

June 11/90

EVENING SITTING

COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure

Social Services

Ordinary Expenditure -- Vote 36

Item 1

Mr. Chairman: -- Would the minister introduce his officials, please.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to introduce a few of the officials that will be with me during the course of these estimates. And I would like to introduce the deputy minister sitting on my left here, Judy Moore, who is the deputy minister; and then we have the associate deputy minister on my right here, Dr. Allan Hansen; and sitting behind me, behind Ms. Moore's seat is Robert Blackwell, who is the assistant deputy minister; and beside him is Elizabeth Smith, the executive director, support services.

Now, Mr. Chairman, there are a goodly number of other officials with us during the course of the estimates. They will be called forward as their particular speciality is being questioned. And I might just indicate to you, Mr. Chairman, that essentially what you see here is literally the tip of the iceberg, as it were, because this department is the third largest department that the government has. And there are literally, Mr. Chairman, thousands of workers working in the Department of Social Services. And so we have certainly a complement of very efficient, very effective personnel that will in no doubt be assisting us very well during these estimates.

Mr. Prebble: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to welcome the minister's officials to the Chamber. I've been looking forward to questioning the minister in a wide variety of areas for some time.

Mr. Minister, I want to begin by asking you a set of questions with respect to the wage exemption policies that you have pursued in the Department of Social Services. And if I could, Mr. Minister, I'd like to begin by asking you how it is that you can justify your claim that you're encouraging people on social assistance to take work when you look at your wage exemption policy, Mr. Minister.

First of all, Mr. Minister, I want you to explain to this Assembly how you justify creating policies in which someone who is self-employed, for instance, who establishes a landscaping business over the summer to try to get themselves off social assistance, is not allowed to keep one penny of the earnings they make from self-employment; every penny they make is deducted off their social assistance cheque unless they reach the point, of course, where they don't have to rely on social welfare at all.

Now, Mr. Minister, you claim that you support the work ethic. You claim that you're encouraging people to get off welfare. How is it then that

someone who is self-employed is not allowed to keep a penny of their earnings, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, in answer to the hon. member's question, I think it should be pointed out quite clearly that for every social assistance recipient that we have there are exemptions for the people who are earning money. And so whoever is on social assistance is encouraged to go to find a job to supplement, to support his income, in addition to what he would be getting from Social Services. And there are exemptions to the amount that he would be able to earn.

So for the member to say that there is no incentive to go out and work, I think is overstating the situation somewhat. There are exemptions; there are incentives built in for the social aid recipients to go and seek supplementary income.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, the minister, with all his staff, doesn't understand his own regulations.

Mr. Minister, look at the regulations with respect to earnings exemptions and read to me where it says that someone who is self-employed and on social assistance can keep anything. You read the regulation, Mr. Minister. You don't know your own regulations.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Yes, Mr. Chairman. I have to indicate to you that as far as my answer previous was concerned, I was talking more about wage earners than I was about self-employed. And I accept the critics point that I did not follow completely what he was getting at. And as far as self-employment, Mr. Chairman, the exemptions are there, in so far as the expenses incurred in the self-employment. I think it's an accepted fact that if you're going to be self-employed there are going to be certain expenses involved in coming up with a net income. And so any expenses and so on that are incurred in that process of making this earning, whatever it may happen to be, those expenses are taken into consideration as exemptions, although be it, the net income as such is not exempt. You were correct there.

Mr. Prebble: -- Yes, Mr. Minister. And that's my point, Mr. Minister, that in fact, your government provides no financial incentive whatsoever for a social assistance recipient who seeks self-employment to get off welfare, Mr. Minister, other than the incentive that comes with the self-esteem of working, which I think is very significant, Mr. Minister.

But I think it's shocking that your government, Mr. Minister, doesn't allow someone who's self-employed to keep any of their net earnings. That is unacceptable and surely even you must admit that.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to look at your wage exemption policy, turning to wages now rather than income from self-employment, and point out to you that again, contrary to your rhetoric with respect to encouraging people to work, what your government has done, Mr. Minister, is discourage people from working by, in effect, reducing the amount of money that they are allowed to keep when obtaining part time work but on social assistance.

And I remind you, Mr. Minister, that prior to October of 1987, for instance, a single person who was earning, for instance, \$100 a month was able to keep \$93.75. Now, Mr. Minister, they're only able to keep \$40, Mr. Minister. If you take a single parent with two children before you changed the wage exemption policy, if they were earning \$300 a month, they were allowed to keep \$241.25. Now, Mr. Minister, they're able to only keep \$120.

Now, Mr. Minister, these are just a couple of examples of how you've changed the social assistance regulations. Your government has changed the social assistance regulations to, in effect, discourage people from working.

Now at the same time, Mr. Minister, we have in the Government of Ontario an example of a government that has allowed social assistance recipients to keep more of their earnings as a result of a policy change that took effect in December, 1989. And my question to you, sir, is: when are we going to see a policy change that you introduce that, in effect, creates some incentives for those on social assistance to go out and take part-time work, incentives by way of allowing them to keep a reasonable percentage of their earnings, Mr. Minister?

Because right now there is no incentive. When you consider the extra costs that are associated with travel to and from work, when you consider the extra costs that are associated with buying clothing for work, when you consider the extra costs of child care, Mr. Minister, there is no incentive, financial incentive, for people to go out into the work place.

And I want you to explain, Mr. Minister, how you can justify, for instance, a single individual who's on social assistance only being able to keep the first \$25 that they earn a month and then only 20 per cent of the rest up to a maximum of \$75. You explain to me, sir, what kind of incentive there is for that individual to go out and take work. How can that be financially rewarding to that person, Mr. Minister?

(1915)

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, I think one of the key issues that we're discussing here is making sure that we have a balance. And I recognize that it's a very difficult task to have this balance between adequate benefits, sound work incentives, and also keeping in mind fiscal responsibility.

And going back to the way the system was, we find that it was based, and the exemptions and so on were based, I think, on an erroneous impression that the more financial assistance that you as a recipient were receiving under the old method, the more exemptions that you were allowed to keep. And this was felt not to be conducive to creating incentives to work.

In other words, what it did is it created the incentive to get more assistance because the amount of the exemptions that you were allowed would then depend directly upon the amount of assistance that you were receiving. In other words, comparing that to the system as it is now, the more money

you make, the more assistance you are . . . or the more money you are allowed to keep, albeit there is a cap. And I think what we are discussing at this moment is the cap as to how much you are allowed to keep of your earnings.

And I think that is basically where our argument or our discussion this evening is centring around right now, and perhaps that is something that can be looked at in terms of increasing the cap or the flow-through so that the person who is doing the working is allowed to keep that much more of the money that he is earning. And I think that's what our discussion is centring around right now.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well yes, Mr. Minister, of course it is. And the point that I'm making is that your government has intentionally created disincentives for social assistance recipients to work. You know that's the case, Mr. Minister; the former minister knows that's the case, Mr. Minister. And this flies in the face of all the rhetoric about encouraging people to get off welfare.

This, Mr. Minister, gets at the real motivation behind your government's policies which has been, from the beginning, to make life tougher for those who are poor rather than to assist them in advancing their financial circumstances, Mr. Minister.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to give you another example of this. And this time, Mr. Minister, it's with respect to people who are studying in post-secondary education institutions. Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could explain to the Assembly why it is, for instance, that . . . Just to give you a specific example: I was visiting with a group of families in Yorkton a few months ago. And there I met several women who last summer -- these are women with large families, anywhere from four to seven children -- and, Mr. Minister, these are women who are involved in adult upgrading programs.

And these women, several of them, had had the following experience. They successfully completed their adult upgrading program during the academic year. They have large families, as I mentioned. They, Mr. Minister, sought part-time employment during the summer. In some cases they were successful in getting it, in other cases they weren't. Several of them had to go back to the Department of Social Services seeking social assistance during the summer. In almost every case, Mr. Minister, they were denied assistance, and they were denied assistance because of the policy that your department has in place whereby student loans are considered to be income.

And, Mr. Minister, because these women had student loans during the winter months, they were not allowed to obtain social assistance during the summer months. Several of them, Mr. Minister, went without money for two or three months. They had to obtain assistance from neighbours in order to survive and in order to feed their children, Mr. Minister. And these are women who are trying to upgrade themselves. Now you explain that policy to the members of the public watching this evening, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, the incidents that the hon. member is referring to, I'm not familiar with the particular instance, so I think,

without committing myself to any particular instance, when these women that you were talking about are taking an upgrading and when they are taking a course, in terms of education, and are eligible for student loans, they automatically would, I would imagine, apply for those student loans and receive them. And having received those student loans, we know that these student loans are based upon need. So I think it would be fair to assume that the needs of those women at that time were met through the auspices of the student loans.

And having said that, then even if at that time they would have applied for social services, they would not have been eligible for social service assistance at that time because they were then still accessing the student loans as such. And it is my understanding that at the time when the student loan funding would have run out and if the women then were destitute and needing assistance and needing help, at that time they should, in my opinion, and I can say again, without understanding the total circumstances, should have been eligible for social assistance at that time.

Mr. Prebble: -- Minister, of course they should have been, under any reasonable set of government policies. But the point that I'm trying to make to you is that they're not, and again you don't understand your own regulations, Mr. Minister.

You have created a set of regulations, you see, in which the department, your own department officials, look back at those women's income over the last six months, and they are of course during the previous six months receiving more in student loan moneys than they would have been on social assistance. Your department, Mr. Minister, by way of your own policies, has determined that that student loan money is income, even though that loan money has to be repaid back, Mr. Minister. And these women are then denied assistance after they've completed their adult upgrading and after their student loans have run out, Mr. Minister. In the intervening summer months until they go back to school in the fall, they are being denied assistance by your department.

Their children are starving, Mr. Minister. I want you to explain and to justify that policy. I say it can't be justified, and therefore I'm asking you this evening, sir: will you change it?

Some Hon. Members: mHear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, the situation as outlined by the critic. I think there's one important element that we have to keep in mind here, and that is that during the time when that student loan was approved, a period of time was taken into consideration for whatever the length of that course was going to be, and a certain amount of money based on the needs assessment was allocated. In other words if it was a three-month course, so and so much money was deemed to be necessary in order for that family to have a credible standard of living.

Now it can be assumed then that if that was not enough, I think there's probably one of two alternatives that we could look at. Number one,

perhaps the needs assessment was not conducted properly and an appropriate amount was determined, or the funding having been allocated to that particular family may not have been used in an appropriate manner.

But regardless of what the situation was, we have to remember that Social Services is a service of last resort. And if the funding is not enough for whatever reason, I suggested two possible alternatives for the reasoning behind that. We must not forget that all of these individuals do have the right, and we would encourage -- I would personally encourage the right of appeal to have the case looked at once more and to give a second opinion as it were, by the appeal board to see whether that individual is properly treated.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you and I are living in totally different worlds. First of all you don't understand your own regulations, which I find it difficult to believe.

I'm talking, Mr. Minister, about what happens after the loan money runs out. And I'm telling you something you don't appear to understand, Mr. Minister, and that is you as the Minister of Social Services are denying hundreds of women across this province, and their children, the right to social assistance, Mr. Minister, if they cannot find work after their student loan runs out and they have children to support. That's your policy, Mr. Minister, and it's a policy that must be changed. It's a policy that it is unjust, Mr. Minister, because you are penalizing people who are attempting to upgrade themselves, and that is unjustifiable.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to turn to another example of how you're doing this. I want to give you a couple of other examples, Mr. Minister. One, Mr. Minister, about the unfairness of your policies with respect to encouraging people to pursue an education or to get part-time work are these: first of all, Mr. Minister, if someone applies for social assistance and they have been holding down a part-time job but they have many children to support and they still qualify for some assistance, your department deducts, Mr. Minister, all of the money that they earn for the first three months they're on assistance. And I say that can't be justified.

And secondly, Mr. Minister, your government has changed the policy with respect to the family income plan, and this is a change that you personally oversaw, Mr. Minister. You changed the regulations at the beginning of this year, Mr. Minister, so that a student loan under the family income plan would be considered income. Now I don't have any problem, and members on this side of the House, Mr. Minister, don't have any problem with the notion that a forgivable loan ought to be considered to be income, Mr. Minister. We don't have any problem with the idea of a forgivable loan being considered income.

(1930)

But, Mr. Minister, when money is borrowed, for instance, for tuition, and that money must be repaid, you explain to me, Mr. Minister, why money borrowed for tuition and for books that is loan money should be considered as income under the family income plan. And you justify for me, Mr.

Minister, a situation that I say is unjustifiable, and that is that once again there are many, many, particularly women, around this province who have been cut off the family income plan and who have lost those benefits for their children, Mr. Minister, because they are attending university or they are attending a post-secondary education institution, and the money that they borrow for tuition and for books is being considered as income. Can you explain to me how that's justified, Mr. Minister. I ask you again to cancel that change in policy.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- There's a number of issues here, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to discuss a little bit.

And that goes back to the other issue, and that is, when these women that we were talking about are finished with their particular education classes and for whatever reason they are not able to access a job so that income would be available to them.

It is false and it is wrong to say that they are not then going to be taken care of or that they would not be able to access the normal avenue of social aid for those particular people, because they would then, if the resources are not there, they become eligible automatically for social assistance once more. And that is the whole point that I think we're trying to make here.

Now as far as the student loans are concerned, I think what we have to do is . . . First of all the change in regulations were necessary as far as the CAP (Canada assistance plan) is concerned with the federal government to bring it in line with CAP.

Secondly, it was an attempt to make all recipients of FIP (family income plan) on an even basis, because student loans, particularly the forgivable section of those student loans, have to be considered as a resource. And the student loans, being based upon living needs, the needs and so on to carry on with the normal process of living, would then in actual fact allow those people who are accessing student loans to have a double source of income. And to avoid that, to make sure that we treated all recipients equally, this student loan then would and was and will continue to be acted upon as a resource.

Now I made mention of the forgivable portion. There's one thing that I'm looking at and one thing that I'm beginning to recognize, that there is perhaps a need to look at the unforgivable part in so far as the . . . particularly the tuition fees, textbooks, and the actual mechanical expenses of going to school. And I think I would agree with the critic that this is an avenue that should be looked at and we are in the process of doing that. So I'd give you credit for coming up with that suggestion and it's seriously being considered.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, I appreciate those latter comments very much. And I wonder if I could receive a commitment from you this evening that you will look seriously at no longer considering the non-forgivable portion of the student loan as income, and that if you could give me also a commitment tonight that for sure, with respect to moneys that are borrowed for

tuition, for books, for all other education-related expenses, that you will, as of tonight, give me a commitment that you will immediately go before cabinet and repeal the regulation that you introduced and ensure that those changes are made, Mr. Minister, so that moneys borrowed for educational expenses are no longer considered income.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- One concern I have, and that is what I will reiterate to the hon. member, and that is that the basis of the changes was on the equitable aspect of it. And I'm having a little bit of a problem making the commitment at this time about the total non-forgivable portion. But in so far as the exact and direct expenses involved in attaining an education, textbooks and the like, I would reiterate the commitment that -- without making a positive because there's nothing too positive in our whole system here -- but I am committed to making that change, I would go so far.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I thank you very much for that. I want to urge you to do it quickly. Get that in place, Mr. Minister. Make sure that that policy change is in place so that when students go back in the fall, students who are supporting children, Mr. Minister, that they are no longer being penalized in the way that they were in the spring term of this year, Mr. Minister.

I know of some women, in fact, particularly single women supporting children, who had to drop out of school as a result of the policy that you instituted, Mr. Minister, and I urge you to change it.

I want to turn to a different area, Mr. Minister, but it's another example of your government's failure to give enough support to preventative programming, to preventative social programming, Mr. Minister. Some of these things that we've been talking about so far are good examples, Mr. Minister, of how your government has in effect failed to give people support to advance themselves.

With the same theme in mind, I want to look at quite a different area now, and this is families who have children who have serious handicaps, particularly mental handicaps, Mr. Minister. And I'm thinking here of the early childhood intervention program. And I asked you during question period some time ago about the waiting-list for the Regina early childhood intervention program. And you will recall, Mr. Minister, that some 26 children a few weeks ago were waiting to get into the Regina ECIP (early childhood intervention program) program, and they weren't able to get in, Mr. Minister, because there was no space for them. All that was required, Mr. Minister, to eliminate that waiting-list was an investment of about \$2,700, of space, the financing of an additional two and a half staff positions.

Now, Mr. Minister, when you think about the cost that can be associated with a child that doesn't get the necessary help early on in life, later on having to get large amounts of expensive assistance, and perhaps having to be institutionalized, Mr. Minister, if they don't get help early on in life, I want to ask you now whether in light of those costs, unnecessary costs for the taxpayer to bear, and in light of the fact that these waiting-lists are robbing these children of an opportunity to at least

partially overcome their disability, will you give us a commitment tonight that you will provide the finances for the Regina early childhood intervention program to eliminate its waiting-list.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, in response to my hon. critic's comment here, yes, I full well remember the question that he asked me in question period on the early childhood intervention program a while back, because that's the only question I have received, so it's hard for me to forget about that one particular question.

However having said that, I don't want to belittle the importance and the significance of the early childhood intervention program. And I recognize your concern and the people out there because of the preventative nature of such a program. And I think my department over the years -- no credit necessarily to me as an individual, but to this government and to previous ministers who have recognized that.

And I could indicate to the hon. member that as far as the early childhood intervention program is concerned, in '90-91 we are going to be spending \$1,231,000 on this program. So there is a significant commitment, significant sums of money being spent on that. If you want to say, well it's not enough, well that's a fair comment. I'm not quite sure what enough is until and such time as every one of those cases would have been properly brought to a conclusion.

Having said that, as far as your comments on the waiting-list, my information that I have just received from my officials is that it is no longer a waiting-list of 26 individuals in Regina here but rather four of those that were on the waiting-list have graduated and have gone on to further programs. And I have had it indicated to me that another four are now going to be dealt with in another field, that of foster care, and they will be accessing different programs there.

And there is some indication, although I would not want to make any firm commitment on this, that there will be further movement come fall. But the 26 is apparently down with eight less than that at this stage. Although we could be doing more, I would suggest to you that there is a significant amount of effort and money being put into this very worthwhile project.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well thank you for those comments, Mr. Minister, but they're not good enough. First of all, let me just say a word about this being the so-called only question. Mr. Minister, I've asked many questions during question period with respect to matters like poverty, hunger, your \$740,000 budget for fighting child hunger in this province, and every time I asked one of those questions you duck it, and the Minister of the Family answers it, Mr. Minister. I don't know when we've seen a circumstance where a Minister of Social Services declines to answer questions about items in his own budget and leaves it to the Minister of the Family to handle it. But that's indeed a unique situation.

(1945)

Now I might say, sir, with respect to the waiting-list at the Regina early

childhood intervention program, that just because the waiting-list, as you inform me, is now down to 18, doesn't make the waiting-list, sir, any more acceptable. Mr. Minister, I'm asking you to establish a policy that whenever a child is, upon examination, thought to be able to benefit from the early childhood intervention program in this province, that that child automatically becomes eligible for services under that program. That's the way the system should work, Mr. Minister.

It is much more cost-effective, Mr. Minister, for the government to spend a few thousand dollars assisting the family and the child in their home to overcome some of their disabilities at an early age than it is to spend much larger amounts of money later on, much less effectively, in helping a child deal with their handicap, Mr. Minister.

And I ask you to look at some of the children that are on the waiting-list. Several of the children, Mr. Minister, are visually impaired; one has a seizure disorder; three have Down's Syndrome; one is missing part of her frontal lobe; one child is on oxygen all the time with serious feeding problems; many children are suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome; and some have cerebral palsy, Mr. Minister.

Now you explain to me, sir, and you explain to the people watching these estimates this evening, and to the Assembly, how you could justify denying these children, with the difficulties that I've described, \$2,700 each for a space in the early childhood intervention program in this province. You explain that, sir. What are you going to do to provide the funds to eliminate this waiting-list?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- First of all, Mr. Chairman, we do not deny anyone the opportunity to have their situation addressed. And again I can empathize with the hon. member and the parents of children who are experiencing difficulty and stress and so on. But I would like to indicate to the member that this is done on a prioritization list, and the needs assessment is done by a committee of professionals who prioritize these individuals.

But having said that, I would like to indicate to the member that we are in the process of having a review being done on this matter. We're very serious about it. Let me assure you of that. And we are having a provincial review about . . . with the whole situation, with the possibly of realignment of programs, realignment of funding, on a provincial basis to address the need that we have been talking about.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well I'm glad that some review will be undertaken, Mr. Minister, but I want to just close this particular subject by saying I urge you, once again, to look at immediately providing the dollars that are required to eliminate this waiting-list in Regina, where it's the most serious in the province.

And I also urge you, Mr. Minister, to look in co-operation with the Minister of Health at dealing with the problem that many children in the early childhood intervention program and their families are having in accessing support services that must be delivered in conjunction with the ECIP program in order to assist children.

For instance, Mr. Minister, it is unacceptable that children in the north-west part of this province must travel all the way from Ile-a-la-Crosse to Saskatoon, and bearing in mind these are children with handicaps, that their families must travel those distances in order to access services like physiotherapy or speech therapy. That is unacceptable. I realize that this is partially in the hands of the Minister of Health. But I'm saying to you, sir, this issue needs to be urgently addressed.

We owe it to these children to give them whatever support we can as a society, and to provide that assistance to them and their families at the earliest possible moment so that they can . . . You know, a child, sir, with Down's syndrome can do a great deal if they get help in the first few months of their life. When they have to wait six or seven months to access this program, Mr. Minister, they then learn many behaviours. For instance, they sit up improperly and they learn to walk improperly, because they're not getting the kind of help that they could get if they could access the early childhood intervention program. And that is wrong, sir, that is just plain wrong. And I don't think there's a taxpayer in the province that would deny you spending money to help those children, Mr. Minister.

Now I want to give you, sir . . . I want to turn to another topic. And I want to give you another example of an area where your government has failed to provide the kind of preventative social services that are required to save the taxpayer money and to help young people who are in need to become self-reliant, Mr. Minister. And I speak here of the very high drop-out rate that we have in this province among teen-age women.

If you look at the statistics, Mr. Minister, which I invite you to do, you will find that there's approximately 1,250 young teenagers in this province who have children each year. And if you look at the figures over and above that, Mr. Minister, you'll see that these young women are getting pregnant when they're in high school. So 1,250 teenagers in high school who are pregnant each year -- 1,250.

Then I invite you, sir, to look at the number of day-care spaces that are available to these young teen-age women and that are specifically geared to teens in high school, Mr. Minister. So I'm talking here about day-care spaces that are either located in a high school or that are located immediately adjacent to a high school in the day-care centre. And, Mr. Minister, when you look at that figure, you'll find that the figure is 22. Only 22 day-care spaces that have been specifically set up for teen-age mothers and 1,250 teenagers a year who are getting pregnant while in high school.

Now, Mr. Minister, I then invite you to examine what is happening to these young women because 80 per cent of them are dropping out of high school, Mr. Minister, 80 per cent -- four out of five. It is the largest single cause of school drop-out among young women in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister.

And so, Mr. Minister, I realize that your government has done something

positive in this area. You have provided funding for these 22 day-care spaces, which I commend you for. Ten of them are at Balfour Collegiate in Saskatoon; 12 of them are at the MacKenzie Infant Care Centre in Regina. We appreciate the steps you've taken in that area. But I ask you to look at the discrepancy between 1,250 young women each year who need day-care assistance to stay in school and the 22 day-care spaces that exist. And I ask you, sir, when are we going to see in your budget significant new initiatives for day-care spaces that will allow teen-age mothers to continue their high school education?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- The particular area that we're discussing right now is a great deal of concern to me, not only as Minister of Social Services, but also a former teacher who has spent many, many years in a class-room. And there was really nothing that was so disillusionary for me to see young kids quitting school. And just, you know, they tend to just kind of cut off at the base of their legs any possibility that they would have of bettering themselves and getting that base of support in terms of education that they will need later on in their life.

So I couldn't agree with you more that it is essential that we keep these young gals in school as long as possible so that they can get that foundation, as it were, with a proper education that they can go out there and compete in this wide world of ours.

In order to do that, again I suppose what we're talking about is resources available. You're bringing up a lot of things tonight and I imagine you will continue to do so as we go through these estimates. And each one of those issues that you're bringing up does have a price-tag to it, so eventually we have to do a certain amount of prioritization and do as much as possible for the resources that we have available.

Teen-age girls who have children when they're 14, 15, or 16 years of age are really up against it if they don't have that education, and I think we recognize that. And what we have been trying over the last couple of years, which was instituted and really begun under the auspices of the former minister, and what I have been encouraging and continuing on, are such things as the MacKenzie day-care centre here in Balfour in Regina -- not in Saskatoon -- and also at the Mount Royal one in Saskatoon. I've gone through that one and I've talked to the young parents and to the day-care workers that are there, and it's very encouraging to see the kind of response that we get to a program like this. It can either be having these facilities and having this program within the school . . . I can see a lot of advantages of moving it out of school into homes within the region, easily accessible to the moms.

And of course we have also an initiative that was taken in Moose Jaw in Chisholm. In Moose Jaw, even as we speak, we are coming close to making a deal, as it were, with La Loche. I've been up in La Loche a number of times since becoming minister, on different occasions, and I've visited the Dene school that is in La Loche. A very encouraging sign when you walk through that school, and I would encourage you to go through that -- maybe you have already -- to get the flavour of the northern community and the flavour of the people who live there and some of their aspirations and some

of the needs, desires that they experience. And even there I'm very glad to say that this is a concern that the leaders of the community have as well. And we're working very closely together in La Loche right now to set up a program that will encourage young girls to stay in school and get that solid basis of an education that will be so necessary for them.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, I'm pleased to hear that you think that having these day-care programs is a good idea, but of course the reality is that your government isn't expanding them.

Mr. Minister, what is needed in this province, just for starters, is at least 100 such spaces, day-care spaces for teen mothers in high schools or nearby high schools, as you say, in Saskatoon, and another 100 in Regina, and at least another 100 to 150 around the rest of the province, Mr. Minister. That's what we need for starters.

Now that can be done, Mr. Minister, and you know that will be cost-shared through the Canada assistance plan so in terms of moneys that have to be put up, half of the money will come from Ottawa.

But more significantly, Mr. Minister, you know that it is much less expensive to assist a young woman in completing her high school education while she's under 21 than it is, Mr. Minister, to help her return and finish her high school after she's 21, after she's an adult. You know it's much more expensive, Mr. Minister, to do it when she's an adult than to do it while she's a teenager. So the cost of providing day-care services to a teenager is minuscule in comparison with the student loan moneys that have to be paid to assist someone with children after they've become 21 years of age.

Now, Mr. Minister, my question to you is: are you going to provide funding to expand these day-care spaces to these teen mothers who badly need these services around the province? And, Mr. Minister, moreover, are you prepared to provide transportation assistance to these young women to be able to get to school because it's very difficult, Mr. Minister, to travel to school when you've got a squirming 10-month-old that you're trying to look after in one hand, and you're carrying books and a lunch and a diaper bag and a change of cloths for the baby in the other hand, Mr. Minister. These women, its very awkward for many of them who have to travel long distances to get to the one high school in Saskatoon or Regina that offers the service, so they need transportation assistance.

(2000)

And also, Mr. Minister, there needs to be a day care for these children of the teenagers that I'm making reference to, when they're past 18 months of age. Because right now, Mr. Minister, once their child turns 18 months, they're no longer able to benefit from the program at MacKenzie Infant Care Centre, or at Balfour, even if they've been able to get into the program. Once their child is 18 months they can no longer keep their child in the program.

So, Mr. Minister, what are you going to do about addressing these obvious

needs? Will you provide some financial assistance that would help these young women to complete their high school education?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, I have already, I think, agreed to the importance of such a program for these young women. Furthermore, I think that we have to take a look at what we are already doing, and if you say, well we have to do more, I'm not going to argue with you on that one. I guess what we have to do, as I tried to indicate to you on one of my previous answers, is we have to take a look at this particular situation within the parameters of the whole government program.

And I think you would recognize, sir, that somewhere along the line you have to prioritize in terms of the services that you can offer. And we cannot, with deference to what you've been saying, do everything for everybody all at one time, kind of thing. And as much as I would like to say to you and make a commitment that yes, every need is going to be met, I can't do that because I have to be fiscally responsible at the same time as I am responsible to these individuals.

But to talk only about the teen parenting program as it relates to child care for these -- as important as it is, we have to go beyond that. And I think we have programs that have been established to help these young moms not only with the child itself, but other programs that we have available on the teen and young parent program such as, for example, the birth parent counselling programs that we have, parent education programs that we have, which work around the theme that nobody's perfect.

And this is important for these young people for their own self-esteem and for their own . . . Well I don't want to get into some of the emotional problems that parents like this would meet, but one of the problems is the lack of self-esteem and lack of self-worth because of the situation that they have found themselves in, the blame that they're putting on themselves and so on. So I think parent education, birth parent counselling, life skills education is another situation that we're involved in as well as education and vocational training.

So I'm not trying to underplay the significance of what we've been talking about, but we have to take that into the picture of the total context of these support services that are available for these young teen parents. So taking a look at it from that point of view, maybe there is more going on for these than we have been led to believe so far by our discussions centring only on that one particular aspect, as important as it is.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, you know we on this side of the House share your view about the importance of fiscal management. The difference, Mr. Minister, when we were in government, was that we had sound fiscal management; we didn't have a deficit.

Your priority, Mr. Minister, the priority of your government -- I don't want to direct this specifically at you -- but the priority of your government has clearly been deficit financing to the point where the interest on the debt is the third largest expenditure of government. There

was no category for interest on the debt when we were in government, Mr. Minister, as you well know.

But the point I want to make with respect to this program is that, Mr. Minister, you try to explain to me the economic common sense of your policy, which as you say, well we don't have additional financial resources to provide day care for these young people. Therefore, Mr. Minister, the consequence of that is that four out of five of these teen-age women drop out of high school. That's 1,000 teen-age women a year out of the 1,250 that become pregnant.

Mr. Minister, you know what happens to many of these women. Many of these women, Mr. Minister, live isolated existences, often relying on social welfare, Mr. Minister, if they live away from home. If they live at home, Mr. Minister, they're not eligible for any assistance from the Department of Social Services by way of social assistance at all, Mr. Minister. And I just don't understand the common sense of that.

You look at the MacKenzie infant program in Regina, Mr. Minister. Look at the women who have gone through that program; 13 out of the 14 women who were in that program, Mr. Minister, last year completed their high school year successfully. That's a drop-out rate, Mr. Minister, of only 7 per cent versus the regular drop-out rate for these teen-age women, of 80 per cent.

You look at the program at Balfour Collegiate, Mr. Minister. And in the first semester of the 1989-90 academic year, every one of the teen-age women who was in that program completed their semester successfully, versus the 80 per cent drop-out rate among those who didn't have the benefit of the program.

And you explain to me, Mr. Minister, the economic common sense that you espouse of letting teenagers drop out of school and having to rely on the welfare system. And then you compare that, Mr. Minister, with the teenagers, for instance, who graduated and who benefitted from the MacKenzie infant program in Regina, where only 16 per cent of those women, Mr. Minister, are now relying on social assistance. The rest have successfully gotten off welfare. Now that saves the taxpayers money, Mr. Minister, but those are the kind of policies that your government just doesn't seem to understand. Why don't you use this as an opportunity to invest in a preventative social program, save the taxpayers of the province a great deal of money by reducing the school drop-out rate in Saskatchewan, and at the same time supporting these young women to complete their education and get on with their lives, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, I'm not quite sure how to respond totally to the member's comments because I'm sure he is and I am, as well, trying to keep this on a reasonably high level of discussion. But it's tempting, because you seem to be baiting me a little bit here. I'm going to respond a little bit just to chastise you and just put this whole thing into a proper perspective, and then I hope that doesn't lead to a counter-attack by you and then we're into it.

You start talking about deficit, and I think we could get into a discussion on deficits and who could hide deficits the best and all that kind of stuff but I don't know . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I hear the member from Quill Lakes starting to react a little bit, and that's what I was suggesting to you that will happen if we get into that and I know we don't want to.

But I want to put one thing into perspective, and that deals with child care . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The Health critic talks about honesty and so on. Let's take a look at the . . . I have a report here and this particular report deals and I'm going to quote from Graham Riches' -- I don't know if some of you might be familiar with that name, Graham Riches and George Maslany taken out of the Canadian Social Work Review article -- and the article that I'm referring to, if the member wants to look up and to see if I've picked out a quote that's speaking on my behalf. That's the social welfare and the New Democrats' personal social service spending in Saskatchewan, 1971 to '81. And I just want to make this one quote, and then I'd like to have your reaction to this:

In terms of child care (and I'm quoting) the critical preventive sections of the family services legislation had not been implemented in the six years following enactment. And the 13,500 day-care spaces promised by 1979 in the 1974 budget speech were to be 10,000 spaces short of the target.

Now I recognize that maybe, perhaps we had not met all of the targets that we had set, but I suggest to you that in times past, there was a previous government that did say that they were going to have 13,500 spaces by the year '79 in a five-year period of time. Now when that five-year period of time was up, unfortunately, the spaces were 10,000 short. So history, I suppose, in a sense, does tend to repeat itself.

But let me just give you an indication of the commitment that this government has had to child-care spaces, and again, there is a need out there, and again, perhaps we have not met that need totally. And I would be the first one to admit that.

But in the year 1981-82, there was a total funding for \$6,692,000.

An Hon. Member: -- And now it's up to 13 million.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- And now, in 1989-1990 . . . No, I say to the member from Saskatoon Nutana, it's not 13 million; now it is \$17,899,000, almost 18,000, which is getting close to tripling over that period of time. And so there is that growth and certainly the inflation factor can be compounded many times and there's still a greater commitment to child-care spaces than there was in 1981-82. We've got lots left to do. I grant you that.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you don't seem to want to talk about your policy with respect to day care for teen-age moms because, frankly, it's indefensible, Mr. Minister. But you seem to want to talk about your larger day-care policy, so let's get into that for a minute.

I hadn't planned to, but since you raised it, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you can therefore explain to this Assembly, in light of the comments that you've just made, why it is that in the province of Saskatchewan, when you look at Saskatchewan's record relative to the record for all of Canada, that only 7 per cent of the children under 13 years of age whose parents are in the work place, Mr. Minister, in this province, only there are . . . when you look at the numbers of children who are under 13 years of age and then you look at the number of day-care spaces, Mr. Minister, there's only licensed day-care spaces for 7 per cent of those children, in contrast, Mr. Minister, with a Canadian average of 13 per cent.

Now, Mr. Minister, that's your record, not ours. Your government's been in office now for eight years. During those eight years, Mr. Minister, not only have you had a dismal record with respect to the creation of spaces, as I've just indicated, but you've also frozen the day-care subsidy for an eight-year period. It remains at \$235 a month, just like it did in 1982, Mr. Minister.

Now my question, Mr. Minister, to you then is: can you tell us, will there be an increase in the day-care subsidy in the current fiscal year? When is that subsidy at long last going to be increased? When will the eight-year freeze come to an end, Mr. Minister? And how do you justify a record, sir, in which, among Canadian provinces, with the exception of the province of Newfoundland, no other province has a lower percentage of licensed day-care spaces for the percentage of children under 13 years of age whose parents are working than does the province of Saskatchewan.

(2015)

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, since 1982 the amounts of money and funding and so on for child-care spaces has increased by over 48 per cent. At the same time, the cost of operating a space -- although the \$235 per space has been in place for a number of years already -- the cost per space has not remained the same. Now when I say cost for space, the amount that has been funded for through the government has increased by 35 per cent during that period of time.

So in other words, with the start-up grants, the start-up grants of \$600 per space, it is a one-time grant for centres. Homes, at the same time, receive a start-up grant of \$200 when they are licensed and, at the same time, a northern home would receive a start-up grant of \$300.

Then there are operating costs that were -- I'm not quite sure what year the operating costs were started, but I believe it was somewhere in the year of 1986 or thereabouts -- when we had the operating costs of \$20 per space per month. So that would be 20 times 12 to give you \$240 a year for operating costs that have been implemented as well.

And so we do have a large amount of money being spent per space, more than was in times past. So granted the \$235 per space per month will have remained constant; it is not that the total cost to the government for this particular space has remained constant because there is additional funding

being provided for them.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you haven't answered my question with respect to when we can expect an increase in the day-care subsidy. It's simply not fair to work start-up grants into the annual operating costs of the day-care centre.

I do think it's fair, Mr. Minister, as you did, to make reference to the \$20 per space per month that your government's made available by way of an operating grant. Yes, that has helped a little, although now it's been at least five years, if my memory serves me correct, since that was increased.

So, Mr. Minister, we're looking at a long-term freeze on the operating grants of day-care centres and, Mr. Minister, that has had very serious consequences with respect to the low salaries that those day-care centres are able to pay their staff. Mr. Minister, because of your long-term freeze on funding to centres, the staff at those centres are being, I think, badly underpaid. You know, Mr. Minister, it is just unacceptable when someone who is caring for animals at the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) or at a zoo is making a good deal more money an hour than a day-care worker, Mr. Minister, who is caring for our most precious resource, namely our children.

Now, Mr. Minister, I won't pursue that any more at this point. I think your answer is on the record and I regret that we're not seeing any policy change in this area from the one pursued by the former minister of Social Services.

But, Mr. Minister, I want to ask you another question, and that's in the area of legal aid. And I wonder if you can indicate to the Assembly whether we can expect that the current policy, which I'm happy to see being pursued despite the legislation that was passed last year, can we expect that in fact there will be no user fees for legal aid services reinstated in the province of Saskatchewan? Can you confirm that that will be the case, Mr. Minister, or is it your intention to introduce a user fee? I'm asking for a commitment from you that there will . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Ask the first part of that question again. I didn't catch it quite at the end there.

Mr. Prebble: -- Okay, the minister is asking me to repeat the question. I'm pleased to do that. Mr. Minister, what I'm saying to you is that last year your government passed legislation that enabled you to charge user fees again for legal aid services. I've been happy to see, to the best of my knowledge, that no such user fee has been reintroduced. I'm seeking a commitment from you today, sir, that in fact that will continue to be the case, and that we will not see user fees for legal aid services in the current fiscal year and beyond the current fiscal year.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, perhaps at the outset I should take this opportunity to introduce to the member opposite Mr. Don Morgan, who is the chairman of the Legal Aid Commission.

And with respect to your question for my . . . I'm glad that you recognize the fact that the user fees have not been applied to this stage. And quite frankly, I don't know if I can at this time make a firm commitment as to what's going to happen in the future because right now we are waiting upon a recommendation from the commission as to what their stand is going to be. And as yet, we have not received this recommendation. But certainly, whatever that recommendation is going to be, I would look very, very seriously upon following it. My inclination is to follow whatever recommendation they make.

Mr. Prebble: -- Sir, you are the minister responsible for the Legal Aid Commission. Obviously you are the person who finally decides on whether or not there will be a user fee or not and, of course, your cabinet colleagues. And my question to you is: sir, will you give us your commitment tonight that you will, as minister responsible for the Legal Aid Commission, not reinstitute user fees in the province of Saskatchewan?

I ask you to bear in mind, sir, that we are talking here about people who are eligible for legal aid, of course, are by definition, people who are living at less than 70 per cent of the poverty line. If you're living at more than 70 per cent of the poverty line, as a matter of policy, your government has not permitted persons whose incomes exceed 70 per cent of the poverty line to be eligible for legal aid at all.

Now we argue, Mr. Minister, that those who are living at 70 per cent of the poverty line or less simply can't afford to pay the user fees that your government previously instituted. And I'm asking for a commitment tonight that you will not reinstitute user fees in the legal aid system.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- I can't make that commitment. And the reason I cannot make that commitment, as I'm sure that the hon. member would understand, is that we do have the commission. I am waiting for a report from that commission. And for me to unilaterally at this stage say this is the way it's going to be, then there's not much point in having the report coming down from the commission to see what they would recommend.

I've already indicated to you the inclination that I on a personal basis have, but you're quite right in assessing the situation that it is not up to me as an individual alone to make that determination. And as far as I'm concerned I cannot speak for cabinet itself. I can certainly indicate that my inclination is going to be voiced in cabinet, but how that's going to turn out, because it's going to be a cabinet decision when this comes down. It would be rash for me to make a commitment of that type that I may not be able to keep.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well I accept that, Mr. Minister. I just want to make a commitment from members on this side of the House that in the event that we're elected government there will not be user fees under the legal aid system as it operates now . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, Mr. Minister. The minister says, well there are none now, but he's not giving us a commitment that there won't be again. And, Mr. Minister, we find that unacceptable.

Now I want to turn to a different and very important topic, Mr. Minister. And I've intentionally left the questioning on this to estimates rather than question period because of the seriousness of the matter. I don't want to in any way imply that, you know, I'm interested in politics here. I just want to get some policy commitments from you with respect to the events surrounding the death of Joel Mike. And of course you'll be very familiar with that case, Mr. Minister.

Now this of course was the unfortunate death of a two and a half year old boy on the Beardy Reserve. This child was being . . . his mother had, you know, had basically made arrangements for him to be cared for by one Edward Spence and his common-law wife. And of course you will know, Mr. Minister, the tragic events that occurred when that took place. The young boy was severely assaulted by Mr. Spence and died. And, Mr. Minister, there are a number of very important policy issues associated with this that must, I think, be discussed in order to ensure that this kind of a tragedy does not occur again.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to begin by asking you a question with respect to police checks. And I understand, Mr. Minister, I want to say from the outset that I understand that it was not your department officials that placed this boy with the family on the Beardy Reserve. So I don't want to hold you totally accountable for this situation or your officials. I do think the department has some responsibility to bear but I don't want to say it's the primary responsibility.

But during the course of the discussions with respect to the Joel Mike case, your associate deputy minister indicated on CBC radio that in fact as a matter of policy, a police check was not done on all prospective foster-parents and adoptive parents in the province of Saskatchewan.

So in other words, when someone is applying to be a foster-parent or applying to be an adoptive parent, at the time that the . . . as of earlier this year when these statements were made, which I think was back in March, if my memory serves me correctly, as a matter of practice there was not a police check done on these applicants to ensure that they did not have a criminal record that included violence or that included assault against children.

And I'm not implying here of course that anyone with a criminal record shouldn't be able to adopt a child or be a foster-parent, on the contrary. There are many situations where somebody, for instance, may have had a drinking and driving offence or something like this, and that doesn't necessarily make them a bad foster-parent or a bad adoptive parent.

But I'm asking for an indication from you this evening, sir, about whether this policy has now been changed. Can you tell me: are police checks now being done on prospective foster-parents and adoptive parents? And if so, what kind of scrutiny is being given in the event that a criminal record is found to be part of the background of the applicant?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, and hon. member, I know that you and I have sat down and discussed this case privately in times past, and we both have, I think, a concern about the situation that you've described, and of others that have occurred, perhaps not of the prominence of this particular case, but there is that underlying concern, I think, that we have to keep in mind. And you are correct. The placement was not done with my department alone as such.

Having said that, I think I made a commitment to you on a private basis before, and I will do that publicly right now, that this police check and so on I think is something that we have to look at very, very seriously, and I think beyond just the scope that we were talking about here. I think it's something perhaps that we should consider on a much broader base throughout government.

And I'm not quite sure how the final thing is going to shake out, but we are pursuing it. We're looking for a policy that will be liveable by everyone. And I make that commitment to you, that in the not too distant future there will be this policy of automatic police checks for people that are going to be in a position of authority and have a responsibility, so that recurrence of that tragic event that you described on the Beardy Reserve will have less chance of occurring again.

I don't know if we can be totally definitive that it will never happen again, but certainly we can't leave too many stones unturned in trying to prevent a recurrence of that tragic event.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well I'm glad to hear that the policy is being planned. I'm disappointed that it's not already in place, Mr. Minister, although I realize that consultations with the foster parents association and other groups are required. I want to urge you to get it in place as quickly as possible, particularly for individuals, Mr. Minister, who have the care of a child for a long period of time when they're alone. I think we have to distinguish between people -- staff persons, for instance in a day care -- who have contact with children but who have it under the eye of many other individuals, and persons who are caring for children alone, in effect, where their behaviour can't be scrutinized by others over prolonged periods of time.

Mr. Minister, I want to deal specifically now with the Joel Mike case, and I want to ask you, how many months before the children were placed with the Spence family were the children in the care of your department, Mr. Minister? I know these children were from time to time wards of your department. I wrote you a letter about this. To my knowledge I've not yet received an answer unless it's just come in the last day or two. I'd like to know, Mr. Minister: when were these children wards of the Department of Social Services and what was the distance in time, what was the period of time between the time they were last a ward of your department and the time they were placed with the Spence family?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, my officials and I have been discussing the question and the concerns raised by the member opposite. My hesitation is a reluctance on my part to go into too much detail on this particular

case. I know the court case is over and all that but there are other children involved, and we have a concern about confidentiality and airing the case like this in public and some of the potential effect that it could have perhaps, on the other children that are involved.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that I would be willing to indicate to the member opposite that, as we have done on other cases and other discussions that we've had on a private situation, if you would prefer to sit down, and I can discuss the situation with you rather than going public in this case, if that would be acceptable to the member.

And I understand that the letter that you sent me that you have not gotten a response to -- I'm not aware that that letter was not answered, and certainly at the same time, we could pursue any of the concerns that you had in that letter at that time.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, unless the letter has gone astray -- it may have been answered and gone astray -- but I've not received it. I did ask to meet with you and your officials some three months ago to discuss the case. At that point you declined to involve your officials in the discussion. And it's difficult to have a discussion on the case with your officials . . . I mean it's hard to discuss it with you when your officials aren't present because obviously you need a briefing from them during the discussion.

The point I want to make, Mr. Minister, is I have reason to believe, although I don't have all the details -- that's why I asked you the question -- that in fact these children were a ward of the Department of Social Services just a short time prior to being placed with the Spence family. I'm asking you if you can confirm whether or not that's the case. And if it was the case, I wonder if you could explain to the Assembly why the Department of Social Services wasn't monitoring what was happening to those children and where they were being placed since they had been wards of yours, sir, only a short time before.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, I am informed by my officials that they were not in care at the time of the placement.

Mr. Prebble: -- No, I realize they weren't in care at the time of the placement. That's not what I implied. My question to you is: shortly before the placement, months before the placement, is it true that these children were wards of the Department of Social Services, and your responsibility, sir? Was that the case?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- My officials are not completely sure on that at this time, and instead of me saying yes or no, we're going to go back, we're going to check the records and find out. And I would offer to give that commitment to you, that you will get the answer to that as soon as we can ascertain as to yes/no, and the time period, as you're indicating that you would like to know, as well.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, I'll accept that reluctantly, I must say, because this is after all a very important public issue. And I'm surprised

that your officials don't have the information. But there's not much I can do about it.

I would also appreciate an indication if in fact the children were wards of yours, sir, whether you could indicate at precisely what time they were no longer wards of the minister. What period of time, then, took place between the time they stopped being wards of yours, and the time that they were placed with the Spence family. And if that period was only a few months, an explanation, in writing, of what type of monitoring the Department of Social Services was doing to ensure the well-being of these children. So I'd be grateful for a commitment from you that that will be done.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to ask you another question associated with this, and that is with respect to the larger question of a lack of native child-welfare policy in your department. Basically you don't have a native child-welfare policy, in my view, Mr. Minister. And I would like to ask you a question and that is why it is that Saskatchewan is one of the only provinces in Canada without a provincial federal agreement on child and family services on Indian reserves. Can you answer that for me please?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Yes, Mr. Chairman, I think we have to take a look at this particular question in its historical perspective as well.

And if you look back in the 1970s, you will find that there was no agreement signed during that time for the fundamental reason that the FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations), the Saskatchewan Indians themselves did not want us to sign an agreement exclusive of the federal government because of their insistence and their recognition that the Indian affairs and so on are a direct -- and sole, might I add -- responsibility of the federal government. And I believe that that is the stand and that is the commitment that they still have currently today.

(2045)

And I could perhaps point out that we as a provincial government have been trying to get agreements in place. As a matter of fact and a case in point, we have an agreement with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council that the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the provincial government have an agreement in place. But there's a reluctant partner that is not willing to sign, and that is the federal government.

And so the federal government basically has frozen their funding right now. And what we're trying to do in conjunction with the FSIN and the provincial government and other provinces is to get the federal government to make a commitment in this particular area that we're discussing right now so that . . .

I guess there's two problems to summarize for you. One is the reluctance of the federal government, and at the same time the reluctance of the Indians of this province to allow, I suppose, the federal government to abrogate their responsibilities in their view that it's a federal responsibility and the Indians, and that is by preference of the Indians themselves.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I realize that there's been a five-year freeze on federal funding for child-care services on Indian reserves. And I appreciate some of the difficulties that you're talking about. But we also can't then allow a situation, in the case of the Beardy Reserve, in which there is no federal dollars for child-care services.

I know there are some foster homes on the reserve, but there is lack of . . . there is not a sufficient number of foster homes on the reserve. I know that the Beardy Reserve has been very anxious to get a group home on the reserve because many of the homes on the reserve, of course, are not large enough to allow more than one child to be cared for in the home. So if you don't want to divide up families with several children, it's difficult to find many houses on the reserve that could accommodate several children at once.

So, Mr. Minister, there's no group home on the reserve; there's a lack of foster homes on the reserve. Clearly there are not adequate resources in place to do all the monitoring and checking of applicants to care for children that are required, and in the absence, Mr. Minister, of federal funding and in the absence of adequate provincial resources, we've got a ready-made situation for the events that led up to the death of Joel Mike to occur, Mr. Minister. Because basically, ultimately, no one is taking full responsibility.

Therefore, Mr. Minister, I want to know what actions you are planning to take and what negotiations you have since the death of Joel Mike, what steps have you taken and what discussions have you had with the federal government to end a situation in which there is a lack of adequate resources for child care on reserves? What steps have you taken in co-operation with the FSIN to meet with your federal counterparts and get a resolution to the lack of child-care resources that exist, not only on the Beardy Reserve, but in most Indian reserves in this province? And when, sir, from you, are we going to have a well-defined, native child-care policy in this province.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- It is a concern of mine as much as it is of yours, I would say to the hon. critic. And that is that subsequent to that unfortunate tragic event on Beardy Reserve, I did . . . actually what I did is I had the Hon. Kim Campbell, when she was the federal minister of Indian and native affairs, in my office right in Regina here. And I in no uncertain terms expressed my disappointment in the lack of funding and lack of initiative that the federal government was giving in this particular matter. And I might indicate to you that I've had my deputy minister as well, in consultation with the federal deputy minister on this very, very important issue.

And I think what I would do to you, sir, is just indicate to you that I would urge you to join with us in expressing our disappointment, and urging the federal government to live up to their responsibility. I think if you would do that and if you would make that commitment, so that in concert with myself and with the FSIN, Chief Roland Crowe, that we could make representation to the federal government as one united voice from

Saskatchewan expressing our concerns and getting them to live up to the commitment that they had made in times past, which they are not living up to right now.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I'm glad to see that you did have discussions with the federal minister. I want to say on behalf of the opposition that we appreciate that you did that and commend you for that. That doesn't exclude, however, the need for a well defined provincial Department of Social Services native child-welfare policy. And that is seriously lacking in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, I want to move on to another area. And I want to ask you a couple of short questions with respect to the problems that Cheshire Homes has been having in the city of Regina. As you know, the board of Cheshire Homes has taken decisions basically to let go the registered nursing staff component of their care. And in the view of many, they therefore were jeopardizing the safety of the 20 residents who live in Cheshire Homes when those services were cut off. Now as I understand it, they're being replaced by contractual services so that at least in this interim period, the SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association) is satisfied that the legislation governing the registered nurses in the province of Saskatchewan is, in fact, being upheld.

But the Cheshire Homes board has indicated that they don't receive adequate funding to deliver level 4 care in the Cheshire Homes facility which, as I understand it, was never designed for level 4 patients but, in fact, now 15 of the 20 people who are being cared for at Cheshire Homes are level 4 cases.

Now, Mr. Minister, I want to go back a few months because this question of medications being given by registered nurses in Cheshire Homes has been an ongoing issue. And prior to June 1989, as I understand it, there were no trained nurses in Cheshire Homes who were giving the medications to the residents. And this, Mr. Minister, must have been a violation of the provincial legislation that we have in this province that makes it very clear that medications are to be given by a qualified registered nurse.

Now my question is, sir: why in 1989 was it not a condition of funding by your department -- because after all, you Cheshire Homes -- why had you not set as a condition, Mr. Minister, that, for Cheshire Homes to receive funding, they had to uphold the provincial laws of this province, and that medications given to patients at Cheshire Homes had to be given by properly qualified nursing staff? Why was that not a condition of funding, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, this particular issue that we're discussing now has been an ongoing thing for a number of months right now, and I would just like to go on record, as minister, indicating that in my opinion, the board has been acting responsibly on this issue. My information that I have is that almost all of the board members -- I'm not sure if all of them -- do have relatives, siblings, in the home itself. And to me it just makes eminent sense that no one on the board would do anything that would jeopardize the health and the quality of life for the

inhabitants, the 20 people that you're talking about in the two homes, in any way, shape, or form.

And I will say that when the board hires a new director, that director will be either a registered nurse or an RPN (registered psychiatric nurse), so that the director, her or himself, will have the nursing qualifications.

Having said that, I can indicate further that the home will be contracting out whatever services are needed in terms of qualified personnel nurses to operate the home in a safe manner. And the funding to accommodate that particular expertise that is required is in place and will continue to be in place to ensure quality service and quality care for the individuals in Cheshire Homes.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I appreciate what you're saying about the board members. And as you indicate, many of the board members have family members in Cheshire Homes and obviously have their best interests at heart.

On the other hand of course, the large number of staff resignations can't be ignored. Nor can it be ignored that prior to June 1989, if my information is correct, in effect The Registered Nurses Act of the province of Saskatchewan was being violated, because the qualified nursing staff were not in place to give medications to patients.

So, Mr. Minister, the questions that I have are these. First of all, since 15 of the 20 patients in Cheshire Homes are level 4 patients, why is Cheshire Homes not receiving funds that reflect the fact that it's caring for level 4 patients?

And secondly, why is the matter of larger policy, to look at the larger policy issue here now, why, when your department funds homes like Cheshire Homes -- I'm just using it as an example -- why do you not as a condition of funding set standards of care? And surely one of the standards of care that you must set is that The Registered Nurses Act of the province of Saskatchewan be complied with and that a reasonable quality of nursing care is being provided to residents. And I don't understand why that's not just a standard that is attached to all of the funding arrangements that you have with similar homes around the province. So could you answer those two questions for me, please.

(2100)

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- In response to the hon. member, he is right when he says that a number of those patients now are levels 3 and 4. Not always has that been the case because when these individuals got into the homes they may have been at whatever level, if we can use that jargon. And I heard the Minister of Health in his estimates starting to use different terminology. But being a layman, level 1, 2, 3 and 4 is something I can understand a little bit better.

But when they were initiated into that home, levels 1 and levels 2, and over the course of a number of years a number of these residents have

deteriorated in terms of their health to perhaps, using that jargon, level 3 and level 4. But I think also we have to be careful that we can differentiate between level 4, the different kinds of level 4's.

One is a level 4 of a personal care nature where the person has personal problems perhaps, whether it be bladder irrigation or whatever it may happen to be, that's a personal care nature which does not necessarily need the services of a nurse. So you may have a level 4 patient being able to be cared for by someone who not necessarily would need the qualifications of a registered

nurse. Then of course there's the level 4 medical care. And I think this is probably the concern that you are expressing. And it's a different level certainly.

And I think what we're doing here is taking a look at a situation that we have to assess on a broader perspective as well, and it's part of the Directions on Health Care, when they're coming down, as to how to relate and how we're going to assimilate all of the different kinds of situations and problems, whether it be attendant care, whether it be those of head injuries, disabled because of head injuries, or autistic problems and these kinds of things.

So we should be looking, I would suggest to you, at it from a broad perspective, including many more things than just the health issue that I think that you were raising.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, I regret that you didn't answer my question with respect to the setting of standards. I note that, but I want to move on to another topic.

And that is, Mr. Minister, with respect to . . . I want to look at a number of important issues that are affecting handicapped people in the province of Saskatchewan. And I want to begin, Mr. Minister, by saying how shockingly inadequate the social assistance payments to disabled persons, in the province of Saskatchewan, is.

Mr. Minister, I just don't know how you can defend a basic allowance covering food, clothing, personal and household items, for a disabled person, of \$225 a month. But that's what it is, and it's remained at that now for several years, Mr. Minister. And that is completely unacceptable, sir. In fact, that is just disgusting.

And you know full well, sir, that a very high percentage of disabled people rely on social welfare in the province of Saskatchewan because they have no other means of supporting themselves. And it is just not good enough to force those people to rely on an allowance for food, clothing, personal items, and household items, of \$225 a month. You know, sir, that you couldn't live on that kind of an allowance if you were a single individual, and there is no reason why someone who's handicapped should have to live on that kind of an allowance.

And my question to you is: when you increased the allowances -- this allowance, by the way, if my memory serves me correctly, has been frozen

for at least six years now by your government -- you announced, finally, small increases in social assistance rates for persons with children, a few weeks ago. I'll have more to say about those in a few minutes.

But I want to focus now on those who are disabled, because they did not get an increase, and I want to know from you, sir, why was their allowance not increased, and how do you justify this highly inadequate \$225 a month basic allowance?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, the hon. member was correct when he says that the basic allowance for a handicapped person is not the 195 it would be for a normal person -- "normal" in quotation marks, I guess -- but \$35, I believe, higher than that making it \$225 a month.

And were that all, as the member is suggesting, that this person was entitled to, then of course it would be a drastic situation for them. But however that is the basic allowance, that's the starting point. And on top of that, a person who is disabled will get a higher shelter rate because we recognize that a person such as this may be finding himself in a circumstance where he has to pay more for his accommodation because of access ramps or any of the special facilities that may be required. So we recognize that and this individual then would be eligible for higher shelter aid.

Special needs are also in place for these individuals where we pay the actual costs of transportation to allow this disabled person to show up for employment purposes, for education, for medical, or rehab needs. So we recognize that as well.

And there is of course special recognition also given further yet for laundry, for clothing that may be necessary due to whatever medical reason this handicapped person might have. And mobility disabled allowance of \$20 per month is also available for them plus an issue that we talked about a little bit before. There is also a higher earnings exemption where instead of having, let's say, a \$25 exemption on the first \$100 earned, this person actually would be able to keep the entire amount.

So the special needs of a disabled person is being recognized in addition to the \$235 that is just their basic allowance.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, you've outlined all those policies correct. And aren't you ashamed of those policies, sir? Those are shocking policies. You allow a shelter allowance of, if my memory serves me right, in the range of \$310 a month. In addition to that, a disabled person then has the basic allowance of \$225 a month, and this is all they get to live on.

And I just want to ask you as Minister of Social Services: could you live on that amount, Mr. Minister, because I don't think you could. Why don't you think about what you need to live on as a single individual, then imagine that you're handicapped, and then tell the members of this House: could you live on the allowance that you have set for disabled people in this province? Why don't you be honest and admit that you couldn't?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- I have no intention of becoming involved in a dramatization of the unfortunate situation.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, that's just not good enough. Ask yourself the question. Every member on your side of the House should ask yourself the question: could you as an individual live on the allowances that you set under the social assistance system? Now specifically here we're talking about disabled persons. Mr. Minister, to cover clothing costs, food costs, all personal items, and all household costs other than rent and utilities, could you, Mr. Minister, live on that \$225 a month, the basic allowance? Could you do it?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, the same answer applies.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well that's just unacceptable, Mr. Minister. The record shows where you stand. I suggest to you that you couldn't live on that, and therefore I suggest that it is unjust that you expect disabled people to live on that \$225 a month of basic allowance over and above their rent costs, Mr. Minister. I think the shallowness and unfairness of your policy has just been demonstrated by your response.

Now I want to look at another unfair policy, Mr. Minister, as it relates to those who are handicapped, and that is with respect to a policy change that you implemented, sir. It used to be that under the former minister of Social Services -- who wasn't known for his generosity and kindness -- but at least under his policy, sir, someone who was severely disabled, who was able to get an independent aide, if they wanted to live in their own home or if they wanted to live in their own apartment and they had a severe disability, there was an independent living allowance provided for them under which they could hire an aide to live with them, if necessary, because their disability was very severe, on a 24-hour-a-day basis.

Now, Mr. Minister, you cancelled that provision. This independent living allowance is no longer available to severely handicapped people. I've had several severely handicapped people approach me asking for help. You've replied to me by simply saying: well these services are now available through home care. I've checked and, in fact, these services are not adequately available through home care. And I, Mr. Minister, I want you to give me a commitment tonight that you will reinstate the allowance for severely handicapped people to be able to get an aide that will allow them to live independently outside of an institution.

Your government talks about how you foster independence, Mr. Minister, but this is another classic example of how, in fact, you do the very reverse. Now I want a commitment tonight that you are going to reinstate that allowance that will permit a handicapped person to hire an aide to live independently in their own home or apartment.

(2115)

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- I'm advised by my officials that what we're talking about here is an issue that is much, much broader than Social Services can

accommodate -- people moving out of institutionalized care into the community and so on. And my officials are right now working together with the Department of Health to work out a broader, more all-encompassing kind of a program that would accommodate the needs that you've just described.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, while you were working out that broader, more encompassing program, could you explain to the Assembly why it is that you cut the allowance, that you eliminated the allowance for a severely handicapped person to live independently, Mr. Minister? That's what you did. And you have to take responsibility for that, sir, because you did that after you became Minister of Social Services.

And I want a commitment tonight that you're going to reinstate the funding that will allow a severely handicapped person to live independently in the community, because if you're not prepared to give me that commitment, then all this rhetoric about supporting independent living is just that, sir.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Yes, I would . . . And the member probably can remember a letter that I sent him when you raised the concern with you where I outlined, I guess, some of the concerns and some of the conclusions that we came to -- and we're talking about attendant care here, and we're talking about the home care program through the health care report -- and I think that's where we're going to leave it at this time. Essentially we believe it is a health care and attendant care problem and the health care report is the one that we will be looking at to resolve the issue.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, that is just a shocking response that shows the callousness of your government and just how hollow your claim is that you support independent living. And I think anybody watching on television will understand what I mean by that.

Mr. Minister, I want to turn to another subject that is closely related but this time deals with mental health rather than persons suffering from physical handicaps. And I want to specifically look at the plight of those suffering from schizophrenia in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister.

You will know, Mr. Minister, that this is a serious disease of the brain with terrifying consequences for many of the individuals involved and for the families involved, Mr. Minister. You will also be aware of the fact that approximately 1 out of every 100 people in the province of Saskatchewan suffers with schizophrenia. And I think it's fair to say, Mr. Minister, that not just here but right across North America a large percentage of the people that are homeless are persons who are suffering with this disease in a very severe state.

Well, Mr. Minister, if you look at my home city of Saskatoon, for example, where I think it can safely be said that there are at least 1,500 people suffering from schizophrenia in the city, and then you look at the numbers of independent, supportive housing situations for those with schizophrenia you find a total of 35 in the city of Saskatoon, Mr. Minister.

You also have to consider the urgent need for respite services for these families, Mr. Minister. People who are suffering from schizophrenia are

more often than not being cared for by relatives. Often they are being cared for by their parents, Mr. Minister. And obviously we're talking about young people often in their 20's or 30's. The parents who are caring for them then are in their 50's or 60's. Respite services, Mr. Minister, are needed for these family members but they're not available through your government.

Now, Mr. Minister, I suggest that what we need therefore are permanent homes for people with schizophrenia who are suffering from the disease with a psychiatric nurse available for those people when they require help. We need respite services for families and situations where family members are caring for someone suffering from schizophrenia. We need, Mr. Minister, support for those families when they cannot get their loved one who's suffering from schizophrenia into a treatment centre, Mr. Minister. They're often told right now to phone the police. You know, that's just not acceptable.

And, Mr. Minister, another very serious problem that persons suffering from schizophrenia have is that they are often being categorized as employable by your government. Therefore, Mr. Minister, the total allowance that they're forced to live on is \$375 a month including rent and clothing and food costs and everything. And that's also very unfair.

So, Mr. Minister, I want to know what you're going to do to address the problem. Are you prepared to provide respite services for the families who are trying to care for schizophrenics? Are you prepared, Mr. Minister, to provide more permanent housing for people who suffer seriously with this very disabling disease? And are you prepared to change your policy so that none of these people will be considered to be employables and forced to live, if they're living on their own, with only \$375 a month. Are you prepared to change those policies?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Schizophrenia is a mental disorder, a mental illness, and as such falls within the parameters of the Department of Health. But at the same time, if there's an individual suffering from this disease that is still looking for assistance and eligible for assistance, certainly it involves my department at the same time. And I know that we have been in consultation with the schizophrenic association of Saskatchewan where they have made requests to us, and we have been sensitive to their requests.

But essentially what we're talking about here is a mental illness, and the Department of Health should be taking the lead role on this.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister, once again you haven't even attempted to address my questions. This is just not adequate. It's just unacceptable. And I'm afraid in opposition there's little we can do about it because you're not obliged to answer the questions or to provide adequate answers. So, Mr. Minister, I want . . . The record speaks for itself, I think.

And I want to turn to another area . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Indicate why it's not adequate.

Mr. Prebble: -- Mr. Minister . . . The minister wonders why his answer isn't adequate, and I find it difficult to believe that he's asking that question.

But I want to turn to another area, and this is, Mr. Minister, with respect to the Finlay case and your intervention into it. And as you know, Mr. Finlay was a Manitoba resident suffering from epilepsy.

Mr. Minister, for years now he has been fighting with the Manitoba government in the courts and he has been arguing that overpayments were being collected from him while he was on social assistance, and his position was, not that he shouldn't have to pay overpayments, but that, given the very low level of social assistance that he was receiving from the Manitoba government -- if my memory serves me right, a basic allowance of \$213 a month -- that he ought not to have to, with that very low level of assistance, he ought not to be having to have overpayments deducted from his monthly cheque.

Now, Mr. Minister, you will know that this case has very significant implications for this province and for all provinces in Canada. Because what happened, of course, is that in the federal court, Justice Teitelbaum ruled last year that in fact the Department of Social Services in Manitoba erred in deducting overpayments from Mr. Finlay's cheque. And Teitelbaum ruled, Mr. Minister, that because the basic level of social assistance being paid was just barely adequate to meet Mr. Teitelbaum's basic needs, that the deduction of an overpayment off that cheque was unacceptable, and was not going to be legally permitted any longer because that meant that Mr. Finlay would then have to live below meeting his basic needs; he wouldn't have enough income to meet his basic needs any more. It's an important test case.

Now, Mr. Minister, the response of your government was very interesting, because you joined the Manitoba government in the courts to oppose the Teitelbaum ruling. And we've just had the appeal case under way now in the last few weeks, and, of course, you're familiar with the intervention that you filed in that case, Mr. Minister, and that the Department of Justice filed with you. But I just want to quote from that intervention, which I found really to be quite shocking. Let me just quote a couple of things, Mr. Minister, that you argue in your intervention. First of all you say:

The obligation to provide assistance in an amount that takes into account the basic requirements does not require Manitoba to provide a particular dollar amount of funding.

In other words, what you're saying there, Mr. Minister, is that there is no minimal level of social assistance benefit that needs to be paid in order to meet basic needs. Now, Mr. Minister, that is a very, very harsh statement on your part, and I think it portrays the policies that your government has pursued over the last eight years. And you go on in the intervention, Mr. Minister, to say:

There is no obligation on the province to provide a specific dollar amount of social assistance each month. It is clear the agreement itself does

not contemplate that a particular dollar figure can be calculated to represent the cost of purchasing basic requirements.

That's from page 7 of your brief of law. Mr. Minister, not only are you failing to support Mr. Finlay, a man who's fought his case for many years, who's suffering with epilepsy, and who's been living on a minimal amount for a long time; not only have you chosen, instead, to support the Government of Manitoba, but you've gone further than that, Mr. Minister. And you're now trying to erode the very foundation of the Canada Assistance Plan Act which is based on the fundamental principle of adequacy, i.e., a person in need will receive an adequate amount of assistance. And what you're saying in your intervention, Mr. Minister, is that an adequate amount of assistance can't be calculated, i.e., there is no minimal amount of social assistance that must be paid.

(2130)

But, Mr. Minister, you know, as the government of Manitoba knows, that social assistance is cost shared with Ottawa. And Justice Teitelbaum in his ruling ruled that the federal government was to cut off cost sharing of social assistance with the government of Manitoba until this problem experienced by Mr. Finlay and many other disabled people was rectified, Mr. Minister.

Now, Mr. Minister, I am not suggesting to you that overpayments should not be collected in this province. I think they should. I think, by the way, your overpayment collection policy has been very harsh. You've been deducting amounts as much as \$70 a month off the cheques of families relying on social assistance to collect overpayments when the error for the overpayment lies with your own department, Mr. Minister. And that is a very harsh policy indeed.

But, Mr. Minister, surely you are not prepared to argue -- I guess you are prepared to argue because you did it in your intervention that you filed in the Finlay case. But surely it's unreasonable to argue that when somebody's level of social assistance is so low that it just barely covers their basic requirements, that overpayments ought not to be deducted, particularly when the error lies with the department. And we're not, of course, here talking about cases of fraud or where there's been any wrongdoing, Mr. Minister. We're just talking about honest mistakes.

And, Mr. Minister, I therefore want to ask you: how do you justify this intervention before the federal Court of Appeal in which you have taken the position, sir, that an adequate level of social assistance cannot be calculated, that there therefore is no minimal level of assistance that must be paid. How do you justify that position?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- I'll try to keep this as straightforward and simple as I can because it is rather a complicated issue here. It should be pointed out that it is not only the Government of Saskatchewan that is intervening on this case, but there are other provinces like Manitoba for example, Quebec, Ontario have all intervened in addition to Saskatchewan. And I might add also that it is also the federal government that is not agreeing

with this decision.

What we're dealing here is the issue of provincial jurisdiction and the ability of a province to decide whether or not they are going to be recovering and to what amount. I think what we have to also keep in mind here is that the federal agreement says that we're not talking about any specific amount that must be paid, but rather the fact that it is up to the province to decide what that minimum amount or what that amount is going to be. I think that's the issue that we have to keep in mind here.

And the situation on CAP . . . The only thing I was going to add here is that its under CAP, it leaves that. The point that I'm making is that under CAP it is left up to the province to decide to make the determination as to what that payment should be. And it doesn't have to be any lower amount or higher amount or whatever, it's the question of jurisdiction.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, that's really not very satisfactory because of course if it's left to governments like your own there basically doesn't seem to be any minimum amount of social assistance that you're willing to pay out. We've already seen now we've had an eight-year freeze with respect to the rates, until finally that freeze was lifted for couples with children a few weeks ago, with a \$10 increase per child, Mr. Minister, and a \$10 increase in the housing allowance.

Mr. Minister, your argument in the brief, however, is not just an argument that the province ought to be able to decide. It's an argument that a minimum amount of assistance can't be calculated. And, Mr. Minister, I say that this is an attempt to erode the foundation of the Canada Assistance Plan Act. You know it is; your government knows it is, Mr. Minister.

You're going beyond the Finlay case now. You're trying to actually erode the very intention of the Canada Assistance Plan Act. And if the arguments that you have made before the Court of Appeal are accepted, Mr. Minister, it has incredibly serious consequences for the future of social assistance all across Canada, Mr. Minister. It's a very, very serious matter indeed. And, Mr. Minister, I regret that you've made this intervention, but I think it's a hallmark of what your government stands for and it's very unacceptable.

Now I want to ask you another question with respect to social assistance, this time with respect to the increases that you've just announced, which I might say are in the range of about 3 per cent, Mr. Minister. We've had inflation over the last eight years, of about 40 per cent. We've had basically a freeze on the rates for families during that time. And now, depending on the number of children a family has, we're looking at an increase that is in the range of 3 to 4.5 per cent -- so in other words, still at least 35 to 37 per cent short of inflation.

But, Mr. Minister, more notably, as I mentioned earlier, disabled people have not received an increase; all single people have not received an increase; all married couples without children have not received an increase; northern residents, Mr. Minister, have not received any kind of an increase in their allowance other than the standard increases I just

mentioned. But no increase in the special northern allowance that takes account of their geographic isolation and the higher costs that they incur as a result of that.

Mr. Minister, can you explain to me why were all these groups left out? Why did they get no increase at all? And especially answer that question for me in light of the fact now that the rates have been frozen for eight years for all of those people, and I might add, for individuals who are employable, significantly cut back.

DHon. Mr. Neudorf: -- If I could just react a little bit more to one of the previous issues that we were talking about, and that is the right of determination by the province to determine the amount of assistance under CAP.

And I would just like to point out that not only are we interveners in the other provinces, but we are supported in our stand by the federal government itself, who is also supporting us when it comes to the fact of who's going to determine how much is going to be paid out. And we feel that it is up to the province to make that determination. That's all essentially what we're talking about.

It would not be fair, in my estimation, for someone in Ottawa or somewhere in the East to determine what we should or should not pay to the recipients in Saskatchewan. Because it's one amount that's going to be the same throughout Canada is not going to be acceptable either because there are wide variations in terms of cost of living and whatnot all from Toronto to Vancouver to any place in Saskatchewan.

Having said that, the amount of increase that we're talking about that is being paid out is no mean amount, I would suggest to you, because we're talking about an increase of about in the magnitude of \$4 million per year. The reason the announcement that I made just a little while ago where individual families and so on are going to receive \$10 per child per month more as far as the children are concerned, and then, of course, there's the \$10 a month shelter rate and utility rate as well. So when I say \$4 million, that's what I'm taking into consideration when I say that.

And working with the limited funds that are available for an expansion of a program of this magnitude, we have to try to say to ourselves: where are we going to be the most effective? Where's this money, what we put out for the people of Saskatchewan, going to have the greatest impact? And we chose cognizantly to target that amount to the members of our society that are most vulnerable, which is the children. The children are dependent entirely upon their families for support, and so we decided that the money was going to be targeted to the children first and foremost. And it's not just to the children of the South; it's not just to the children of Regina or in Saskatoon, but rather whether you live in the southern part of the province or in the far North, the impact is going to be all over so that the North and South get the same kind of a benefit increase.

You mentioned something about the singles. My preference is to make the singles as much as independent as possible through training opportunities,

through job search, and probably somewhere along the line we'll get into the long list of opportunities and programs that the government has initiated to make the singles that much more oriented toward getting a job in the market-place, so where they will no longer be -- and I think you appreciate this -- dependent upon the system, but rather become independent where they will have this opportunity to be gainfully employed. And that is the trend and that is the emphasis of the government, rather than simply saying well here's more money for the singles. Because it's targeted toward the children.

(2145)

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, I don't object to you targeting special supplements to the children. That's not my point of objection at all. My point of objection is that you've left out a whole group of other individuals who also badly needed help, including as I mentioned earlier, those single persons or married couples who are suffering from physical or mental disabilities.

And, Mr. Minister, I want to point out to you just how inadequate your rates are with respect to the North. I mentioned to you that you'd done nothing to increase the northern allowance.

Now, Mr. Minister, just consider this for a moment. I want you to take a family who are living in northern Saskatchewan. Let's take . . . I'm just looking for an appropriate community here. I'm going to take Black Lake. The cost of food, Mr. Minister, for a family of four in Black Lake, according to a study done by the Prince Albert District Chiefs, is \$867.60 per month because of the very high food costs in that community.

Now, Mr. Minister, the Department of Social Services basically allows that family, until the change in your policy, \$780 a month. Now we'll want to add another \$20 a month on there for the two children. That would take it to 800, plus I assume some kind of an increase, at least \$10 a month, in the household allowance, which would take it to 810. But the figures that I'm dealing with here now don't include shelter because if you take a band family, that's being looked after usually through Indian Affairs.

So we're now just dealing with the question of the rates for food, clothing, personal items, and household items, excluding rent and utilities. Okay? And what I'm saying to you is that with your increase, this family will now be getting \$800 a month. The cost of food for them alone in that community is \$867.60 a month -- a \$67.60 shortfall, Mr. Minister.

This is just one example I can find for you. All kinds of other communities where the shortfall is much greater than in Black Lake, but let's stay with Black Lake for a moment.

Now, Mr. Minister, you explain to this Assembly please, why there has been no increase in the northern allowance to take account of the fact that even if this family just spends all their money that they receive in the basic allowance on food and doesn't spend a penny on clothing or on household

items or on other personal items other than shelter, if they don't spend a penny on any of those things and just spend all their money on food, they're still \$67.60 short a month. Now the reason for this is that the cost of food in northern Saskatchewan is very high, Mr. Minister. It's much higher than it is in the South. And you have failed to take adequate account of that, because the total amount of your special northern allowance is only \$25 a month, Mr. Minister, and that's just not adequate.

Now I want an explanation of why this northern allowance has not been increased.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- A number of points. And you recognized that a list of the communities -- I had here it somewhere -- that are getting the \$25 a month in addition to the regular, in acknowledgement of the higher cost in the North. And I think we would be doing an injustice if we did not also recognize another special feature of the North which is the traditional life-style of the North where the people of the North, a goodly number of them at least, would have the ability to supplement some of their food intake and so on simply through the traditional methods of fishing and hunting.

So to directly relate the amount of moneys given to them to buy their food allowances and to meet their food allowance without recognizing the supplemental avenues that are available to them, I don't think would be fair either.

Another issue that I would like to draw to your attention is that there was the study done by the tribal chiefs and this study was given to INAC (Indian and Native Affairs Secretariat), and INAC has turned around and shared some of those concerns with us. Currently we are right now encouraging and working with the federal government to make some changes and some alterations, certainly at their level, and we are looking at, in conjunction with the federal government, coming up with a proposal, but that has not yet been completed.

And so from our point of view, instead of waiting so that we had a complete package to come forward with, we said, well we're not going to wait with other initiatives that I announced three or four weeks ago, with the targeted funding available to families with children. Because the need was there. I, at least, ascertained that the need was there for children so we said, well let's go along with this as an initial step, and hopefully within a short period of time there will be further action taken by the federal government in terms of the tribal chiefs' proposal that they had come up with.

Mr. Prebble: -- Well, Mr. Minister, you know that the federal government's policy, long-standing policy, has been to follow the rates that you've set. In other words, Mr. Minister, you set the rates for northern Saskatchewan and where persons are the responsibility of Indian Affairs they follow. So this is totally within your hands, Mr. Minister, totally within your hands. And you have failed the people of northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, you don't have to just take one of the fly-in communities, if

you look at other communities, Mr. Minister, that don't get the special supplementary allowance, the northern allowance. Take, for instance, the community of Southend. There, Mr. Minister, the cost of feeding a family of four is \$831.60. With your increases, this family would get \$700.00 a month for a \$131.60 a month shortfall. And that's just with respect to not having the money to cover food, Mr. Minister. That leaves no money for clothing, no money for personal items, no money, Mr. Minister, for a household allowance.

You don't have to do a study, Mr. Minister, to see that this family is living in poverty. I don't know why . . . You've had eight years now, Mr. Minister, to establish . . . Your government has had eight years to establish a reasonable policy on this. You've failed to do so. You've had, Mr. Minister, more than six months. You've failed to do so.

Mr. Minister, on this side of the House, we want to see action on this, and we want to see it within the next few weeks. And I want an undertaking from you that that will be done, Mr. Minister, and that we'll see an immediate order in council that increases these rates.

Now, Mr. Minister, because our time is coming to an end, I want to raise a couple of other important issues before we bring these estimates to a close. And I want to particularly bring to your attention the very high numbers of people in the province of Saskatchewan who are relying on food banks; you must know this by now as Minister of Social Services. And you must realize, Mr. Minister, that a lot of those are people who are depending on social assistance. But many others, Mr. Minister, are people who are working part time or full time at inadequate wages as a result of your cheap labour policy, Mr. Minister. Many others, Mr. Minister, are victims of the fact that women in this province are consistently paid less than men for work of equivalent value. Your government has failed to do anything about the urgent need for pay equity in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister.

There are a whole series of reasons why we have seen escalating poverty in the province of Saskatchewan. Your government has tried to link all that back to a decline in agricultural prices and the farm crisis, and we acknowledge that that has some role to play in the problem. But the larger problem, Mr. Minister, has been your government's failure to create adequate employment for the people of Saskatchewan, your government's cheap labour policy, and a long-time freeze on the minimum wage, although we finally seen that lifted in January of this year and I know there will be another increase next month.

But even so, someone living on minimum wage, even a single person working full time will still be living at least a thousand dollars, more than a thousand dollars, below the poverty line, even if they're working full time.

Now, Mr. Minister, I ask you to look at some of these food bank statistics because these are a shocking condemnation of the failure of your income security programs, Mr. Minister. And I remind you of the fact that eight years ago there were no food banks in the province. And now, Mr. Minister,

the use of food banks is at unprecedented numbers.

Now, Mr. Minister, I ask you to consider the fact that there are 3,500 children a month relying on the Regina food bank. There are 2,700 children a month relying on the Saskatoon food bank. There are, Mr. Minister, 50 families a month using the food bank at Melfort. We've seen a rapid rise in rural food banks in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister. Food banks now in communities like Lashburn, communities like Carlyle. Mr. Minister, the numbers of people who are using the Prince Albert food bank has doubled from 1986: 579 people a month relying on the food bank in Prince Albert in January of 1986; 1,267 people relying on that food bank in the month of January 1990.

Now, Mr. Minister, these figures simply reflect the fact that your income security programs have failed the people of Saskatchewan. We've had an eight-year freeze on social assistance rates. We've had a five-year freeze on family income plan rates.

(2200)

And, Mr. Minister, the final question that I want to ask you tonight is this: in light of these numbers and in light of the fact, Mr. Minister, that your government has frozen the family income plan benefits now for five years and in light of the fact, Mr. Minister, that your government is the only government in Canada that deducts family allowances off social assistance cheques and in light of the fact, Mr. Minister, that your government has cancelled travel allowances for those on social assistance and has forced families, women, and children to drag their groceries through the snow in the winter-time because they have no bus pass, Mr. Minister -- in light of these facts which are well established and in light of these food bank statistics, I wonder, Mr. Minister, if you could give us your commitment tonight that you will do three simple things for families with children.

Number one, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could give families with children who are relying on social assistance in the province of Saskatchewan a commitment tonight that you, Mr. Minister, will no longer, effective July of this year, you will no longer deduct family allowances from the social assistance cheque.

Mr. Minister, I wonder secondly if you could give us a commitment that you will reinstate the travel allowance for all social assistance recipients in the province of Saskatchewan, and especially, Mr. Minister, families with children.

And third, Mr. Minister, I wonder if you could give us your commitment that you will lift the freeze on the family income plan and make all families living below the poverty line eligible for some family income plan benefits.

Will you do those three things for families in Saskatchewan, Mr. Minister? Will you finally do something to fight the fact, Mr. Minister, that we have in Saskatchewan now, effective as of the Statistics Canada figures I have

in front of me for 1988, the highest rate of child and family poverty in all of Canada?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Well, Mr. Chairman, I was debating with myself how detailed I wanted to respond to some of those comments that the hon. member made.

The first thing I wanted to address is his closing comments on the previous topic which dealt with the North. Somehow through my association with hunting and fishing and so on, I've acquired a great affinity for the North and I spend as much time up there as possible, not only as Minister of Social Services right now, but I have over the years. And I think I can understand and appreciate some of the problems and some of the concerns and some of the traditions that the people in the North have. And since becoming minister, I've spent a fair amount of time in the North making sojourns up into Garson Lake area -- well, pretty well every community in the North I think I have been I have been very impressed with what I have seen.

Now I understand that there are conditions in the North that are far, far from desirable, and I recognize that. But when I say I'm impressed with the North, I'll give you an example: when I went into La Loche for the first time. Prior to going into La Loche, like you folks do over across the way too, you do your research, and so I did some of the research as well by finding out what can I expect when I go into La Loche. In other words I preconditioned myself as to what I would find. And I even went so far as to get a copy of a CBC tape that had been aired about a month or two before I went up there for the first time to see what it was like.

So I went there properly preconditioned of the horrible conditions that I would see. And let me tell you that I did not do myself justice or the people from the North justice by going up there with this preconceived notion. Because being a past teacher, the first thing I did when I got into La Loche was to go through the school because I find that a school is a good thermometer as to what the community is like. And I walked into the school and I was shocked, because what I expected to see was broken up lockers with a lot of graffiti on it and all these other kinds of things.

I went into that school, and in my experience, 22 years as a teacher, I have never seen, and I don't say this in a patronizing way, I have never seen a school that I was more impressed with -- clean, the studious atmosphere. I can walk into a school, as any administrator could, you can walk into a school and you can put your fingers on the hum of activity right away.

And you could sense that this was a school where the kids were interested in education. You got the sense immediately that the teachers were on top of it. And during the whole visit that we had, we went away -- I was there with the Minister of Northern Affairs at the time -- we left La Loche convinced that there was a future, that there was a future in the North if we could assist them and if we could help them in whatever way.

Now we have established a lot of programs in the North where we are trying

to address that, not by simple hand-outs, not by increasing only the minimum wage and increasing the number of payments that are available, because the folks up there told me, that's not what we want. We want jobs. We want economic activity. And that is ultimately going to be the answer.

I don't have the answer right now. As Minister of Social Services, I'm trying. We've got a Sask works program up there. They're building road; they're developing skills; they're developing techniques in all these kinds of things that are going to be beneficial to them.

I don't know if that's the ultimate answer. I know the Minister of Northern Affairs is doing there with the fire suppression program and so on. It's creating jobs. It's creating skills for the people. I think ultimately that is the answer.

But to what degree that we'll be successful, to what degree we can establish long-term, meaningful jobs, it's going to take more than the Department of Social Services to do that. It's going to mean a concerted effort on all the government departments and the people up North.

And I would just like to leave you with this idea, that the people up North are desirous of earning their way; they're desirous of getting meaningful jobs and some kind of economic activity up there that will be on an ongoing basis. So there are problems up North. We're determined that we're going to help solve them as much as possible.

You mentioned food banks. You mentioned some of these other issues and it's a complicated issue. I don't mean to skirt the issue like you indicated in one of your previous announcements there, that when you ask questions I'm not answering. It's a acknowledged strategy on the part of this government that we have set one minister aside that is going to be dealing with that issue. We recognize the issue, that it is there. But we also recognize the issue as being a very, very complex one with no one cause and certainly no one solution to it. And so the Minister of the Family has been designated as the spokesman and the spearhead to deal with this issue. Not in isolation -- I mean, that's going to have to be done in conjunction with my department and other departments as well. So I'm not abrogating responsibility, other than the fact that he is the lead minister that is responsible to answering this.

You made some comments about the deduction of family allowance and so on. A couple of quick points on that. The matter of deducting the family allowance as part of the basic allowance as such was not started by our government. You were the guys that did that, and so we've continued the practice that you have established. Now I want to say something more about it and that is that, even with the deduction of the family allowance, first of all the total needs of the people are still being met because the allowance that we pay recognizes the fact that the family allowance is not going to be a part of that. So even with the deduction of the family allowance. We are, when it comes to families, still amongst the highest in Canada as far as payments to families are concerned, and that's an established fact. So you can argue whether that's enough or not, that is a fair argument, but the fact does remain that we are doing those kinds of

things.

You acknowledged the fact that some of the other things that we are doing, that the minimum wage has been increased, and that it will be increased once more. And so that is something that we are doing.

We have other things like the family income plan, the mortgage protection plan for all families, and so we could go down the list. I don't intend to do that at this point. But I guess what I'm trying to do is offset a little bit some of the bleak picture that you were painting, that there are some offsetting structures that we're putting in place to address this problem.

I guess the commitment that I want to leave with you is that we will continue to strive. I as Minister of Social Services take the job very, very seriously. Sometimes I can't do quite as much as I would like to, sometimes I would like to do more, but we will continue to work on an ongoing basis. We're not going to solve all the problems at one time, but I think if the two of us in conjunction with our federal counterparts are going to continue at it, I think we will see steady progress. It may be slow but there will be steady progress as we forge ahead.

Mr. Prebble: -- I just want to conclude on this note, Mr. Minister, and then my colleague, the member for Elphinstone, has a couple of questions that he wants to ask, but just very briefly because the hour is late.

We have record numbers in terms of users of food banks in the province of Saskatchewan: 45,000 people using food banks a year -- 22,000 children, Mr. Minister. And all these figures demonstrate graphically that all your claims about adequacy with respect to income security programs ring hollow, Mr. Minister. Your income security programs, your failure, your abandonment of a full employment strategy in northern Saskatchewan and in all of Saskatchewan have led to this, Mr. Minister, and there can be no doubt about that.

And then, Mr. Minister, to top it all off we have the obscenity of you coming forward with a mere \$740,000 a year under grants for family service organizations to fight hunger in the province of Saskatchewan, an amount equivalent to the amount that one person working for your government, Mr. Chuck Childers, receives.

Mr. Minister, 22,000 people, children, using food banks in Saskatchewan -- that is unacceptable. Bringing forward a budget amount that you brought forward, sir, not the Minister of the Family, of only \$740,000 to fight child hunger in Saskatchewan, that small figure is obscene, Mr. Minister, when it's the equivalent of one man's salary. That is an obscenity. I can't think of any other way to describe it, Mr. Minister.

And so my final question to you relates to two matters. I want to come back to the matter of the family allowance. Yes, our government established the policy of deducting the family allowance from social assistance cheques. But, Mr. Minister, we did it at a time when the amount paid to families was 40 per cent higher than it is now. And you know that.

Acknowledge that. That's the case.

And so my question to you is now, in light of the fact that you won't increase the rates, will you at least stop deducting the family allowance from social assistance cheques, and will you tell the House whether or not the federal government gets back the half of the family allowance that you deduct.

(2215)

And secondly and finally, Mr. Minister, will you give us a commitment here tonight that you will bring forward a special supplement to your budget that increases that \$740,000 to fight child hunger to at least \$5 million, so that you can finally put in place a lunch program and a snack program and, where necessary, a breakfast program in those schools where hunger is a demonstrated problem in the province of Saskatchewan, so that we can finally get a serious program to fight child hunger in this province.

Will you at least, Mr. Minister, do that? I ask you on behalf of the 22,000 children that are using food banks in the province of Saskatchewan: will you increase that \$740,000 allowance? Will you bring forward a special order in council that would do that within the next few weeks?

Mr. Minister, I want to conclude by thanking your staff and thanking you. I look forward to the answers to those questions.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Mr. Chairman, in response to the hon. member's latest comments, we recognize that hunger and so on is a problem out there. And like I indicated to you before, it's not a problem that's going to have easy solutions or quick-fix solutions.

When we talk about \$740,000, let's be clear that we understand that this is \$740,000 that's earmarked for special incentives and special programs that are going to try to solve the problem of hunger, not only on the short-term basis, but getting at the root causes of it and finding out what we can do to alleviate the reasons for that hunger. And they are many, manifold.

It's not fair to say that all we're doing is spending \$740,000 to combat this situation. Because as I indicated in one of my previous answers, we have just allocated \$4 million more in this particular budget to help families -- targeted to children, targeted to the most vulnerable. And some of our other programs, if you add them all together, I think that even in the new initiatives, \$740,000 is not the total amount that we're talking about. And it's going to take an effort on many, many groups.

We're in consultation . . . I've had meetings with different groups throughout the province. The Minister of the Family has had meetings with different groups of the provinces. We've met with the mayors of the major cities. We've met with church groups. We've met with the food banks. In fact, as we speak right now, there are initiatives that my department is taking with the food banks to assist them and to work with them in order to fight against this problem of hunger. So it's a many tentacled problem, but at the same time we're working from many, many fronts, together with

community groups. I don't think we can ignore that. Government has a lead role, government has a responsibility, but so do communities. And I think working in harmony and working in conjunction with each other, we will find that lasting solution that we're all looking for, and hopefully it'll be sooner rather than later . . .

An Hon. Member: -- Did you answer the question on family allowance?

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- The family allowance, and I think there was another issue, I can't recall right offhand . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'm not going to make a commitment on that at this point.

Under review? Since I've taken this portfolio almost everything has been under review, and we've done a number of things. Some are going to cost the government money and some are not going to cost the government money.

For example, the cheque cashing was one little thing that I couldn't for the life of me see why we hadn't done something about that. And it's meaningful to those individuals who were caught up in it. When you had to give up to 20 per cent of the value of your cheque just to get it cashed. And this is something that we were able to do.

And I'm working on another project right now is a lot of social assistance recipients have the problem of cashing their cheques -- the I.D. problem. The normal people who do business and so on, you can't comprehend that there would be such a major problem with certain individuals simply because they don't have an I.D. that they'll be able to tell the banks or the cashing institutions who they are. But these are some of the kinds of things that we can do.

So I'll take your concerns under advisement and we'll continue to work with them. I hope that you will be able to feel free to have the dialogue with me, as we've had in the past, so that we can keep discussing on these situations.

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Minister, I just have a few questions. I don't want to take a lot of time, but they're very important questions because they're being brought to us and we're being asked to put to you these questions. And basically it's on the people who work in group homes and who are not protected by the labour standards and many of the labour laws that apply to other working people in Saskatchewan.

Now this results as you know, Mr. Minister, from the fact that at one point in time people who worked in group homes also lived and actually stayed in the group home when they were off duty. They maybe slept overnight and worked part time during the evening and used the facilities, maybe took their meals at the group home.

In the last number of years that has all changed, as you well know, and the people work in the group homes and then they live in another residence. As you also know, the labour laws do not protect those people and when they work 15 or 16 hours a day there is no overtime paid. And many people who work in group homes feel abused and used by the system.

What I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, if you can outline your government's policy in dealing with people who work in group homes and whether or not you have any plans to make changes that would reflect the needs of these people who in many cases, as I say again, are being used by the system in terms of working many hours of overtime and not being compensated properly through overtime or other privileges that other working people have in the province at the present time.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- The hon. member is correct in his assessment of how it used to be and how it is now in terms of living and staying over in group homes, and now you're living elsewhere and you have two domiciles actually to take care of. And so we have switched over to the shift model as such. I would like to indicate to the hon. member that we had had a few changes made over the last couple of years. We have actually put in extra staff where this is needed. And I would just suggest to you that if you have any individual cases of where this is creating problems, this new shift of living in two homes and so on, just let our department know. We'd certainly take a look at it because we are quite willing to address situations as such.

Over the last couple of years we have also made some strides into standardization of salaries and standardization of benefits as well. I could go into statistics. I don't know if you're interested in the amounts and the percentages and so on, where we have had made an attempt to standardize the salaries and the benefits across the piece.

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Minister, I guess my question to you is, why is there this discrepancy between people who work in a group home, for example, and people who work in another area? Why wouldn't you be appealing to the Department of Labour, or in fact suggesting amendments that would allow these people to have the same privileges and rights and benefits that other working people in the province have?

I understand what you're saying about making changes to shifts and all of that. But that doesn't help if you have an individual who has to work 16 hours a day, and for the simple reason that they're working in a group home, they don't get any overtime. If they were working anywhere else in Saskatchewan, they would have the privilege or the protection of getting overtime. And I guess my argument is that what we need here is a change in legislation that would see people who work in group homes have the same labour laws applied to them. And that isn't the case at the present time.

And I think the only way this problem is going to be solved, if you as minister take that up with the Minister of Labour and get the legislation changed. I guess that's what I'm asking you here on behalf of the people who work in group homes, if in fact you intend over the next month or hopefully before the end of this session, bringing in a Bill? It would be a very small Bill to make that kind of amendment, and you could be guaranteed that it would pass speedily because the members of the opposition, I'm sure, would support the change. Because it seems to me that these people, a very small group of people, are being left out and unprotected by the labour laws of the province.

I guess I'm asking here tonight whether you will consider the kinds of amendments that it would take to make these labour laws inclusive of people who work in group homes?

(2230)

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- I would say to the hon. member that the issue that he raises is an issue that's going to have to take a fair amount of looking at. And I don't think at this time that I'm in a position to make any firm commitments one way or the other. But it will be taken under advisement, and we will certainly be looking at it.

Mr. Lingenfelter: -- Mr. Minister, I just want to say, I guess, how disappointed I am in that response on behalf of the people who work at the centres. My colleague, the member from Saskatoon Nutana, reminds me, and correctly reminds me that many of these people who now work in these group homes previously worked in North Park Centre, who were fired or laid off and moved to group homes were getting the kind of pay that we're talking about and protected by the labour laws, and now find themselves in a position of having to work very long hours without that kind of protection.

Also, Mr. Minister, you'll know that many of these people are women -- the vast majority would be women. And I can't believe and can't understand why you take the position that these people shouldn't have the same benefits as other working people in Saskatchewan and it will take a lot of study and a lot of time in order to make the proper changes that would protect them. But having said that, I guess there's no sense in pushing you further on it. You've made up your mind that you're not going to deal with the issue, and I just say to you that we'll be relaying this message to the workers who have been corresponding and phoning us on this issue and asked us to raise it for them.

Mr. Prebble: -- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, in conclusion I just want to read into the record some questions that I'd like to get written answers to. I'd like to receive from you, if I could, at your convenience within the next month, the moneys that in the past year your department has spent on travel, on polling, on advertising.

I'd also like to know in writing whether or not you have approved any private, for-profit, commercial day-care centres in the province. I'd like to know, in the last year, how many new day-care spaces you've created and where they're located.

And finally, I would like to get an answer to the question I asked you that you didn't answer a few minutes ago with respect to whether or not you rebate the federal government half of the family allowance when you deduct it off the cheque. I would like to know that. If you could get that for me in writing, that would be fine.

I also have a number of other outstanding letters. I'm particularly thinking of one that I was hoping to get before estimates, with respect to a comparison for the last two years of what each of the non-government

organizations have received from your department, a breakdown of benefits being paid under the family income plan Act. This letter is on record, and I know you have it and I know you will be getting back to me on it, but I'd just like to formally ask for a reply to that.

I want to thank you once again for what I think has been an interesting debate. I also want to thank you for the one commitment you gave me to re-examine the wage exemption policy of the department which we appreciate. And also to re-examine the deduction of . . . well the policy that you pursued with respect to the family income plan and treating non-forgivable student loans as income. I appreciate your willingness to look at those policies and look at changes there.

I want to thank your staff very much for their time here in the Assembly. We on this side of the House very much appreciate their presence in the Assembly. I want to thank you, Mr. Minister, and wish you good night and good luck in the months ahead in terms of improving the lot of families in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Neudorf: -- Just a brief response. I listened very carefully to the questions that you were asking and from my perspective I don't see any problem in supplying you with the answers for them. And I'd like to indicate to the members opposite, I was very pleased tonight in the kind of constructive questions that were being asked. And I think the objective that I set at the beginning that we would keep this on a plane of both of us expressing our concerns with the people of Saskatchewan, that we've been able to maintain that at a very high decorum, and I certainly appreciate that.

Item 1 agreed to.

Items 2 to 16 inclusive agreed to.

Item 17 -- Statutory

Items 18 and 19 agreed to.

Vote 36 agreed to.

Supplementary Estimates 1990
Consolidated Fund Budgetary Expenditure
Social Services
Ordinary Expenditure -- Vote 36

Item 1 -- Statutory

Mr. Chairman: -- Thank you to the minister and his staff. That concludes the estimates on Social Services, and to all a good night.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:40 p.m.