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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Alberta | 17e  | 3e  | Étude des crédits du ministère de la Santé et du Développement social  | 4 juin 1974 | M. Neil S. Crawford | Ministre de la Santé et du Développement social | PC |

**Mr. Crawford:** Mr. Chairman, first of all I do want to thank all hon. members, in particular of Subcommittee A, for having afforded me so many opportunities to expound on the various programs and policies of the department, during the subcommittee hearings, and again today. There is no question that I've had every opportunity on many, many occasions to explain myself fully. Of course, the fact that that has not met the entire satisfaction of some of the honourable gentlemen opposite is to be expected and is entirely fair.

I want to deal, if loan, with the remarks in the order in which they were tendered, and then maybe make a few generalized remarks. I don't want to underestimate the importance to any individual or any hone member of any of the issues that have been raised either in the subcommittee or here this evening.

I think the hon. Member for Bow Valley knows that up to the present time, despite all the activity in the area of the Cow Camp directed at asking the Department of Health and Social Development to take a particular step in a particular way and grant a particular sort of recognition, actually, no real request for anything specific has ever been made. It is interesting to note the degree to which some of these subjects can gain attention when that is so, but those are the facts.

The hon. member was fair enough to say that the only grant being asked for by the people at the Cow Camp was an eight-cent stamp. In other words, he wants me to simply be in touch with them, and that's all there is to it. Well, all they are asking for of course is a special, unique kind of seal of approval so that they can use that in the necessary discussions with the Government of Canada. I have consistently declined to do that.

I would have to say to the hon. member that, from the point of view of the treatment philosophy that's expounded there, put forward by Mr. Smith and those with him, I recognize it for what it is - it is a contemporary attempt to deal in one of the accepted ways with extremely complex issues involving disturbed adolescents. It is, indeed, one of the accepted ways. That has never been the issue.

If the issue was whether or not we want adequate facilities for our young people in Alberta, the answer would be a resounding, yes, of course we do. If the question was, is there anything more that we can do, the answer would be, of course there's more that we can do. But if the question was whether or not this particular individual from the State of Maine should - and I don't make a big issue out of the fact that these people are not Canadians - all I'm saying is this: return to the point. The point is, what do we need for young adolescents who are in trouble in Alberta today?

What facilities do we have? We have many. They are spread from border to border. Many are excellent. The people who serve in them are experienced, competent, all of them doing the best they can. I would say none, but some of the agencies might say that we could spend more money in some areas, but all of them are being funded adequately each year.

So those aren't the issues. The willingness to help the children is not the issue. The only issue is whether or not this particular gentleman and the small group of people that he has brought with him or had sent up from south of the line should receive my approval to do what they are doing. That's all.

I have taken the attitude, and the hon. member will remember this in a conversation that he and I had, that most people who come to Alberta don't ask me whether they can be here or not. Why should these people ask me whether they can be here or not? The very simple answer to the thing is that they have had certain difficulties with the federal immigration department, and a little bit of political pressure, a little bit of time on television, a few little angles like that should be a satisfactory way to get the good old Minister of Health and Social Development to write a letter and say they are a good bunch of fellows.

I haven't done that yet. The record of the program is that, as of the only statistical period I am aware of, there were nine people involved in the program and four of them had failed in one way or another. Again, I am not criticizing that statistic. All I am saying is that there were five left and if they succeeded in all of them that would be a good record. The chances of succeeding with all of them I don't know.

Three of them were subject to police investigation in Canada shortly after their arrival and were immediately dispatched back to the United States. One other, in an accident on the premises, gravely injured himself, is no longer in the program, is in the Foothills Hospital crippled and, I believe, in due course is to be returned to his home for medical treatment there.

With five remaining the program could carry on, and so it did. But to say that what has been demonstrated by that is such an outstanding piece of work that I should give my personal endorsement to it, is something that I am not yet persuaded of.

In concluding that one I just wanted to say that I still have no quarrel with the fact that what is being attempted is valid. Success may yet come, but my view has been that it is not in the best interests of the responsibilities I have to discharge to act in a particular way at this particular time as requested.

Now another subject, the one raised by the hon. Member for Lethbridge West, related to in his and my view, looking over the material that he presented to me distributed by a service in the city of Lethbridge which counsels in family life education, a rather ugly couple of pamphlets and rather seamy material. There is no doubt of that. He made the suggestion in the course of a conversation that he and I had that the intent was valid enough, to provide information to young people on the subject of birth control, venereal disease and the like, but that it could be done in a better way.

I was inclined to agree with him and I still do. It, is my intention to look further into that and see if maybe our department might not be useful in upgrading the standard of that type of material. Then it would be available to anyone in the field in Alberta who wanted to use it. I look forward hopefully to making a contribution in that respect.

Now, much of the rest of what was said related to two issues. One was the question of welfare incentives that the hon. Member for Little Bow raised, and the hon. Member for Calgary Bow and the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo raised again the issues of the alcoholism commission. I would like to remark on those two areas.

I think that at the heart of the discussion over the Calgary Drug Information Centre there was the issue of the involvement of the private sector, and yet that wasn't a precise definition of the issue. It was a convenient and I suggest a careless definition. I say that because it relates, in the whole field of private sector involvement, to a very, very wide range of patterns you might find as soon as you start to discuss that subject.

I don't think private sector involvement is as accurate a way of speaking as to say what you really mean when you raise the issue is non-government involvement, because it would be stretching things a great deal to refer to some agencies that trade under the name of private sector as actually being such.

Once again, I subscribe as enthusiastically as any member present to placing in the hands of the private sector everything that it can do best. But we have people coming to us, and always have had in my experience, where the most emotional claims will be made on behalf of the work being done to a group of volunteers. You will find that there may be volunteers involved or there may not, but the citizen board you are dealing with is all on salary, anywhere up to $1200 or $1300 a month. You will find the total budget – they say, oh, we only need so much for our budget, just a proportion of it is all we need from government. You'll find the other agencies are other governments, municipal, federal and one private agency - a very, very militant group of people.

To be honest with you, we ended up helping them, where we knew that 97 per cent of their funds were government funds. I wanted to know by what classification they became a private agency. I would certainly admit this much, I can see that there are certain duties that can be performed which, even if all the money has to be public funds, may be performed better by a group of citizens rather than by a bureaucracy. I can see that. I can also acknowledge that I fully understand the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary Bow and the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo is that, with the Calgary Drug Information Centre, that is precisely the case, even though the funding is public and even though the people who work there are paid, some of them quite well. There is a fringe of volunteers. They may be fairly numerous. The actual input of hours, based on the fact that they do get paid something for the volunteer work - which they do - is perhaps minor to that part of the issue. That may be the sort of function that can be better performed by a group of citizens than by a government, and if so, I think they should be supported.

I would have to say that as the issue finally resolved itself it was not to me lacking in clarity. The Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission had concluded, rightly or wrongly, that this particular agency was not fulfilling an objective consistent with the overall policies of the commission at that time.

I suppose, and some people remarked upon it at the time, that when the government found an alternative way of funding it was taken as a rebuke to the commission. But I don't think there is any reason why the commission, if its judgment is that a certain area of activity is outside of its proper scope, shouldn't say so. If the function is useful and if, as happened in that case, another agency came forward and said, we'll give you the support because we believe in it even if the other people don't, what's so striking about that? What is so remarkable if that happens - the Calgary Social Service Department came forward and said, we think the alcoholism commission is wrong, we'll support you. That is really the way the matter was resolved, and we've spent so much time talking about it since.

I think the public commitment I made at the time it was resolved was that a thorough evaluation would be done and that all parties would welcome that, as I was sure they would. We have in the meantime explored in a couple of directions to locate a consultant for that purpose. One has not yet been named, but it is something that will transpire very shortly. That issue will perhaps still be with us for a while, but I think it's one that will be workable.

In fairness to the alcoholism commission too, I want to say two things to the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo on his views in regard to the legislation. One is - and he may think I am arguing against my commission at this point - the letter of the law seldom determines whether or not an agency of government or a program succeeds. That is seldom the real reason. The real reason is the ability and resources of those who are put into the fray to resolve the particular problem.

But before going on to discuss that, the second thing I wanted to remark upon in regard to the suggestion about legislation is that some very, very good points were made, in particular the one suggesting that maybe the commission could have a role similar to the Human Rights Commission. I was interested in that suggestion and I know that would change the character of the commission. I will certainly speak to the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo further about that, and it will be my intention to consider whether or not legislation should be either amended or re-enacted in due course to achieve that, if the examination of that alternative would appear - after more thought than I have given it at this point - to be an improvement.

But coming back for a moment to the commission itself: the statements that were made about reducing grants, for example, to $8,000 out of a budget of $3,700,000. I think hon. members who were on Subcommittee A heard the explanation of the chairman on that. In fairness to him I will now repeat in substance the explanation.

He indicated that the giving of a grant is one way to fund a private agency or a nongovernment agency. That much is obvious. He also said that for the serious question of recovering contributions paid, recovering a portion from the federal government of programs paid for, a grant was not a workable system. He said that you could still support the private agency by purchasing its services, either on a per diem system or on a contract type system.

He acknowledged that this often involved at least a liaison between the personnel of the commission and the personnel of the agency, which would bring it into the area of qualification for cost sharing and then provide to all hone members the impressive list of private agencies - and if 1'1 not mistaken that was distributed at the subcommittee where moneys were indeed paid; not $8,000 total in grants, but grants and purchase of services where the commission makes payments to the society to carry out a function that is within the intended area of involvement of the commission - in other words, consistent with the purposes of the commission, but not being directly performed by the commission. That's the way of funding which is similar to a grant but is an alternative to it.

Then he listed the Riverside Villa Association, Poundmaker's Lodge, the Women's Overnight Shelter, Community Corrections for Women, the Hobbema Detoxification Centre, Standoff Native Counselling Program, Bonnyville Indian-Metis Rehabilitation Program, Trinity Industries, Collingwood Acres, the Drug Information Centre, Alberta Native Training School, Alberta Native Action Committee McDougall Society, Halfway Recovery Acres Society, Project Recovery, Saddle Lake Drop-in Centre, and then a reference to an individual Indian counselling service at High Prairie. I think that information was filed with members of the committee, but for those who were not there I thought that that might be put on the record for tonight's proceedings also. I suggest that is a respectable record of contribution to societies which are non-government agencies and carrying out responsibilities in this field.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to go on now to the question of the incentive program and, I suppose, a few of the other items that I wanted to deal with that were not specifically raised in remarks of other hon. members.

I would want to say that if I were asked to state the areas where I thought the department had made its greatest contribution in the past year and probably can again in the next year, I would refer to the top government priorities which are well known. I won't go into detail regarding them, but I would have to say that the sense of service to the people of Alberta that I have enjoyed and that my colleagues and the people in the department who deliver the service have enjoyed, has certainly been in areas such as senior citizens services and, without even referring to the programs of the hone Minister of Municipal Affairs in respect to housing and so on, I refer to the program for extended health benefits and financial support. These are the new ones in addition to programs that had previously been in the hon. minister Miss Hunley's programs in regard to Blue Cross coverage again this year. The indication that I have recently been willing to give publicly [is] that in due course, even more will be made known, some of it no doubt during this year, in regard to programs that are at present in the development stage through my office.

I would have to say again that the programs relating to the disabled have been one of the things we have been most attentive to. Just one in particular, the massive changes, [both] physical and in programs that are taking place at the two Red Deer institutions, [are] long overdue.

I can't fail to mention mental health, the attention that the Blair report has again recently got, and the fact that we were honored, I would say, to have Dr. Blair accept the role of chairman of the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Council - to have that council working now, working hard since last August and going carefully over recommendations relating to the field and relating those to me for implementation in due course, or consideration for implementation in due course, by government.

Then we had the whole area of health sector funding, which changed the base of operations in particular for the health units so that the viability of these local services in the communities was greatly increased. Specialized services were injected as a direct result of provincial initiatives, for example, in regard to speech therapists.

Then we have the important decision to take the question of child battering very seriously during the last several months, going back to about a year ago; legislation last fall and then the registry in January of this year. The public relations program has gone on in respect to that.

Then knowing the agonizing statistics of accidental deaths, I think the first and probably only commission of its type in Canada is operating under Dr. Walter MacKenzie in regard to an in depth study. We estimate that about 18 months will have to be spent to try to bring some ideas to government that might help, if implemented, to slow down the agonizing - I use the word again - rate of deaths related to suicides and accidents of all sorts.

I was looking at figures tonight which disclosed to me that for males between the ages of 5 and 35 years of age in OUI country, the leading cause of deaths is motor vehicle accidents. You probably knew that but the second leading cause of death was all other accidents. The third leading cause of deaths for males in that group, if I remember correctly, was suicides. So this is an area that we wanted to give attention to. The steps that have been taken under the leadership of retiring Dr. MacKenzie and Dr. Cochrane, we hope will show us the way.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, on the question of incentives I have been working through the spring with certainly the department people and with the chairman, Dr. Paproski, and other members of the task force on needs, opportunities and responsibilities of the individual. I would have to say that I have recognized the difficulty, after reviewing the attempts that have been made elsewhere, of trying to solve the difficult question of incentives. I have noted that in Alberta this is maybe not such a great statistic as it is elsewhere because of the very low number of unemployed and the buoyant state of the economy. This has been an historic fact in Alberta and it is more so now than ever. Therefore the whole issue, as many troublesome cases we may uncover from time to time of people who could have done better with a little incentive, does not involve a very large portion of those people who are receiving assistance.

We have given our attention in the area of assistance to the people who are in the greatest need. The people who have been in the greatest need referred to before mean primarily those who have been disabled in some way, sometimes on account of age and sometimes for other reasons. The policy on incentives will come. Whether or not it will make much change, I don't know. We would only bring forward the best effort we can come up with in that respect and apply it as diligently as we can and hope to see at least as good results as any other incentive program that exists elsewhere.

The expectations for these shouldn't be too high. Other jurisdictions know from experience. We have observed of course from reviewing their material, going back into the 1960s possibly even into the 1950s, some jurisdictions found it necessary that long ago to try such programs. They are not famous for succeeding. I say again that in due course the incentive program will come forward. It will be the best that we can come up with.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those few remarks I will ask the hon. members to give their support to these estimates and thank the hone members for listening so patiently.