Again, my colleague will outline funding specifics associated with the third element, Services to Persons with Disabilities. You will note that vote 3 shows a 9.5 percent increase of more than \$41 million.

3:40

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin my remarks on vote 3 by clarifying funding details of the child welfare estimates. I would like to focus in particular your attention on the fact that the overall increase, estimate to estimate, is nearly \$20 million or 14.4 percent. In reviewing last year's actual expenditures in preparation for this year's budget, we have placed funding in accordance with the way it was actually spent during the fiscal year. As a result of that, some elements show larger increases than might be expected while others show modest decreases. I want to assure members that there has been no decrease in services or supports in this area, absolutely none. In fact, when actual costs for 1990-91 are considered as the base for increases this year, there is a 9 percent increase in foster care basic rates, a 1.8 percent increase in group home funding, a 6.4 percent actual increase for in-home family supports, a 10.3 percent increase in actual allocations for adoptions, and additional human resource funding to provide for workload standards, all of which has been reallocated from management and administrative positions.

Mr. Chairman, this government believes that caring for children in a family environment is very important, and the programs and services that we offer are based on this very

important ideal. Last year I announced comprehensive reforms to Alberta's foster care system, which included a new foster care delivery model, better financial compensation, standardized and mandatory training, an increased emphasis on recruitment, and improved support and resources for foster parents themselves. Equally as important, the reforms formally render foster parents and families the status and respect that they so rightly deserve. The new foster care model provides us with an opportunity to redesign the system. The reforms will strengthen and diversify Alberta's foster care system and better prepare parents for the challenging task of providing care to children with more severe emotional and physical needs.

In addition to improved training and support, I'm pleased to note that approximately 2.3 million new dollars have been added to foster care. This new money reflects \$897,000 for increased basic maintenance rates in 1991-92 and funds for 12 new frontline positions to assist foster parents in the challenges that they face.

The new foster care model will include the provision of a skill fee to compensate for additional training and expertise over and above the basic rate. This fee will recognize the increased efforts of foster parents caring for our more difficult children. Four classifications and the training required for each will be provided to foster parents through a comprehensive training program. This will involve initial training for all foster parents and more specialized training for those who choose to care for children with special needs. A mandatory preservice training course is now delivered to foster parents prior to placing children in their care. Our hope, Mr. Chairman, is that the foster care reforms will enable us to retain foster families, to decrease the number of multiple placements of children, and to take care of increasing numbers of children in family as opposed to institutionalized settings.

Mr. Chairman, overall there is a 2.9 percent increase in vote 3.2, Family Support Services. This represents an additional \$3.8 million to address a diverse range of issues affecting our senior citizens, families with preschool children, the homeless, victims of violence, and communities which are developing local responses to their own local needs. The family support division provides an essential preventative focus to my department's efforts to meet the needs of Albertans through programs and services such as the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, family and community support services, seniors division and advisory council, and Alberta's day care programs.

Mr. Chairman, our society is evolving, and if our programs are to remain effective in meeting the changing needs of Albertans, they too must change. This is especially true of the family and community support services program. It is for this reason that I announced a nine-person committee led by our colleague from Highwood, Mr. Don Tannas, to review the program and forward recommendations for its future. The review committee scope is broad and will include accessing input from participants in each of Alberta's 146 existing FCSS programs and the knowledge and expertise of members of community agencies and services throughout Alberta. This government recognizes the unique partnership that we have with Alberta communities and Albertans. We recognize that our strength lies in unity, in co-operation, and working together. By investing in the community in preventative programs, we offer opportunities to help families before their needs reach the point of requiring crisis intervention.

The government's investments in Alberta's FCSS programs have been substantial. Since 1982-83 the provincial FCSS allocation has grown from \$11.6 million to \$34.6 million,

amounting to a 276 percent increase. With reference to the 1991-92 estimates for the FCSS program, members will note an overall increase of 8 percent.

Mr. Chairman, funding for Shelters for Homeless Adults, vote 3.2.4, requires special clarification. The \$150,000 or 3.5 percent decrease in this program again does not in any way reflect a weakened commitment to the needs of homeless persons, but what it does do is reflect an adjustment that represents the actual costs of the resources required to staff the program.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta is the only province in Canada with an Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. We're the only province to maintain a comprehensive information system on the families seeking shelter services. This government has shown a long-standing and firm commitment to addressing the serious problem of family violence and has positioned Alberta in a leadership role in Canada today.

I'm very pleased to note that funding for women's shelters will increase this year by 5.7 percent. In 1991-92 overall, 321 spaces will be provided to assist women and their children to find refuge from abusive situations. Of this total, 15 shelters will provide 296 spaces while six satellites will provide an additional 25.

Mr. Chairman, I was pleased to join my colleague, the minister responsible for housing, in announcing additional facilities in Edmonton and Calgary as part of our ongoing effort to address the needs of victims of family violence. This initiative will result in a new 32-bed shelter here in the city of Edmonton, and between 50 and 100 two- or three-bedroom apartments for second-stage housing when abused women and their children leave the shelters. My department will provide operating funding for the shelter in Edmonton when it is opened in the 1992-93 fiscal year. As well, for the third year in a row we have joined in partnership with community-based organizations to undertake some 30 educational and demonstration projects to prevent family violence. Communities in all regions of Alberta are working hard to increase awareness of this devastating problem and to try out innovative approaches to family violence prevention.

3:50

Mr. Chairman, the last budgetary element that I'd like to discuss concerns Alberta's day care programs, which show a 1 percent increase of some \$783,000 from estimate to estimate. Due to a leveling off of demand, no major increase in funding was required for this program this year. On November 1, 1990, the first adjustment in funding from the operating allowance to the child care subsidy program was made. This allowed for a 5 percent increase in the eligible family income to qualify for maximum subsidy funding. On July 1 of this year the subsidy schedule will be further adjusted with a \$1.6 million transfer from the operating allowance program. This transfer will cover increases in maximum subsidy rates for infants and again increase the net family income eligible for maximum subsidies.

In times of fiscal restraint and debt control, Mr. Chairman, we must review our funding priorities carefully to ensure that those who need the greatest help receive it. Therefore, between July 1, 1991, and July 1, 1994, we will gradually move 60 percent or \$20 million from the operating allowance program to the subsidy side in order to encourage opportunities for lower income families to strive for economic self-sufficiency and to offset the need for reliance on supports for independence.

New day care regulations were introduced on December 1 of last year, and I am pleased to announce that implementation is on schedule. The revised day care licensing manual will be

released later this year, again after extensive consultation throughout the province to ensure that the concerns of all stakeholder groups can be considered and included.

I am very encouraged by the progress being made to meet the new staff qualifications required under the new policy. Orientation courses for day care staff are being piloted in four locations in the province and after an evaluation will be contracted out for provincewide delivery. I'm proud to announce, Mr. Chairman, that I recently presented the first three of an expected 6,000 certificates for day care centre staff meeting the new requirements for the three levels of training. As well, my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education has reported a significant increase in early childhood education enrollment. This trend further strengthens our ability to provide high-quality care to Alberta's children.

To finish my remarks this afternoon, I would like to make a general comment with respect to human resources within the department. Although from estimate to estimate there is a \$23 million or 11.7 percent increase in manpower expenditures, a portion of this has already been allocated through a special warrant of \$7.2 million to meet negotiated increases in 1990-91. The new funds for this fiscal year are required to meet manpower settlements which have already been agreed to. We have also reallocated staff from management and administration to the front line. Again, Mr. Chairman, in making these decisions, I believe that we have been very sensitive to the service demands and have balanced these with the limited resources and our long-term service priorities.

Mr. Chairman, I'm also happy to note that the department is developing workload standards for many of our programs. We developed standards for child welfare and will be developing standards for the income support program and handicapped children's services in the near future. The new standards are an example of the co-operation and goodwill shown by the department and locals 1 and 6 of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Through extensive consultation with staff from all regions of the province we have moved ahead with agreements based on shared principles which will ensure that we meet the department's programming and organizational goals while at the same time meeting the requirements of the government's personnel policies and addressing long-standing concerns of our staff.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, the department has reduced the number of full-time equivalent employees by 13.5 FTEs. At the same time, the department was able to add 161 positions made possible by a significant reallocation of management and administrative resources. Again I'm pleased to note that most of these positions are on the front line. In addition, the department has been able to find the necessary resources to meet staffing levels agreed to in negotiations with the union in order to achieve a manageable workload for child welfare staff.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to say that the budget estimates I present today are founded on principles of fairness and equity to reflect this government's belief in policies and programs that build on the strength of the people and that reflect our ongoing commitment to this province.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Calder. Oh, the associate minister.

MR. BRASSARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You almost forgot me, didn't you?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. BRASSARD: I'd like to begin my remarks today by thanking the Premier and the people of Alberta for the opportunity to serve as Associate Minister of Family and Social Services in this province. I have to say that I feel very fortunate, and I thoroughly enjoy what I'm doing.

It's also a pleasure to join with my hon. colleague the Member for Red Deer-South in presenting to this committee budget estimates for income benefits to seniors, services to persons with disabilities, the services to seniors division in the Seniors Advisory Council, as well as the office of the Public Guardian, widows' pensions, and other related services.

Times are changing in Alberta, Mr. Chairman, and they're changing for the better. Albertans with disabilities are more informed than ever before about the issues concerning human rights, equality, and social well-being. We are more open to accepting others even if on the surface they seem different from ourselves, and we are more aware of how our attitudes impact on those lives around us. That attitude will affect how each and every one of us views ourselves and others. The recognition of each individual's humanity is the stepping stone to developing services which support and encourage their citizenship.

Opening ourselves to others in ways that ensure their inclusion and participation in daily community activities is going to be absolutely essential if we are going to find common ideals to take us into this new century with confidence. Simply recognizing our personal responsibilities to acknowledge the rights and meet the expectations of others will confirm our intentions. I believe that this transition in attitudes will strengthen our province. It will encourage those in the margins to enter the mainstream of our society and make their rightful contribution, and it will ensure that all Albertans benefit from the wealth of opportunities offered here in Alberta. As Associate Minister of Family and Social Services I am committed to working as conscientiously as possible to make these ideals a reality.

We've all heard a great deal of discussion lately about the seniors programs in this province. I'd like to just take a moment and reflect on some of the ramifications that we're facing. Because of advances in medicine and a generally more health-conscious life-style, people are living much longer and healthier than they ever did before. Seniors will make up 16 percent of Alberta's population by the year 2016, and the number of Albertans over 85 is expected to double. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, it is expected that by the year 2030 the entire senior population will triple. The fastest growing segment of Alberta's population will be the 75-and-older group, Albertans traditionally requiring some of the most expensive and the most intensive social and health services. We all recognize that Alberta has excellent service in programs to support older Albertans, programming which is unparalleled in Canada. We have Canada's most generous health care and social supports for senior citizens; in fact, this commitment will reach \$1.2 billion in total program funding this year. These programs offered by the departments of Health, Advanced Education, Transportation and Utilities, Recreation and Parks, Municipal Affairs, Family and Social Services, and others have all been expanded for the most part to ensure that all senior citizens can enjoy a rewarding and meaningful life-style. Indeed, seniors issues directly impact well over three-quarters of the government and are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping long-term policy programs for Alberta. The gray challenge, as it's known, is prompting both government and the community to look to the future and

refocus some programs so that they are directed where they are most needed.

4:00

As the number of seniors continues to grow, the Alberta government will strengthen programs which emphasize the importance of seniors as contributing and participating members of their community. We recognize that some changes may be necessary. For seniors requiring more intensive supports, programs must be aimed at helping them to function as independently as possible and, when possible, to do things for themselves.

This government strongly believes that we must continue to develop a full spectrum of services and community based programs which stress independence and self-sufficiency and promote a healthy and fulfilling life-style. Part of this movement is a shift in focus from reacting to the problems to putting more emphasis on preventing them in the first place. We must emphasize the promotion of wellness, whether it be programs to assist older Albertans living in their own homes or assured financial supports to help older Albertans live in dignity. We must look to a time when our services to seniors are expanded, and when we introduce new societal programs aimed at addressing the contribution and continued participation of all Albertans, we must strike a balance which is both fair and equitable for all Albertans, a balance which will allow us to enter the 21st century with a clear game plan and well-thought-out priorities.

It is with this thought in mind that I established a seniors division in 1990 to promote and manage an interdepartmental agenda and to work to co-ordinating planning across the government. The seniors division is undertaking a number of initiatives in 1991 and 1992. It will address interdepartmental issues in areas such as resource management, program development, and service delivery to ensure that government works with a united and co-ordinated game plan for seniors programs. It will work in co-operation with the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence to address the problem of elder abuse and neglect with the development of action strategies to respond to the needs of the abused elderly. We must make certain, Mr. Chairman, that our priorities are clearly established and that all departments providing services to our senior population are well co-ordinated and able to utilize their collaborative expertise and ensure the ongoing state-of-the-art supports which we have all come to expect and I as minister of seniors demand for seniors.

Our government introduced an Act to legislate the existence of the Seniors Advisory Council just recently, and I am pleased that our Premier has elected to make this his number one Bill for this session of the Legislature. The Seniors Advisory Council, under the chairmanship of our hon. colleague from Bow Valley, Tom Musgrove, continues to reach out into Alberta communities. The advisory council's 16 members have been very busy listening to the concerns of Alberta's older citizens throughout the province. The council advises me, and through me to the Alberta cabinet, on programs, policies, priorities, and other issues concerning senior citizens, and ensures that we in government hear the view of the individual Albertan. The council's activities include: managing a resource centre of information relating to seniors and seniors issues, operating a toll-free information line, directing the publication and distribution of topical information, and providing grants for special projects, education, and research on aging. In the last year they have held countless public hearings throughout this province, and these forums were hosted in co-operation with seniors organizations and agencies serving seniors. They enabled the

council members to share information about programs and to hear the concerns of Albertans. These activities are essential to the council in carrying out its major function of advising the government of policies, programs, and services relevant to older people.

Council members also examine a number of key issues. They are gathering information about the concerns of older native people. They are looking at the need for a variety of housing options for seniors, and information on community services and home care is being compiled for evaluation and analysis. Each year the council also sponsors Senior Citizens' Week, held in the first week of June. This provincewide celebration goes a long way to recognizing the contribution made by older Albertans and provides a wonderful forum for community discussion about seniors and their contribution to society.

In vote 3.2.7 you will see a 30.6 percent increase to services, to the Senior Citizens' Division and Advisory Council funding. The majority of these additional dollars will be applied against increased administration costs incurred with the establishment of a separate division and council in the '90-91 fiscal year. Funding for the division and advisory council will be maintained in '91-92, and these important supports of the government will continue to provide an excellent level of service to older Albertans.

There are few issues affecting seniors that can be addressed within the exclusive purview of any one department or community agency, so it is going to take a very collaborative effort, Mr. Chairman. However, I do believe that government can and must provide the leadership in facilitating the changes necessary to meet the challenges of Alberta's aging population.

I would also draw your attention to vote 2, which contains estimates for the Alberta assured income program and the widows' pension. These elements demonstrate the Alberta government's strong commitment to establishing and meeting realistic program expectations for Alberta seniors. The Alberta assured income program provides income supplements to seniors who receive federal money from the federal guaranteed income supplement. With the continuing trend of a lower caseload and lower average costs per case as a result of better pension programs, the program requires a 10.2 percent less funding level in this year than last to reflect actual expenditures. With respect to the widows' pension: in spite of the fact that the maximum rate has been increased by \$35 per month, the continuing trend to lower average costs per case has also resulted in a reduced funding amount.

As each year passes, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta government continues to strengthen its commitment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and seniors in this province. Seniors and persons with disabilities have often suffered from society's misunderstanding of their needs. While long-term care may be appropriate and a necessary option for some Albertans, far too often these segments of society have been stereotyped and seem to be in need of protection, occasionally at the expense of their own personal freedoms. Too often we didn't listen to what they wanted for their lives and too often we made decisions for them because society believed that they were unable or did not want to take the responsibility for themselves. When they needed a helping hand, we sometimes overreacted in a protective way and made choices for them rather than with them.

4:10

From discussions with persons with disabilities I learned that we cannot deny Albertans with disabilities the opportunity for success or failure simply because we may feel that they are not

ready for the challenge. It is often we, society, that turns a disability into a handicap by thinking only of what people cannot do rather than seeing what they can. I learned that society has no right to say to a person with a disability that he cannot succeed and become a full member of society simply because we have overlooked his or her strengths. I learned that we have no right to make decisions about the lives of people independent of their own identity, their own goals, and their own aspirations. The philosophy espoused in *Claiming my Future* was joined last year by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities action plan. Together they provide a united voice in stating that persons with disabilities are able to direct their own lives and make choices in their own life-style planning. Over the last few decades the rights and full citizenship of people with disabilities have been recognized in both legislation and deed. There is a greater awareness of the needs and the desires of persons with disabilities, a greater acceptance of their fundamental humanity and the contribution they make, and with that attitudinal change greater opportunities to become part of the mainstream.

The trend towards living in the community in Alberta is not new, Mr. Chairman, but I'd like to make one point very clear: institutions such as Michener Centre are home to many Albertans in this province, and it is not the intention of this minister or my department to put any Albertan out of their home. Having said that, however, I will offer my full support to anyone wishing to access an alternative life-style where it can be proven that such alternative will enhance that individual's quality of life. Residents will only be moved if community placement is indeed the best option for them. In such cases the funding will follow the individual into the community and will in no way detract from the quality of life of residents remaining. In fact, you will note in vote 3.3.5 that Institutional Services received a 7.5 percent increase in funding this year over last.

Adult Albertans with severe and permanent disabilities are assisted to live in dignity and participate in the social life of our province through the assured income for the severely handicapped program, which received a 7.9 percent increase in funding this year. Significant administrative reforms to the assured income for the severely handicapped program have been a priority of the department, with the aim to reduce program growth and to ensure consistent and effective service delivery. The additional \$10.3 million in funding reflects the increase in maximum monthly benefit payments from \$720 to \$755. In addition, provisions have been made for these benefits to keep pace with the federal government's annual increases in its disability pension under the Canada pension plan.

Like seniors issues, issues concerning persons with disabilities are complex and challenging to society as a whole. People with disabilities want the power to define the kinds of supports and services they receive, and they want a say in where and how those services will be delivered. If we have learned any one thing so far, Mr. Chairman, it is that we must work together. Only through our combined efforts and will can we help ensure that people with disabilities have increased opportunities for full participation in the social and economic life of their communities. For me personally it is very rewarding to see and share in the beginnings of a truly integrated society where persons with disabilities participate in all aspects of our province's political, social, and economic life. To assist them, my department has revised and updated the Guide to Services for Albertans with Disabilities booklet, which lists programs offered by 12 government departments and agencies in addition to community information and other resources. This is simply an

example of our ongoing commitment to promote full citizenship and full access to services for all Albertans. To ensure that integration and inclusion are prominent from an early age, the department has revised and updated the Assistance for Parents of Children with Disabilities brochure to provide information on government services and community agency supports.

We have accomplished a great deal, Mr. Chairman. Advocacy and provincial support groups, community agency personnel, families and friends, staff of my department, and individual Albertans should be very proud.

Mr. Chairman, you will note on page 77 of the 1991-92 budget summary by elements that funding for Services to Persons with Disabilities increases by 10.7 percent. The Program Administration element, vote reference 3.3.1, shows a 78 percent increase in funding between estimates. This increase includes a reallocation of staff during both the '90-91 and the '91-92 years from Michener Centre to various locations in the province to assist residents who wish to be located in their home communities.

Handicapped children's services received more than \$6.9 million in additional funding in the '91-92 estimates. The majority of this 65.7 percent increase is to cover increases in handicapped children's services caseloads and cost per case and the annualization of a 1990-91 special warrant. As in previous years the Handicapped Children's Services element shows a significant increase. Approximately \$6 million, a 57 percent increase actually, reflects the effects of inflationary pressures and increasing caseloads. The balance of the increase results from a reallocation of staff from management and administrative support positions to frontline deliveries of this program.

The Public Guardian program is mandated by the Dependent Adults Act and appoints guardians for adults who are unable to care for themselves or make reasonable judgments with respect to personal and financial matters. In vote 3.3.3 you will note an 8.8 percent increase for Office of the Public Guardian to help cover court-ordered legal travel and fee increases.

In addition, the '91-92 estimates include an increase of approximately \$1.8 million to community based individual services which ensure that individuals receive the support they require. Together with individuals and service organizations within Alberta's communities, this government is committed to the movement forward in the provision of care to seniors and persons with disabilities. This year will be marked with the energy and efforts of thousands of Albertans as we together travel the path that leads us into a future that holds out more promise, more hope than ever before. I am very proud to have a part to play in this dramatic evolution, and I look forward to seeing the dream become a reality as we help forge a more equitable society for all citizens of our province.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and if the members have any questions concerning any of these items, I'd be very pleased to respond.

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

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I always look forward to debating the budget allocated to the Department of Family and Social Services, because the longer this government is in power the more concerns we have in this area. I don't think that the Minister of Family and Social Services or the associate minister will be surprised when I have to take exception to some of the things they have said.

Before I begin, though, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my appreciation to both ministers, and other ministers for that

matter, for responding very quickly to concerns that I have raised personally with them. I appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman, when it comes to social programs in this province, I believe that they are under attack. When we look at the seniors programs, as the associate minister has mentioned, at the lack of funding over the years for FCSS, when we look at all kinds of issues within child welfare, which I'll get into in a minute, when we look at the lack of counseling services available to various victims of abuse in the province, when we look at the lack of quality child care in the province – I can go on – I believe that we are not forging forward, that in fact our programs in this province are under attack. As well they are under attack at the federal level. Even though this government has tried to dissociate themselves from their federal cousins, I believe that the Conservative agendas are very identical and very deliberate when it comes to social programs.

4:20

In debating the provincial budget today, Mr. Chairman, I do believe that we have to look at what is happening at the federal level, because they directly affect the programs and the funding here in the province. As a result of the Conservative federal government we have seen universal social programs that have been eliminated in the country. UIC benefits have been drastically cut; job creation programs have been given next to nothing in terms of funding; job training programs have been drastically cut. We have seen CMHC drastically decrease the involvement that it has providing housing for those who need it. We have seen a GST implemented that affects poor families, affects middle income families, and that has direct effects here in the province. Probably the most significant initiative, if you like to call it that, of the federal government is the transfer payments to the province. In reality, we are losing millions of dollars in transfer payments from the federal government. That has to hurt us at the provincial level. I'm concerned when I hear the Minister of Family and Social Services say that it is okay not to get these transfer payments because, in fact, we don't need them because we are removing 2,000 people from social assistance. I would hope that he would comment on that.

Mr. Chairman, if you take a look at the country, Canada is far down the list of major industrialized countries when it comes to social spending. I think this is very important to keep in mind, because in this province we continue to spend millions of dollars on mismanagement and bungles of this government. So when we hear arguments such as, "Well, we can't afford to do these things or to fund adequately a lot of these programs," it just does not fly. I think Albertans expect and recognize that we must have strong economic policies while at the same time ensuring strong social policies. The two go hand in hand, and I think those are the kinds of goals we should have.

The minister alluded to vote 1. It includes Minister's Office, Associate Minister's Office, and Deputy Minister's Office among other things, and when we look at this, we see that there has been an increase of 6.2 percent. Now, I might say, Mr. Chairman, that if the minister and the associate minister were lobbying hard and bringing in some very progressive legislation in many of the various areas that fall under this department, then maybe we could justify that kind of increase.

We'll move on to vote 2, which is Income Support to Individuals and Families. Mr. Chairman, we continually talk about the serious concern that poverty plays in the lives of many individuals in this province. It's a continuous and growing concern, especially among children, I might add. Whether you are working for low wages in this province – currently we have

the lowest in western Canada; we have no yearly review of the minimum wage. I might add that a large majority of people on social assistance or that are getting supplemented by social assistance are in fact working, and I think this is a very important point to keep in mind. You may be unemployed in the province, because we do have a very high unemployment rate; 7 to 10 percent in this province is extremely high. You may be a person with a severe disability – then again you will be living in poverty – or you may be a single parent heading a family, and then again you have a good chance of living in poverty. All of these reasons – and I know there are more – affect people in the province, and especially when it comes to this budget, because the programs that address these people who are living in poverty in the province: this is where they fall.

I was taken aback when the minister was talking as if people like being on social assistance, as if they like being dependent on a system that removes any dignity they have from them, as if people like being poor. I take exception to those remarks, Mr. Chairman.

We know there are thousands of children in the province living in poverty, Mr. Chairman. We know the devastating and very negative effects that has on them. We know they experience illness more often than other children, they miss school more often, they're more likely to drop out of school, they have poor self-esteem, they are apprehended more often than other children and are moved into the child welfare system. What I find really distressing is that nothing in the throne speech alluded to children, more specifically to children growing up in poverty, even though we know the devastating effects.

We have 29 food banks throughout this province that are feeding many children and many families. I think it's time we had some specific programs to target this group of people. Mr. Chairman, where in the budget do we see the funding of preschool programs, for example, for children who are growing up in low-income families? Where do we see the minister addressing the high rates of dropout among young people? Now, we may argue what department this comes under. Nevertheless, we do know that the numbers are higher when these children grow up in low-income families. Where are the school lunch programs for the hungry? Where are they talked about in this budget? Where is the strategy to deal with these crucial issues?

I know the minister may say that there have been increases that will indirectly affect children, and they do in indirect ways, Mr. Chairman. One thing we do know for sure when looking at the budget, though, is that this minister directly affects children in that he cut back by half the recreation allowance for children. He argues that it's more equitable now. Well, I argue that those families that were already accessing that program now have 50 percent less money to give their children for a recreation allowance. They are now, and I'm sure the minister is aware of this, getting \$9 a month. I'm not sure what you can do with \$9 a month when it comes to recreation for your children.

Mr. Chairman, the minister talks about supports for independence. Last fall he introduced a program without any public input or hearings, as far as I'm aware. On November 26, 1990, in the Assembly the minister stated that he had "made a personal commitment to listen," when he was referring to this program. "By listening," he said, "I have heard what Albertans want for their province's social programs." I had a question on the Order Paper last fall asking the minister to outline which "groups, individuals, and organizations" he consulted with prior to developing this program called supports for independence. That question was rejected, and to this date we still do not know

specifically what groups, what organizations, which individuals he consulted with. I would like to ask the minister if he today could let us know. I think if you want a program to be effective and truly meet the needs of people within that program, you have got to get some input from the public, and I am distressed to realize that the minister has not done this.

We do know, Mr. Chairman, that the minister has privatized many of the programs within the supports for independence to quite an extent. I think, in all fairness, that a lot remains to be seen in terms of how effective the programs are. I do know that initially when people were being referred to the training programs, there was some concern, because what was happening was that they were going to these training programs and being told how to dress properly and how to bathe and things like that. They know how to do these kinds of things. What they really wanted was some meaningful job-training programs, and this certainly wasn't what they were receiving. I would hope that the minister is listening and is monitoring what exactly is taking place.

4:30

When it comes to increases in the rates that we had announced last fall, Mr. Chairman, they were very small increases, not nearly enough to cover the real costs of the increases to food, clothing, utilities, and personal expenses, because the last increase was eight years ago. So there still is a great concern there. The minister did cut money available for people who live with relatives, shifting the burden onto families, which I believe is very unfair. We received a lot of calls from people who were very distressed over that cut.

One of the major concerns I have as well is the cuts to Employment and Training Support by \$16 million in this budget. The minister claims he is working with Career Development and Employment, but again in that department they have cut that aspect of their budget as well. I know the minister has said that he anticipates that 2,000 recipients will come off the welfare rolls so that we can in fact decrease in this area, but I would say that with the current layoffs we've had in the province, the minister should be very concerned about this money being cut from this particular area. I would think that if people are being removed from social assistance, that money should come from Transitional Support, which is ongoing support, but not from the employment and training area. Perhaps the minister could clarify that for me.

We've heard some talk now from the associate minister on the AISH program. The total budget was increased by \$10 million, but AISH recipients in the province still live well below the poverty line. I would like the minister to explain – perhaps he did already and I missed it – where exactly this money is going. Recently, Mr. Chairman, someone within the department said to me that there are rumours now that the AISH program will be phased out over a five-year period of time. I would hope that the minister could make a very strong commitment in the Assembly today that that is not the case, that people on AISH will not be subjected to means testing and asset limitations. I would ask that that commitment be given by the associate minister.

Mr. Chairman, the government is now saving once again on people receiving the Canada pension plan disability benefit. The associate minister alluded to this in his remarks, that the government is not allowing people on AISH receiving this disability benefit to keep their cost of living increase. They're not allowing them to keep the disability benefit as well, which is a more serious issue. This money has been earmarked by the

federal government as money that is supposed to go to the poorest of the poor. I know I have been discussing this on an ongoing basis now with the ministers, and I know that at times the province will say that, well, we can't make any changes to this because it will affect transfer payments. At the same time, the federal government is saying that this is exclusively a provincial program and you basically can do what you want to do. We're still waiting for the government to really get their act together on this.

Two years ago the government at least let people on AISH keep their cost of living increase from the federal government. Now they are once again deducting that money. I did write the associate minister a letter about this, and I did receive a reply. I know in the House one day the associate minister stated that it wasn't working; that's why they discontinued letting the people on AISH keep their cost of living increase. I wasn't clear at that time on exactly what wasn't working, and that wasn't explained in the House. However, the associate minister did write me a letter, and I'm still not clear, because what he states in his letter is:

The review concluded that it was not consistent . . . That is, keeping the cost of living increase.

. . . with either the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped legislation or the program intent. The practice was therefore discontinued on December 31, 1990.

Mr. Chairman, I would submit to the associate minister that those are very weak excuses. I do believe that if there was a commitment by this government to people on AISH, they would in fact continue letting them keep their cost of living increase at the very least.

Again, with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we did discuss this during estimates of Executive Council last Friday. The Action Plan does contain many recommendations, Mr. Chairman. It goes into areas of training, employment, education, recreation, transportation, housing, accessibility, personal support, and financial support. The throne speech indicated that some of the recommendations in the Action Plan will be implemented. I raised it with the Premier last Friday, and I'll raise it again with the associate minister: I would like to know specifically what recommendations will be implemented, and what are the time lines that we're looking at. I think that's very important for people to know.

Mr. Chairman, many people with disabilities continue to live in the community in various settings. People are moving out of Michener Centre. While most of us, I'm sure, would support community living, what people need, though, from this government are guarantees that they will receive quality care once they are moved out into the community, and I don't believe that they have received this commitment from this government. I know that the associate minister in his remarks said that he's offering full support to these people, but that is not happening in reality. I have heard of persons from Michener Centre being isolated in an apartment in a city somewhere and ending up on the streets or in places like the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre, which does not have proper support for these people.

Mr. Chairman, I was contacted by a constituent of mine who happens to have a relative in Michener Centre. They were contacted that this person would be moving out of Michener Centre, would be moving into the community. The family was not against the idea of that person moving out into the community, but what they wanted from this government and what they requested was a written guarantee that that person would receive funding and would receive proper care, and they could not get that in writing. They have reason to be concerned that

once a relative or a person moves out into the community, proper supports aren't there and proper funding isn't there. I've also talked to very good organizations that are working on an individual basis with people living in the community with disabilities. They have expressed to me that it's an ongoing struggle every year to get funding, individual funding. It's just a very, very serious concern that they have. So I would hope that the associate minister perhaps contacts some of these organizations. I can certainly give him some names of people to contact if he wants feedback in this area.

Mr. Chairman, a few months back there was a tragedy that occurred in one of the group homes, where a resident had drowned. Consequently, An Operational Review of Resources for Dependent Handicapped was released after an investigation was conducted. It was full of recommendations, and I'm sure that both the ministers are familiar with this report. It gave examples in its recommendations, examples like staffing standards, strategy to recruit and retain qualified personnel. It went into training in five key areas: basic first aid, medication application, transfers, lifts, back care, CPR, and orientation to policy and procedure. I would ask the associate minister if he can bring us up to date in terms of how many of these recommendations have been implemented to date and how many have not, and if not, why not. What exactly is the status of that report?

In vote 3, Mr. Chairman, we move into Child Welfare Services. Not too long ago we went through a strike. One of the main concerns in that strike was caseloads and, I think, the lack of respect that this government had for the responsibilities that social workers or child welfare workers have in their everyday jobs. After that strike the frontline workers were told that they would be informed, consulted, and involved in decision-making. This is not happening. The recent example would be the privatization of the foster home initiative that was announced in the fall and implemented just a little while ago.

[Mrs. B. Laing in the Chair]

4:40

We've got many questions that surround that whole initiative. Given that the contracted agency will now recruit, screen, train, and even place children, I would ask the minister: what is the role of the child welfare worker? Because they are asking these same questions. They're not clear on how the two mesh, Madam Chairman. They're feeling a great concern because they do feel that they are no longer involved directly with these children, yet I'm under the impression that these children would have status with the department. So it's a concern. I think the bottom line here is that there's less accountability for the department, and perhaps that's why they're moving in such a direction. There's a fear that the child will have less direct contact with their social worker. There are no standards in place. Everything was done very secretly, and to date I'm not sure that any of the child welfare workers have been informed of really what's going on when it comes to these. I'm talking specifically about the therapeutic foster homes that were initiated a few months back.

I think the fact that the minister did not insist that his department develop standards to ensure quality of care and that it be consistent throughout the province is a major concern. Now, I know that the contract could very well have gone to a very excellent agency, but I worry about who the next contract is going to go to. We do know that the minister is continually contracting out to for-profit agencies, and that raises another whole gamut of concerns.

Again, these therapeutic foster homes will be taking care of severely disturbed children. It was listed in the proposal that was sent out to people who were interested in getting the contract that these children would be suicidal, have psychotic behaviour, dangerous behaviours, and so on. We don't know what the qualifications will be of the foster parents taking care of these children. We don't know what will happen if there's a breakdown in the foster home, where the backup services are. There are many, many questions that need to be answered. The minister has left a lot of ground uncovered in that area.

I would say, Madam Chairman, that children are presently dying in the system. They are very quiet deaths; we don't hear about them. They don't hit the newspapers. One tragedy did hit the newspapers recently, and that was two-year-old Jason Carpenter. Again I would ask the minister: when the report is done – I know there's an investigation being conducted – will that report be made public? I do believe it should be, and maybe the minister could clarify what the status of that report is at this time.

I do believe, Madam Chairman, that child welfare services should be expanding their mandate. Right now we're seeing the province decreasing their mandate. Many children are just being tossed aside because they do not fit in anywhere. I would say to the minister that we have to take a serious look at expanding child welfare services, and that's not happening presently in the province.

I would like to just quickly allude to shelters in the province, Madam Chairman. The Member for Edmonton-Avonmore did sponsor a motion yesterday that called for 100 percent core funding for shelters. This was a recommendation in the 1985 special report on family violence, as well as of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. They felt the government has fallen \$2.7 million short of being able to give the shelters a hundred percent core funding. Yesterday when the motion came to the Legislative Assembly, one of the government members spoke against 100 percent core funding, and I would like the minister to explain why they have fallen short of the 100 percent core funding. While they are doing that, Madam Chairman, many women are going without shelter, women and children that are in some cases beaten and maybe even in danger of dying. They are being denied services. I would ask the minister to comment on that.

We know that staff wages are a serious problem within shelters and within the voluntary community agency sector. I know that the minister has been involved in negotiations with many of the agencies in order to achieve wage parity. I don't know where the negotiations are at, but I would say that's a growing concern, that funding for the agencies is far below what it should be in order for them to be able to pay their staff what they are worth. Many of the staff in many of the agencies are leaving, and it's very difficult for the agencies to recruit well-qualified staff and retain those staff.

Now, under vote 3, Madam Chairman, we move into the area of adoptions. I'm not sure why there is such a drop there. I think the minister did allude to that and I missed it; I apologize for that. We do know that in the province various private agencies can charge fees. What the legislation says now is that the fees have to be reasonable. I'm of the opinion that no matter which way you look at it, they are fees and they are being charged for a child. Now, maybe the minister could just clarify what exactly is reasonable. One suggestion has been that there should be a figure put on that and a cap put on how much can be charged. I also realize that third-party adoptions are happening in the province. Well, third-party adoptions bring

into mind a lot of concerns, and I think that whole area needs to be looked at very seriously.

Madam Chairman, realizing that I have one minute left, I just want to briefly talk about day care and out of school care. I've had the opportunity to raise the fact that we are the only province in Canada that currently does not have any out of school care standards. The minister talked about choices when it was brought up in question period, and I would suggest to the minister that parents do not have choices currently. They just do not have choices. You take what you get, and oftentimes it's not quality service, not quality care for their children. Surely to goodness we value our children enough to implement some standards provincewide for out of school care.

Thank you.

MADAM ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.
Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I was interested in both ministers' glowing accounts of what's happening in the department, but I'm not reassured, and I'm sure they're not surprised by that.

I think the seniors dilemma that we're all struggling with right now is simply an illustration of what is wrong and what has gone awry in the department. We see isolated decisions being made with no real indicators of what's going to happen, no measures as to what can be sustained by people, no real measure of the consequences. I feel that's just an illustration of how the department is not functioning as I would wish. My reality doesn't reveal the same kind of rosy situation that has been described by the ministers.

4:50

I think, Madam Chairman, we see a gradual deterioration of human resource service programs in our province. They appear to me to be budget driven. We have, of course, the compounding problem of the federal government decisions, and I see the document *Caring & Responsibility* behind a lot of the decisions that are being made now. My view, of course, of that document is that the government's trying to convince us that they care and that you and I have to be a lot more responsible. I think that is the driving force here.

Some major flaws, Madam Chairman. There's no real comprehensive attack on poverty. None of the suggestions that were made by this side of the House last year, modest changes that would release people from the awful poverty that we see in many of our communities, have been taken up. The situation of children in poverty remains there for all of us to see and agonize over. No leadership shown here in Head Start or nutrition programs by this minister.

The social service reform programs released last November are now five months old. As far as I'm concerned, the jury is still out on them, although it seems to me from my own experience with them that people are not appreciably any better off at all. In fact, some are not as well off as they were before these so-called reforms came in. For a long-term social allowance recipient living with a family, shelter rates have gone from \$258 to \$64 a month. Added to food and basic needs of \$270, total benefits are \$334 a month. That's a reduction of \$103, so we penalize a family that is trying to care for a loved one. We penalize them for doing that. A single mother with two children now suffers a loss because of the cut in recreation from \$220 to \$108 per year for the second child. Also, a cut in telephone allowance from \$15 to \$11 a month, transportation benefits for this single mom from \$38 to \$25, elimination of \$14

for youth bus passes, and no change to shelter allowance, since that increase was not given to two-person families.

Madam Chairman, I really question, and the minister has not yet revealed to us, his status reports of five months. We hear glowing comments about how things are working, but I haven't seen any real empirical data that says people are better off at all as a result of his new programs. In child care we see the absence or the demise of the consultation unit, which has been deplored all across this province by frontline workers. We are getting increasing numbers of concerns expressed about wage disparities between the community organizations, who are asked to take on increasing numbers and increasing levels of care of people through contracts with this government yet are expected to do so and not pay people a reasonable amount. We now see moves towards not contracting out but fee for service, with the government, not the professional who deals with the child, deciding what services will be paid for, how many hours of consultation will serve the needs of a sexually abused child, what they will pay.

I welcome the study on family and community support services. I have talked with members of that study group and have suggested that we need seriously to look at such things as out of school care and Meals on Wheels, which I don't think should any longer be in competition with those other innovative preventive services in our communities. I think they should now be thought of as requiring universal and separate supports.

The reports on training. Again the jury's still out. It appears that a good deal of this is being done commercially, and as yet I have seen no evidence or documentation that says we have X number of jobs created.

Madam Chairman, I must say, and I want to be clear about it, to the minister: my office gets many calls about social services, and the frontline workers are extraordinarily helpful. When we have called and asked for assistance for a particular constituent or people from anywhere in the province who call my office, the workers are very helpful, but I do find that they are still struggling under immense caseloads and under some very rigid and constraining kinds of rules and regulations. But I have to say thank you because they are really doing their best, and I think the department is blessed with some very fine professional people who are the frontline workers, and they do care about their clientele. I'd like to pass that on.

Madam Chairman, I want to go just directly to the votes. In vote 1, votes 1.0.2, 1.0.3, and 1.0.4, perhaps the minister again will explain these increases. I haven't felt that there was a satisfactory explanation of why they are increased when we are in this time of real constraint.

Vote 1.0.6, up 12.9, almost 13 percent. I'd like to know from the minister if there are new programs and policy development planned for this budget period. Is that why that increase is there? Is there something new coming down the pike? We didn't hear about that.

In the next one, 1.0.11, I'd like to know from the minister: whatever happened to the plan to recentralize certain offices? Has that been left in limbo? Is it going ahead? Where are we on that one? Again, why does the ADM's office get an increase when the department is talking about layoffs?

In 1.0.13, this one is up a large percentage, Madam Chairman. My question is: are there efficiency audits? In other words, in this department does the audit consist of telling us whether or not we're getting value, whether the service performed in the department in fact produced something that was thought to be efficient last year and that's why we're buying more this year? I believe we need to be able to provide that kind of information.

If we can go on to vote 2, Madam Chairman, 2.1 is up. I need some details on this one, and perhaps the minister can just tell me: is this a reflection of the new reforms? Is that why that particular program administration has been increased?

Vote 2.1.2, Employment and Training Support: what percentage of this whole training component is done by commercial companies? It's down, I see, by 6 percent. I don't understand that, why we allow Program Administration to receive an increase of over double that. I'm unclear as to why employment and training is experiencing this decrease, especially when we consider the supposed intent of the reforms introduced, with a concentration on employment and training. I don't know what the mandate for training is; perhaps there's a written document that tells us that. I want to know if, in this whole program, there's any opportunity for loans or loan guarantees to start a business. Or are we simply training people to go out and find jobs that aren't there? Is it training on how to find work? Is there training involved after work is found? If an individual does find a job, does the support continue? I've already asked if they're commercial or nonprofit.

What's the division of responsibilities once again, please, so that I understand more clearly, between Career Development and Employment and the Family and Social Services Department? What happens to individuals who drop out of training? If at the end of the training period they haven't been able to secure a job, do they then go back into the stream, or do they go round again? The most critical question, I guess, is: how many jobs have been created through this process? What are the updates on this one, and will the minister give us regular reports on it? In 2.1.3, is the Transitional Support program up and running? I would like to know about that.

5:00

Vote 2.1.5, Assured Support. Madam Chairman, to the minister: do these increases reflect increased numbers of caseloads, or are they reflecting increases in benefits or increases due to program start-up costs, or all three? That's not clear from the budget.

Vote 2.2.1 is up a whopping 56.5 percent. Perhaps we could have a detailed explanation as to the reasons behind this increase, considering that other votes under Income Benefits have not received anywhere near that increase and this division has received a fair percentage.

Assured Income Plan for Senior Citizens. Well, we all know the story that's happening with seniors in our province and the discomfort that I'm sure government members of this House are feeling as well as some of us on this side of the House. I'm sure that the ministers have figured this out now and that we aren't going to repeat this sad story. Seniors who are on assured income are still living in very difficult circumstances, and we haven't seen an increase in the program.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped. Madam Chairman, while we welcomed a minimal increase to AISH recipients last year, it was little more than 5 percent, \$35 a month, for those who are receiving the maximum benefit. It doesn't go nearly as far as it needs to in meeting the actual needs for AISH recipients. What I'd like to ask the minister is: will the minister commit to an annual review of AISH benefits relative to the cost of living, and is the minister considering indexing AISH benefits?

In the Widows' Pension, Madam Chairman, has the government any plans finally to move away from the discriminatory practice in this program and eliminate the restriction to divorced

and single women? I think we need a commitment from the minister once and for all on this one.

If I can move into vote 3, Madam Chairman, the vote is up 14.4 percent in Social Support to Individuals and Families. The minister has never really fully declared what his plans are in the department for the care and counseling of children who are not in wardship. Increasingly from our other programs we find children from the various shelters and so on who are desperately in need of counseling and support. They are not wards of the province. We find children who are desperately in need of mental health services and counseling who are not wards of the province and whose families have no intention of making them wards of the province, yet they cannot get the kind of counseling they need.

MADAM ACTING DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member.

Could we have order in the House, please. Thank you.

MRS. HEWES: I have mentioned before my dismay, Madam Chairman, with the consultation unit and the threats to the crisis unit. I hope the minister will take those comments from me and from others who have spoken to us and will change his thoughts. I know he has said that those workers will now go on to the front line, but you do deprive the excellent workers who are serving well but who need that backup support.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, vote 3.1.3, In-Home Family Support, is down 14 percent. Why a decrease in this one when the government is continually promoting recognition and support of families? I just wonder about that decrease and how those needs are going to be accommodated.

Adoptions: down again. Is this a result of the effects of the Child Welfare Amendment Act passed in 1988, or are private adoption agencies taking the major role? Perhaps the minister can give us some explanation for that.

Mr. Chairman, Foster Care is up 41.2 percent. The minister has spoken glowingly about the new program in foster care. I have some problems with the new system of franchising foster care where the franchisor is the same person that does the monitoring as the person who does the recruiting of the homes. I am concerned about the perceived potential conflict there. To the minister: perhaps he can comment. There is no question in my mind that the level of difficulty that foster parents are going to be expected to deal with with children is increasing, so it's absolutely essential that we have incredibly increased backup support for these families. What are the training plans for foster parents? What are the standards that are related to the required level of care and supervision for foster care?

Again in this same section, why hasn't the minister implemented the Thomlison report recommendations, and what about the Cawsey report? The Cawsey report I think was a real indictment of this government and some of the things that we are not doing, and I believe the report has some excellent recommendations, particularly related to native children who are in care.

The Children's Advocate: down. Will the minister commit to tabling a report of this advocate, especially regarding investigations that are done by the office? I'm pleased with the fact that the advocate is there, and I have been pleased with the assistance that office has given to us as well, Mr. Minister.

Group Homes: up only 6.1 percent. Mr. Chairman, will the minister be tabling standards for group homes so that the public and families with loved ones in these homes can be assured they're receiving the best quality of care from people who are trained? Will the standards speak to training, monitoring, and enforcement? Will the minister please tell us where such training is available in this province or elsewhere, where people can be expected to bring their skills up to standards that are going to be required in group homes?

Institutions: up 3.4 percent. Mr. Chairman, the number of beds closed at the Yellowhead Youth Centre, 25 in the past year – is it the minister's intent to downsize institutions as they gear up to off-load child welfare responsibilities onto the community, to foster homes, and to groups homes? What is the plan there and what is the timing? Why did the minister allow beds to be shut down at Yellowhead before the group homes were in place and were functioning to take care of these children? Why was the child welfare consultation unit shut down in spite of strong protests from social workers? They're still coming in.

Why is there a proposal circulating through the department to cut hours of service to the crisis unit? Will the minister immediately table plans for the reorganization of the child welfare department, and will he table the foster care model? Will the minister also describe the standards for the level of care and supervision of foster care that would be applied and monitored? Will the minister develop adequate transition periods to ensure a high level of care is maintained? Will he instruct the Children's Advocate to conduct a complete review of the transition and reorganization period to ensure the protection of children and as well so that the public can be assured that proper transitions are made?

If I can go on to vote 3, Program Administration, here it's gone down. I'm not sure why all the others went up and this one went down. Why didn't they get an increase?

Day Care Programs is up 1 percent. Can the minister tell the House how many parents and families are now receiving a subsidy? Is there going to be any support for the required training for day care workers? How are they expected to get the training? Has the minister met and consulted with the various community colleges as to how they're managing handling the increased demands for training? I think it would be useful to have a report on that.

Family and Community Support Services. Yes, I'm pleased the study is happening. I anticipate, Mr. Minister, that that report is going to be tabled in the Legislature for debate here as to what their recommendations will be.

Vote 3.2.4, Shelters for Homeless Adults. I know of the announcement on the inner city in Edmonton yesterday or the day before, and I was pleased to see that. But the program in general has decreased, and perhaps the infusion of funds from Municipal Affairs and other sources, the federal government, has accounted for that. That may be the answer that the minister can give to me.

5:10

In Prevention of Family Violence, I'd like to ask the minister: why did he not respond to the request by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters for 100 percent funding? They raised last year some \$600,000, which had to go into operational funding rather than going into the support services that they require, that they originally went to the public for. Mr. Chairman, will the minister be reclassifying the Lurana centre to a small shelter so that it can qualify as well? When will the minister be providing supports for aboriginal women in terms of safe houses, recom-

mended in the Cawsey report? Would the minister consider separate funding for counseling for victims of family violence; separate, that is, from the women's shelter funding component? What about innovative programs in family violence? We still see no support for the batterers in these circumstances, and I think that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Chairman, senior citizens' division. Have we ever done a real study of the consequences of the cuts that have been made? What about the impact to individuals, and what about the impact down the road to taxpayers? It seems to me that when we make those rather sweeping kinds of changes in programs, people get very alarmed and anxious about them. We ought to know in advance what the consequences are anticipated to be. I'd like to know as well if we can have some details on what the upcoming issues are that the council is going to be working on over this budget period.

In Handicapped Children's Services, Mr. Chairman, does this increase reflect new programs here? If so, what are they, and can we have the details? Are they expanding their services, and will this result in increased benefits to individuals or just more children under the program? Will respite care be a part of the program from now on?

In vote 3.3.4, Community Based Individual Services, up only 2.5 percent. I wonder why this increase is so small when the department is actively pushing services onto the community. I don't know how the minister expects communities to cope with increased responsibility if we don't provide them with the kind of support they need to meet demands. When are we going to see something from the government on wage disparity? Agencies are not asking for wage parity; they're asking for a fair chance at a fair wage. We've asked, of course, for copies of the Goldstein report. I think it's time the minister released that report and what his proposals for actions are.

Institutional Services, finally. Almost done, Mr. Chairman. Can we have some commitment in writing from the minister as to the future of Michener Centre? We've been told that it's secure. If that is the case, then why have we seen a reduction in admissions? Will the minister provide a record of admission rates at Michener for the last five fiscal years? Will he please tell us his view of institutional care? I think we need to have a clear statement from the minister as to whether or not he believes that for some individuals with acute disabilities there will always be a need for a controlled environment such as Michener.

Mr. Chairman, just in closing, I am disappointed that this budget does not look to families in real stress and families in poverty, the most vulnerable of our society. It doesn't deal with children in poverty. It doesn't deal, I don't believe, adequately with the elderly or with the disabled or handicapped. I believe we still have some way to go. The reforms have been there since November in social assistance. The reforms in day care have been there longer than that. I think it's time the minister gave us a different kind of accounting as to how well these new programs are working.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MS M. LAING: Mr. Chairman, I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would entertain questions?

MRS. HEWES: Certainly.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would just make a note from the Chair that the Member for Edmonton-Avonmore had asked me about this. Technically it should be put when you are speaking, but perhaps you could go ahead.

MS M. LAING: Mr. Chairman, I note with some surprise that the hon. member was able to maintain concentration and focus very precisely and effectively on the subject of debate. Given that she has just become a grandmother, I wonder if she would explain how she managed to do that. On behalf of the members of the Assembly I wish to extend our congratulations to her. [applause]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to stand up today to commend the minister and the associate minister and staff of Family and Social Services for some of the fine work they're doing for our provincial people and also some of the innovative moves the department is making to look at new ways of delivering programs for Albertans. As an aboriginal member of this Assembly I commend this government for the overall commitment to assist the needy. Just looking at our budget, you can tell we are committed to looking at delivering programs for Albertans. But again as an aboriginal member I'm not proud to say that a high percentage of the needy people in Alberta are native people, native people who at one time a very short while ago, only about two generations ago, never saw welfare. There was no such thing as welfare for people, and native people were completely self-sufficient.

Today we have our native statistics. For an example, the unemployment rate of our natives in Alberta is running at 22.8 percent, while the average for the rest of Albertans is 7.5 percent. The proportion of the population with less than grade nine education is running at 23.6 percent for natives, while the rest of Albertans enjoy 10.8 percent. The proportion of adult offenders in Alberta correctional centres is running at 36 percent presently. It's nothing to be proud of. The proportion of deaths due to alcoholism, accidents, poisoning is running at 43.9 percent, while the rest of Alberta, the nonnatives, is running at 8 percent. Again, it's an issue that I as an aboriginal member of this Assembly am not proud of. I personally have lost 45 friends of mine in the past 35 years, and it's something that I don't mind admitting, but it's something I'm not proud of. We definitely need to make changes. Just yesterday a young person of 14 years old from my community committed suicide – I read that this morning in the news – and that's not proud.

I've been here for two years now, and this is why I've been stressing the fact that we need welfare reforms. I find the welfare system has filled the role, but it's been a very negative role for the native population. Reforms, Mr. Chairman, like the support for independence program as discussed by the minister: part of this program is presently being piloted in the Athabasca-Lac La Biche constituency, in Calling Lake and in Athabasca, and I hope it will commence very shortly in Lac La Biche. I'm very, very optimistic that this is going to be one of the major changes we will see in the delivery of the welfare system right across Alberta and possibly across Canada in the near future. That system works because it's a positive system.

Mr. Chairman, in order to provide alternatives to welfare and attack the poverty that our residents of Alberta continue to live in, we need jobs. This is why I've stressed to my colleagues in this House that it is very, very important to continue diversifying

our province. It's very, very important to continue developing jobs and training programs throughout the province, jobs located where the people are at.

5:20

I realize that there have been major discussions in the past two weeks here in relation to support for businesses to start up, like Al-Pac. The opposition has raised a number of times that our government should not do that. Their policies and motives, of course, are something different. A project like Al-Pac is a major move for this government and a major initiative for the northern natives to get off welfare. The construction jobs in that project will be over 2,800, with 365 permanent jobs at the mill once the project is completed, an additional 660 jobs in the woodlands operation, and another 75 jobs for capital projects. In addition to that, when the paper mill commences, we'll have another 500 jobs in the construction and 200 operational jobs once the paper mill construction is completed. In addition to that, of course, there are hundreds of spin-off jobs throughout Alberta and throughout Canada.

Alberta's diversification plan is working. I believe it's something that's necessary in order to deal with the programs that are provided under Family and Social Services that the hon. minister talked about. Under the diversification plan we presently have over \$20 billion of projects either under construction, completed, or being planned. That means thousands of jobs for Albertans. Mr. Chairman, this is the type of a plan that will eventually eliminate poverty in Alberta and poverty amongst native people and no doubt poverty across Canada someday, not like the economic vision, of course, of the opposition. I hear them every day here talking about increase the welfare for this, spend more money on welfare, spend more money here and there. Never did I ever hear them once in the past two years indicate that the way to attack poverty and welfare is through job creation, job training, putting people back to work, and being productive.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member.

Could we have order in the committee, please. Order in the committee, please.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Chairman, the vision of the opposition is something I cannot understand. I spent two years here telling this Assembly the importance of job creation to get people off poverty, and they continue day after day after day attacking our government for the diversification plan, which is a direct way of attacking poverty in Alberta. That I cannot understand.

This government under the leadership of our Premier has done a commendable job. I think if we continue in the direction we're going, we will work towards the elimination of poverty. I know in the past 10 years the number of initiatives our government has taken. Going back a bit to 1981, this government established a Business Assistance for Native Albertans Corporation, which provides assistance for native people wanting to start businesses. In 1983 the Alberta Legislative Assembly was the second Legislative Assembly in Canada to introduce a resolution to support a first amendment to our new Constitution. In 1983 the Northland School Division was formed, where today we have 24 school boards across northern Alberta, mainly positions occupied by native people running that system, a very positive system. In 1983 was the establishment of Alberta Native Venture Capital Co. Ltd., which provides seed capital for native business. In 1984 was the establishment of the native education project. In 1986 was a settlement in the Fort Chipewyan Cree

band treaty land entitlement; in 1986 also, the establishment of policing agreements between several bands across Alberta.

A major agreement in 1987 between the Metis nation of Alberta and this province, the signing of the Metis framework agreement, is a program that directly works in close association with the programs provided by Family and Social Services to work towards the elimination of poverty. Others: in 1988 Premier Getty and Lubicon band chief Bernard Ominayak reached a historic land deal agreement, and I think it again shows a sign of our Premier's leadership in working towards the elimination of poverty. In 1990 was the settlement of the Whitefish Lake band treaty entitlement, in which the band received 5,830 acres plus close to \$20 million of development funds; in 1990 the settlement of the Sturgeon Lake treaty band.

Again in 1990 the Premier established the native caucus, which is another indication of his sincere wishes to assist native people to make the transition from the existing welfare situation more into the mainstream of society. In addition to that is his recent transfer of the native services unit to the Hon. Dick Fowler, who is an aboriginal member himself, to deal with native-related issues. The other item is the transfer of 2.5 million acres to the Metis settlements and housing programs, training programs, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, I believe I would encourage the hon. minister, again talking about the alternative to welfare programs, to try and move forward as rapidly as possible. Once those two pilot projects are under way and prove successful, we should look at those initiatives possibly across the province, because I think we'll go a long ways in eliminating poverty through programs of those natures.

The other item I'd like to discuss briefly is AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped. A couple of concerns have been brought forward to me because these people are on a fixed income, and in a lot of cases their income is a lot lower than the seniors who get the seniors' pension. In relation to the \$1,000 tax rebate towards property taxes, I think that's some-

thing that should be considered, because I believe people on AISH are a bit worse off than the seniors themselves. Possibly provide some extra income also, allowing people on AISH to earn a little more extra income to keep the people active.

Mr. Chairman, with that, due to the time I would move to adjourn debate.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

MR. MOORE: 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. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you agreed with the report of the Member for Lacombe?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 5:29 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 2:30 p.m.]

