

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 10, 2001**  
Date: 01/05/10

1:30 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Bill Pr. 3

#### The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, being The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

### Bill 15

#### Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

MR. GRAYDON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill effectively lowers the single-rate tax from 10 and a half percent to 10 percent and increases the value of some tax credits, lowers the fuel tax on railway fuel from 3 cents a litre to 1 and a half cents a litre, and exempts tax legislation from the provisions of the Limitations Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 15 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

### Bill Pr. 1

#### Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, being the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

### Bill Pr. 2

#### Burns Memorial Trust Act

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, being the Burns Memorial Trust Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Bill Pr. 4

#### Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 4, being the Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of this government's commitment to openness and accountability and in accordance with the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act I would like to table five copies of the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly. This report is for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2000.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to table five copies of the report detailing every payment made by government in the form of grants, supplies, services, and capital assets. The report of the general revenue fund, better known as the blue book, is also for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2000. This report is another example of the openness and accountability of this government.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a letter from Kim Bouwmeester of Edmonton, who is calling on the Premier to abolish health care premiums because in his view they are causing huge, unnecessary hardships for many, many Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter from Mr. Robert Bouvier, president of Teamsters Canada, dated April 30, 2001, urging the provincial government not to support the extension of driving hours of truck drivers and bus drivers to 14 hours a day.

My second tabling is the statement of claim in a case involving Mr. Ziad Jaber.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report for the year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to table for the information of the Legislative Assembly a letter from 1994 from Alberta Labour signed again by Bruce Allen, research and approvals officer, regarding the certification of pine shakes.

Thank you.

#### head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. On behalf of Mr. Speaker I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are nine grade 11 students from the Covenant Canadian Reformed school in Neerlandia. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Henry Stel, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are 12 grade 6 students from the Busby school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Nancy Zeise and Claire Stitsen and parents Beth Andersen and Mary Ann Isaacson. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. VANDERBURG: Again on behalf of our Speaker I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, my neighbouring constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are social 30 students Jill and Erin Holub, Adele Little, and Karli Wurm from Swan Hills. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Cora Ostermeier, and their vice-principal, Nadine Marchand. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to see that so many guests from your constituency have joined us in the Legislature today. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a number of guests from my constituency. I'm very pleased to be joined by a representative of students, teachers, and parents from two different schools in Medicine Hat that are in Edmonton over the next couple of days. Unfortunately, the one group will not be able to get into the Legislature until tomorrow, but I would like to acknowledge that St. Louis school has a delegation in Edmonton today and will be visiting with me tomorrow.

Today joining us in the Legislature I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a large group of 89 students representative of Crestwood Elementary school in Medicine Hat. Accompanying them are teachers David George, Kathy Western, Jackie Sehn, Karen Shaw, Wade Lawson, Gary Ziel, and Mark Traher. Also accompanying them are parents Ron Hill, Don Milne, Cheryl Noble, Sharon Pudwell, and Mark Klautdt. I would ask them, being seated in both the members' and the public galleries, to rise at this time so that they may receive the recognition of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly five students and seven adults from the Rosedale Christian school. They are seated in the public gallery and are accompanied by teachers and group leaders Mr. Roger Klassen, Mrs. Lisa Klassen, Mr. and Mrs. Murray Loewen, Linda Wohlgemuth, and Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Klassen. I would ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of members of the Alberta division of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. They are the people who provided us with the reason for wearing white carnations today. Their names are Darlene Cavanaugh, the chair of the MS provincial board; Glen Lavold, a provincial board member; David Johnston, president and CEO of the Alberta division; Howard Riddel, executive director of the Edmonton chapter; and Kim Cassidy, social action manager. These people are found in our members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

#### head: **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **Gaming Licences**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As more details of the Jaber case become public, there are more unanswered questions. Court documents show that the head of the ALCB had correspondence with a minister of the Crown regarding a liquor lease. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier tell us how often a minister of the Crown becomes directly involved with the granting of a liquor licence in the province of Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier certainly couldn't tell you that, but I can tell you that ministers of this government come in contact with people on inquiries several times a day.

This line of questioning has gone on for a couple of weeks. It appears that most of the issues arise out of court documents and court proceedings. I want to remind all hon. members that these matters have been investigated and charges have been laid where warranted. I'm not sure of the value of conducting these separate reviews or inquiries.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Deputy Premier tell us what effect a minister of the Crown's involvement in the granting of a liquor licence may have on the success or failure of that licence application?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister most appropriate to deal with this issue is the minister who would be responsible for overseeing that department and would know all of the procedures of how licences are granted, and I would ask the hon. minister to respond.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time the AGLC is responsible for that particular process. There is a process that is followed relative to the granting of all liquor licences, and I can tell the Speaker and all members of this House that I do not get involved in that process. I have not been involved in that process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the Minister of Gaming: when can we expect a public review of the openness of those kinds of applications and the process so that Albertans know who's being involved?

MR. STEVENS: I believe that the hon. Minister of Justice should supplement my answer on this, but the fact of the matter is that the workings of the AGLC are very open and transparent. We have an annual report, which is tabled with this Legislature. We have audited financial statements. The fact is that there is no incident, no evidence which I am aware of that would warrant any investigation into the matter referred to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to supplement in order to clarify some of the suggestions that have been made and put them into an appropriate context. It's clear from the exhibits and the testimony at the preliminary inquiry, which have been provided to the opposition – the testimony has been provided to the opposition; I'm not sure if the exhibits have as yet. The memo that's being referred to clearly deals with and the conversation between the chairman of the commission as he testified in that was that he was concerned about the government policy relative to privatization and whether that should be taken into account before any determination about determining a new site. So it's very clearly an appropriate time for the chairman of the commission to consult with the minister on whether there was going to be a change in government policy relative to the privatization of liquor stores prior to determining a specific site lease. That must be put into that context.

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

#### **Farm Income Assistance Program**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Bill 1 the government requires vendors to pass on the user rebate on natural gas to the actual user of that natural gas. My questions today are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why is it that in the agriculture acreage payment program the ministry didn't require the registered operator of the land to pass on the acreage payment to the current operator of the land? In all of your news releases you talk about this being a payment to cover this year's high costs.

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, I don't think that we talk about it being this year's high costs, because costs started rising actually even before last year. However, it's very clear that this payment is made on the year 2000 acres, and I think I was clear on why. The federal government offered to be part of a cost-sharing program, and their criteria was on the year 2000 acres. We had an option of participating in that program, which we chose.

Now, if the hon. member is saying that we should have split this

out and written a cheque for one year and then a cheque for another year, I don't think that that type of administrative activity would have been helpful to farmers. What farmers told me is that they needed some help and they needed it now.

Yes, prices are increasing even more this year. However, I have had a number of calls to my office, as you might expect, on this program. Generally, they are extremely favourable, and generally they indicate what we indicated: it's a help; it's probably not enough. But they're most appreciative that this program is very specific. It goes to the actual producer, to the person who is farming the land.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the minister talks about passing this on, why couldn't you allow new operators of the land this year, say, a 30-day appeal period where they could apply to the government to have that title and the acreage moved to the new operator, away from the old operator, so that it actually goes to the people who are experiencing the high costs this year?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think I indicated in my first answer that the federal government made an offer to all of the provinces in Canada that have grains and oilseed production and, I suppose, others. The criteria was very clear from the federal government that it was on 2000 acres.

Now, as I indicated, I guess we could have administratively separated that out. It didn't seem to be in the best interests, one, of keeping administrative costs down, which, I will tell the hon. member, on this program are very, very, very low. The very large majority of this money is going directly to farmers.

Secondly, the application forms were able to be in their hands in a very short time. I announced the program about 20 after 12 on a Friday, and by 12:58 we had our first applications. So I think that speaks to the urgency of the program and also the need to make a turnaround.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: why is a farm operator able to receive the payment on privately leased land, yet they don't get a payment on land leased from a public owner, from the public?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I think the program is very clear on what this covers, and it is for land that's under a cultivation disposition. That's a very simple way to say it.

Now, we do have Crown lands that have improvements on them, that have been seeded to hay maybe five years ago, maybe 10 years ago. Maybe this year somebody is adding fertilizer to it; maybe they aren't. This program was very specific to cultivation disposition. But to protect the producers who in their management practices deem it a good practice to seed their land that they have under private cultivation to hay or to a forage, we ensured that it covered those crops.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate, I think it's practical, and I think it would have been very, very difficult to try and deem what public land that had tame forage seeded on it would be eligible.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

### **Alberta Hospital Ponoka Sewage Lagoon**

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May, an entire year ago, the Official Opposition brought to the attention of the minister of health the health and environmental problems with a landfill at Alberta Hospital Ponoka. No real answers were given to our questions, so now we'll go back and see if they have answers this time. My questions, of course, are to the minister of health. When the department of health was made aware of the health and environmental concerns of the garbage dump, why did it order the contractor to keep working rather than stop work and fully consult the Environment department?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, a year ago I was the Minister of Environment, and although this is some time ago, to the best of my recollection the Ministry of Environment was involved in an evaluation of the particular site in question at Alberta Hospital. It was found that the materials that were found in the landfill site were in fact safe for the contractor to continue to operate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the Battle River periodically has dramatic floods, how can the minister be sure that contaminants from the dump have not been flushed by these floods out of the dump site and into the surrounding watershed?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly review this matter with my colleague the minister of environmental protection, and I will undertake to do so. But to the best of my recollection, again, the Department of Environment did conduct such an evaluation as to the safety of being able to operate within this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to complement what the minister of health has had to say, last year the Ministry of Environment, as the minister has recollected correctly, began an investigation of that site. We are just finishing that investigation, writing up the results of that site. I can assure you that we bored holes in that site, a number of holes, and there is no evidence of any toxic waste, no evidence of any contamination. What is there in that dump: things that were put in the dumps all around this country in the 1960s. What we found is that there are bricks, glass and that type of thing, and some building materials but no evidence of any contaminated or toxic waste.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess to the minister of health: given that people have experienced repeated frustration in obtaining government reports, will the minister release all reports and studies related to the sewage lagoon project at Alberta Hospital?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I will undertake to consider that request. Again, I do not know what documents would be within the control of the Department of Health and Wellness and which would be under the Department of Environment, but I will undertake to review that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

### **Conflict of Interest Court Case**

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the govern-

ment continues to stonewall the Jaber affair, the questions simply multiply. In the statement of claim against Mr. Jaber, which I tabled earlier today, it is revealed that on or about March 27, 1998, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission was carrying out its own investigation into the prior business activities of Mr. Jaber during his term on the Gaming Commission. My questions are to the Minister of Gaming. How comprehensive is or was this investigation, and did it focus only on Mr. Jaber's lobbying efforts on behalf of Mr. Naqvi, or did it investigate all aspects of Mr. Jaber's activities while chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tabling today is something that I have seen for the first time. The hon. member referred to the allegations contained in this statement of claim as if they were fact. The fact is that a statement of claim is nothing more than a series of allegations which may have some foundation in part or in whole or not at all in fact, and that is what is important about this particular document.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, commit to look into whether or not his department has conducted an investigation into these activities and table the results of that investigation in the House?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that I will take a copy of this tabling and discuss it with the AGLC.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, what I would request of the minister, then, is that he will undertake to report fully on this investigation to the Assembly, including the results of the investigation.

MR. STEVENS: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that this matter has come to my attention. It may well be that there is something here to report on; it may well be that there isn't. In any event, I have undertaken to the hon. member that I will conduct appropriate inquiries of my officials.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### **Drought Assistance**

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we know, the lack of precipitation around the province this spring and the leftover dry conditions from last fall and the winter have caused significant concern with the province's farmers and ranchers on how they will manage this year. Of particular concern right now is the pasture situation for our cattle producers. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise us what options are available for cattle producers dealing with no pasture and in many cases no water or limited water and herds to feed?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this is a particularly dry year, and unfortunately it's continuing on into the spring much longer than any of us had perhaps anticipated and/or hoped. One of the things that is most remarkable about this dry period is the extensiveness

across the province. It isn't limited to any one area. I understand that the city of Edmonton hasn't recorded as dry a period in 121 years of records. So while we don't like to talk about drought the first week in May, we understand that this has already caused some severe problems in the pasture and water conditions.

Members would be aware that we provided an acreage payment on pasture for farmers. It was \$3 an acre. Those cheques are going out. Many of them have. Many producers are making arrangements to move herds to other areas. That's not the best solution, but it's one that's possible, particularly to the west country. We've announced the program on pumping water where that's appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges that these producers are facing are many, and we're certainly talking with them to look at what solutions we might be able to support them with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Specifically again to the minister: could you advise us on what kinds of options are being assessed right now?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with Alberta Environment, with the PFRA, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, in both the monitoring and looking at solutions. I would say that ultimately right now our most pressing concern is water needs of the cattle producers. We're monitoring that and talking to producers about what type of assistance would be most appropriate to help them.

Water pumping is great if you've got a source to pump from, but if you don't, that doesn't work. Water hauling is another option. Again you have to have a source. Unfortunately, it's a large intake of water for beef cattle especially, and it's an ongoing, daily job, and when you're done, that's exactly what you've got. You've put in a few months of hauling.

We've been talking with the federal government, as I indicated earlier, about tax deferral if a producer has to reduce a herd significantly or indeed sell out. That is not a preferred option, especially with the demand for the quality beef that we provide in this province.

I just want to assure the hon. member and all hon. members that Alberta Environment and Alberta Agriculture will continue to work closely and quickly to look at what we can do to respond to this serious situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the minister of agriculture: again can the minister please advise us – she referred to it quickly – as to the time frame that we're looking at in terms of acting on any of these options?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the very short answer is just as quickly as we possibly can. I'll again repeat the commitment. Alberta Agriculture and Alberta Environment will continue to work hard on this with our federal partners, the PFRA, and try to bring some options forward as quickly as we possibly can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

### Young Offenders' Programs

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1999-2000 report of

the Children's Advocate chronicles the poor treatment of some young offenders who have child welfare status. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. What is being done to prevent young offenders who have child welfare status remaining overly long in closed custody due to lack of community placements?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are several things that are being done. We have in fact improved considerably the number of placements and the residency of children once they have been apprehended for any reason either under temporary or emergency situations. We have been able to expand our placements by agreements with various agencies so that there is additional capacity. We've also been able to ensure that one of the previous practices, which was a fairly costly practice, a fairly ineffective practice of putting these types of individuals in hotels, has been discontinued and that we have other secure placements for them where they are properly managed and cared for.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that over the last two years each child and family service authority has made considerable advances. If you look at that report and cite the number of times that there are references from individual children as opposed to a recommendation that perhaps identifies the outcome of certain measures that have been taken, it would be hard to read that report and evaluate that children are being protected in a less desirable fashion than they were previously.

DR. MASSEY: This is about the young offenders. Why do those young offenders often lack access to optical and dental services that they need?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any being denied access. I have not had any complaint to my office, and I would appreciate it if in fact the hon. member has any knowledge that they are or individual cases that are – references of incidents that happened previously are the very things that we are driving so very hard to overcome.

If I could remind the hon. member that when I was first given the privilege of being Minister of Children's Services, the expenditures were \$467 million. If you look at the record of this year's budget, the addition of almost 400 frontline workers, the addition of at least 30 percent plus on the front lines in our budget, you can see that there have been dramatic improvements, and to suggest that things may not be improving is to ignore the obvious.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to improve the planning between child welfare and the young offenders' system?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are numerous things that are being done. Currently I've met with the Solicitor General, and I've also met previously with the Minister of Justice. We have talked about ways we can collaborate and improve the system, ways that we can train staff so that they are fully cognizant of things that are being done in each other's shop. We engage in a number of workshops, including times where we discuss how we combat circumstances with fetal alcohol syndrome or deal with the neurological disorders that are appropriate. So we do a number of different cross-training purposes. As well, I'd remind you of the Alberta children's initiative, which continuously, vigorously approaches those issues that we may have in common. This year our special emphasis is on youth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### **Orthopedic Surgery Waiting Lists**

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Albertans, especially seniors, who are in need of knee or hip replacements are suffering while waiting for these medically necessary operations. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness advise the House and Albertans as to what is the maximum waiting time for these operations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should say at the outset that I can understand the difficulty that it can create waiting for health services. One of our greatest commitments in health care is to reduce waiting lists. Under our six-point plan for the health care system we have put in some \$55 million a year for the purposes of addressing waiting lists, and we are making good progress. Last year the number of hip and joint replacements went up by some 10 percent. Emergency joint replacements are done within 24 hours. The Calgary health region advises me that the waiting time currently for a hip replacement would be between three to nine months after a specialist has made a decision that the joint replacement is required. While we are doing more replacements than we have ever done before, the list continues to grow significantly. Regions are making every effort to ensure that there are the appropriate staff, operating space and equipment, and acute care beds required to continue to do more of these types of procedures.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since one of my constituents has been waiting 18 months for a knee replacement, does the minister believe that 18 months is a reasonable time to wait for a hip or knee replacement?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the blunt answer is no, I don't think that's reasonable. We have set a target time of four months for hip and joint replacements. Currently, individual circumstances may result in times taking perhaps more than that. We are concerned about the length of time that it takes for people to get this procedure done. I think those individuals who have the need for hip or knee replacement should stay in close contact with their physicians. If their condition worsens, they can certainly advise their physician, who can pass that on to the specialist, because specialists do prioritize their own waiting lists and schedule patients according to the urgency of their need.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister of Health and Wellness aware of any CRHA rationing of operating rooms in order to save money and that specialists are only allowed to use operating rooms five times a month?

MR. MAR: Well, the answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. The CRHA is not limiting times and is in fact offering additional time to specialists. The operating rooms that the CRHA has at its disposal right now are being fully utilized, and in fact at the Peter Lougheed centre they are putting in place plans to open and staff three new operating theatres for the purposes of providing more such services. It will take some time to reach the desired levels of service that we want in this area, but I expect that there will be improvements, particularly in this specific service of hip and joint replacement.

As well, I should say that the recently released report on the western Canadian waiting list project will be an important step in standardizing and co-ordinating wait lists for selected services like hip and joint replacement, and the next step of this project is to look at the recommended wait times for each particular procedure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

2:10

### **Coalition of Power Companies**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A large block of electricity generating companies in Alberta – included in this coalition are such industry giants as Aquila, ATCO Power, Duke Energy, EPCOR Utilities, TransAlta Utilities, and Fording Coal – appears together routinely before the EUB. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Would the minister agree that this coalition has the potential to become a cartel?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister. Seeking an opinion here.

MR. SMITH: Opinion, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: what measures have been taken by the Department of Energy to ensure that the coalition does not become a cartel?

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no discussion about whether the coalition is or is not operating with oligopolistic power or disproportionate economic power. There is in the marketplace through the Power Pool Council a market surveillance administrator that looks very closely and carefully at market actions and reports back through the Power Pool. Of course, there's also the other avenue of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, that has the ability to, as it is doing now, conduct a marketing review.

I think that as desperate as the opposition member is to avoid competition in free market activities and would much prefer a socialist environment, as he's expressed on many other occasions, we think that competition will provide a number of opportunities for businesses that are owned in Alberta, public corporations that have shareholders in Alberta, and, in fact, over the long term, Mr. Speaker, will benefit all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: what measures are there in the Department of Energy to deal with the concerns about another block in Alberta called the Firm? The Firm is made up of associations representing municipalities, consumers, and large users of electricity who expressed concern to the EUB in December with the degree of collaboration in the coalition, noting the volumes of net supply that the coalition now controls.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the hon. minister did stand up when the question was asked. Please proceed.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult for me to

remember that far back to the original question, but scaling my memory as I reviewed the second part of the member's question, there are the safeguards of a market construct that certainly promote competition at the wholesale level. It is early in the new competitive market model, but we do know that prices have come down some 40 percent since January 1 of this year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Energy Rebates

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past couple of weeks my constituency office has been kept extremely busy dealing with calls from constituents about the Alberta energy tax refund. The people in my constituency are extremely frustrated and many are angry over problems that they are experiencing in receiving the second installment of this \$300 that was to be paid to all Albertans by the provincial government. As we all know, the federal government is responsible for issuing these cheques, and my constituents have a number of questions that they have asked me to pass on to the Minister of Finance. I would like to do that at this time. Why does it appear that there are inconsistencies between withholdings on these cheques that were issued in November as compared to the cheques that are currently being issued?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I've tried to go through the difficulties with administering this program a few times in the House. This is a good question from the hon. member, because there does need to be some clarification as to why there were no difficulties with the November cheque for \$150 that people received and the cheque that they did or did not receive in April.

When the program was announced in September, we approached the federal government, in particular the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, who administers income tax collection and refunds, to put the cheques through their system for us. We did that so that these cheques would not be taxable, to run it through the program. By using their system and because we didn't give them much notice that we wanted to access their system – that's why people had to have filed a 1999 tax return, so we knew they would be on the CCRA system – there was not an opportunity at the federal level for a crossover between outstanding debts for income tax to be deducted off those fall cheques.

Now, I know you're asking me to move along, but I think this is important. We have an agreement with the federal government for tax administration and tax collection that allows them to withhold payments if there are outstanding taxes on an individual's file. In the situation of November there was not the time frame to be able to cross-check between systems. On April 1 the federal agency did do the crossover, and that's why they held some of these cheques back: to deal with outstanding debts on accounts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question I hear most often is: why is it that people who were organized enough to file their income tax return early and delay payment until the end of April, which they were entitled to do, are being penalized by having cheques withdrawn or reduced, yet people who were not organized enough to file their taxes until the end of April or in fact didn't file their tax return at all are receiving their cheques with no deductions?

THE SPEAKER: Let's get to question and answer period, not debate back period.

MRS. NELSON: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, again it goes back to the original answer. The time frame involved between the first cheque and the second cheque gave the federal tax collection group an opportunity to crossover their systems or to link them together, and for those that filed early or even through the Internet but subsequently sent a cheque, the debt for the tax owing was sitting on the books as of the date of these cheques being released.

I said last week in the House that we have been in touch with the federal minister. Our deputy has talked to the deputy of CCRA and asked them to correct this and mail back to Albertans the \$150 if in fact people have paid up their taxes for the year 2000. It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that that cheque run will be made this next week and will be sent out to Albertans to rectify the situation.

MR. RENNER: Final question: who will be responsible for paying the additional costs for Albertans who will now receive two separate cheques, each amounting to a total of \$150?

MRS. NELSON: Well, it's my understanding, as I said before, that the cost of the two program runs is \$1.25 per cheque for the November and the April cheques. This additional run that we've requested will be at the expense of the federal agency because of the holding back of debts or current tax obligations on something that was supposed to apply to the 1999 tax year.

### Class Action Legislation

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, an Albertan recently wrote: it is our view that there is no good reason why Alberta does not pass class action legislation; this is an access to justice issue. Who said it? It was the Calgary lawyer the province has just hired to represent it in its lawsuit against Servier, the French pharmaceutical giant. Both the Alberta Court of Appeal in '98 and the Law Society of Alberta in June 2000 called for quick class action reform, as did the Law Reform Institute in a report to the Minister of Justice. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. Would the minister please advise this House as to the status of his review on this matter?

2:20

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, we're always looking at ways to make the access to justice and access to the courts and dispute resolution more effective and more efficient for Albertans. There are jurisdictions which allow class action suits, and we've looked at them as well as looking at the reports that have been brought forward by the Law Reform Institute. People do have concerns about class actions as to whether they promote litigation, so we've looked at the question as to how class action legislation might be brought forward in such a manner as to deal with those types of concerns, and it's a matter of ongoing review.

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, would the minister please explain why he's dragging his feet on reforming class action legislation? It would have been very helpful to Albertans who were suing over involuntary sterilization, pine shakes, silicone breast implants, or residential schools. Why dragging the feet?

MR. HANCOCK: I don't recall, Mr. Speaker, indicating that I was dragging my feet on the particular question but that we were doing a thorough review, examining all aspects of it to see how it could be brought in most appropriately. When we're ready to proceed with a proposal, we'll be prepared to bring it forward.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, in the meantime, then, Mr. Speaker, what other remedies does the minister offer to Albertans?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, anything that can be brought forward in a class action can be brought forward in an individual action. In some cases when it's appropriate, things can be brought forward in a representative action. I certainly don't disagree that it would be more efficient, more effective, and more appropriate in certain circumstances for Albertans to have access to class action suits. They can, of course, join class action suits on some of those issues in other jurisdictions where class actions are being brought forward, but certainly in some of the areas that were mentioned that are specific to Alberta, it would have been appropriate, and that's one of the reasons why I'm very interested in looking at the issue and finding out if there's an effective way that we can deal with the concerns that people have and still provide that opportunity for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Code of Conduct and Ethics

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Jaber affair has raised serious questions about how and how seriously the government goes about ensuring that senior appointed officials act appropriately at all times. Its blanket refusal to require senior appointed officials to file a public disclosure statement is just one example of the government failing to ensure that strict standards are set for senior appointed officials. My simple and straightforward questions today are for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Are all government officials required to acquaint themselves with the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been a Conflicts of Interest Act since 1992. It was reviewed, I believe, by a committee of this Legislature. I may be wrong on that, but nonetheless a thorough review was reported I believe in 1996 and amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act brought forward in 1997. In addition, there's a code of conduct under the act which governs the public service. Its name I can't recall just at the moment. All senior public service officials should review the code of conduct under the terms of their employment pursuant to that act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be a little more specific this time. What procedures are in place to acquaint senior public officials with the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that may be a question that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment may want to address further, being the minister responsible for the PAO, which stands for personnel administration office, as to what policies he has in place to make sure that senior officials do review that code of conduct. I can't specifically speak to that, but I would hope that any senior official of government would acquaint themselves with the rules of their employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, just the fact that we do have a program in place for senior officials, and we believe it stands the test of reasonableness and natural justice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that the statement of facts agreed to by the Crown states clearly that Mr. Jaber has no recollection of the code of conduct having ever been brought to his attention, how can Albertans trust this government to enforce that code of conduct and ethics?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, the enforcement is obviously clear in the results of the case, Mr. Speaker. If there is someone who violates the code of conduct or violates the criminal law, they'll be prosecuted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

### Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that two children are born every day in this country with either fetal alcohol syndrome or another alcohol- or drug-related birth defect, resulting in significant human cost and cost to public services, which I find disturbing. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. What has this government accomplished in addressing this devastating and I believe preventable condition?

MR. MAR: This is a very costly issue, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that our efforts in this regard are an example of where you can spend money in order to save money in the long run. Since 1998 there has been a fetal alcohol syndrome cross-ministry initiative involving partners across government and outside of government as well. This committee has been championed by AADAC and the Department of Children's Services and has worked with departments like the Ministry of Health and Wellness, regional health authorities, child and family authorities, also the Alberta Medical Association, Health Canada, and many others.

The purpose of this initiative is to initiate multiple strategies of training service providers, providing funding for communities, and public information to raise awareness of fetal alcohol syndrome. Mr. Speaker, I should say that there are a number of recent accomplishments of this initiative: a public campaign to raise awareness of fetal alcohol syndrome among professionals like teachers, physicians, corrections workers, social workers, and of course the public, women of childbearing age and their partners. Also, our partners have included the Alberta Restaurant and Foodservices Association, the Alberta Liquor Store Association. Members may be familiar with the Born Free program, where a number of restaurants provide free nonalcoholic beverages to pregnant women.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the initiative has introduced a priority for treatment at AADAC treatment centres for pregnant women. There has been funding provided to community associations. A fetal alcohol syndrome awareness program is being provided to all new young offenders in the province during their orientation process at young offender centres. Also, clinical practice guidelines have been established for physicians to increase their knowledge about the effects of exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

This is a complex problem, Mr. Speaker. There's no single solution, but I believe that we are taking a number of initiatives across a number of different government departments and with nongovernment organizations as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mentioned one of the partners being Children's Services. I'd like to direct my second and last question to the Minister of Children's Services. What are your government's future plans to address fetal alcohol and drug-related birth defects?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. Just last week with the hon. member who was engaged in the responsibilities of the Youth Secretariat I attended meetings in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with members of the prairie fetal alcohol northern partnership. It's a wonderful group of ministers and officials from Winnipeg through to the Yukon. We talked about how we could collaborate and publish best practices, three per province, to initiate some further discussion within provinces so that we're not all reinventing the wheel.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the people that are most likely affected by fetal alcohol or people who would engage in drinking while they are pregnant or intending to be pregnant don't read the literature, and you have to find other ways to get to them. We've talked about spending time in consultations with community members, and through the Minister of Learning we're looking at the school curriculum. In the announcement made last fall in commitment to action, we announced \$48 million in the area of risk management. A good part of that funding will go for fetal alcohol syndrome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

2:30

### **Trucking Regulations**

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CRASH, Canadians for Responsible and Safe Highways, has some serious concerns about the proposed plans to allow truck drivers to drive up to 84 hours per week. The teamsters' union, which represents 100,000 members throughout Canada including 45,000 truck and bus drivers, is strongly opposed to these changes. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Does the minister support increasing the maximum number of hours that truckers can drive per day?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, our position in the department is that we will follow up, on further consultations, in reviewing the numbers of hours that our truck drivers operate. I wish to point out to the hon. member that our proposal that we have will actually look at a reduction in the total number of hours. However, I want to advise this House that we took on these public consultations with the clear understanding that the federal department would also work along with us and all provinces to ensure that we have a clear, concise policy that is harmonized across this country. To date, Alberta is the only province that has conducted public consultations with the industry and all of our stakeholders.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister table copies of any reports or studies that the government has on the effects, both on personal health and public safety, of truckers being behind the wheel longer?

MR. STELMACH: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I believe – and I stand to be corrected – we are the only province in Canada that is jointly funding a research project with the position of looking at

fatigue management. We know some of the issues with respect to truckers: issues of perhaps poor diet, overweight, maybe having a little heavier neck, not getting the kind of oxygen that's necessary as they're driving, all of these. I'm not pointing fingers at you, Mr. Speaker. I will say that these are all very important areas of review. At the end of the day, with the review that we're doing with the fatigue management team, with our department, and also all of the stakeholders, the goal is the same, and that is to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister support the replacement of logbooks with onboard recorders to enforce driving limits in commercial vehicles?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, this province, I believe, today is further ahead of other jurisdictions in a number of key areas. In fact, we have a project going together with the Minister of Learning and the minister of human resources to look at a program that would be similar to an apprenticeship program for truck drivers, covering a number of areas like fatigue management. The other area, of course, is to look at the new technology that's coming forward every day in the truck driving industry, and part of this may be global positioning rather than just simply logbooks. I do know for sure that there's a group of larger freight companies called Partners in Compliance, and they are very eager to work with the government to ensure, once again, that the integrity of the trucking industry remains intact.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before moving to the next item, let me just indicate to all hon. members that today is the anniversary of the birth of the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, and tomorrow is the anniversary of the birth of the hon. Minister of Transportation, who will hit five zero tomorrow and this afternoon is offering hamburgers to anyone who wants one.

### **head: Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

### **Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month**

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. This month alone 80 more people in Canada will learn they have this disease. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, with Alberta having the highest prevalence in all of Canada. Though MS is still deemed the mystery disease as the cause is unknown, its course unpredictable, and its cure is yet undiscovered, tremendous strides have been made. Today there are four therapies approved in Canada for treating relapsing-remitting MS, and one is approved for the treatment of secondary progressive. For those of us with MS this is very, very good news.

The MS Society continues to be a leader in funding MS research in Canada. For instance, earlier this year the MS Society approved nearly \$3.3 million for 14 research projects and 46 research scholarships. Half of these projects focus on how myelin can be repaired or regrown. Myelin is the vital protective covering of the central nervous system damaged by MS. The MS Society of Alberta is strong. Many individuals willingly volunteer their time and energy towards service programs, fund-raising events, and public awareness campaigns. Many events will be held across the province this month or next to raise dollars for research and programming: bike tours, walking tours, and of course the MS carnation campaign.

Having been asked by the central Alberta MS chapter to be their

honorary spokesperson for their seventh annual bike tour on June 23 and 24, I encourage each and every one of you to participate at such an event in your own community. I'm very pleased that I can announce that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has willingly agreed to participate and will be biking in the bike tour in central Alberta.

Only through working together and understanding this debilitating disease can a cause and cure be found.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### **Edmonton Emergency Response Services**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to express a heartfelt thank you for the brave efforts of the Edmonton emergency response department's fire rescue branch with regard to the fire that nearly destroyed Fulton Court, a 70-unit seniors' condominium complex in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Fire stations 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, and 15 were involved in assisting residents out of the building and in fighting the persistent fire. Thankfully, none of the residents of Fulton Court were hurt or injured as a result of the fire. Without the tireless and quick efforts of the fire crews and police I am certain that we would have seen even more property loss and possible loss of human life.

In addition, I would like to commend those individuals and organizations who were also involved with the rescue and relief efforts, especially the two unidentified young people who alerted the emergency response department to the blaze, as well as the Fulton Place Community League for temporarily housing the displaced residents of the condominium complex.

I wish to point out that although the population in Edmonton has grown by approximately 8 percent over the past 10 years, the number of firefighters serving this city has not kept up with that pace of population growth. Firefighters continue to work hard to protect all of us. Their efforts do not go unnoticed. I would ask that all members of this House as well as the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar join me in thanking those individuals.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### **Rogers Sugar Ltd.**

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and recognize the significant contribution of a major business in my constituency. Rogers Sugar Ltd. operates a sugar beet processing plant located in Taber, Alberta. The plant is the last remaining sugar beet processing facility in Canada. Over the past three years the company has invested over \$50 million to upgrade and expand the processing capacity of the factory.

Rogers Sugar is one of the largest employers in southern Alberta, with more than 380 permanent and temporary employees on the payroll, which totals more than \$8 million annually. Each year contracts are signed with approximately 450 southern Alberta growers to plant 45,000 acres of sugar beets. Close to 1 million tonnes of beets are harvested and processed each year. Company payments to sugar beet growers total more than \$30 million each year. Another \$12 million is spent on operating and packaging supplies.

2:40

The factory is also a significant consumer of natural gas. For the 2000-2001 processing campaign nearly \$11 million was paid for gas and electricity. Soaring energy costs are a threat to

the future viability of this plant. The end of this campaign also marked the completion of the 50th year of operation for the plant in Taber, a remarkable achievement considering the vagaries of the world sugar market. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Assembly I offer congratulations to the administration and workers of this plant.

Thank you very much.

### **head: Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our House leader I would ask the Government House Leader for the projected plans for the business of the House for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For Monday, May 14, under Government Bills and Orders in the afternoon, Committee of Supply, day 1 of lotteries, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply with the main estimates of Finance and Energy, and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, May 15, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 8, Bill 11, Bill 14, Bill 15, Bill 16; in Committee of the Whole, Bill 1; and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the main estimates for Executive Council and Government Services.

Wednesday, May 16, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the main estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Community Development and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, May 17, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, as designated, the main estimates of Seniors and as per the Order Paper.

### **head: Orders of the Day**

### **head: Government Bills and Orders Third Reading**

#### **Bill 5**

#### **Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I would like to move for third reading the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001.

The details have been discussed in second reading and Committee of the Whole, and I won't prolong debate by going into them other than to say that this bill is necessary to complete the finances for the last fiscal year. I'd ask the House to pass it as expeditiously as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Bill 5 and the fact that there is significant money for the departments of Children's Services, Infrastructure, and Learning and also in reference to schedule B, in light of the time, at this time I would like to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 6****Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move on behalf of the Minister of Finance Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware and as the Members of this Legislative Assembly are well aware, we're in the process in Committee of Supply of dealing with the estimates of the government, which will be dealt with in the appropriate appropriation bill at the appropriate time. The interim supply bill really is just that. It allows the operation of the government in the interim until main supply is passed. Thus, all the numbers and all the amounts that are being proposed for expenditure under the interim supply bill are actually going to be superseded by the main appropriation bill when it's introduced after Committee of Supply is completed. Therefore I would commend this bill to the House and ask for immediate passage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, in regards to Bill 6, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**head: Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the meeting to order.

**head: Main Estimates 2001-2002****Children's Services**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services to open debate.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I'm very honoured today to present the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce in the gallery some of the very key members of our staff that are here today accompanying me and listening to the remarks that would be made in the House this afternoon. First of all, we have our deputy minister, Paula Tyler; my director of finance, Bryan Huygen; and Nancy Reynolds, who is the executive director of partnership and innovation. I trust that there may be others that will join us, but presently we're delighted to have them here.

Mr. Chairman, I have on a number of occasions cited critical things from our business plan, both in response to members across the way as well as our own members, and I'm going to try and make this digest relatively succinct so that it affords me some opportunity later to make some brief concluding remarks.

If I may, this ministry, as you know, is new, but the work of the ministry has gone on for many years. We're engaged in child protection, adoption, services for children with disabilities, early intervention, day care programs, family violence prevention, help to children involved in prostitution, and those affected by fetal alcohol syndrome, and you're very familiar with our work through family

and community support services. We do a number of initiatives such as co-ordinating the Children's Forum, and the Task Force on Children at Risk commitment to action was a good part of our endeavours in the past year. More recently the amendments to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act resulted in an act that is unprecedented anywhere, I would suggest, not only in North America but worldwide.

Our partnerships are well known, but another honourable mention today – Born Free – the Great Kids awards, work we have done on raves, and advocacy that we have done generally in this province to elevate the profile of how people can serve the children of the province better. The Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency created a milestone this year, for the first time having a pilot project placing First Nations children for adoption with First Nations families. This has never been done in Canada, and the work that was done complements Justice, the ministry of aboriginal affairs, and many other partners that we're proud to have.

2:50

According to Statistics Canada there are about 760,000 children in this province between zero and 17 years of age. Many of these children are healthy and well cared for by responsible families in communities, and their parents do work hard and spend time with them. Mr. Chairman, last year, though, was a sore point when I heard in fact that a thousand youth that attended forums in Alberta said the one thing they wanted more of from their parents was time. What a sad statement on behalf of the people of this province that our children ask us simply for time, time to be spent with them, and those that cannot afford to or do not spend time with them more frequently result in issues which are creating work for Children's Services.

Mr. Chairman, we're challenged, too, by a number of the outcomes of society in general. Our handicapped children's services expands its mission every day in part because of an excellent health care system that enables our frail children and those that aren't as well to be served within the system as they grow. It results in many more programs and challenges for our department. Mr. Chairman, our caseloads have grown 60.7 percent since '95-96, from 8,800 in '95-96 to 14,207 in 2000-2001. Lest you think we are alone in this, this is a North American phenomenon in large part, I believe, symbolic of other issues that are surrounding us in society.

Government is the permanent or temporary guardian of 53 percent of these children, approximately 7,900 overall. We also estimate that the child welfare caseload may increase by 5 percent in the current year. The children with disabilities program helps families meet some of the extraordinary costs. Handicapped children's services' caseload has increased, and the cost per case is also increasing in large part because of new approaches and technologies.

Mr. Chairman, our ministry is a major contributor to the aboriginal policy framework, which is a tool outlining collaborative efforts in the development of services for aboriginal children and their families. We have delivery agreements with 16 child and family services on reserve agencies, that provide services to 37 First Nations. We're also working closely with our Metis population.

Because our ministry is only two years old, still at a developmental stage, we have operational challenges: reliable performance measures, fiscal accountability, and addressing concerns of the Auditor General, to cite just a few. We believe that in this business plan we are addressing our priorities; namely, aboriginal services, permanent living situations for children, better outcomes for children in care, youth services, and building effective partnerships.

Our core businesses differ slightly from last year's plan. We have reduced our core businesses from six to three, articulating better, we

hope, those key areas which impact significantly on children's lives. We continue to work, as other ministries do, through the Alberta children's initiative to identify those performance outcomes that can be most meaningful. Our corporate strategies and partnerships are enabling us to create effective human resources and to improve our strategies in caring for children.

In our new initiatives we have increased our budget by \$2.9 million for the treatment and protection of children involved in prostitution, quite specifically for treatment centres, and have added \$2 million to programs working to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome. We have received \$20 million through the Canada health and social transfer for early childhood development strategies that were identified through the forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. We will focus on healthy birth outcomes, ongoing supports to parents, and optimal early child development. A total of \$6 million has been budgeted to initiate a home visitation program directed at parents of newborns, particularly those in high-risk situations.

For FCSS, a very important program in over 260 municipalities of this province, we have increased the budget by over \$4 million and look to further expanding our initiatives. We have Dr. Bruce Perry, an internationally renowned child psychiatrist who'll be working on contract with ourselves and with the ministry of health through the Mental Health Board on creating even better strategies dealing with children at risk.

In conclusion, I know that I'll be well able to address the questions that the hon. members have both in follow up and hopefully some at the very conclusion. I would say, Mr. Chairman, that I am delighted that the hon. members chose to conclude debate in order to enable a maximum time to hear the issues that they may wish to address. I believe there is absolutely no more important ministry in this government than Children's Services, because we address the beginning of our future society in Alberta, and we can make them better with a collaborative effort.

Thank you.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**DR. MASSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I concur with the minister: there is no more important ministry in the government than Children's Services and Learning. Without those there wouldn't be a concern for agriculture or some of the other ministries.

Because I'll have an opportunity several times in the next couple of hours to speak, I wanted to spend my first opportunity asking some questions about the report of the Children's Advocate. I've asked in question period several questions about the report of the Children's Advocate, and I keep getting the feeling that the advocate's report is dismissed as no longer applicable to children in the province, yet if you look at that report and you read it and you read on the back page the disposition of previous reports, this seems to be a pattern: the Children's Advocate is ignored.

I know there have been a couple of reports, and the government has those reports under review, but I think if the Children's Advocate is to be the tool that Albertans expect that office to be, then that office has to be taken seriously. I think certainly the matters that are raised are serious. I know in response to my question earlier this afternoon, the minister indicated that there had been some improvement in the placement of children, but it's been a recurring theme in the reports of the Auditor General that there is a shortage of placement and resources and insufficient spaces for secure treatment. They also indicated that there is a lack of mental health resources to help those youngsters. So placement remains a problem. I would

like to know exactly what it is the department is planning to do to make the matter better.

The report goes on to indicate that there's a "lack of consistent permanency planning." Some children weren't even aware that they had a caseworker, some had never seen their social worker, and many were unaware of the plan. That seems to be very damning, Mr. Chairman. Certainly you'd think that youngsters in care would at least be aware of their social worker. It may only be a few children, but still these are children under the care of this government, and they deserve better.

The report raises the problem of "refusal to provide support" to older residents and refusal to support them to adulthood. I'd ask what is being done on that. What are the plans in terms of overcoming that criticism?

3:00

A number of youngsters in care have behaviour problems. We know that those problems don't go away on their 18th birthday, so what kinds of bridging mechanisms could be put in place to help these youngsters make the transition to adulthood? Some of them even indicated that they had to fight for support to finish high school. You'd wonder how that could happen, given what we know about the importance of completing high school on future success occupationally for all children, let alone children who have suffered some trauma or some problems in their childhood.

I indicated earlier today and the minister did say that there was greater co-operation between the Children's Services department and young offenders, children who are under the Young Offenders Act, and I think that's a positive move. It seems incredible to me that there would be children in care in an institution that wouldn't have access to dental or optical care. Certainly the Children's Advocate report indicated that there are a number of children who were suffering because of that, so I hope the discussions the minister indicated she was having with the Solicitor General result in that no longer being a complaint in future reports of the Children's Advocate.

The lack of mental health services I mentioned before. Again there's a question as to the timeliness of mental health services that are available to them. The report indicates that often that kind of care is not there, and the root of the problem, according to the Children's Advocate, is the lack of resources. There's the problem of children who suffer abuse while in the care of child welfare. That seems to outsiders to be an incredible state of affairs, but it happens. Those individuals lack adequate support for legal representation, so it seems that the very children the government is charged with caring for are becoming victims under that care, and I think that's a state that's not tolerable in this day and this age.

The court delays of course are a problem, and it's not the Children's Services department that has direct control over those delays. But when rulings on guardianship do not occur, then plans for youngsters are made more difficult, particularly trying to put in place permanent plans for youngsters becomes very difficult. So there's a need again for the ministry to work with the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice to make sure that the court system accommodates children in care quickly, with the best interests of the youngster and not the court system being paramount.

Custody/access. For young people in care sometimes access to siblings is denied. For those not in care who are the subject of custody disputes between separating or divorcing parents, there's nobody who independently represents their interests, and that would seem to be tragic. I wonder what plans the minister has to try to accommodate those cases.

The advocate went on to say – and this is not a new recommenda-

tion – that in terms of child death review, “There is need for an independent, comprehensive, multidisciplinary body to review the deaths of children to try to reduce the incidence of childhood fatality.” There have been a couple of cases in the news recently, Mr. Chairman, that I would think would make this recommendation even more important to be acted upon, and I would ask the minister and the department exactly what kind of leadership they’re going to be taking in this area.

In terms of the system itself there don’t seem to be adequate mechanisms in place for the young people who are in the system to have any influence over it, to be offered feedback in terms of their treatment, leading to a feeling of powerlessness and again the notion that they are somehow or other being victimized by the very system that’s supposed to be working in their best interests.

There are problems with gaps in the education system for young people who have been neglected, who have suffered abuse. Many conventional school programs fall short, and there’s a need for alternative programs and for flexibility in educational programs. So again some gaps in the education system. There’s much to do made about partnerships and working with other departments, and I’d be interested in terms of how this particular criticism is being met by the department.

The boundary issues between regional authorities and the creation of the regional authorities are not unlike what’s happened with some of the health authorities. Maybe it’s only in the early operation of these divisions that we’re going to find these problems, but the pressure for resources has led to disputes between and among regional authorities. Again the people who suffer are the children and young people in care when those disputes start to govern what happens to them, and I’d like to know what mechanism the department has in place for dealing with those disputes when they do occur.

I think one of the worst kinds of criticism in the report was the charge that children are being warehoused and that they’re “being kept in short-term care facilities for long periods due to a lack of suitable alternatives.” The term “warehousing” has been used elsewhere in the care of children, particularly in the school system where special-needs children have been warehoused, according to some recent reports, put in classrooms with no suitable programs. So I can’t imagine what happens when a special-needs child in government care needs a program if the charges from the special education community and the charges of the Children’s Advocate in this report are true. It seems we’re asking for future difficulty when we don’t address those problems, and it seems incredible that in this year we would be talking about children being warehoused because there are not appropriate services or placements for them.

The concerns raised about the medication of children in care, the “inordinate use of medications as a behaviour management tool.” That’s a charge that has been laid to the school system too. The Ritalin generation is a reality, and we’ve raised it in the Legislature on a number of previous occasions.

Along with the lack of opportunities for children in care to give any feedback on the system, there’s the charge that youth are treated with disrespect, that they are sometimes confronted with punitive attitudes, and, again, that they lack any kind of meaningful input into the decisions that are going to affect their lives. I would think it would be a charge that the department would want to take seriously, and I’d be interested in measures that are being undertaken to make sure that that doesn’t happen.

3:10

The budget announces money for new positions. I think I heard the minister indicate that 500 new workers would be put in place to

help with handling the needs of children and youth. The problem with staff turnover is a problem not just here but in systems elsewhere. It results, of course, in discontinuity of care for young people, and the need for stable relationships for many of them is very, very great. So I’d be interested in knowing what kinds of programs the department has in place or is considering to reduce the amount of staff turnover.

The last concern is the extreme lack of services in northern Alberta. The resources are not there for children.

I took the time to highlight those issues that were in the report, and I hope they aren’t just dismissed as being last year’s or that was the system before the new system was in place criticisms, because having read previous reports, having talked to a number of constituents who spend some time in our office, I know that’s not the case, that many of these are problems that still plague the system. I think to disregard them is to disregard children, so I would hope there would be some response from the minister in terms of the recommendations. My preference has been – and I think the minister indicated it would happen – that before we adjourn the spring session, there would be some response from the government on the Children’s Advocate report, and I hope that that is still the case.

The advocate went on to identify the issues of greatest concern, and they were more limited. The top of the list again was placements, and the report chronicles the placement problems of some young people.

The second greatest concern was the delegated First Nations child welfare agencies, the kinds of problems that this delegated model has and the kinds of problems that are faced in this area.

A third area is services to older youth and the transition to adulthood, and it would seem to me again, Mr. Chairman, that this is an area that really begs some action. We can’t simply wash our hands of youth once they reach the age of 18, yet I know it’s fraught with difficulties.

Another issue is the disrespectful treatment of youth as being one of the areas of greatest concern. There is direct control, and something can be done immediately about the problem. There’s no excuse for this being an issue in a report from the Children’s Advocate.

Another concern and a concern for all of us – and I’ll ask some questions directly about this later, Mr. Chairman – is the child and family services authorities. I have some questions about the funding of those authorities, the kind of money that they asked for in terms of carrying out their mandate and the kind of money that was actually allocated to them.

So those are the comments that I had based on the Children’s Advocate, and I would like to move in the next few minutes to a question. In the business plan there’s the promise of a number of performance measures that are going to be developed. I would like to spend a bit of time talking about the child and family indicators and the kinds of indicators that are going to be put in place, but seeing you’ve indicated that I only have seconds left, I’ll save that for later this afternoon.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, it’s a pleasure to participate this afternoon in the estimates debate for Children’s Services. Certainly from my perspective I would like to commend my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for his diligence in pursuing the issues and keeping not only the minister but the entire government accountable on this. The whole series of questions that the hon. member has asked regarding the Children’s Advocate report has been enlightening for this member. I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly if they have not yet read that report to do so over this

weekend or the long weekend. It is my estimation that it has not yet been read by some members of this Assembly, and they certainly need to do so.

I see there's an additional \$105 million to be spent over three years to support children at risk and respond to the recommendations of the Alberta Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. There's also funding for the child health benefit program. There are to be increases there of \$1.3 million to \$16.8 million in 2001-02, and this is, I understand, to accommodate increased demand for health benefits for children in low-income families.

I would at this time ask the minister if any of that funding is possibly coming – and I certainly hope it is not – from the federal claw-back. Alberta is the only province that's initiating that. I certainly hope the minister's answer is a straightforward no on that. I don't know for sure, and I would be grateful if the hon. minister could please provide that in due time.

Now, I see here also that the province will invest in the health and wellness of children with \$9.3 million towards the children's initiative aiding early childhood development and the prenatal program. In regards to early childhood development I hope later on in this debate to address some specific questions I have regarding day care, day care workers, and the day care industry in the province.

It is understood that the ministry has four pillars that it bases its work on: community-based service delivery, the integration pillar, the aboriginal pillar, and early intervention pillar. Now, when you look at the four pillars and you look at the trends and issues that we're going to be facing here, whether it's an economic issue of families continuing to come to the province who need economic support, the difficulty of the agricultural sector – commodity prices and weather patterns have contributed to this decline in the agricultural sector. This, as a result, has created stress on families in rural areas.

We look at 1996: "45% of Aboriginal people in Alberta had a total household income of less than \$25,000 compared with 26% of the non-Aboriginal population." The aboriginal unemployment rate was over 17 percent; the nonaboriginal population unemployment rate was slightly less than 7 percent.

If we look at Social Trends, we see that "alcohol-related birth defects are a widespread problem" for families in Alberta, and aboriginal people represent close to 40 percent of the total inmate population. Four percent of aboriginals had a university degree at that time. There certainly is a need for culturally appropriate and accessible services.

3:20

Now, I understand from the budget that the child population will decline after December of this year and that more children will be moving into the teenage bracket. I note that between 2000 and 2011 the aboriginal population will increase by 22 percent versus 12 percent for the rest of Alberta's total population, yet one-third, or 33 percent, of children in care are aboriginal.

Another trend is the regional trends that are occurring. We look at suicide, family violence, incarceration, low income, unemployment, education: all these trends are being felt by aboriginal children, youth, and families, especially those receiving services through handicapped children's services and the transition to persons with developmental disabilities.

Now, in the ministry goals, core businesses, "Promoting the development and well-being of children, youth and families," I have the following questions for the minister under line item 1.1.1. Certainly it is quite appropriate if at some time, if not today, the department officials get a chance to have a look at my questions, and if they could provide written answers on behalf of the hon. minister, I would be very grateful.

Regarding this line item, what programs – and this is specific to on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs – is the ministry developing, what is the cost of each of these programs, what accountability mechanisms are in place for each program, and how will the performance measures be calculated? I had a discussion earlier today with one of my colleagues regarding performance measures. I'm very interested to know how these performance measures are to be calculated. Another one of my colleagues said that it was a very useful tool of management. It was a very enlightening exchange between those two colleagues regarding performance measures.

Now, on line 1.1.4 there is discussion on best practices: "Ensure that best practices for early childhood care and education settings are being shared, implemented, monitored and evaluated." Again to the hon. minister: what best practices have been put in place for early childhood care, who is monitoring and evaluating the education settings that are being shared, and when will the final evaluation be made public? I don't know if this is an appropriate time to bring up the Cleland report, but hopefully I'll get an opportunity later to express my concerns about the Cleland report.

On line 1.1.5 there's again a discussion. We're going to "initiate a new home visitation or mentoring program for parents of very young children and at risk families." I have five questions in regards to this. Who is taking responsibility for the new home visitation program? What will the budget for the program be? How many families are expected to take part in the program, how will families at risk be identified for the program, and what educational training programs are being developed for mentors involved in the mentoring program?

Now, further along, on line 1.1.6, initiatives are being examined "to improve the quality of child care programs." I can only assume that somewhere in there would be the Cleland report. I'm very anxious to see that document tabled in the Assembly. We all know that child care programs for all Alberta families are very, very important, but what are the new initiatives that will improve the quality of child care programs? What is the budget for these new initiatives? What new performance measures will be or are being developed to measure the quality of the programs? How many children and families are expected to take part in these programs, and how many are single-parent families that will take part in the program?

Now, further along on line 1.2 there is a statement: "To provide a continuum of services to support and promote the well-being of children, youth and families." Again I have two questions for the minister, please. Why is "Families assessing Handicapped Children's Services report a positive impact on their families" to be a short-term goal rather than a long-term goal? Why is the performance measure those families "who report the services are having a positive impact on the family" rather than a measure of an increase or decrease in the quality of life for children and the family members?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

On line item 1.2.2 there is the statement: "Continue to enhance and implement a comprehensive inter-provincial . . . intervention, care and support of individuals with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect." I have three questions for the hon. minister, please. What measures are being used to enhance the fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effect program? Will the minister provide reports regarding the plans for interprovincial intervention, care, and support of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect individuals? Finally, what is the cost to enhance and implement this program?

Now, again further along, the statement on line 1.2.5, and this is to “complete a Handicapped Children’s Services complex case review to ensure that children are receiving supportive and high quality services.” I have three questions. Firstly, who will participate in the complex case review of handicapped children’s services to ensure that children are receiving supportive and high quality services? Secondly, will the minister provide details of review processes for the case reviews? Thirdly, how will the ministry ensure that privacy of the individuals is maintained?

The next reference is 1.2.6.

In conjunction with the Youth Secretariat, work in partnership to enhance supports available to youth making the transition to adulthood, including transition to adult services such as those provided by Persons with Developmental Disabilities.

I have three questions. What mechanism does Children’s Services have in place so that children enter the PDD system with no transition problems? Certainly all hon. members of the Assembly are well aware that there have been problems with this in the past. What mechanism does Children’s Services use so that children’s files are not held up when moving into the PDD system? What are the protocols used to ensure smooth transition from one system to another?

3:30

Now, moving along to 1.2.7:

Collaborate with other ministries to provide a range of integrated health and related support services to children with special needs (Student Health Initiative).

I have at this time, Mr. Chairman, four questions, again to the hon. minister. What are the other ministries that are helping to provide integrated health and related support services to children with special needs? What programs are available to children with special needs and their families that provide a range of integrated health and related support?

Included in that would be speech therapy. What programs are available for students who need speech therapy in the early grades? I would like to start in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3. If those children are enrolled in a public school system, what support can they expect? Then again, for instance, if they were to go to a school like the Tevie Miller school, what exactly could the parents of those students who for whatever reason perhaps don’t have the money – what support is available for them to ensure that speech therapy could be provided? Certainly it is my view that intervention at the early grades could possibly prevent a lot of problems as the child becomes a teenager and later on as an adult.

Again to the minister, please: what mechanisms does the ministry use to inform families about the programs? How is the ministry making the programs user friendly?

Mr. Chairman, on line 1.2.9 the discussion here is:

Collaborate with Child and Family Services Authorities to initiate mobile Community Response Team pilot projects to assist children, youth and families in crisis.

That seems to be quite an interesting initiative. I have five questions for the minister regarding this pilot project, the first one being: how many mobile community response team pilot projects will be carried out in the province? What authorities will the projects be carried out in? What are the professionals that will be part of the community response team? What is the budget for the pilot project? I understand, Mr. Chairman, that there is now only one pilot project for the entire province. When will the reports of the response team in this case be presented to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta?

Under goal 1.3: what mechanisms will the department ensure that “children in out-of-home placements stay connected to their family and community”? Because stable homes and ongoing nurturing

relationships for children and youth in care are very positive. There’s no doubt about that.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Now, reference line 1.3.4:

Develop the Custom Care and Adoptions Initiative in concert with First Nations agencies and Child and Family Services Authorities to improve permanency for Aboriginal children in care.

I have three questions at this time for the minister, and hopefully I can get them in in the time that I am allowed. Who is responsible for developing the custom care and adoptions initiative with First Nations agencies and child and family services authorities? Secondly, what is the budget for the custom care and adoptions initiative program? Thirdly, what is the vision, mission, and values for the custom care and adoptions initiative?

Mr. Chairman, I’m certainly anxious to get some more time to participate in the debate later on this afternoon, and I will hopefully get a chance to talk about child care and subsidy programs regarding all Alberta families. With those questions I will cede the floor to one of my hon. colleagues.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Glen-garry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again I’m honoured to be able to speak here today in regards to Children’s Services. I want to thank the minister and her staff that have shown up here, particularly on Thursday afternoon, our last working afternoon in the House, to answer many of the concerns that we have about perhaps some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and that is our children. In doing so, I know that it is a huge, huge responsibility, and I also know that this minister takes that responsibility very, very seriously. So we are, I think, being very well served in this province. Certainly this is one of those areas where no matter what we do, there’s always more that can be done.

My comments today and my questions to the minister will certainly focus around these needs. Particularly I’d like to note that some of these comments that I’m going to pass along are comments made to me by constituents of Edmonton-Glen-garry.

We were extremely happy when Ma’Mōwe was opened in Edmonton-Glen-garry. It’s a much-needed resource for the people not only of Edmonton-Glen-garry, but surrounding regions of Edmonton-Glen-garry as well as regions outside of the city limits now can make good use of it. Certainly it is there for the use of all and much easier for them to access than having, for example, to travel down to 107th Street here to get to the main location. These types of satellite centres are a great, great step in the right direction.

What I’m going to refer to first here is a survey done by the Alberta Children’s Forum: Uniting for Children. This is the paper Poverty & Physical Needs: 3 Good Ideas. It was done by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. I don’t think that even in our great days here in this province – this was quite current – that things have changed that much for a number of our people. So what we are looking at here are certainly a number of issues – and two of those are poverty and physical needs – that face quite a few children in this province.

Of course, when we looked at it, we found that when people were surveyed, their number one concern and their number one issue of the problems that Edmonton children face is poverty. It was quite an eye-opener for me, Mr. Chairman, when I was at the National Conference of State Legislatures last summer in Chicago and we had an opportunity to listen to Jesse Jackson. Jesse went on to say that

the poorest people in America today are not the new people that have moved to America, and it certainly wasn't the seniors who are trying to survive on a fixed income, but it was mothers with young families. I would think that those are the same challenges so many young mothers in this province face, and it's certainly one that I know as a province we must address. Certainly we all know the statistics that a dollar spent today will save us seven down the road. So in looking at this, as I said, poverty certainly is the number one issue.

3:40

After this I looked then at the ministry's goals, and they are admirable. I would hope that we could attain all of them, and certainly it is a goal to work towards. But I do have some questions for the minister when we get to performance measures.

Now, I also notice that

a number of the performance measures in the 2001-04 Business Plan are considered new measures and as a result there is insufficient baseline data to establish meaningful targets.

So when I'm going through this, I will pay special attention to those, realizing that that data is not available to answer questions at this particular time.

Performance measure A: the "percentage of childcare centres that meet critical standards." Now, these are given in percentages. When we are collecting data, certainly we would like to know the numbers. How did you arrive, for example, at an actual in 1998-99 of 95 percent? Were all child care centres surveyed in this? If so, how many of these child care centres were there? If it was a sample, then how many were used in the sample? Also, from what parts of the province was the sample taken? Is this truly a representative sample, or is it focused on the major centres, where I think, as a generalized statement, the majority of poverty would be centred? What exactly does 95 percent for the year 1998-99 mean?

I see that in the fiscal year 1999-2000 we have an estimated amount of 96 percent. I'm very, very happy to see that our target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. So if the minister could just enlighten us on how that information is going to be gathered and who all is represented and from what part of the province that is.

Then, as well, performance measure B. Now, again this is one of those new measures, and this will be measuring the "percentage of families accessing handicapped children's services who report the services are having a positive impact on their family." Again, if the minister could provide what data is going to be used to reach this particular performance measure.

I notice here that another new performance measure is going to be the "percentage of children residing in a stable, long-term arrangement within 12 months of permanent guardianship order." The same questions would apply there.

Now, performance measure D: "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while receiving child protection services." Again, a huge, huge challenge for people in this province who are dealing with this type of child who is under protection services. Certainly I'm very, very happy to see that our target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. Again, if the minister could please just outline how they determine, first of all, whether children who are in protective services are free from abuse or neglect and, secondly, the number that they looked at for this. I certainly will be interested to see how the actual compares to the target of 100 percent.

Now, then, performance measure E:

Percentage of respondents to a public awareness survey who indicate that they are aware of activities undertaken by the ministry and its partners to address issues affecting children involved in prostitution.

Again, this will be quite an interesting statistic, particularly with the passing of Bill 1, the child prostitution act, and when we see these

statistics which have been compiled since '98-99 and see how this act is going to influence the number of minors that are involved in prostitution, then what I would like rather than a percentage are the actual hardcore facts of the number involved. It will certainly give us a much better idea to track just how effective the bill has been and how effective we are in this society at stamping out child prostitution.

Now, then, in performance measure F, we're looking at the "number of municipalities participating in family and community support" and the target is to "maintain or increase number of municipalities participating in family and community support services." We have here in 1998-99 an actual number of 278. I see that this decreased slightly – and this again is an estimated amount – in the year 1999-2000 to 272. Could the minister provide why we had a slight drop here of six communities?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

As well, what in the business plans and what in the budget is going to raise that amount to a projected number of 281 in the year 2000-2001, and I see that we also have that as targeted for the year 2001-2002. How does this number compare against all municipalities that could or should be participating in family and community support services? Give us a little bit better idea of the level of participation compared to how many could be participating.

Performance measure G is the "percentage of aboriginal children receiving foster care services from aboriginal foster homes", and I see that

this measure supports the short-term outcome of delivering services to children that are appropriate to their culture, and the objective of improving services to Aboriginal children.

I fully agree that certainly the best people to provide foster care services to aboriginal children are in the aboriginal community, but once again I see that we are using percentages, and percentages do not give us a total picture of what is taking place.

Now, then, I also see here that we have in the neighbourhood of 31 percent projected for 2000-2001 and again our target of 31 percent for 2001-2002. That is to me a very, very high number when we're looking at roughly three out of 10 children that fall into this category. So could the minister please indicate in the estimates what programs we are looking at in order to reduce that number? As I said, that does seem like a very, very high number, and we would like to certainly see that cut down from the standpoint of children not requiring it. So if the minister would please provide more information in that regard.

3:50

As well, I see that two other new measures here are performance measures H and I, H being the "percentage of respondents reporting awareness of services provided by the office of the Children's Advocate." Again the Children's Advocate is certainly a very, very needed position in this province, and it will be one of these performance measures that I will be following closely. It will be quite interesting to see how the role of the Children's Advocate is going to play out and the important role that it will fill.

In looking at performance measure I, the "percentage of survey respondents who access selected ministry services that indicate that they participated in decisions that affect them," I see:

Consistent with a community-based service model and the objective of meeting the needs of the children and families being served, this measure will assess whether recipients of Ministry services are provided opportunities to participate in decisions which affect them.

Again I have to agree with the minister on this particular issue. This is a very, very important performance measure. With the goal

of recipients participating in decisions which affect them, it is certainly one of those types of measures – when we give people ownership of a situation, then we expect the success rate to climb. I have to commend the minister for this. Could she please let us know what steps and what decisions are going to be made on this particular performance measure which would allow those people to make their own decisions? In other words, how are we going to get people involved to take ownership and to be part of this worthy performance measure?

Now, as well, in looking at the core business plans, I want to focus at the start of my time here today on core business 2: “Keeping children, youth and families safe and protected.” To do this, I want to look at goal 2.1: “To protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect,” an extremely, extremely needed goal, because we do have too many children today who are suffering from abuse, who are suffering from neglect.

I think what we have to do to highlight this particular problem is to look again at the number of students who go to school hungry. This is a basic goal and a basic need of all students. We look at people that are living in poverty and see that 73 percent say that they cannot afford to feed their children enough fruits and vegetables, 58 percent say that they cannot afford enough meat for their children, and 41 percent say that they cannot afford enough dairy products. What this means as well is that parents – and probably it’s mostly single parents that find themselves in this situation – are going without food themselves to feed their children. It was quite interesting in the survey that I quoted earlier that 46 percent went without food for a day or more, and 18 percent of the parents say that their children are missing meals because there is not enough food.

To start my questions on goal 2.1, “to protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect,” my first question to the minister would be: why is “children in care stay free from abuse and neglect” only a short-term outcome? My next question to the minister would be: when will the minister consider keeping children in care free from abuse and neglect a long-term goal? Again, we certainly have to look at this worthwhile goal from a very short-term perspective initially and make it a long-term goal that all children can grow up in safe environments where they are free from abuse and neglect.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I will cede the floor to another member. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to spend 20 minutes commenting on the estimates of the Department of Children’s Services. I want to start by acknowledging the sincere interest that the minister responsible for this department has in the welfare of families and particularly of children.

While she is working hard to bring about changes, to muster the resources needed, what we need to do here is look closely at the proposed course of action as embodied in the business plan of the department, the highlights of initiatives as summarized on page 59 of the year 2001-2002 government and lottery fund estimates, and look at the budget operations by program. So the departmental operations by program and the budget allocations are something that I’d like to pay some attention to.

While we do this, I want to spend a few minutes talking about the overall context which gives rise to and produces the need for our extensive children’s services in the province and services for families. That context certainly is multidimensional.

There are all kinds of reasons why families and children get into difficulty and need help and services. But the one broad condition that produces the need for these services is, of course, the condition

called poverty, so we should pay some attention to the incidence of poverty, its distribution across Alberta’s population. Who are the poor? Why is that the case? What kinds of services are needed in order to alleviate those conditions if we are really concerned about taking action and undertaking programs that are as much committed to prevention as they are to providing relief after the problems have occurred?

I’m looking at an executive summary of a report that is called *No Safeguards: A Profile of Urban Poverty in Alberta*, produced by a group called the Inter City Forum on Social Policy, representing about 18 municipalities in this province. According to this document, the incidence of poverty is quite high in this province based on 1996 statistics. They’re subject to change by now; I would certainly acknowledge that. They count that about 1 in 5 Albertans is poor. The greatest rates of poverty are in Edmonton and Calgary, but Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, and Lethbridge also have rates above the provincial average.

4:00

Children and youth are more likely to be poor. The highest rates of poverty are found among children 14 years and younger, people aged 15 to 24 years, and then of course seniors. More women on average are poorer than are males. Lone-parent families are likely to be poorer than other types of families. In particular, members of our aboriginal communities are the most serious and the largest in percentage terms victims of poverty. Among the aboriginal population the incidence of poverty is about 62 percent. This is the figure for Edmonton. Compared to other places such as Cold Lake or Leduc the poverty rate goes down, but Edmonton has the largest concentration of aboriginal people, and 62 percent of them live in poverty.

Persons with disabilities are another group, of course, who are subject to conditions of poverty. The rate is quite high in places like Wetaskiwin. Their rate of poverty, according to this report, was 32 percent. Red Deer was 35 percent, whereas Strathcona county and Spruce Grove had the lowest rates, at 10 and 12 percent. So that’s another group.

Being employed helps in reducing poverty but is not necessarily a safeguard. There are lots of working families in Alberta that find themselves living in poverty. Over three-quarters of the 106,610 poor families in Alberta, almost 77 percent, were employed for at least part of the year for which statistics are taken, yet just under one-half worked full-time. These are working poor who earn a minimum wage or close to it. So a low minimum wage causes hardworking Albertans to experience poverty and live under those conditions which produce the problems that this ministry then finds itself addressing.

Mr. Chairman, this is sort of a very quick, brief background against which the adequacy of services and the need for them is to be assessed.

Looking at the initiatives and the highlights for the years 2000-2004, there are several initiatives being taken here. Many of them, if not all of them, are well called for, deserving of special attention, but very little is indicated here that would suggest that we are dealing with the symptoms and the consequences as well as the causes of poverty and children’s difficulties and troubles and crises, which are issues that are at the very heart of the minister’s efforts and certainly a *raison d’être* for the existence of this department in the first place.

The poverty issue is not discussed as to how to deal with the problem of the growing numbers of the working poor in the province, and no linkage seems to be acknowledged between that and the growing numbers of children who are falling in the care of this ministry. We all acknowledge a rather radical increase in the

number of children and the growth in the percentage of children that are coming in the care of the government. I don't need to repeat this. Headlines in papers made the story very, very well known across the province: a 60 percent increase since 1995. One has to ask: why is that the case? Is it just the case that there are more incompetent parents in Alberta? Or is it because more and more parents and families find themselves living under conditions of poverty in spite of their hard work, which leads them to then either neglect their children or fail in delivering the services that they need, and they would then become the responsibility of the government?

One other minor matter I was trying to look for through the budget to see if there's any change there, and that's the vision section, page 58, Major Areas of Emphasis. It talks about "better outcomes for children in care," and reference is made there to the critical role of the Children's Advocate. Again, looking at that commitment on one hand and then seeing if there is any action indicated on what's recommended by the Children's Advocate's latest report, *Working for Youth in Care*, I am disappointed to find no evidence here which indicates that the recommendations made by the Children's Advocate are being taken seriously by this government. Certainly there's no indication in the vision or in the three-year business plan that the government has.

Having said that, I also find in the business plan that of the nine performance measures that appear on pages 60 and 61, five are new ones. So there's no benchmark at this stage to make any really good judgments about how things may be moving for the better.

The one indicator that I have some questions about for the minister is the one that deals with the number of municipalities participating in family and community support and the targets that are set. The target for this next year, at least, is the same as for this year, with 281 municipalities that are participating. Then there's some indication that some increase in this participation is expected or sought or targeted but very, very small: one municipality to be added to the numbers already there over the next two years, so an annual increase of one.

I wonder: how many municipalities are there altogether? The minister will obviously enlighten me on this. Of the 281 that are participating now, what percentage are they of the total number of municipal jurisdictions? That will give us some idea as to why we are seeking such a slow increase, if it is a slow increase. Maybe the total number is 283, and the minister will hopefully answer that question for me.

4:10

On the next page, statement of operations by program, I notice that there are some areas where some considerable funds have been added for the year under discussion, the year 2001-02, where I find increases very minimal in light of the fact that the caseloads are increased enormously over the last five to eight years, from 12,783 cases in '92-93 to 22,905 in the year '99-2000. With this enormous growth, almost an 80 percent growth, the increase at least this year that I find in the child welfare part of the program expenditures is 2.4 percent. Is it adequate at all? It doesn't seem to be. That's a question that was raised by the Children's Advocate in his report as well: the inadequacy. Money may not be the answer to every problem, but in this case in the judgment of the advocate money is an issue. Financial allocations are an issue, are important.

Similarly for children with disabilities: in actuals in 2001 it is \$54.6 million, and the proposed 2001-2002 estimate is very slightly increased, maybe less than 1.5 percent, over last year. I certainly question this and ask the minister: how come? Is she satisfied there are enough resources there already? I question that very seriously.

Day care: 4 percent increase. That's an area where we need to pay

very serious attention if prevention is our goal. If children are to receive proper care when they're very young if their parents work – and most of them want to work and are working – the day care area of the ministry's responsibility certainly needs a lot more attention. Low wages for day care workers is a chronic problem. There was some talk during the election even from the government side that it may receive a review. I'd like to ask the minister if she has any initiatives on that score. You cannot get qualified workers to provide quality day care at that rate. It's less than \$10. We proposed in our alternative plan that the minimum be set at \$10 an hour, if not more. The low-wage problem for our day care workers is a very serious and chronic problem. Unless that is addressed, we will not be able to achieve a better quality in the provision of day care in our province for our children who badly need it.

The fact is that there are no direct operating allowances given to day care centres. The government therefore has lost the ability to enforce any provincewide standards. It's very difficult to do that when you don't pay money, when you pay the subsidies directly to families, who then use that money to pay for their day care bills. Also, the level at which families qualify is set too low to be able to access those subsidies. That means that the cost of sending children to day care becomes a major issue for low middle-income families. Consequently they find shortcuts. They send their children to day care facilities which may be cheap and that they can afford, and that means sacrificing their concerns about the quality of day care. I wonder what the minister has in her budget plan to address that issue.

I notice that the early intervention commitment has been strengthened, but the problems caused by the withdrawal by this provincial government over the years in that area have led to an enormous increase in the number of children in the care of the government, so I'm pleased that there is a clear indication here of investing in early childhood intervention in this budget. I'm pleased to see that.

Mr. Chairman, this will be my last point. The caseload for social workers and the ratio of supervisors to social workers is again important in reducing the ratio, making it more reasonable if quality children's services are to be provided by appropriately qualified social workers and child care providers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll take my turn again when the time arises.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to reinforce some of the comments of some of my colleagues and add a number of concerns and issues of my own.

The first particular point I'd like to make would be concerning the first goal, 1.1, under core business 1 in ministry goals, which has to do with "on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs." I think all of us here are aware that we need to be paying particular attention to the conditions on reserves for families and children and early intervention. In fact it came up, perhaps just coincidentally, in question period today concerning an issue that's certainly not limited to reserves but is found on reserves, fetal alcohol syndrome, and the value of prevention in cases like that. So I would reinforce the ministry's efforts when it comes to on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs and would be delighted to learn more about what the ministry is doing in those regards. What are the costs? What are the trends in those costs? It would be interesting also, though I know it's difficult to quantify prevention, to get a sense of whether the costs we are spending now will be saving us money in the future. I realize that's difficult to do, very difficult to measure, but certainly worth examining. So that's one area of particular interest to me.

Another area I raise partly because I know a number of constituents of mine are involved in handicapped children's services and have particular and, of course, very close involvement with that because it's their own children who may be requiring these services. Some of the cases are unusually complex and difficult, very demanding on the whole family, and it seems to me – and I think the research would support this – that family breakup and divorce and so on is more common in families which have handicapped, especially severely handicapped, children in them. So support services that keep those families together, keep the children at home without making them an unmanageable burden on the family, certainly would have my full support. Information to us on those kinds of programs would be of real interest to me.

I know from professional work, oh, 25 years ago that at that time it was very common for handicapped children to be institutionalized. Frankly, some of the conditions in those institutions 25 years ago were simply intolerable by today's standards. So the whole philosophy of shifting those problems – and they are problems – those burdens, and opportunities for sharing love, too, in these families and keeping those children at home will be very important.

So those are a couple of areas that I think my colleagues have mentioned and I reinforce.

Shifting to core business 2, "keeping children, youth and families safe and protected." The issue of family violence, child abuse, and neglect comes up in various forms under this core business area. Under goal 2.1 in the core business, "to protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect," a goal that I'm sure all of us would endorse and support, it seems to me it should be something that has a long-term outcome to it rather than simply a short-term outcome.

4:20

I'm also noticing under goal 2.2 this initiative: "to reduce family violence and address its impact on children, youth and families." I do notice in my travels through Alberta that there are, for example, billboards or bus ads and so on about services for children to combat family violence. I found myself thinking, as I went through the business plan there, about women's shelters and family shelters, and it brought to mind a particular case that's come to my attention and the attention of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. It's a case involving a women's shelter that suggests that there are risks even in these days of expanding government spending and that funds to women's shelters, through the department and through the child and family regional authorities, may in fact be in some cases being reduced. It goes to questions of immediate service and justice to people who are seeking protection, and it also goes to the issue of trying to break the cycle of family violence that we see played out generation after generation in the same families.

If I could talk for a few moments about this kind of a case. It concerns a satellite agency in a smaller town in Alberta, at least a women's shelter that began as a satellite shelter and initially began providing a maximum of seven days of shelter. They quickly found that was inadequate and, probably working with the department and with local authorities, expanded to I believe a full-service women's emergency shelter which then allows them to provide shelter for 21 days. It allowed them to expand to provide the kinds of preventive and intervention services that I believe in the long run will create a much better situation. For example, they were able to hire a part-time child support worker and eventually increase the child support to full-time and hire a part-time outreach worker working on family violence prevention, going into schools, doing education programs for the public.

They noticed, as they got into this, that after a couple of years they were actually seeing a marked drop in the number of repeat clients.

So they were able to take clients in, provide them with short-term emergency service, and then move them out into the community and support them there while they went back to school or perhaps relocated in a different town where they were away from the violent situation. So it sounded like it was on the way to a real success story.

Then in the most recent round of budgeting they find that apparently they're facing funding cuts. As it is, of course, provincial funding doesn't cover the full operating expenses of women's shelters and family violence shelters. They cover the basics, as I understand it, for beds and food and crisis counseling for the moment. But in terms of longer term support and any enhanced services, these agencies rely on the community, and probably all of us have donated from time to time to various women's shelters. Certainly the shelters are not opposed to that sort of fund-raising, but the core funding, when it's reduced, means that some of the outreach and support services that allow them to break the cycle of family violence get eliminated. Then we take a step backwards, and we see an increase in repeat clients and an increase in family violence, certainly in the long run, and a decrease in people's ability to escape from those problems. So I would encourage the minister and the department to ensure that family violence remains a high priority in their department and in the activities of the regional authorities.

Continuing on through the business plan, again I'll settle on a few of the areas that I saw as particular highlights. I return, partly in my role as critic for aboriginal issues, to core business 3, "promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families," and goal 3.2, "to support Aboriginal people to plan . . . implement, monitor and evaluate services in consultation with their communities," and, related to that, the goal of supporting "the development of a culturally effective training model for First Nations delegated agencies." Again, reflecting on the experience I had professionally many years ago, the whole challenge of delegating family and children's services to native and aboriginal organizations is one that is, shall I say, a great challenge.

There's a cultural conflict there between our own needs as a government to manage closely and be very careful and follow standard corporate procedures, as it were, for managing money and personnel and at the same time recognize that cultures such as a First Nations culture may have a different approach to those expectations and those issues. So it's a difficult and challenging area, yet of course we realize and groups on both sides of the issue realize that it has to be addressed and resolved if we're going to move ahead.

So I'd be interested to know, for example, how the ministry is planning to "support the development of a culturally effective training model for First Nations delegated agencies." How is that going to be done? I'm sure it's being done on the basis of now many years of experience. I'm sure we're learning from our experience, and if we evaluate that experience and move ahead, we will hopefully be improving each year that goes by. I'd be curious to know what training models have been developed for delegated agency personnel. Again, recognizing the cultural differences between maybe a very European-based model for providing children's services and an aboriginal model, how do we sort those out and mesh them, hold accountability yet delegate authority? I'd also be interested to know, along this line, what policies the ministry has in place across all children's authorities, in fact, to provide leadership in developing and implementing those training models.

So certainly anything related to aboriginal issues, the unusually high number or proportion of aboriginal children who form child welfare caseloads and aboriginal families who are needing support, speaks to our need to be very attentive in those areas. Of course, those same issues arise for areas that go beyond the scope of this

department – areas of poverty, issues of education, issues of justice – so it's certainly a multidisciplinary concern.

I also share my colleagues' concerns that seem to persistently emanate from the office of the Children's Advocate. Report after report of the Children's Advocate identify ongoing problems, and I'm prepared to concede that, with some of these problems, the best we can do is manage them; we cannot solve them. But I'm not convinced that some of them we can't solve and that others we cannot manage better. I'm frankly a bit skeptical that the department is responding as enthusiastically as it might to the reports of the Children's Advocate. We are, after all, in a position of enormous responsibility when we take on the role of looking after people's children. We are their surrogate parents, and we need to be their advocates. We need to ensure that everything possible is being done to support them, to break the kinds of patterns that see children growing up to repeat the same mistakes as their parents. So it echoes my earlier comments. I'd really like to know more about the department's efforts in these areas.

4:30

What recommendations will the ministry be implementing for the review of the Children's Advocate office? That issue, the Children's Advocate report, has come up in debate and in question period, and it's not something we're going to let go of. It's a high priority for us. It's a moral responsibility all of us share as legislators: to be devoted guardians of children in the care of the provincial government. I'd be interested to know how soon after the Children's Advocate's annual reports are released the ministry will be acting upon the Children's Advocate's recommendations. It would be interesting to know details about the activities of the office of the Children's Advocate, the number of families who are connecting with that office each year. So those are some of my particular questions around the office of the Children's Advocate.

I could go on with my concerns about this department. There was a time when I actually had extensive personal and professional involvement working in these kinds of areas. I know the sometimes grim realities of the cases that these authorities encounter and that the minister will be no doubt aware of and how insolvable they at times seem, yet what a moral responsibility they place on all of us. It's an area that I think I and our caucus will be watching very closely, so we'll be back again next year to see what has happened.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Because I may not get time to get to them later, I'd like to start, if I might, with some specifics about the budget items. In particular it's item 2.3 in the estimates, the financial support to child and family services authorities, and 2.3.1 through 2.3.18 have the allocations for the various authorities.

There's a discrepancy, Mr. Chairman, between what some of the authorities asked for or estimated they would need to serve their area and what has been allocated to them in the budget. In some of them the differences are very little, but in some of them the differences are quite notable. I start with Sun Country. I believe \$28,899,000 was their estimate of need, and they've been allocated \$25,474,000. Now, that's a fair slip in terms of the amount of resources they have to work with, and I wonder why they put in their estimate and then it was reduced to what it was.

That holds true for a number of regions. Calgary Rocky View asked for \$135 million, and the allocation is \$132 million. West Yellowhead asked for or estimated their need would be \$15,296,000,

and they were allocated \$13,632,000. That's an almost \$2 million shortfall in their estimate and fairly significant, I would think, in terms of the delivery of services. The amount in the budget of the Capital region is about – if my math is quick here – 8 and a half million dollars less than the amount that they estimated they were going to need to conduct business. There are a number of others on the list. As I said, most of them are fairly close to the estimate of the authority, but there are some discrepancies that, on the face of the figures we have, would seem to be fairly significant in terms of the operation of the authority.

So I have those specific questions about program 2.3 and would appreciate some information on why those decisions were made or why those figures appear to be the way they are in the budget.

I wanted to turn, if I might, Mr. Chairman, to performance measures. It's been sort of a constant theme as we've gone through the estimates for 2001-2002, and that is what seems to happen to performance measures. The Auditor General has put a great deal of faith in those measures as the basis for the business plans of the province and has made some cross-department recommendations. It seems to me that for a number of departments those recommendations have been ignored. If the performance measures are as intrinsic a part of the government's financial planning as they seem to indicate, it would seem to me that ignoring those performance indicator warnings from the Auditor General puts the whole process in question.

I know that this is a new ministry and people are still feeling their way around and there is a need for some new measures. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry has already made some specific comments about the percentages and the way the measures are being put in place, but I do have a question. There are a number of new measures that are being asked for, and baselines are being developed. But if I couple that, the development of those new measures, with what I hear from people working in the system about the heavy workloads, I wonder if adding the performance measures aren't going to add to the workload that some of them find very, very difficult already. I think there was a parallel, for instance, when the postsecondary system went to key performance measures at the local level with the kinds of complaints I heard from institutions then in terms of the amount of time that it was taking to develop the measures. Is that a concern, or are these developed elsewhere? Are there special groups that will be charged with developing the measures?

That said, Mr. Chairman, I may be evidencing the fact that I'm a newcomer to the area and to the ministry except for what I've been able to read in past budgets. But I've been doing some reading, and looking at the business of child and family indicators, I wondered if the department has considered or will be considering developing a comprehensive set of child and family indicators. I was interested in terms of what kinds of criteria might govern the development of such a set of indicators. We've always had a profound interest in families and children both nationally and provincially in terms of what is happening to them. It seems to me that a comprehensive set of indicators that was initiated by the government itself would be very useful.

4:40

It would also eliminate the kind of constant warfare that seems to be engaged in between agencies that are developing indices and putting forward claims based on those indices, only to have them rejected by the government as not being relevant, not being comprehensive enough, or not having been developed properly. I think of the disputes there have been over poverty, over how many Albertans are actually living in poverty and how many children are in poverty.

I think a comprehensive set of indicators that was done under rigorous development methods with standards that are very high could alleviate that, but more importantly they could be a very useful tool as we try to track what's happening to children and families both across time and in making comparisons with various groups.

Indicators could be useful for a number of purposes: providing descriptions of groups and subgroups within the population. They'd be useful in terms of monitoring. That's exactly what the performance measures are intended to do, to help us in terms of monitoring progress of particular groups. They would allow us to make some comparisons. We'd be able to see if conditions were improving or were deteriorating or even holding steady across a time period.

A comprehensive set of indicators would be useful in focusing activities across agencies and government departments. They would be useful in trying to develop strategies for dealing with problems. I think that indicators could be used to hold agencies and managers and even the government itself responsible for outcomes rather than focusing, as we do so often now, on the inputs into the system.

It would also help us in terms of evaluation. We've had, for instance, programs for pregnant teenage mothers for a number of years in the province. I have no idea what's happened in terms of those programs or how they have progressed. There are programs to prevent teen pregnancy. What has been the impact of those programs over time? Have the rates actually been reduced with the introduction of those programs in schools? So I think a comprehensive set of indicators could be very useful.

There was a set of criteria established, as I indicated, for developing those indicators, and one of the criteria would be that it is comprehensive. The performance measures that we have in most of the business plans are very selective, but it seems to me that this is one ministry, children and their families, that would benefit from a comprehensive set of indicators, as well as some other departments, but particularly this department. A comprehensive set of indicators would be very useful in terms of looking at youngsters from birth through adolescence and the transition into adulthood.

Any set of indicators I think would have to be clear and comprehensible. I think that's a given. It would fit into some of the performance measures here that are aimed at trying to make sure that programs are easily understood by the public. Any such set of indicators I think would have to make sure that they were open to common interpretation, and they would have to be geographically detailed. I think in our province that would be useful. Because the province is so diverse in terms of the needs and the social life of citizens, that would be useful.

I guess I would make the argument and ask if the department has considered the development of a more comprehensive set of indicators, and that would in no way detract or take away from the specific performance indicators. I think it might help formulate those indicators and put them into a context that would be useful as we try to consider the progress that we're making as a province.

I'd like to move, then, if I may, Mr. Chairman, to the matter of caseworkers. As I indicated before, the minister has announced some measures to get more people into the system, to help with the caseloads. Again, I have to confess my ignorance on the matter, but I wonder: are there minimum standards for case-related activities? I was looking at a set of such standards developed elsewhere and was really quite surprised that jurisdictions do have workload standards that caseworkers use as a guide and also the number of cases that a worker could be expected to address given the kinds of activities that they were engaged in.

Just for a couple of examples, one of the problems here has been the permanent placement of children and youth. Under the standards that are used at least in one American state, the monthly workload

for each of those cases is determined to be about two and a half hours or two and a quarter hours per case, and the maximum caseload for a worker who was exclusively working on placements would be 54 cases. That seems to me to be awfully high. I wonder: are there similar standards in our province? I compared that to the standard, for instance, for a worker who was screening or on a hot line or on intake activities, where they devoted about half an hour a month per case. They were expected to be able to handle 322 cases, which again is a little mind-boggling. My question is: are there similar standards in our province that are used for caseworkers? If there are, who determines those standards? Is it done by the profession, or is it done by agreement? How do they come about?

I've had, as we've all had, Mr. Chairman, information from caseworkers from across the province lamenting their inability in some cases to do the job as they see fit. Their concerns seem to be with more time: more time to do the job the way they would like to do it, more time for contact with families, more time for finding resources, more time for working with service providers, more time to properly prepare plans for court contests, more time for assessments of parent and child relationships, more time for face-to-face contact with clients, for training relatives as required to be foster parents, to facilitate parent/child visitations, for conducting case management in order to reduce placement moves for children, and adequately inputting information into the system itself. So a whole host of areas where they indicated they needed more time, and that wasn't all of it.

Those seemed to be the more important reasons for needing more time, but they also needed more time for documentation and for writing required reports, for conducting more thorough investigations than what they felt they were able to do. The collaboration with other agencies is a time-consuming activity, and they needed more time for preparing children for adoption, for working with parents, preparing children for separation, for reviewing client history, for educating adoptive parents, for co-ordinating with public health and other agencies, for working with long-term guardians. As you talk to or hear from caseworkers, the conclusion you come away with is that there's a very heavy, heavy workload, and many of them are feeling frustrated in their ability to deal with it.

With that, given that I have a one-minute signal, I'll conclude, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

4:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand I have only a few minutes left. I have a couple of quick questions.

I notice some anomalies in the budgets of some regional child and family services authorities, and I thought I'd just ask the minister to perhaps address that. I notice that on page 82 for the Metis settlements child and family services authority there is a very dramatic drop in the budget from last year to the year for which we are debating on the prevention of family violence. I looked at the other budgets in other authorities as well, and although the money budgeted last year in many cases was more than was in fact spent, the money budgeted for this coming year has not dropped so dramatically as is the case for this. So you might want to address that. On page 72 I compared it with the West Yellowhead case, for example, and there was no such serious drop there, so I wonder why it happened.

The second very specific question has to do with the board of governance budgets. For the Capital region the budget for governance is much, much smaller than the Calgary region authority budget for governance. The difference is almost three, four times.

Calgary is spending three, four times more on governance than is the Capital region, and I wonder if that is something that you can explain for the benefit of the House and for my benefit.

Thank you. These are the two specific questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I have some specific questions for the hon. minister regarding child care in this province and in particular on the Cleland report. This report, as I understand it, is going to look at family income, is going to look at the number of children that are in child care that are under the age of seven and before grade 1. There is to be also a look at the number of hours of child care per child each month. Also, there is to be a study of special-needs children.

More importantly, I think we need to address the issue of compensation for child care workers, and hopefully this is going to be addressed in the Cleland report. Many of the staff that are involved in that industry in this province are living certainly below the low-income cutoff. Their compensation packages are a little bit more than \$1,000 a month, if that, and as a result of that, there's a high staff turnover rate. When we think of caring and nurturing and educating the young children of this province, it is perhaps the most important job, after parenting, that can be done to ensure that the next generation is well looked after while they're in their formative years.

We have money in this province for risk management funds. We have money for generous subsidies to industries. Certainly there is money somewhere to ensure that the child care workers of this province are adequately compensated for what they do so that there will be some stability in the workforce, so there won't be this high rate of transition, and so we can attract young Albertans into this very important field. Now, one only has to discuss this whole issue with the professionals at Grant MacEwan College to get a firm handle on exactly what needs to be done.

At this time I will conclude my remarks, and I will look forward to hearing about the Cleland report from the minister. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would the committee grant consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be remiss as the MLA for 27 schoolchildren that were in the Assembly earlier this afternoon, who came and went during question period, if I didn't make note that they were here so that I can send them a copy of *Hansard*. This afternoon we had 27 students from the Lacombe Christian school here with teacher Mr. Tim Van Doesburg and parent helpers Mr. Norm Noordhof, Mr. Henk Ryper, Mr. Henk Kassies, Mr. Otto Schermers, Mr. Henk Bos, Mrs. Gea Bos, Mr. Roger Young, Mr. Harvey Doornbos, Mrs. Karen Doornbos, and Mrs. Annette Wiersma. I thank them for coming. That was the Lacombe Christian school from Lacombe.

head: **Main Estimates 2001-2002**

**Children's Services** (*continued*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services to conclude debate.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I want to start by just thanking the hon. members opposite, all of them, for what I believe have been thoughtful, sometimes provocative comments and I think in many respects well-researched questions. I particularly want to cite the ministry critic, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who has a long and distinguished career in looking after the young people of this province. I value his opinions and his impressions, and I will certainly commit to doing my level best to getting all of the responses prior to any conclusion of our spring session that I have indicated previously, as well as, as much as we can, to provide a framework of response on those issues raised by the Children's Advocate report. So that would be my first comment.

The second comment. I'm not going to use the full privilege of five minutes, but I want to just provide some food for thought to all members in the House, and that is this. Yesterday I met with Dr. Fraser Mustard and discussed the issues that he very adequately expressed on brain development and the work he had done with Senator Margaret McCain. He suggested that far too frequently people who care for children are assumed to be baby-sitters and are assumed to be some sort of less than honoured, less than valued professionals.

5:00

I want to assure the hon. members opposite that I do value the people that care for children. It is the most important type of effort that we can make to ensure brain development and the full nurturing and development of the child, and wherever possible, when the child is not being parented or nurtured by their own family in an adequate fashion, we should do our level best to ensure that the most excellent people are in touch with that child. If we do not do that, we're going to pay as a society in the longer term, and pay and pay and pay. So we do have, I think, not only a trust but a duty to honour those people who work for and with children. I am happy that our government is working in that direction, albeit I will concede that we're not there yet, but we must collectively work to be there.

When the hon. members have cited these questions, I look forward to providing them a full written response without being dismissive with a cursory response, and I commit further to meeting with the minister's critic to discuss those responses at a later date.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$643,866,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Children's Services: operating expense, \$643,866,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

**Third Reading**

*(continued)*

[The following bills were read a third time and passed]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 Nelson

6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001 Nelson

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the progress we have made today, I now move that we adjourn.

[At 5:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

