



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Third Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Community Services

Department of Culture and Community Spirit  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, February 22, 2010  
6:30 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 27th Legislature  
Third Session**

**Standing Committee on Community Services**

Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC), Chair  
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC),\* Acting Chair, February 22, 2010  
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL), Deputy Chair

Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (WA)  
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC)  
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL)  
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)  
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)  
Vacant

\* substitution for Arno Doerksen

**Also in Attendance**

Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)

**Department of Culture and Community Spirit Participant**

Hon. Lindsay Blakett                      Minister

**Support Staff**

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
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Rachel Stein	Research Officer
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6:30 p.m.

Monday, February 22, 2010

[Mr. McFarland in the chair]

**Department of Culture and Community Spirit  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Acting Chair:** Welcome, everyone. Note that the committee has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011. I'd like to start off the meeting by going around the table left to right, introducing ourselves. Before we do that, we'll start with the minister, and I ask that the minister introduce the staff at the table with him, please.

**Mr. Blackett:** Lindsay Blackett, MLA for Calgary-North West, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. I have with me to my left Deputy Minister Lois Hawkins and Carl Royan, Pam Arnston right next to me on my right, and we have some other officials: executive assistant Paul Bajcer; Assistant Deputy Minister David Link; Parker Hogan, our communications director; and Patrick. Glad to be here.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister.  
I'll start on my immediate left, then.

**Ms Sawchuk:** Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

**Mr. Rodney:** Dave Rodney, MLA, Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Benito:** Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Blakeman:** Laurie Blakeman, and as always I am just thrilled to welcome each and every one of you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Manmeet Bhullar, Calgary-Montrose.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Good evening. Janice Sarich, Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Johnston:** Art Johnston, Calgary-Hays.

**Mr. Hehr:** Kent Hehr, MLA, Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Johnson:** Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you. I'm Barry McFarland from the fabulous downtown riding of Little Bow, and I'd like to note for the record that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.4) I'm officially substituting for Mr. Doerksen tonight.

Our process review on speaking order and time. Standing Order 59.01(4), prescribes the sequence as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party [the Wild Rose Alliance], if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (d) any Member may speak thereafter.

With the concurrence of the committee the chair would recognize members of the fourth party, the NDP, if any, following the

members of the third party. For the next 20 minutes members of the fourth party and the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak.

I would like to call for a five-minute break, if that's agreeable to the committee, following the Official Opposition's time at approximately 7:45. Not seeing or hearing any objections, that is what we will do.

I'll take a real quick break and have Rob and Rachel introduce themselves, please.

**Mr. Anderson:** Rob Anderson, MLA, Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Ms Notley:** Rachel Notley, MLA, Edmonton-Strathcona.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

Continuing on, then. The committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Department officials and members' staff may be present but may not address the committee. Members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. I'd like to get that agreement if possible. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Voting on the estimates is deferred until the Committee of Supply on March 18, 2010.

With respect to amendments, an amendment to the estimates cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimates being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount. The vote on amendments is also deferred until Committee of Supply, March 18, 2010.

Written amendments must be reviewed by Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day they are to be moved. Seventeen copies of the amendments must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

One final thing. Sorry, Karen has just advised me. A written response by the office of the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to questions deferred during the course of this meeting can be tabled in the Assembly by the minister or through the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly for the benefit of all MLAs. A copy to the committee clerk would also be appreciated. With that, I apologize. We did that at another meeting.

I'll now invite the Minister of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit to begin his remarks.

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know, Alberta Culture and Community Spirit is a ministry with a broad mandate. We recognize and support the role the arts, culture, community partners, and nonprofit and voluntary organizations play in building a strong and vibrant Alberta. In fact, it's estimated the annual economic impact of Alberta's not-for-profit voluntary sector, which provides many essential community-based programs and services, exceeds \$9 billion of gross domestic product. The cultural sector represents a \$4.6 billion benefit to the provincial economy in terms of gross domestic product. These two sectors provide a measurable competitive edge for our province for now and in our future.

With your support we will work to create strong, sustainable communities and enhance cultural opportunities throughout our province in addition to making Alberta more competitive. We will be moving forward in a number of areas to meet our mandated priority to continue to work in partnership with the Alberta nonprofit voluntary sector to respond to its current and future needs by strengthening capacity and supporting collaborative community initiatives. This, in turn, will support and strengthen vibrant, inclusive communities and ensure there are opportunities to share, express, and experience culture in Alberta. We will do this by continuing to build on the spirit of Alberta, our province's cultural policy, and the four keystones of access, capacity, excellence, and fostering cultural industries. We will continue to lead the province by working with Alberta's not-for-profit, voluntary sector to respond to its needs as we have over the past year.

The overall budget for Culture and Community Spirit in 2010-11 is \$283.7 million. All areas will share in budget reductions to help us achieve our goal of being back in the black by 2012. Budget reductions were made with an eye to providing the most possible funding to these groups that provide shelter and support and work with the most vulnerable as well as increasing the competitiveness of our cultural industries in the future. In addition, we have made administrative and operational changes within the department to help ensure that we continue to support critically important nonprofit, voluntary, and cultural sector services during this period.

A total of \$165 million is dedicated to community and voluntary support services. This includes \$38 million for the community facility enhancement program, \$25.5 million for the community initiatives program, and \$22 million in operating capital support for major fairs and exhibitions. In addition, \$60 million is being provided for the community spirit program.

Within budget 2010-11 there is inclusion of \$30 million from the capital fund. These one-time grants are being used to support the building of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame, the expansion of the Mount Royal Conservatory of music in Calgary, renovations to the Citadel Theatre, and construction of the GO Community Centre in Edmonton.

#### 6:40

These capital projects address two government priorities. First, they create jobs for Albertans through the planning, construction, and operational phases. Second, they're integral components for maintaining the quality of life that Albertans know and appreciate and maintaining our reputation as one of the best if not the best places to live, work, and raise a family. The budget for these programs will enable us to continue to work on our initiatives to enhance online access to information, explore opportunities to encourage more youth to become actively involved in their communities, and collaborate to develop public engagement. The community spirit program will also provide targeted financial support and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of support for capacity building in rural Alberta communities.

When it comes to funding arts and culture, a total of \$56 million is budgeted for arts and culture industries. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts will receive \$29 million, and \$17 million is allocated for film, television, and digital media production.

In addition, we will continue our efforts to promote our Alberta Arts Days, increase opportunities for our artists to travel, and increase access to Alberta's art collection. Arts Days began in 2008 as a one-day celebration of our province's cultural expression. Last year they had more than half of all communities in Alberta participate in the expanded three-day program, which included over 571 different events in 116 different communities. In 2010 Arts Days

will continue to be built on a successful past during the weekend of September 17 through 19 and also be held in conjunction with Canada's first cultural days, to be held across the country.

Through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts we will continue to assist and encourage artists to hone their craft through touring opportunities and support for their endeavors as we're doing presently at the Olympics and the Paralympic Games through the Cultural Olympiad and a national touring program to follow. We also continue to support exhibitions and touring programs that take the work of our talented artists to all reaches of the province, so regardless of whether you live in a big city or small hamlet, Albertans will be able to experience our culture.

We will also be implementing the Film and Video Classification Act, collaborating to increase film production capacity, and consulting on additional funding models for the Alberta film development program.

Protecting, preserving, and showcasing our past is another part of Culture and Community Spirit. To do this, \$47 million is allocated to supporting Alberta's 19 provincially owned historic sites and museums as well as heritage preservation and conservation programs. Funding will also be available to safeguard Alberta's significant historic places and extend their physical life. In addition, the ministry will implement improvements to provide the ability to explore heritage collections online; moving towards expanding delivery of distance learning, virtual tours, and other programs; and developing a heritage collection strategy.

We will also spend \$2.3 million to continue addressing environmental obligations at various historic resources such as the Turner Valley gas plant, Bitumount, and Greenhill Mine.

Finally, \$8 million will be spent on protecting human rights and creating healthier and more inclusive communities in Alberta. This will include ensuring that the complaint resolution process within the Human Rights Commission is timely, fair, and transparent. The human rights education and multiculturalism fund supports the development and implementation of initiatives to create a greater sense of belonging and the development of welcoming and inclusive communities.

Recently I hosted six regional dialogue meetings for feedback on how we can move forward together through a challenging year. I was pleased to learn that many organizations have already been planning and preparing for reductions. In fact, although the recession has added increased pressure, many of the issues for these groups remain the same as before: turnover of paid staff, declining volunteer rates, and escalating operational costs. But this is a chance for all of us, with the recession in mind, to actually look at what we do and make sure that we are delivering the services to the people that need them the most and delivering them with the proper programs.

Discussion also centred on collaboration and sharing services, improving the way they operate and do business. As you're aware, this is the same approach that we're taking within government. We want to make sure all our not-for-profits and all these other community organizations are sustainable through the economic downturn and beyond. It's certainly an opportunity for all of us to create a more efficient way of doing things. With this in mind, Culture and Community Spirit is participating in a strategic review of grant programs, some of which have not been reviewed in years. Our most recent data on our programs is probably about eight years old, and most of our programs are 15 or more years. With the changing multicultural complexities in places like Edmonton and Calgary and Brooks and others and a growing aboriginal population, it's fairly naive to assume that our programs don't need some review and some change to make sure that we leave no one behind and make sure that those communities are properly represented.

We'll be also working to improve the community initiatives program, such as caps on projects like playgrounds, international travel, and technology upgrades for schools. It's my goal to make sure that the money that we have earmarked in those community investment programs is going to those community investment organizations, whether it's a community league or a community association or a not-for-profit organization, especially with respect to social service centres, and encourage other ministers and other departments who sometimes rely on these to fund their own program initiatives to fund it themselves. We'll take our money, and we'll focus on the people we're supposed to represent.

In addition, we'll be reducing the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 36 grant programs down to four. They're now going to be categorized as arts organizations, operating; arts organizations, projects; individual artists, projects; and cultural industries, operating and projects. Within Culture and Community Spirit we're going to take a look at all of our grant programs. We're going to try to streamline the processes, reduce the administrative burden on applicants, and ensure that dollars are being directed to where they're needed most. One example is the consolidation of the cultural policy initiative within the arts branch to ensure services while increasing efficiencies.

As we move forward, it's important to recognize the critical role in the health and well-being of our citizens the nonprofit and voluntary sector plays. For my ministry building safe communities that are ones that are safe and secure allows a deeper sense of belonging, and enhancing access to a vibrant arts and cultural scene will be our focus.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

I would now call on Laurie Blakeman, the critic from the opposition, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much.

**The Acting Chair:** Sorry, Laurie. Are you going to combine time?

**Ms Blakeman:** Yeah. Sure. I'm good with combining time. Is the minister okay with that? All right. Terrific.

My thanks to the stunning array of talent that we have here tonight from the minister's department. We always appreciate seeing everybody come out. Thank you very much for that. And, of course, welcome to the minister.

I'm going to be upfront right off the bat and talk about what my agenda is for the arts. The policy that we've had for some time, this is what we built it on: that we would be doubling the funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts immediately and tripling it within three years; that we would pursue status of the artist legislation; that we would launch an Alberta arts festival running along the same lines as the Alberta Winter Games, so every second year and moving around the province; that we would create an Alberta film and television tax credit; pilot an Alberta publishers fund; develop a capital investment strategy for heritage and cultural facilities; eliminate entrance fees for youth to cultural facilities; establish a ministry devoted to arts, culture, and heritage; and pioneer an annual provincial arts festival. We had a focus on professional artists, but the minister and, indeed, the whole department is to be commended on the advancements that they've made with the Alberta Arts Days. I think that's worked really well for a lot of people, and it's been a big hit.

However, what we're looking at with this budget, no question, are fairly significant cuts in the areas that affect the arts. In line 2.0.2 we're cut by almost a million, 45 per cent out of that budget; 2.0.3,

film, cut by \$3.2 million, 19 per cent; from 2.0.4, the AFA, cut \$5.6 million, or 19 per cent. A big hit to the arts community. Heritage loses \$5.665 million, or 15 per cent. Human rights is down by 13 per cent. The multicultural fund is down by 17 per cent, although when you combine those two, they're down by \$475,000, which comes out to about 6 per cent over the total. So it's a hard hit. I'm wondering: how do these cuts from this sector compare with the cuts in the other departments? Did this department take more than its share of cuts compared to other departments? How were you able to defend this?

6:50

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I can tell you what the numbers were initially and what they are now, but there are other departments that are in the nature of 15 per cent cuts. I know Service Alberta is. Ours was 15 point something as a percentage off from where we were. I think Treasury Board definitely took a hit in the neighbourhood that we have. We all had to take our share, and when you're looking at \$1.3 billion and you have a \$300 million department, it's a piece. We had to make a commitment to put more money into health care. I think that's something that everybody applauded. We put some more money into advanced education and education, and it had to come out of somewhere.

Now, nobody wants to ever cut a budget. Nobody ever wants to take money away from people that do so many great things for our province, as we're seeing in Vancouver right now. But that was the number that I had and we dealt with. If you look at our neighbours to the west of us, they had a 90 per cent cut in their arts. If you look at what's going to come in the other provinces when they come through their budgets, there will be significance. And I'll tell you, 15 per cent will look really good compared to those.

We're in a recession, and I can be the first one to tell you that there is not another dollar better spent anywhere in our government than in the arts or than in our department. But I don't sit on Treasury Board. A lot of people with a lot bigger budgets and a lot bigger say in it make those decisions. I will continue to fight for our department and what we can, but this is what we are dealt with, and we're going to try to do it as appropriately as we can.

I have some flexibility as we move along. As I promised the not-for-profit and the arts groups and I had said to the film guys, we'll have a sit-down; we'll discuss it. But I fervently believe there is 10 to 15 per cent waste that's out there in what we do now either through inefficiency or just programs that are bloated. There are people who are getting money that shouldn't be getting money, and there are other groups that should be getting that aren't. If we work with the sector – and by the indications that I've had in talking with all the different regions of the province, they're willing to do that. So we'll see where it ends.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, maybe I can put out a plea to get the minister on the Treasury Board, then, because we need somebody fighting hard. I wanted to make sure that we took a fair share of the hit. I think we took a harder hit than a lot of other ones did, so maybe you and I will agree to disagree on that one.

What risks have been identified by the department as a result of the cuts? I'm going to go through these in sort of sectors. I'll go arts, film, heritage, human rights, and then the voluntary and community sectors so that we can kind of follow the budget set-up here.

When we're talking about the cuts to AFA, what are the risks that you've identified as a result of the cuts that are coming? Further to that, what is the plan to rebuild, and what is your timeline to rebuild?

**Mr. Blackett:** Sorry. I was just looking at a note. Could you just repeat that last part of the question? Timeline to rebuild and . . .

**Ms Blakeman:** What are the risks to AFA as a result of the cuts, and what is the plan to rebuild?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I don't think there is much of a risk to the AFA because we haven't determined where that's going to come from. We're going to try to manage as much of this in administrative changes as opposed to having reductions of grants. We're going through a review now – we have been for over a year and a half – with the board and working now with the different groups and figuring out where we need to spend the money, where we need to focus. I have promised all our groups that we will have a discussion again in the May-June time frame, and we'll go forward. I think most of the major organizations that have been getting their funding will not see an appreciable change in that. Our challenge to our staff and to the people on our board is that we're going to come out with some efficiencies to make sure that we don't harm or unduly create a burden on any of those organizations, and I think we can do that.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. A couple of questions flow from that. This budget commences in approximately five weeks, but what I'm hearing the minister say is that he's planning on working into the beginning of that budget cycle on exactly how he's going to be restricting that budget. I know that the PASOs usually get a final number to proceed from sort of in April. Am I hearing correctly that these organizations are not going to get any kind of firm answer on what their budget is until well into the government's budget cycle?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. Major organizations will have that, but I don't expect they are going to be adversely impacted. If they are, it's going to be a maximum of a 15 per cent reduction in their budget. Most of the organizations have been well aware of this for the last six months, and most of them have planned accordingly, but we haven't made that determination yet.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, in the AFA contracts on grants there is a one-year fair notice clause. What is the effect of that on what's happening here? Does that one-year fair notice clause pertain to the budget changes or not budget changes but everything else? Can you explain that for us?

**Mr. Blackett:** We can take that one, and we'll give you a response on that.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. As the chairperson has mentioned, it gets tabled in the House. Of course, before we vote on the final budget would be very helpful.

Okay. The line item 2.0.2, arts, which is sitting in the budget at \$2.215 million: what is this? We tried to go through past annual reports. We tried to phone the department and get an answer for what's actually under this. Could you tell me what is included? What are the programs? How does it break down?

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. In the Culture and Community Spirit budget this line item supports the artistic development of artists, public participation in the arts, and informed viewing of film presentations by providing advisory, policy, developmental, and planning services related to Alberta's arts and films classification section, and provides assistance to individual Albertans and organizations in meeting their career and development needs. It also includes support for the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture, support for the EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts and the Citadel Theatre, provides administrative and management service for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and oversees the operation of the Jubilee Auditorium.

**Ms Blakeman:** How are a number of the things that you mentioned around policy development and advice to artists and board governance different than either what the department itself is doing through the ministry support services or through the AFA? How is that different?

**Mr. Blackett:** It's program support. AFA is more administration of grants to the actual artist. So we have, for instance, program support for Arts Days. We have funding to the individual artists who perform at Arts Days that comes through the AFA, but support of the program itself does not come from the AFA. It comes from the department.

**Ms Blakeman:** So this is actually what is the department's funding for the arts, then, in support of the various agencies and activities that you've mentioned.

**Mr. Blackett:** Right.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Really, this sector in the arts is now looking at – last year they didn't get an increase. This year again there's a cut, so they are actually two years back. It's a hit for the second year in a row, and I'm wondering what is being done to support those artists that are going to be affected by these cuts. For example, what is the acquisition budget for AFA, and has that been cut? Because if that budget gets cut, you have artists that aren't getting paid for their work. That affects other supporting arts organizations like the Craft Council or, you know, some of those other arts service organizations. What's the plan here to make sure that we still have artists that live and work and are able to pay a mortgage in this province at the end of this year and two years down the road?

7:00

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, let's be fair. I mean, in the last five years arts funding got doubled in this province. Last year they didn't get an increase, but they didn't get a decrease when other jurisdictions did. I fought very hard to make sure we didn't have a decrease. This year there's a decrease because we have a \$1.3 billion deficit, and \$30 million of that has to come out of our budget.

We're supporting artists tremendously. For the Cultural Olympiad we've spent over \$6 million over the last three years; \$1.1 million is going to artists' pockets right now who are performing in Vancouver or who are going on a national touring program. We're putting money right into their pockets, and that's visual artists as well as literary and performance artists. We're also giving them the ability, because they're in Vancouver on the world stage, to access other markets so that they can perform there and make a living there. The Alberta Ballet is going to Seattle a couple of weeks after the Cultural Olympiad. They're getting exposure. They had exposure today in the *L.A. Times* and the *Seattle Times*.

What we're doing is that we're creating an opportunity for them. It's not just all about funding; it's about promoting and sustaining an organization. I know you believe in that. You know, other opportunities will come because we're going to make them aware of the benefit. I think that's the most important thing that Arts Days did. All of a sudden communities across Alberta realized the importance of arts and culture so that more people are supporting it, more people are participating in it. Hopefully, we can get the corporate sector.

I agree with you. I'd love to in two or three years be able to say that we're doubling the funding, but right now, in these tough economic times, we don't have that luxury. We'll work with them and give them every opportunity to be successful.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thank you. And I agree: let's be fair. From 1989 to 2004-05 the AFA had absolutely no increase. In '04-05 they had \$19 million in funding, and yes, it did increase by \$2 million, \$1 million, \$4 million, \$9 million, and finally topped out at \$35 million. We're now back to \$29 million. But it's more than just the grant funding. What I keep coming back and saying to you is: what are the other programs you have in place here to keep the artists and the organizations that support them or promote them going? We are facing moving forward and coming out of this recession with a diminished sector, and I don't think that's the point. You started to get into it at the end about, well, promotion. So if you can give some detail about what you're looking at.

You know, the Arts Days is a wonderful project. I know it's the signature project for this minister and that he's very proud of it. All credit to you, but it promotes amateur arts. It does not promote the professional artist. It doesn't help them at all. It costs them money to participate in this, and they don't gain a heck of a lot from it. Arts Days is a great program, and I won't take anything at all away from that, but what else have you got in mind?

**Mr. Blakett:** Well, we started out last year, and we had a strategy: with every major event that is funded through our department, there would be a component for arts and culture, whether that was WorldSkills, whether that was the Grey Cup in Calgary, and there'll be the Grey Cup in Edmonton. Obviously, we have the Olympics. We're going on a national touring program after the Paralympic Games. We are also right now working on a series of tours that I will participate in, hopefully, in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. I met with the Quebec tourism minister along with Minister Ady yesterday to discuss that. We're going to do more in conjunction with British Columbia after the games. We met Minister Krueger last Monday, and we discussed that. We're also working on a cultural exchange with the Yukon, again giving us a chance to share some things. They have a dynamic cultural scene there that nobody knows.

We're all part of kind of the same problem in Canada. We all have great things going on in our own little areas, but there's nobody actually pushing for the greater good. So we are spearheading a meeting of cultural ministers, not an FPT but a meeting with ministers, to discuss what we can do for arts and culture collectively for the country, not for our own selfish interests but for what's the best. We're taking the lead on that, and that's why we're meeting with these other ministers. I think that the federal government is vulnerable on that issue, and I think they are so determined to worry about Quebec and not about Alberta that we have to go and try to work on that separately.

We have dollars earmarked for a cultural ambassador program. We have limitations on international travel, but I've met with representatives from Russia and France, and I plan to meet with representatives from both China and India this week in Vancouver. They are very much interested in culturally sharing. We have a lot of artists who perform and are known internationally, but we have to make our colleagues more aware of the benefits.

I think they are absolutely blown away by the fact that we have 60 musical acts in Vancouver. I'm very proud of the fact that six of those are aboriginal and six of those are francophone. We're at the Talking Stick Festival, the Aboriginal Pavilion, the francophone pavilion. We are at all of those and our Alberta House, on our train every day, and they are seeing them. They are seeing the reaction, whether it's the security guard up at Whistler who's begging to come and see the Dudes play at Alberta Plaza or having our other artists play at Molson hockey house, having the Dudes and George Canyon play on Alberta Day at Molson hockey house the day after we had our Alberta Arts Days. They are just realizing that, wow, that's a lot

of impact, \$6 million that we've spent over three years. The amount of benefit that we've gotten can't be tallied.

So I think there is a greater sense of enthusiasm, but we just have to continue with that. I think that we keep on pushing, and then soon will come the day where it's just: "Yes, Minister. Duh. You should get more funding because what you do is good for arts. What's good for arts is good for Alberta."

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Well, following on that, then, in 2004 the Cultural Human Resources Council issued a report called Canada's Cultural Sector Labour Force. It's these series. At one point, actually, commissioned by the then Minister of Employment and Immigration – I don't know what it would have been then, but it was Clint Dunford – Alberta had actually done a cultural workers' survey here. Then it sat on a shelf, and it's still there. That is an area that you could pick up on and move with the rest of the cultural ministers because we're missing a piece of federal funding because we don't have anything in place here in Alberta.

We're being asked to send representatives, and we don't have them. You know, it's telling us how many cultural workers there are, but the last time this was done was 2004, based on a 2001 census. We're 10 years out of date on this one, so there is a place that you could go with that. We had something in Alberta although I'm trying to remember when that would have been done, maybe 2002 or something like that, but you might be able to pick up on it.

The minister did say that he was evaluating the AFA grant programs and reviewing agencies to ensure mandates remain current and was investigating opportunities for operating efficiencies. That was in last year's budget. I went back to the *Hansard*. So I'm assuming that strategy 2.1, implement changes to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts programs, streamlining grant programs to better support the growth and development of the arts in Alberta, is the 36 grant programs down to four, but I'm wondering: is there anything else that he has changed there? What is the streamlining that is taking place?

**Mr. Blakett:** Well, instead of having 36 different applications, they can go to one of four. I mean, one of the things that became loud and clear, whether it's the arts community or the not-for-profit community, is the amount of red tape that they have to go through. As much as they are grateful for the money that they get, the amount of red tape that they have to go through is ridiculous. You know, some of the larger organizations almost have to employ somebody full-time just to be able to fill out the grant applications, and that's not what the intention was.

At one point we tried to get our department to where we have one application for everything. You know, whether you're an AFA, whether it's a film development grant, or whether it's CFEP or CIP, the information is still the same. You need to have an address, you need to have a business number or a business location, you have to have your board of directors, and you have to have financial information. Then it's usually another paragraph or two where they actually require specific program data. Instead of having all of these forms, we're trying to reduce that. I'm also looking to help encourage other ministers to do something similar. We put those online. We have a system now. We've got CFEP and CIP that we're putting online, and our intention is to have AFA grants and film development grants online by April 1.

7:10

**Ms Blakeman:** Is this going to eventually mean that there is a one-grant policy? I know some time ago there was a concern by members of the government that arts organizations in particular shouldn't be able to get a grant for more than one place. At that time it was changed so that they couldn't get a project grant and an

operating grant; they had to choose. I'm wondering if the day comes where you choose between an operating grant and a CFEP grant or a CIP grant and a project grant. I understand the streamlining, and frankly, having written a lot of those applications, I'm sure people are grateful for it. Is there a move by the department towards limiting or reducing the grants by using this streaming system?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. When we talk about streamlining and anything we're going to eliminate, it's the other departments' pet projects that come in and take funding out of these other organizations. For instance, you've got these Water Council or water for life groups. They're great. The Ministry of Environment said: go ahead. But they create not-for-profits. Now they've got to go compete against all the others, whether it's social services or arts organizations, for the dollar.

We've got economic development programs created across the province by another ministry, again not funded. They're not-for-profits competing for a dollar with everybody else. What we want to do is that we want to take the money and make sure we focus on, like I said before, arts, community, cultural groups. I think that if we can start to take the dollars that are spent on those other programs, we'll have plenty.

I think we can go and find, not in AFA because that's a little different, but I think we can go into CFEP and CIP and say: if you want to go and take your hockey team – I know Mr. Johnson was a little upset with that last year – you know what? We're not going to pay \$75,000 for a hockey team to go to Europe. I believe now it's \$10,000. We have to curtail the spending. Playgrounds should be in the purview of Education. There's \$10 million a year we spend there. We figure there are plenty of dollars there to spread around if we focus on what it's supposed to be.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. The AFA has not had a chairperson since September, so we're six months now. We've also had the executive director of AFA on a leave. I think to work on the cultural policy, the Spirit of Alberta policy. So we've had lots of things up in the air. The minister referred to 18 months of reviewing various programs and blueprints and policies. When will we actually see outcomes from this? When do we get to see something concrete? There have been a bunch of different avenues pursued by this department over a considerable period of time. When do we see some product? Right now AFA has got no chairperson and no executive director. We've got the executive director out there on whatever it is, the spirit-of-something project. When does this all end?

**Mr. Blackett:** Cultural policy, the Spirit of Alberta, one we should be very proud of.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sure you are, Minister, but let's hear when we're going to get a piece of paper.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, first of all, Jeffrey Anderson will be returning to his role in the branch with AFA, and we're consolidating the cultural policy department with that. That's part of that efficiency. We'll be naming a new chairman of the AFA probably in the next two to four weeks.

**Ms Blakeman:** When do we expect Mr. Anderson back?

**Mr. Blackett:** April 1, so he will be back in about 30 days. We have Eric Fechter as acting chair as of now, and we'll have, hopefully, a new chair in place. We've selected the individual. We have to go through the order in council process.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. So you're going to get a new chairperson for AFA. You're going to get your executive director back. And we'll get something on paper when?

**Mr. Blackett:** On paper particularly about what?

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, any one of those you want to choose. You've got a bunch of things happening about policy development, cultural policy, the spirit.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, cultural policy we've been working on for a year. For instance, when I came to this department, the province of Alberta did not have a list of theatres, did not have a list of events, did not have a list of companies, troupes, artists. Everybody makes these assumptions that it's this outcome or that outcome. We didn't even have a base point to start from. It took a year just to get the information and the data. So take the data, analyze it, and now talk to the different groups, and see where it goes. There are a lot of people who never want to get their hands dirty. There were some tough decisions to be made, but nobody wanted to do it. We had to build a sense of trust and collaboration. That doesn't happen overnight. We will go forward, and we'll make some of those announcements as we need to.

In terms of those groups and their funding, they will know, I'm sure, by about April 1 what they will have in 2010-11 so that they can plan for their budget.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sure I'm being pretty clear on the question that I'm asking. The minister has been in place for two years now. Whatever background work he needed to do – and I know that at one point there were enormous databases there because I had them. I worked there, and I saw them.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, that's great, but I didn't see them.

**Ms Blakeman:** So you rebuilt stuff. Fair enough. We're two years in now, more than two years since you were appointed to this. We're looking for when we are actually going to get something that we can all see that has come out of all of this guideline, program, policy visioning that the department has done. When will we see something concrete? When do we see an outcome?

**Mr. Blackett:** You've got a cultural policy called the Spirit of Alberta. That was pretty concrete.

**Ms Blakeman:** When do we see an outcome from this work?

**Mr. Blackett:** There are outcomes in a multitude of things, and I just went through a litany of them. You want to see a breakdown. We haven't been able to come up with the measurement of those outcomes. We talked about streamlining 36 AFA grants down to four. That information is out there. That came out recently. You weren't more specific. Give me more specific questions.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. What exactly has the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture done?

**Mr. Blackett:** The Premier's Council on Arts and Culture has met probably four times, above their mandated two times. One of the things that they had suggested was that we push the Minister of Education to actually go with a promise that he had made. The Legislature had voted a motion in 2005 to get more arts curriculum in the K to 12 school system, and we've been working with the Minister of Education to push on that. But, again, in a budget year it's a little tough to be able to get concrete steps going forward.



They made a number of recommendations, and I'm not about to make them all public at this point in time. But, you know, promote more arts and culture. Get out there and actually meet with the people, actually consult in the different regions. We have made-in-Edmonton solutions, which are great for Edmonton-Centre but not necessarily great for Fort McMurray, not necessarily so good for Medicine Hat or Cardston.

You want paper; we've got actions. If you go to any other province or the Canada Council for the Arts, we're taking the lead, and you're saying here: "Wow, we're doing such a terrible job. We've been so slow. It's so frustrating."

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Minister, I haven't said that. I've asked you for what's on paper. We've heard that there are program changes. We've heard that there are guidelines being developed. We've heard that there are people who have been seconded for 18 months to produce something. We're going: "Okay. Where is it? Give us something we can all read and understand where the department is going." Money has been put on this. There has been time and effort.

Here's what the city of Edmonton did. It's readable. There are concrete actions that are set to take place. We know exactly where they're going with this, and we can measure their results against it. Part of the frustration is that it's very hard to measure results about what's going on in this particular department because there is nothing to compare it to. You say: "We're working on it. We're developing it. We've done lots of stuff. We've taken lots of action." How is anybody supposed to be able to hold you to account on that one when nothing is permanent and there is no outcome we can judge against?

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. We'll give you the progress report – that should be ready – and I will make those copies available to you.

**Ms Blakeman:** Great. We look forward to having that tabled. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Blackett:** You're welcome. And disregard my previous comment.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you.  
Was the touring money cut?

**Mr. Blackett:** We haven't made a decision on that, but right now I advocate for as much touring as we can, so I don't anticipate reducing that at all.

7:20

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. The Budget 2010 news release said that \$331 million over the next three years was going to capital spending toward community facilities, and these included buildings used by not-for-profits, foundations, museums, historical sites, et cetera. How much of this is new money that would address the deficit of cultural venues in Alberta?

Now, I'm aware that the minister has done a number of around-Alberta tours. One of them was specific to cultural infrastructure, in which people were asked: what do you need? "We don't have the money to give it to you," you were quick to say, "but what do you need because, gee, in five or six years, when the money rolls in again, we might be able to do something with it?" There's \$30 million that is in this budget that we know is the flow-through money from the feds. I hope it's not part of this \$331 million because it's not provincial money.

**Mr. Blackett:** No.

**Ms Blakeman:** Right. Okay. How much new money is going towards cultural venues in Alberta? Is any of it part of the government's original capital plan and is just being restated?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. I think we've got here – \$114 million of that is the community facilities enhancement program, so that will be new dollars. It's definitely not the federal flow-through dollars. It's also not the major community facilities programs, that we also put \$10 million into: Mount Royal College and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame. It's not the \$27 million that we put into the Art Gallery of Alberta. It will include some of the money for the Royal Alberta Museum; I think that's \$83 million. Sorry. Apologies. That \$30 million is flow-through as part of the capital plan, so that is included in that \$331 million total.

**Ms Blakeman:** So the federal money that appears in the operating budget is part of the \$331 million?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Then you said that there was something or another from the major facilities program.

**Mr. Blackett:** The community facilities enhancement program, \$114 million.

**Ms Blakeman:** Over three years?

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Aside from the Royal Alberta Museum, \$83 million will not a museum build, so what is that \$83 million for? Is that split up into three years as well?

**Mr. Blackett:** It would be \$10 million, \$34 million, \$39 million.

**Ms Blakeman:** What does that support?

**Mr. Blackett:** We haven't determined it all yet, but a lot of that will be design of the new facility, and some will be collections. Hopefully, some of that will go towards construction. A definite use has not been earmarked for it yet. I'm certainly trying to pull in our schedule, but we'll see what we can do.

**Ms Blakeman:** We had one plan for the Royal Alberta Museum, which was kiboshed, and then they were sent back to the drawing board for plan B, which doesn't seem to have gone anywhere. Now we persistently hear that there's actually going to be a second Royal Alberta Museum, on this site of the Legislature Grounds. What is it? What are we going to get?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, right now we're looking at a two-museum concept.

**Ms Blakeman:** And the second museum is here on the Legislature Grounds?

**Mr. Blackett:** That is the intention.

**Ms Blakeman:** When would the shovel go in the ground?

**Mr. Blackett:** We don't know. Right now it's pushed out to three years.

**Ms Blakeman:** In my lifetime?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, yeah, hopefully in your lifetime, hopefully in mine.

**Ms Blakeman:** That would be great. Okay. So it's at least three years away before a shovel goes into the ground?

**Mr. Blackett:** As far as we know. Hopefully, the economy improves significantly in 18 months or 36 months, and we may be able to move things sooner. I don't know at this particular point in time.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Let's move on to film and television production. I think we've got a little bit more than 20 minutes left here. Film and television production took a hit of I think it was 19 per cent: \$3.2 million, 19 per cent, going from \$20.193 million to \$16.975 million. Line 2.03 on page 102 is where that's showing that decrease, but strategy 2.7 says that the minister will "consult with industry stakeholders regarding additional funding model changes." Part of the question is: who is the minister consulting? I know that the minister has his own Alberta Film Advisory Council, but my understanding is that he hasn't attended meetings of that. I've heard from a lot of people working in the film industry who are really, really worried, and these are people that own prop shops. They're horse wranglers. I mean, one guy actually sent me a list of all the different sectors that film people get employment in, and they're really concerned.

Two questions, I guess. Will the minister consider combining stream 2 and stream 3? It appears that one of those is not working anymore. It's part of the way you fund film. It might have worked once as an incentive to develop homegrown Alberta producers, but now we can't get the really big film companies, who employ a lot of Alberta people and spread a lot of American money around in Alberta. They won't participate in that because Disney is not going to come in here and give over half of their company to an Alberta producer, which is essentially what that stream is suggesting. There's a real desire on behalf of the film community to see stream 2 and stream 3 combined. That's the first half of it.

The second half is moving. I'm looking at a British Columbia press release . . . [A bell sounded] That's the second 20? Thank you.

It says that they're moving their film development credit from 25 per cent to 33 per cent. They're cleaning our clocks, and we are not competing well. People are really desperately worried. Two questions: will you consider combining streams 2 and 3, and will you either increase the percentages that are currently under the program you've got or, please, please move to a tax credit system?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, first of all, yeah, we'll certainly look at that. I've heard from people, many, many different producers here in Alberta. I've heard from people in Los Angeles. I've heard from people in other jurisdictions. Right now, though, I'd just say that, yeah, we'll look at it. I understand that I'm dealing with two different particular cases right now, and I see their reluctance to do that, and it makes sense.

In terms of the increase in labour, we made a move back in September, I believe, to increase our labour to 29 per cent, which was the highest labour percentage.

**Ms Blakeman:** That's stream 1, though. That's all Alberta production. That's stream 1. That doesn't help us with the big film companies, that employ a lot of people.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, it wasn't my understanding that that was the case.

**Ms Blakeman:** In stream 1 it sits at 25 per cent. If you qualify by doing the extra things on the extra list, you can get up to 29 per cent, but you only get that if you're able to compete by taking from the second list that's offered. That's the highest, and that is basically a hundred per cent Alberta production. We're talking about the big movies that we're not getting here anymore. We're talking about *Brokeback Mountain* and *Jesse James* and the big Hollywood ones.

**Mr. Blackett:** I know what you're talking about. I was just on the phone with the producer of a large-budget movie that was going to look at coming to Alberta, but the problem wasn't that. The problem was that he couldn't find a director. The problem for a lot of people in L.A., which nobody seems to mention, is that when you go to B.C. and you sit down with somebody like Grace Gilroy and you sit down with IATSE there, they'll tell you: we've got a comprehensive labour agreement that has three years, and we're ratifying for another three. When one of those large producers like Disney comes to Alberta, they have to go and negotiate independently for every production. That is something that's not competitive with any other jurisdiction in Canada.

7:30

**Ms Blakeman:** There's an opportunity. If the minister is talking about doing some stuff that is valuable to this, then why are you not facilitating that?

**Mr. Blackett:** Who says I'm not? At the Geminis I met with the president of the CFTPA, Norm Bolen, and I met with Damian Petti from IATSE, and I said: you need to sit down and work out the agreement. When I walked out of that room, I was told I would get it, only to see IATSE come out two weeks ago and say: we're not going to do it; we're going to stay the way we are. So I am working with Minister Lukaszuk to try to get both parties to the table and sit down and have that discussion, but if the union representing the people who work in this province don't want to sit down with the producers, that is part of our biggest problem. That's why there are a lot of people that were producers in Alberta that will not come back here: because we act like children.

As much as we have fantastic talent, and I'm not disputing that – you know, everybody can blame the government for a lot of their ills, but a lot of it falls on the industry themselves. There are very few people who have an interest in the collective good of the film or television industry in the province. There are some, but most of them are just worried about themselves, and that's the problem.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, what I'm seeing is the community coming together. When you're getting the film commissioners at the table, IATSE at the table, ACTRA at the table, the Directors Guild at the table, you're getting that film community pulling together. If IATSE's got a problem, fine. You've certainly put it on the record. I know they're listening tonight; they will have heard you. But that's not accounting for the actors and the directors that are here. Those big films coming in help grow our community, and they help keep us here. You want to see, you know, a fabulous John Ulyatt on stage at the Citadel Theatre or a Chris Craddock doing a one-man show somewhere in New York or here. Those people are able to

afford to live here because they can do film and television work, and that amount of money they're getting in that industry basically allows them to subsidize the other arts that they do.

This community is asking for serious consideration, and I'm joining with them and asking for that serious consideration. We need some revision in the policy. We had the AMPDC. It was disbanded. We got a new version under Stockwell Day. That was the three streams we were working with. It doesn't fit what we're doing now and what we're competing with now, and I'm asking the minister to please sit down and talk with them and look at revising this as fast as possible for us to be competitive, because we are not.

**Mr. Blackett:** Agreed.

**Ms Blakeman:** The minister can say that he has talked to producers in Ontario and he's talked to the head of the CBC. Great. But that is not getting jobs for the horse wranglers, it's not getting a job for the props buyers, and it's not going in and buying out an entire store of antiques in Nanton because they wanted to set dress something. That's what I'm talking about. CBC doesn't produce movies in Alberta. God bless them for telling you that, but it doesn't.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, what will Sam Steele be? That won't be a movie? That will be a movie.

Your previous point about getting some of those larger productions. We'll be competitive. I'll sit down with them to do that. They asked us to raise the cap from \$1.3 million to \$3 million; they asked to raise the cap from \$3 million to \$5 million. We did that. They asked to include travel outside of Alberta as part of their deal. We did that. They asked to have the film development program grants as part of their negotiating package. They wanted an opportunity to be competitive vis-à-vis any other jurisdiction.

We have a lot of digital film people in Alberta and, probably, per capita some of the best in North America, but they had no one, no voice, no representation, no access to funding. Most people don't seem to care about that, but I do. I think we have an ability through digital media to go and get a bigger piece of the pie. We had some of the very best people in HD technology and 3-D technology right here in this province, that we've lost. Digital production as well as the other ones will generate jobs.

I'll do whatever I can. I'll sit down with those people to come up with that, but they've got to also come to the table with some of those other things. We touched on one. I think they're coming together, but they need to come together, and we'll certainly meet them.

**Ms Blakeman:** Good. I'm glad to hear that.

What has happened with the development of the film studio that the minister announced that was to be in Calgary?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, right now we're hoping that the two levels of government, the federal and the city of Calgary, come forward. The federal government has indicated that they're getting closer. We have now created a not-for-profit entity. We're going to sit down with the industry, pick some members for the board, and then we're going to put out an RFP to those interested in building the film studio. I've met with several, but they're preliminary discussions. Through Calgary Economic Development now we're going to go forward and see who those companies are. A lot of people say they're interested, but let's see if they have the financial capability to do it. We have one of those government partners just dragging their feet for political reasons.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Can the minister tell me: what's the cash on the barrelhead for the province on this project?

**Mr. Blackett:** What we're going to try to commit to is \$10.5 million.

**Ms Blakeman:** And where is that in this budget?

**Mr. Blackett:** It's not in there yet because it will come from a multitude of different places. I mean, we put a budget out there, but at our discretion we're able to move some money. We may have some surplus money that comes forward from this year. I have \$1.2 million that I've already earmarked towards it. We'll go forward.

**Ms Blakeman:** What else would be affected if you moved money from other places? What are you thinking of moving the money away from?

**Mr. Blackett:** I'm not going to discuss that at this particular point in time. I don't know.

**Ms Blakeman:** This is a budget debate.

**Mr. Blackett:** This is a budget debate. That's right. It's a budget debate. That's not a line item in the budget, is it?

**Ms Blakeman:** If you're considering taking money away from a program in order to fund something else, a capital project that's not in the budget, what are the programs you're considering?

**Mr. Blackett:** I haven't had a consideration at this point. I have an opportunity to go to Treasury Board and ask for money if there's money available at the next quarter or the quarter thereafter.

**Ms Blakeman:** So there's no money for this.

**Mr. Blackett:** There's \$1.2 million that I have right now.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okey-dokey. Let's move on to heritage. They got a 15 per cent cut. How does the minister determine the provincial designation of historical buildings and sites? What are the rules or the specific criteria? If they're lengthy, you're welcome to just table them.

**Mr. Blackett:** Do you want to address that?

**The Acting Chair:** Through the minister, please.

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll get you a more detailed part of that, but it's based on, obviously, the historical significance, the integrity of the building, and the needs and interests of the community.

**Ms Blakeman:** This has been done very much on an ad hoc basis through a number of ministers. Is there any movement to harmonize these rules? Again I'm going to refer to the city of Edmonton, which has a very well integrated historical designation policy. On the province's side it's basically at the whim of the minister. I'm sure the minister wouldn't be whimsical about this, but that's where we're at. It's completely on an ad hoc basis. Has there been any consideration to move towards a harmonization there, particularly with the two larger cities?

**Mr. Blackett:** Not at the present time, but it's certainly something to take a look at. There are a lot of areas in this department that for a long, long period of time didn't get looked at, got buried under a larger department. Not that heritage isn't important, but the arts, the not-for-profits, and the film and television and, obviously, the Human Rights Commission have taken a little bit more time and focus. But that's something that we'll definitely look to address.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Maybe you can't answer my next question, then, because I was asking what other initiatives are in place to support Alberta museums in light of the fact that they've got \$5.6 million worth of cuts in this area. Do you have any other plans on how they're going to get through this?

While they're working on this, I'll just mention to the clerk and the chairperson that I think this is a particularly dumb rule, that we make the staff work through the minister when we could have experts here just come to the microphone and tell us. I'll just put that on the record, and maybe we can work on it. Gee, as a House leader, maybe I could work on it.

Okay. Ready?

7:40

**Mr. Blackett:** Point taken.

I mean, we're looking through everywhere else. Are there efficiencies that they can go through? Are there things that we can do to offload some of that administrative burden? Again, it can be more discussion of what is needed. One of things we really heard in our cultural facilities discussions is that we had never really looked at money for the preservation of a lot of our buildings, not just the ones that are 50 years old; we're talking about ones that are 15 years old, like the Winspear, for instance. That's something to look at. We said that we will continue to have that discussion to see how we can get some of those things in the capital plan, how to address that. Dollars need to be made available to do some of that stuff. So it's in progress.

**Ms Blakeman:** Yeah. Someone suggested to me that the province needed to start thinking of itself more as a sophisticated investor when it came to arts and culture in Alberta. I hear that the minister is particularly irked by this example, but there actually is a strategic investment policy in Quebec. I think that's part of where we need to go.

**Mr. Blackett:** I'm not irked by that at all.

**Ms Blakeman:** Excellent.

**Mr. Blackett:** They've got 300 years on us.

**Ms Blakeman:** Moving along to page 61 of the ministry business plan, strategy 4.8. Could the minister tell us how the Culture and Community Spirit department is supposed to "support the Alberta Land-use Framework by participating in its regional planning teams and contributing to the development of conservation and stewardship strategies for historic resources"? Done a lot of work on that, have we?

**Mr. Blackett:** We do get advice on areas. If you look at the Turner Valley gas plant for one area and other historic sites, there's always a burial ground or there's always something: somebody wants to dig a gravel pit or they want some sort of excavation. A lot of times we're involved with Sustainable Resource Development, and we're involved with the Department of Environment.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Does that explain 4.9, "Collaborate with the Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat to ensure an integrated policy approach on historic resource regulatory practices in oil sands regions"? That sounds like we're going to make regulatory practices of the oil sands a historic resource. What's happening on that one?

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. A streamlining of all our permits, but we also have the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, which is involved in a lot of the story with respect to that region of the province.

**Ms Blakeman:** That falls under the secretariat?

**Mr. Blackett:** Does it fall under the secretariat? No. We collaborate with the secretariat.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, you learn something new every day. Thank you for that. I'm going to move on while I have about four minutes left.

Human rights is the next one. There are cuts in human rights. It looks like 13 per cent, which is not a lot of cash because there's not a lot of cash in that area to begin with. I am particularly troubled by the fact that at the time when we have increasing cultural, ethnic, religious diversity in our province, we're cutting back on the human rights education fund, not by a lot, I grant you, but that fund isn't very big to start with. What risks have been identified if less money is available in that fund? What was the business case for cutting that fund?

**Mr. Blackett:** There wasn't a business case for cutting any fund. The business case was: you get a 15 per cent reduction in your budget in your department. We try to spread that reduction across every sector of the department as equally as we can.

**Ms Blakeman:** I keep hearing that we'll look at helping those that need the help the most and that we'll work with those that are the worst off. Well, how do you know that if you don't have a business case that assesses the risk that will come forward as a result of the cost reductions that you've done? I mean, if I look around this room and go, "If I had to take \$50,000 out of everybody's salary, I could be fair and take it across the board," that's when you start going, "Well, some people have children, and that's got more of an impact. This person has to travel further." That's why you develop a business case and assess risks.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, first of all, the Human Rights Commission. Last year I increased it by \$1.7 million, so the small reduction there. That's to have more staff, so the legal counsel for the chief commissioner. That's to have more legal counsel for our director. We need help with respect to intake. We had to physically remove the chief commissioner from our department because we want to separate the commission physically from the department. We've done that in Calgary, and we're about to undergo that in Edmonton, so there's a cost there.

The human rights education fund. I mean, we're talking about grants specifically. One of the things we wanted to do long term – the missing part in our department, frankly, I think, is that it's culture without any cultural area designated in the department other than the multicultural education fund.

We have to talk about diversity in a multitude of different ways, whether it's festivals, whether it's programs to deal with employers, employment, or access to accommodation. We have a secretariat now with three people that is for the not-for-profit through the

ANVSI. One of the things we're doing is that that is a resource arm for both of the sectors, and that would include those people, whether it's the visible minorities, different ethnic groups, or aboriginal population. We're trying to find out what the demographics are.

I know full well that we have an increase in problems with respect to all different types of crime because of the cultural imbalance for a lot of people who come to Alberta. Just because they have a well-paying job doesn't mean everything is hunky-dory. It's a big change if you're coming from Vietnam, if you're coming from India, or if you're coming from China. So we're trying to identify those and find out where we should spend it.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister. We'll do the five-minute break. I was chastised last meeting. It starts right on time, in four minutes and 58 seconds.

[The committee adjourned from 7:47 p.m. to 7:53 p.m.]

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you. Mr. Anderson, you're up for 20 minutes, please.

**Mr. Anderson:** All right. Thanks, Minister. I guess I'll start with the CFEP and CIP programs, a little discussion about that. It's a good chunk of change in the budget, so it'd be worth discussing.

Maybe some housekeeping first. Do you have a list of projects that have been approved under the CIP and CFEP programs, or could you table one in the next, I don't know, week or so of the different programs that have been approved over the last year from the CIP and CFEP, the individual projects themselves?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. That's already public knowledge. It's already on our website.

**Mr. Anderson:** It's all on the website? Fantastic. Good.

**Mr. Blackett:** We try to do that every month.

**Mr. Anderson:** Awesome. Good stuff. The things you learn when you're new in opposition.

Okay. With regard to the CIP and CFEP programs do government MLAs have any input into how these funds are allocated?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, MLAs are sometimes asked for their recommendations because they are in their community and active in their community sometimes. But the decision is made; I see every single one of those. The committee liaison officers make sure that they meet the acceptable criteria. I look at them, and I will ultimately sign off on those.

**Mr. Anderson:** So government MLAs are asked sometimes to recommend these projects.

**Mr. Blackett:** And sometimes they submit letters in there. That is not a policy, though.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay.

**Mr. Blackett:** And there are opposition MLAs that make suggestions, have called up, and have asked for help. That's also fine.

**Mr. Anderson:** But government MLAs are not contacted on every single project to ask whether they recommend a project or not.

**Mr. Blackett:** That's not our policy.

**Mr. Anderson:** Does it happen?

**Mr. Blackett:** I don't know. I'm not there dealing with each and every application. To my knowledge that's not our policy. I have talked to our representatives from our lotteries. Mr. Royan is the director of lottery funding programs. We've had that discussion, and that is not our policy.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. You just said that you reviewed every single one. To your knowledge is each individual MLA that is in government asked to recommend a project or not recommend a project that's put before them?

**Mr. Blackett:** No.

**Mr. Anderson:** That's not the policy?

**Mr. Blackett:** No.

**Mr. Anderson:** And you don't know if it happens?

**Mr. Blackett:** Sometimes it happens because if you've been an MLA for 15 or 20 years and you've been dealing with the same community liaison officer for 10 years, you've got a rapport and, you know, you've got a working relationship. That happens. There are some of our opposition MLAs that have a similar working relationship with our community liaison officers, and they have an ability to do that. But it is not government policy that the MLAs – you've known this, when I've talked to you in caucus. I've been very strong on that. This is not an MLA's right or a privilege or part of their job description. This is a government program operated out of my department.

**Mr. Anderson:** So it is not government policy for MLAs to get any type of documents or correspondence relating to whether they recommend a project or not under CIP or CFEP.

**Mr. Blackett:** There better not be.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Are there updates sent to government MLAs outlining the status of applications, funds, and the total CIP and CFEP funds remaining for the year in their constituencies?

**Mr. Blackett:** I believe we do give updates to them but mostly on which projects have been approved and which ones have been denied. Remember that for every one that's approved, there are probably three or four that are denied.

**Mr. Anderson:** Right. But there's not a document that shows pending applications that are still waiting to go through the approval process or that have been accepted at one level but are waiting for another level of approval?

**Mr. Blackett:** No.

**Mr. Anderson:** There's none of that? It's just accepted or rejected?

**Mr. Blackett:** Most of the time I don't get that, so I don't see how an individual MLA gets it. No.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Are government MLAs able to recommend a certain, specific dollar amount for a project that they recommend?

**Mr. Blackett:** They can recommend whatever they want, but it doesn't mean it's going to happen.

**Mr. Anderson:** You've never received any input from an MLA as to a specific dollar amount that they might be willing to recommend for a project?

**Mr. Blackett:** I've received recommendations from many MLAs from all different parties in this Legislature, making recommendations to an amount, and the amount that they ask for may be met; it may not be met. It all depends.

**Mr. Anderson:** Have you ever gone with that recommendation from the MLAs?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah, I've done that. I've done that with the MLA for Calgary-Currie. I've done that with the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Mr. Anderson:** So once in a while . . .

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Mr. Anderson:** . . . but not for everyone.

**Mr. Blackett:** No. I mean, you're talking about 1,500 grants for CIP and about a thousand for CFEP.

**Mr. Anderson:** You would say that you get recommendations from them, but it's not policy to always follow the recommendations of whether or not to accept either a project or the dollar amount for that project.

**Mr. Blackett:** No. I don't have enough time in a day to be able to do that. I see them. If the project is worth while, I look for the trends. I mean, there are things that we want to make sure we're funding. I do some random checks. For instance, when I took a random check of 20 CIP applications, I was shocked that in eight of the applications that were in Calgary, there were consultants that were making over a hundred thousand dollars that were on there. I said: well, now, that's something we have to look at. I just try to, you know, take the temperature in some random spots and make sure that it makes sense.

I monitor how much we spend on playgrounds, how much we spend on technology upgrades and other departments for things that should be funded by someone else.

**Mr. Anderson:** If it came to light that for whatever reason projects that were being recommended to you by government MLAs were recommended and that those recommendations occurred all the time, including the dollar amounts, you would find that practice unacceptable?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Would you put a stop to that practice if that came to light?

8:00

**Mr. Blackett:** I'd have to put a stop to it.

**Mr. Anderson:** All right. Well, that's good.

We'll move on to something else. With regard to page 102, line item 3.0.9, bingo associations, \$6.6 million, can you just explain how that program works?

**Mr. Blackett:** It's somewhat like horse racing was, and I know that nobody asked me about horse racing today. It's flow-through dollars. The government collects the net proceeds from electronic bingo and keno machines from across the province, and we make sure that those dollars are provided to the charities through the bingo associations. Right now this funding is provided to 20 bingo associations, with about 35 to 40 charities per association.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. So you give the grant so that they can run their bingo, and then you keep, basically, a percentage of the funds, which you distribute to charities. Is that what I'm hearing there?

**Mr. Blackett:** Actually, the money is generated, and there's already an agreement in place. That's set up through the bingo associations and the AGLC. We're just the ones that actually take the money in and pass it on, basically.

**Mr. Anderson:** So 6 and a half million dollars.

**Mr. Blackett:** It's 6 and a half million dollars generated by the bingos themselves, and then the net proceeds go to those different organizations, which is 20 times 40, or about 800 associations.

**Mr. Anderson:** So this is just a flow through, then, this item here.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Good.

Other initiatives, \$6.5 million. What are other initiatives?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, other initiatives are those things that we fund that do not meet the guidelines of the other things, so they don't have matching funds like CFEP did or MCFP did. We sometimes have some multiyear commitments. We have things like the Grey Cup, for instance, in Calgary, the Grey Cup in Edmonton, the Junos, the Gemini awards, funding for the University of Alberta to assist with the purchase and the processing of the Sam Steele collection, support for the 2009 biathlon youth and junior world championships, funding for the Rick Hansen initiative, \$500,000 to the Haitian disaster, funding for the Upstart program.

**Mr. Anderson:** You don't need to go through all of them, but is there any way we could get a list of that, or is that on the website as well? It is on the website. What's it under on the website?

**Mr. Blackett:** It should be on the website under grants and other initiatives, grant recipients.

We should note there that there will be \$1.2 million for the film studio. That's in there. Just others, like the Canadian Red Cross Society . . .

**Mr. Anderson:** Oh, that's good. We can move on to another subject.

The community spirit donation grant program. I'm assuming, just quickly, that's also on the website, all the grants.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. Last year I think that about 1,500 organizations received that. That was something that the Premier and I announced in April 2008. That was new funding. It was \$20 million at the time, and now it's reduced to \$16 million.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Thanks.

Going on to the Human Rights Commission, \$4.5 million is the line item. Would you say that the point of the Human Rights

Commission – well, you tell me. Why did Peter Lougheed, why did we, in Alberta anyway, set up this Human Rights Commission? What was the point?

**Mr. Blackett:** The point was to make sure that individuals are treated equally, to make sure that they weren't denied access to employment, accommodation, or other services on the basis of race, colour, creed, disability – we've included, of course, sexual orientation in that – so that every Albertan feels safe and comfortable and respected.

**Mr. Anderson:** Absolutely. I think everyone around the table agrees that that's a laudable goal and something that that commission was supposed to do, especially when you look at – I mean, it's very difficult for new Canadians who are coming in to access court services. You know, it's a very expensive legal system that we have, so I think that there definitely is a role for a Human Rights Commission in the way that you just talked about.

Has the Human Rights Commission in recent years started to expand its original role into areas that you're not comfortable with, or is everything great?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. There are a lot of areas I wasn't comfortable with. First of all, it's a quasi-judicial body. In many other jurisdictions it falls under Justice. In ours it happens to fall under Culture and Community Spirit, but that shouldn't really matter, which department it falls under, because it's supposed to be a quasi-judicial body independent of government. There's an applicant and there are respondents, and hopefully 60 per cent of those cases are resolved through conciliation, but it's supposed to come out with a resolution of a dispute at the end of the day. That's supposed to be the goal.

What the people who are there in that commission are supposed to do is take that evidence, that body of evidence that's provided by a complainant, look at the respondent's argument, look at it in a nonbiased manner just like we're supposed to in a court of law; that is, with the blindfold on and weigh the scales based on the facts that are presented before them. What was happening was that people took their personal prejudices and made decisions based on that. They took actions where they said: "Well, I think that this person has done something wrong. The applicant couldn't actually come up with that, so I'm going to go help them do it and come up with a case for them." That's not what a human rights commission was ever meant to be. If you talk to Alan Borovoy, as I have over the years, the father, really, of our human rights commissions and civil liberties movement, that's not what it was intended to be.

We thought we'd put some more discipline back in there. We wanted to have somebody like a judge who could look at it impartially, who had the legal experience and legal training and legal discipline to be able to form a commission to operate much like the Court of Queen's Bench should be able to operate. You should walk into the Human Rights Commission and feel that you have gotten a fair hearing, a fair shake, every time you go in there. Blair Mason was an excellent choice, after 26 years on the bench. But we need to do other things. It's not the fault of the people in the commission if they're not given the resources to be able to do the job properly. We have to get training, and we have to provide resources to them. That's why we have to do that.

You know, the question is that either you support it properly, fund it properly, or you abolish it. I think that we absolutely need one, and it's an important step. I think we were a leader in 1971, when we came up with it. We're Albertans; we can work to make it better.

**Mr. Anderson:** I agree with everything you just said. I mean, there's no doubt, I think, that everyone agrees: Sheldon Chumir, I

think left and right, centre, and everything in between are not comfortable with some of the recent decisions on free speech with regard to *Maclean's* magazine, for example, and others.

I guess my worry is that I don't see how the changes that we made when I was in government, so I say "we," or that you made to the human rights act really, really accomplished the goals that you were just talking about. The reason I say that is, first of all, there's no doubt that there's a judge there, which is a positive, as I've spoken to you about. But there are no real rules of evidence in there. I mean, there really aren't. It's a bit of a kangaroo court. I think it brings the administration of justice into disrepute when people go in there and there's no such thing as truth as a defence. They can't use that. They can't use many other defences because, essentially, there are no rules of evidence.

I know, Minister, that this is something that you are aware of and that you've looked into. I think that in caucus in discussions with other members we had come to some pretty good solutions on what to do with section 3 in order to make it more appropriate for what a human rights commission should be doing. I guess I would just ask: when those were brought forward, was there a free vote in caucus on whether to accept those recommendations or not?

**Mr. Blackett:** What's that got to do with the budget?

**Mr. Anderson:** Everything. It's a \$4.5 million line item. I want to know if the people's representatives were voting for or against curtailing their powers or increasing them, increasing the budget, decreasing the budget.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'm not going to discuss what was discussed in caucus, but I'll tell you this: I outlined to them, as I did a year ago when we went forward and as I said in the last budget, that we will increase the money towards it. We have a freeze on, but we were still able to hire, to have an order in council appointment. We were still able to hire those legal resources because that's a commitment we made as a government.

#### 8:10

Back to some of those other things, we've got to work through them. We're working on governance to start with. We've had some outside legal help, also some help through the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, who's been involved in this from the very get-go. There are a lot of things to change. This is really complex. Too bad that it's focused on 3 per cent of the cases, that happen to be freedom of speech, and not the 900 cases that are out there. That's my biggest goal, to make sure we focus on those. It's great that somebody has a special point of view, but the goal at the end of the day is to make sure that all Albertans feel representation free of repression.

**Mr. Anderson:** Well, there's no disagreement there. I mean, there's no doubt that no one should be denied access to services or jobs or housing or what have you because of a trait that they may have or where they may be from or their sexual orientation or whatever it may be. The question, I think, is that a lot of people out there now feel that it has gone so past its original intent that a lot of people feel, frankly, essentially discriminated against for their views.

I think that it would have done a lot of service to Albertans and a lot of service toward legitimizing the Human Rights Commission, which I think we all want to do, and legitimizing the money spent on the Human Rights Commission if we had taken care of section 3, which is clearly, without any doubt, an unconstitutional piece of legislation. I don't think anyone doubts that. The recent Alberta

Court of Appeal decision, you know, did everything but say that. Everything but say that. I guess my problem is that we had a chance to do that. Why didn't you take the opportunity to seize that moment, and why didn't the Premier take the opportunity to seize that moment?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, you know the full reason why, Rob.

**Mr. Anderson:** Was there a vote on that in caucus, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we're not going to talk about what happened in caucus.

**Mr. Anderson:** I don't want to know what anybody said or did not say. I just want to say: was there a vote? I don't care about the discussion. Was there a vote?

**Mr. Blackett:** You were in that room, so you know exactly what the question is.

**Mr. Anderson:** So there wasn't a vote.

**Mr. Blackett:** Everybody knows that I advocated for section 3. Also, people know that had certain members left my recommendation alone, it would have passed without a lot of hullabaloo, and we would have it today. Others thought that they knew better, and it didn't work. So that's the way it is, for another time. But I'll never regret the fact that we actually pushed for changes after 13 years of people sticking their heads in the sand. Inclusion of sexual orientation is not just a minor detail. I mean, if you want to be looked at as a province of tolerance, that's what we've got to do.

**Mr. Anderson:** Thanks.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.  
We'll now move to Ms Notley from the NDP, please.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. I am going to try to get this discussion a little bit back closer to the budget. Unfortunately, there was one sort of line of discussion that I just have to follow up on a little bit. Am I correct in recapping what you said in answer to one of those questions, that you were not pleased with the direction or the outcome of some of the Human Rights Commission decisions prior to the appointment of the most recent chief commissioner?

**Mr. Blackett:** I never said that. I don't comment on decisions, never have. I have a problem with the fact that it takes 400 days to get to a decision, whatever that decision is. I think that in most of the cases, at the end of the day, the decisions went the way that most people wanted them to go or thought they should have gone. It just took so long, and it was so painful to get there. That's what I have the problem with.

**Ms Notley:** And that's a completely appropriate thing for you to have a problem with. I'm a little afraid, though, that if we go back and read the *Hansard*, Mr. Minister, in fact it did sound like you were commenting on the substance of decisions made prior to the appointment of the new chief commissioner. We can debate it once we look at the transcript, but I just want to flag that. I think you understand the issue that I'm getting at here, the fact that you are the minister in charge of that commission and the very significant difficulty that arises from that action.

**Mr. Blackett:** I haven't ever gotten myself in trouble with that. What I said was the individuals in the commission trying to predetermine or assist an applicant in a case. I didn't talk about the decision. I didn't talk about the director. I didn't talk about the Chief Justice. The people other than that don't make those decisions.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. We'll take a look at that. I appreciate, at least now, that that's what you're saying because I think that's really important for the future direction of the commission, that it be very clear that as minister you're not ever issuing any kind of statement about where those decisions are going.

**Mr. Blackett:** That's how you lose your job.

**Ms Notley:** Indeed. Indeed, that is my concern. I am concerned for you.

Anyway, just to go back to more of the particulars about the budget, I went back through the discussion that we had last year about the money, and you mentioned the \$1.7 million extra. You talked about the kinds of things that would go to. In particular, last year you were talking about primarily focusing on intake workers. Then you started saying: well, what we're going to do is that we're going to hire intake workers, and we haven't started yet, and we're waiting to see how long it takes HR to get on it, blah, blah, blah. I believe we had that discussion sometime in April.

For obvious reasons, then – I'm sure you can see where I'm going with this – I'm a little concerned. It would seem to me that if those intake workers were ultimately hired and put on your payroll at, say, two or three months into your budget year and now here we are in the new budget year and we have exactly the same amount of money budgeted, what's going to happen? Are we laying off intake workers now? What's happening? There was a clear understanding that we needed to grow the commission. That growth didn't occur at the beginning of the budget year. Now we're funding a full 12 months with the same amount of money.

**Mr. Blackett:** We haven't hired those workers. Blair Mason was brought on board, I think April 1, and when we had our discussion, he said: "Well, we have to look at the commission as a whole, how it operates. We have to come up with a governance structure, and if you make a determination by hiring that front-line worker, that may have an impact on how the rest of it works." So I deferred to him. We haven't done that because we're not going to just put money in and put somebody in a position there and then have to go yank them out. We just want to get it right the first time and move forward.

**Ms Notley:** So you're saying none of those new intake workers have been hired yet?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. But we have worked on streamlining the process and becoming more efficient because there are a lot of things they did that took a lot of time. We're able to make decisions quicker on the 30,000 some-odd requests that we have and are able to say no in a much faster fashion.

**Ms Notley:** Then are we to assume that there will be no intake workers hired if we've got the same budget?

**Mr. Blackett:** There should be intake workers hired when we have the governance pieces in place. Our chief commissioner wanted to make sure that we had his office staffed. We were going through an order in council search for the new director because we have to



separate the director from the executive director, and part of that will include the new staff. The other part is that we're moving facilities, we're moving the offices, so we want to make sure they have the office in place and that before we bring people in and have to move them around again.

**Ms Notley:** I guess my obvious question is: where are you going to find the money for these new bodies that you're bringing in this year when your budget remains the same as it was last year?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the money for those positions was there. We may have surplus dollars left over at the end of the year, which we will spend on what we need to spend within the commission, but it won't be on the HR component.

**Ms Notley:** I mean, I see, absolutely, that the commission budget is forecast to be less than what was budgeted, and perhaps that is in part because those intake workers weren't hired. But you're budgeting to go forward on the basis of what you actually spent this year, not on the basis of a surplus, so again I don't see where those intake workers get hired.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we have an ability to be able to move things around in our department from an administrative standpoint because there are still a lot of dollars administratively. That's what we'll end up having to do.

**Ms Notley:** Do you have an estimate for what the global cost will be for those new intake workers?

**Mr. Blackett:** No, because we don't know how many people we need exactly.

**Ms Notley:** Can you give us a sort of per worker estimate?

**Mr. Blackett:** I can't say. Originally, I think, we threw out a number of eight just because, but right now through operational efficiencies we may only need four or six. We're seeing what we can use in terms of technology. How do we get some of this automated? What kind of phone system are we using? How can we better do that? I don't know what that exact number is yet. I've asked for it, but I haven't received that yet.

8:20

**Ms Notley:** I assume, though, you'd have a per intake worker understanding of what the cost would be since you were talking about it last year as well as this year. Do you know what that number would be?

**Mr. Blackett:** I don't know what that number will be.

**Ms Notley:** Can you provide that to me?

**Mr. Blackett:** I don't know if we have that number yet.

**Ms Notley:** I think it's pretty easy.

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay.

**Ms Notley:** I mean, obviously, we're concerned, again, because there was quite a bit of assertion last year that those intake workers would be there, and we've already talked about how we need to resource. It's a little concerning to hear that they're not there and we're not exactly sure where we're getting the money for them.

Then, of course, we see that complaints themselves are actually up 18 per cent, so you've actually had quite a significant workload increase at the commission. Not surprisingly, the rate of being able to close files has decreased. How do you see dealing with that problem as well? Quite a significant increase in workload there, and again no change in the budget.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the backlog that we had wasn't at the intake level. The backlog was at the director's level and was at the chief commissioner's level. By hiring a full-time commissioner for the first time in, I think, forever, we're able to help off-load some of those that the chief commissioner works on. We've got two new part-time commissioners that are helping with that backlog, and the fact that the chief commissioner now has a legal and administrative resource, which he didn't have before, to help with that is going to help us to get rid of some of that backlog of cases. We'll do the same with the director when we get that person into place.

**Ms Notley:** I can see where that might help with the backlog, but what I'm talking about is, in fact, an increase at the front door. We're not talking about old cases that haven't been dealt with. We're talking about an increase in new cases and no increase to your budget. Now, I know that we talked about how 418 days at one point was the time for a case, and now we're at, I believe, 435, although I'm not sure if that 435 is current. What's the current timeline?

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll give you a written response to that.

In the administrative change – and I can't overstate that – there were significant requirements necessary. Very few people paid any attention to it, and it's not going to happen overnight. I wish it could, but it is the systemic way that we've done things, and the lack of resources has really hamstrung their ability to be able to do that. Our commissioner and his council have said: "Let us go through the governance. Let's go through the systems." They're monitoring the things that you're talking about. They're looking at: how can we get more through mediation, how do we get more people through conciliation, and how do we speed that up? That's something that they're trying to address.

**Ms Notley:** Right. I can absolutely believe that a new administrator could make big changes, but also, though, when you've got an absolute increase in workload, I don't know how you can address it with the same amount of money in the budget. I'm concerned that what we're doing, basically, is creating a greater barrier to people who are looking to have their human rights issues resolved in Alberta these days. Of course, we haven't even gotten into the discussion of, you know, when that new piece of legislation might be proclaimed and what lovely things that will do to people's attention spans at the Human Rights Commission once that happens because that, too, will have a cost item associated with it.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I don't think it will have a cost item associated. I can tell you that in talking to the Minister of Education, the school boards and the ATA have come up with their process. They're about to meet with our commission representatives in the next 30 days, and they feel confident that they have a system, working through our commission, that will make sure that those complaints are dealt with through this process that the school boards have set out. It'll be a formalized process in place. Every parent will be notified at the beginning of the year of what it is, and on we go. I don't expect there are going to be hundreds of thousands of people there, but they have to exhaust themselves even to the point of having to go through the minister before they come to the Human Rights Commission.

**Ms Notley:** But it is a component of the human rights act. Sooner or later, they're going to be there, and it's going to be a big case, and it's going to take some time.

**Mr. Blackett:** Ah, fear. Fear, fear, fear.

**Ms Notley:** Law, law, law.

**Mr. Blackett:** Not necessarily.

**Ms Notley:** Anyway, I'd like to just move on to a different topic briefly. Line item 1.0.6, your communications piece. It's not huge, but we've heard a lot about how there are cuts everywhere, and we all have to do our part and deal with that. I'm just wondering if you can explain why it is that the communications budget for the ministry is up when we're cutting notably in so many other areas?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, one of the things that we need to do is that we are there to be the facilitator in government. We're there to support arts and culture and film and television: promote, promote, promote, promote, promote. Arts Days is part of that. We spent \$700,000 on that, and a good chunk of that was promotion and advertising, communications. Also, it was supporting our artists.

We need to get the message out of the importance of arts and culture and the importance of the not-for-profit. One of the things we had at the dialogue meetings from both groups: they said they need information. They need information to help themselves in being able to build their case, how to educate the public, how to educate the corporate sector, basically a value proposition. We said that we would definitely support them in doing that. So a lot of it's going to be there to help communicate with our stakeholders and for the stakeholders to be able to utilize our assets.

**Ms Notley:** Although it's a bit frustrating if we're increasing the promotion of our assets at the same that we're reducing the assets available to said assets. Doesn't quite seem to make a lot of sense.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, you could say that, but if you've been in Vancouver any of the last 10 days, it doesn't matter whether it was BBC or if it was oil company executives or . . .

**Ms Notley:** I don't think that was being funded out of this line item, that stuff.

**Mr. Blackett:** No. The point I'm making is that once they realized how good our artists were, there are now companies out there that are willing and interested in providing more funding to them. So the more that we are able to communicate the message, the more chances – it doesn't always have to be government, but we want funding from all sources increased if we could.

**Ms Notley:** Right, but I think we might be talking about a different line item in terms of that bit of promotion.

In terms of communications – and I'm not sure which line item this is out of. What I'm talking about right now is 1.0.6, but for the moment, just talking more generally about communications, perhaps you can tell me which line item the communications around project announcements comes from. When a particular project is approved, in some cases there is promotion of that project, and there may or may not be cheque presentations; there may or may not be a press release, that kind of stuff. Where is the funding for that found? That's the 1.0.6.

**Mr. Blackett:** Information bulletins, press releases. I mean, there is the cheque, but it's four cheques. You erase them; you put it on there with a marker. It's not like we spend a lot of money on that kind of stuff.

**Ms Notley:** Right. Now, you do sometimes have announcements, and you have cheque presentations, though, correct?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. We have them, but there's not a cost usually associated. I show up. It's usually at the facility or whoever we're giving the money to. Once in Edmonton we did have 12 or 14 different groups, and we did it at Government House. Usually it's just whether we go to the Go centre or some group there. A lot of the times it's just sent to them. We do have them, but there's not a big cost to it.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. I'm just wondering if I could get a listing of which ones of those presentations or events that you just described involve MLAs and which MLAs? Of course, that I've never actually been part of one of these is no big surprise.

**Mr. Blackett:** It's a government program, so I don't think . . .

**Ms Notley:** Paid for by taxpayers. This isn't out of the caucus budget. This is out of the ministry budget.

**Mr. Blackett:** Right. So if there is a ceremony in your riding . . .

**Ms Notley:** Never been invited, so I'd like to know a list.

**Mr. Blackett:** Have you had one in your riding? I haven't.

8:30

**Ms Notley:** Well, you've given out money in my riding.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah, but that doesn't mean there's a cheque presentation.

**Ms Notley:** Anyway, I'd like a list, if I could, of all the presentations that have been done that had press releases associated with them and which MLAs were part of it.

**Mr. Blackett:** Now, do you want that specifically for Edmonton, or do you want it for the entire province?

**Ms Notley:** The entire province.

**Mr. Blackett:** What's the timeline?

**Ms Notley:** For the last year.

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay.

**Ms Notley:** There was an interesting question asked by the previous questioner which I hadn't heard about, which is this concept of MLA updates, information going out to government MLAs indicating how much money was left in the program area. I think that's what it was. That was what was discussed by the previous speaker.

**Mr. Blackett:** That was a question.

**Ms Notley:** He asked about it, and you indicated that, yes, there was such a thing as MLA updates that went out regularly.

**Mr. Blackett:** No, I didn't. I indicated that there were recommendations that they can make to the . . .

**Ms Notley:** This was about communication from your office to the MLAs.

**Mr. Blackett:** And I said that there shouldn't be any of that communication to them.

**Ms Notley:** No, I think that was more about the decisions. But I think originally there was a conversation about updates, something referred to as MLA updates that were prepared. We could go back over the transcript, but assuming that that is the case, the information that I'm looking for is: how much department resource is spent on preparing those MLA updates? Then, again, the obvious question is: why is it that opposition members never receive such a document?

If I could move from that to CIP really quickly because I don't think I have – yeah, I think I've got one minute left. We had, of course, extensive discussion last year about how much money would be carved out and ultimately distributed particularly for international development. I've spoken to some stakeholders in that area, and we've not been able to get a global amount for how much was distributed in this last year, nor do we have a sense of what's coming, so I'm wondering if I could get both of those figures from you.

**Mr. Blackett:** Sure. It would be the international piece, which would be \$1.5 million, that came out of CFEP, with the maximum \$25,000 per. Yes, we can get you that. We might as well give you at the same time the \$4.7 million that would have been available under Wild Rose on a not-matching basis. We can provide that to you as well. Sorry. I think \$1.3 million was international; \$4.7 million was domestic.

**Ms Notley:** Okay. Is that the same thing planned for?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yes.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Ms Notley.

I'll now move to Mr. Rodney. Would you indicate if you're going to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Rodney:** If the minister is okay with it, if we could go back and forth, that would be appreciated. Are you okay with that, Minister?

**Mr. Blackett:** I'm very glad to be able to do that for you.

**Mr. Rodney:** Excellent.

Minister, you've done a lot of great work on film. I know there are a lot of people that are just a little confused on where things are at with that, and I just wonder if we can use a chunk of our 10 minutes to clear up some of the confusion. I know that you've committed to and you've acted on supporting the film industry, but it has been mentioned by one other speaker that 2.0.3 illustrates the \$3 million decrease. Some say that that means that the province doesn't support the industry, but I've got a little experience in this, with 20 documentaries and books, and I guess that's why a bunch of people have written to me over the years.

Now, Minister, if you'll permit me, there's a very interested person who writes, I think, a fair question. If you'll permit me, it's on their behalf. They write:

The attached letter from the Alberta Association of Film and Television Unions (AAMPTU) was submitted to the Alberta Film Advisory Council (AFAC) on December 18 . . . and has yet to be implemented.

**Mr. Blackett:** December 18 of 2009?

**Mr. Rodney:** That's what it says here.

**Mr. Blackett:** And has yet to be implemented?

**Mr. Rodney:** Yeah. So it's a fair comment.

**Mr. Blackett:** No, it's not fair. That's three months.

**Mr. Rodney:** They're just drawing a reference. I'm just quoting what this person has said.

While other Provinces are increasing their funding for film and television, the government of Alberta has cut its film fund by 15%. Ironically B.C. increased its fund by 15% on the same day. Our province continues to ignore the fact that more than 500 person-years of employment were lost last year alone and it is the feeling that another 500 will be lost this year if this trend continues. A perfect example of this lack of funding affecting the film industry is that a film with a \$150 million budget, with a producer that has been here three times previously, decided against filming in Alberta just this last week.

Minister, as you know, they've got recommendations on AFDP funding streams, enhanced eligibility for key positions, regional bonus, and development. Now, I'm not asking you to comment on all this. I think it really boils down to this. You work really, really hard on making sure that people understand that Alberta is open for business when it comes to the film industry. What would you say, in general, in response to someone in this position? You and I and people around the table know and the person listening on *Hansard* knows that it's really a little more complicated than just a few numbers. What words of encouragement do you have for people in the industry about where you've been and where you're going? What kind of a future can folks look forward to in our province when it comes to film?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'd start by saying first of all that last year there was \$20 million in the film development fund, and people still didn't have work. So it's not the film development fund; it's the lack of work. Now, part of it, if they're honest – and I've talked to lots of Alberta producers. If you're talking about bringing in foreign films from L.A., that's one thing. If you're talking about indigenous production, which I'm also very concerned about with Canadian content at the mercy of everybody right now – nobody is speaking up for it – we need to get better scripts written. With better scripts you get better pitches. With better pitches your hit ratio becomes better. We don't have that. We've never had money in development. In December we announced that we have money that we've taken and we're going to put into that, into development. If you have a project, you can apply for development money. We've never had that before.

These are recommendations that came from these same groups, the same groups who asked us to increase the cap on it, the same groups who never mention a labour agreement. But you go outside of our province, and all of a sudden it's a big deal. It's like: okay, guys; if you're advising us, then why aren't you advising us on the stuff that people are telling you? That's what I've got a problem with. I spent a year and a half going out and trying to sing their praises. Then I get hit in the side by three film studio representatives from L.A. who said: there's no way I'm coming there; I'm not dealing with that.

It's not about film development money. Film development money you get approximately two months after production. If you have a tax credit, it's 18 months. You go and ask any producer whether

they want money two months after or 18 months after; they'll tell you they want the money. I mean, I've tried that fight. There's not an appetite for it.

I do agree with what the Member for Edmonton-Centre said before. We've got to look at ways of enticing people to contribute money for cultural programs and get money off the sidelines. They won't do it if they can't get a decent rate of return. In much the same way as with charitable organizations, that if you're giving money to them, you can get up to 20 per cent back. You should be able to get a 15 to 20 per cent return on your money invested in film, invested in the arts.

You know, people talk about it being bleak here. I had a meeting with the minister responsible for film and television from B.C. last week. Their numbers are horrible: half. Ontario: no better. How do we think we're going to trend? What are our numbers? They're probably about half as good. Is that good? No. Do we have to be more aggressive? Yes. Do we have to work together? Damn right we have to. I'm here to help them do that. But we have to live in the realities in which we live.

The other part of the deal is that there's a lot of money that goes into film development stuff. It goes to produce stuff that sits on the shelf, that will never be seen by anybody, and a significant amount of that. One thing we'll have to do is sit down with the industry and say: "How do we focus on excellence? How do we produce better things? How do we become more attractive?" We can't fund everything. We have to fund good projects. I know that's a tough decision. That's a tough question to ask. How do you adjudicate that? How do you deal with that? That's a good discussion to have because if we want to be successful – and I believe that as Albertans we can be – we've got to up our game.

You know, we don't act professionally. Our unions are hard-working – people from California will tell you that they're harder working than people in Quebec or Ontario or B.C. – with great skill, but to go and deal with their leaders, not so easy, and they're about to raise their rates.

**8:40**

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Minister. I really appreciate that on behalf of the person who wrote in, and I'm sure he'll let me know if he's completely satisfied or if he has more questions. I know he wants to work together with you, too.

I know I have a colleague who wants to ask questions about tax credits, and you've hinted at them, so I will go in a different direction. It's a subjective answer, and I'm not trying to nail you to the wall here. No. Really. As we know, this is very complicated, and these are complicated times. The \$16 million in funding: is it fair to call that sufficient in terms of keeping pace with the growth of the film and TV industries, attracting the industry to the province? You were just mentioning about how the other provinces are doing. Is \$16 million a pretty fair number to land on? Is it sufficient for these times and appropriate?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, I'll tell you this. Should we spend more money? Absolutely we should, but with the fiscal reality we are in – if the problem becomes six months from now that we have projects on the table and the only limitation is that our film development fund is going to get exhausted, then I have no problem going to the appropriate people and asking for that. That's not the problem right now. Let's not fixate on that number. Let's fixate on making sure we can actually use the \$16 million. I'm not so sure that that's going to be exhausted either. There are lots of great projects in talks, but they're just that. Until they're consummated, you know, they're just that.

**Mr. Rodney:** Understood. We have somewhat similar or related situations with the strategic tourism marketing commission and Travel Alberta when it comes to marketing and development and so on.

**Mr. Blackett:** Just on that point.

**Mr. Rodney:** Yes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Blackett:** That's where we realized in the last week in Vancouver how much we have to work together, Travel Alberta and tourism. We have to create cultural tourism. Film can be a huge piece of that. People love to come and see where that movie was shot or that location, that kind of stuff. I mean, that's stuff we've got to do to work together.

**Mr. Rodney:** Absolutely. Thank you for mentioning that. The issue is very dear to my heart and to others, too.

I think I have a few seconds left, do I, sir?

**The Acting Chair:** You've got 10 minutes.

**Mr. Rodney:** Ten minutes more?

**The Acting Chair:** Yeah.

**Mr. Rodney:** I thought we were just about out of time.

**The Acting Chair:** You're doing fine. You can be shorter if you like.

**Mr. Rodney:** Okay.

**Mr. Blackett:** Don't sing to us.

**Mr. Rodney:** I have sung in the Leg., but I'm not going to do it to you here. You are the minister. If you want to sing, you go right ahead.

The Alberta film development program. I've been asked before, and maybe you can just clarify for the record: is there still a shortfall, and if so, what's happening there?

**Mr. Blackett:** No shortfall and no backlog. We cleaned that up with the \$14 million we added in 2008 to the \$20 million, so there's no shortfall.

**Mr. Rodney:** For the hordes listening via *Hansard*, there's no negative impact, and any impression in that regard should be dispelled for good. Correct?

**Mr. Blackett:** I'd put a challenge out there: make the situation that we don't have enough money in the film development fund, and I'll go deal with that. That's a lot easier than to deal with what we're dealing with right now.

**Mr. Rodney:** I want to thank you, Minister. It's quite a night. I can't imagine what it's like being on the hot seat over there. Thanks for clarifying things, and I'll pass it back through the chair to the next speaker.

**The Acting Chair:** Edmonton-Centre, Laurie Blakeman, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to pick up where I left off. I had asked about what actions the ministry was taking for the anticipated effect of the cuts to the multiculturalism fund. The minister had responded and spoke for a while and seemed to be saying that there was a secretariat that would pick up some of the slack here. Can I just confirm that this secretariat would actually be funding these projects, or is this governance support or what exactly?

**Mr. Blackett:** What it is: the secretariat was for the not-for-profit sector. It wasn't for the multicultural education fund. But, like everywhere, when you get a 15 per cent cut, everybody is going to have to take a piece. The bigger picture is what we're trying to address with that secretariat getting the information. Which organizations should we be focusing on? What kind of services are we looking at? If there is a consistent need from a particular organization to get funding out of the education fund every year, then maybe we can help fund it in another way. Maybe we can get it from another area. Maybe we can utilize some other resources.

**Ms Blakeman:** Has the minister been able to do that, to take groups that have applied repeatedly to the multiculturalism fund and fund them from a different source?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, no. It's one group – and I can't remember their name – right here in Edmonton. For that one I think they were looking at \$40,000 or \$50,000. I said: you can get that out of CIP, and we can do that for you. But part of what we need to do is what we're talking about. We haven't looked at the cultural part of it. We probably need to look at more funding that goes into supporting what the education fund does. I've talked to the Premier about that, and now we have to find out exactly what our needs are. Then I will go and ask the Treasury Board for that. Your point before was that we made a commitment to the people that are most vulnerable. New immigrants and the aboriginal population, which is young and growing, are people that I think are vulnerable. But we don't know what we need to ask for yet. Hopefully, we'll figure that out pretty quickly.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. This is sort of a factual numbers series of questions. How many cases were opened by the Human Rights Commission in the previous year, how many cases were closed, how many were carried over, and, finally, how many are anticipated this year? I'm sure you'll have to get that to me in writing.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah, we'll get that to you.

**Ms Blakeman:** Are there any plans to address bullying in the workforce or to add workplace bullying to the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the human rights act?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, we looked at that when we came forward with the bill, but we were told by legal advisers in Justice and others that it's just too nebulous to be able to define what bullying is. But that's something we're looking at working on with Employment and Immigration to see if we can come up with some parameters that actually define that, and I think that should be part of occupational health and safety, that there should be some sort of definition as to when they cross that line. Even if it comes to the Human Rights Commission and we end up doing that, then at least we know what we're dealing with. Right now we get thousands of cases that really should be handled by Employment and Immigration, but they just send them over to us anyway. So until we have parameters, we're

just going to create more requests, and we won't be able to handle them very well.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Could we get a status report on the changes to the Human Rights Commission that came through Bill 44 last year? Is there anything that's outstanding? You've answered a number of questions, but is there anything that is unimplemented as a result of that act at this point?

**Mr. Blackett:** There are, and we'll get those to you, the main one being section 9 with respect to the schools and the opt-out clause, which will become effective September 1, I believe, of this year.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. And the rest of the questions about new intake workers and the reorganization . . .

**Mr. Blackett:** Right. And the director and that sort of stuff, yeah.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Sorry; this is going backwards a bit. I had received communications from a group in Jasper. This is back under the arts venue funding. There's a group in Jasper that has no publicly operated art space at all, at least nothing inside. They certainly have summer festivals which are outside. They're petitioning to have the old courthouse there, I think, turned into an art space. Is the minister aware of this application, and is he open to helping them in any way, shape, or form?

**Mr. Blackett:** I just became aware of it two weeks ago. Yeah, I'd be more than happy to sit with them.

**Ms Blakeman:** That's about my timing on it, too.

**Mr. Blackett:** So I will definitely meet with them. One of the tenets of our cultural policy is to build a capacity in communities. How can you do it if you don't have an indoor facility to be able to do that? Yeah, we'll do that, for sure.

8:50

**Ms Blakeman:** Good.

I just want to work my way through those items of the funding and who's funding what that appear in votes 3.0.10, 3.0.11, 3.0.12, and 3.0.13 on page 102 of the estimates budget. We have \$13,175,000 in support of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame. In looking at the government of Canada news release dated May 21, 2009, we've got them committing to \$15 million and \$10 million from the province and \$5 million from the city of Calgary. So for the three years of funding for this Sports Hall of Fame – and it does appear, actually, in those other line items – can you confirm: is this entire \$13,175,000 the supporting money from the federal government?

**Mr. Blackett:** Our commitment to this project is \$10 million, and the feds' total is \$15 million.

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes. And your \$10 million, is that what appears from last year's budget? In other words, how much of the \$13,175,000 is the province's and how much is the feds'?

**Mr. Blackett:** Last year, '08-09, it was \$2.4 million, and this current fiscal year it's \$7.6 million.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Why is it appearing in the budget as \$9.8 million?

**Mr. Blackett:** The feds' is \$2.2 million as well, which would mean . . .

**Ms Blakeman:** So included in the \$9.8 million is \$2.2 million of the federal money.

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct. And \$7.6 million from us.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. So the entire \$13 million, then, that's appearing in the budget is the federal money flow-through.

Okay. Let's go on to the Mount Royal Conservatory. Again, we're seeing \$10 million budgeted there. In a news release dated July 14, 2009, we see that Alberta is going to commit \$20 million and the feds will fund up to \$20 million, or one-third. So is this \$10 million provincial funding?

**Mr. Blackett:** All provincial.

**Ms Blakeman:** Completely provincial. Okay.

**Mr. Blackett:** The feds will pay theirs directly to the Mount Royal Conservatory.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. No federal money at all. Good.

Item 3.0.12 is the Citadel Theatre, and we know that that's all fed money because the province put in their money in '08.

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** And 3.0.13, the GO centre: now, that's \$14.8 million. The government of Canada news release in September of '09, joint funding agreement: Alberta's contribution, \$10 million, which was in '08-09. We can see that in the budget. So that would make this \$14.8 million all federal.

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** Good. Got that confirmed.

There are no changes in the funding for the community facility enhancement program, which is listed in 3.0.5. What is the processing time now on an application to the CFEP?

**Mr. Blackett:** Too long because we've got a tremendous increase in the amount of applications. One of the things we do now, that we took from the Wild Rose Foundation, is make quarterly decisions. I'll always say that it's too long because sometimes it took up to a year, and they still had no notification. Now, at least, we have to make decisions on those applications in a quarterly time frame and let them know. We are looking at changing the provisions to make them able to reapply, work online. We've gone through a few hiccups with the online system, but we expect that to be reduced.

**Ms Blakeman:** So that's four months, then; they should hear something from you within four months. Okay. And they will have an opportunity to reapply in the same fiscal year?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Now, would you say that it's oversubscribed at this point?

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. It has been and always will be.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Oversubscribed, the language as I understand it from a previous minister, means that there are more people that have actually been okayed for money than there actually is money.

**Mr. Blackett:** No.

**Ms Blakeman:** So on a three-year funding agreement they tended to steal from next year's Peter to pay this year's Paul. Is that still happening?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. Absolutely not.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. How many applicants are receiving the full amount of funding that they qualified for? And, therefore, how many are receiving a partial amount of what they qualified for? Has any of this funding been reallocated?

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll get back to you on the first two. Funding being reallocated to . . .

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, most of the pickup on the funding for the Wild Rose and the international, that \$6 million, came out of CIP. Did any of it come out of CFEP?

**Mr. Blackett:** No. It came out of CIP.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. So, again, the breakdown on the funding for CIP: how much of it went to the former Wild Rose recipients? I take it that's \$4.7 million out of the current CIP fund. Really, this meant, as I was predicting, that from last year's amount to this year's amount there's a \$6 million reduction from what was available for all groups to be applying for because now \$6 million of it is segregated out for the Wild Rose and international fund people.

**Mr. Blackett:** Actually, if you look at the money, we had almost \$6 million when we eliminated the municipalities' ability to come in and use CIP money because they have MSI money. That was, I think, close to \$2 million. When we limited the technology upgrades for schools from \$75,000 to \$50,000, I think that shaved off another \$1.2 million. The international travel was about \$800,000 that we saved by reducing it from \$75,000 to \$10,000. And we can do more of those things. In essence that money was being taken up by those organizations anyway, and frankly I don't think that was the intent of the program.

**Ms Blakeman:** So you've been able to recover about \$4 million by taking it back out of these other departments' areas, but \$6 million was reallocated, so we're still down by \$2 million.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. I will get you the list, but I think we came pretty close to that \$6 million, and we'll continue to do more.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. What was the reasoning for moving the horse breeding and renewal program to the Solicitor General?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, one of the things that I think we realized in government – that's the great thing about a recession; you actually have to go and start looking at things and making sense. Horse racing didn't fit in our department. It didn't have a lot in common with arts or heritage. I know that many times many people have said that. I mean, we have a tradition in horse racing.

It's the flow-through dollars that come from the tracks themselves and the machines, and it was going to the Solicitor General. He had part of the responsibility for it, so we might as well put it all in one bailiwick.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Can we get a listing of who the recipients are under 3.0.7, major fairs and exhibitions? Now, at one point

Edmonton Northlands and Stampede Park were also allocated out of that. I'm not sure if you rolled it all up. It's \$22 million in here, and my memory is that the last time I looked, they were each getting about \$9 million. That'd be \$18 million, which would leave \$4 million for the rest of the province. If I could get a list of each one and how they're funded for that.

**Mr. Blackett:** Sure.

**Ms Blakeman:** Also, are there any performance measurements available for that funding? I've been able to read the Northlands annual report to get a sense of whether they've accomplished what they said they'd set out to do, but I didn't find one particularly from Stampede Park, and I probably can't find any from the smaller ones. So how exactly are we judging the successes and the performance measurement for the money that's been distributed out of this particular account?

**Mr. Blackett:** We'll get back to you, but I will say that we need to do a better job of that.

**Ms Blakeman:** My understanding is that these are ag societies, and that's why they're receiving this money. So I guess the question is also: why are they being funded out of this department?

**Mr. Blackett:** Because I haven't had a chance to actually see them go somewhere else.

**Ms Blakeman:** Good luck on that.

**Mr. Blackett:** They need help, but I think there has to be a fundamental shift with them and others in realizing that we've got to find ways to sustain ourselves, that we can't just continue to ask, ask, ask. There are a lot of them in rural Alberta that are having some trouble. We didn't cut them to the level of some of the other groups because their very sustainability was threatened.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, maybe they'll turn up in ag next year.

Under the other initiatives you gave a list or indicated that the past years are listed on the website. I would like to know who is anticipated to receive funding or who's budgeted to receive funding under this initiative this year.

9:00

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sure you have a list, which you'll be providing.

**Mr. Blackett:** Yeah. That's easy to do. I should say that it's only the ones we made commitments on based on multiple-year requests. For instance, we have the 2012 world junior hockey tournament, which is paid out over three years. We'll have those, but we'll give you what we have in commitments thus far.

**Ms Blakeman:** And the unallocated money is up to the discretion of the minister as to how he chooses to spend that in the year?

**Mr. Blackett:** Correct.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Could you tell me why other initiatives has a four-year funding agreement with the Canada West Foundation? I went to their annual reports to find out what they were using that money for, and they don't acknowledge receipt of it. I'd be

interested in knowing why we're funding the Canada West Foundation out of the Culture and Community Spirit budget – to do what? – under an other initiatives venture.

**Mr. Blackett:** Okay. I'll get you that.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm just going to have so much paper. It'll be so much fun. Gosh.

As we move into the voluntary stuff, I am particularly interested in capacity building. The minister had talked about the secretariat and some of the things he was hoping to do under that. Is there anything – I mean, these organizations have dealt with a lot of cuts. They've had, you know, less fundraising. If they had endowment funds, they made less off that. They were already behind in the staffing and services they were trying to provide, because of the recession. Now they're having their operating grants cut, so the NGO sector is in a very tough spot, and I would argue they've been quite good at finding administrative efficiencies. What are the innovations that the government is looking at to build capacity in this sector?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, with the secretariat I use the analogy of teaching people to fish instead of providing fish. When I went on these consultations, it was a lot different than the response I was getting from our usual advisory groups, and we wanted to get out there and find out what actually makes sense in Grande Prairie or Medicine Hat versus what makes sense here in Edmonton. There was a multitude of different things that we needed to work on, but they need information. We just have no data. We rely on StatsCan data, but it's seven or eight years old. It's very hard to make decisions on where we should be going forward, and the sectors themselves don't know. They wanted statistics to be able to tell their story better so that they can help market themselves to the prospective corporate or individual donors. They want help in being able to reach out and find out information about government services right across the board.

I'm chair of a 12-person cabinet committee. We look at the sector as a whole, the service sector. That would include both education departments, housing, seniors, Service Alberta, the Justice department, Solicitor General, health to a limited extent. We look at all the grants that we have, because that's \$1.2 billion. If we haven't looked at those programs for 10 years, then we know: how could they possibly be current in today's world? That's a lot of money, but there's never been a real co-ordination of where it went and how many different people it went to or didn't go to.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Our next questioner will be Calgary-Montrose, Manmeet Bhullar, please.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good evening, Minister. I trust you're having as much fun here as you did at the Olympics.

**Mr. Blackett:** Actually, I think this is a really good thing because, you know – I'm not kidding – there are things we miss. There are definitely things we miss. Part of going and having these dialogues is to go out there and listen to people who have ideas. We've got to have the courage to say we've made mistakes sometimes, ask for advice and get some. There have been some good points made, and some of those ones we'll look at seeing how we can implement, but to have a discussion about it in a civilized sitting is a good thing, a good thing for those stakeholders to know that they're actually being talked about.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Well, yes, Minister. I think it's a good thing that we live in a western democracy that facilitates this sort of transparency, openness, and accountability. A reflection on various parts of the world would or should, at least, deem someone to feel very lucky for simply being born here, I think. I give thanks on a continual basis for giving my parents the wisdom and the courage to immigrate to this great country.

With that, I'll briefly venture into human rights. I, sir, have had folks on both sides of the spectrum, I guess, if you want to call it such, in my office, some that say, "I'm being taken there for no good reason," and others that say, "I have good reason to take somebody there, and I've filed a complaint." Actually, one case I believe was over three years ago, and this matter is still unresolved.

Now, I guess that since we treat this as a quasi-judicial body, I will not get into the details of the cases, but I'll take this opportunity to ask you how the changes that you have made procedurally will help both people, as I said, one from the side that says, "Somebody filed a false complaint against me," and the other person who says, "I've got a legitimate complaint, and it's taken years for it to be addressed." Very briefly, Minister, if you could on that.

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, the first one, the one that's taken lots of years is because there's been a backlog, and the new addition of staff is to be able to resolve some of those.

Secondly, for the person who says – who says – that they were there, that's what the system is there for. If it's a frivolous case like, you know, 29,100 are, it will never go anywhere. If it's got merit, like probably up to 2,000 have, but really only 900 actually get through the process, that's what will happen. We just need to make sure that we do it in an impartial way so that person who feels they were wrongly accused has a chance to prove that they were wrongly accused and for the person that feels that they should be there and have a case, they have a chance to bring that case forward as well.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you. I think that in Canada and the western world we deem human rights to be one thing, but in conversation with somebody who spent some time in a not so pleasant situation overseas, they deem human rights to be a completely different issue altogether. Anyway, I use this opportunity just to reflect on the fact that we are so blessed to have a society with the rule of law.

I'll also use this opportunity to make the observation that, unfortunately, in our society people use issues like human rights as mechanisms to pit one group against another to advance what I call polarizing politics. I think that's quite unfortunate when we live in a society where folks try to say that the rights attributed to one group are going to limit the rights attributed to another. I think that in a fair and just society everybody has equal rights, and sometimes we need to tweak the system to make sure application of those laws ensures that everybody has equal application of the laws as well. So thank you for making those procedural changes, Minister.

I will then move a little bit over to a completely different topic altogether.

**9:10**

**Mr. Blackett:** Right. If I could comment just a little bit on that. We make those changes, but what we need to do is stand up and actually talk about it so that people actually walk the walk. I was in Vancouver last weekend, and I went to the Pride pavilion at Whistler. It's not something every Conservative goes and does. They were happy to have me; I was happy to be there. We had a discussion. You know, you get past the issues of our sexual orientation, and we realize we're just people. Whether you're gay or you're straight, your problems with your partner are no different. Sometimes you love them, and sometimes you don't.

What we have to do is remember that we have more in common with people than we have differences, and I think Alberta is good at that. I don't think we do enough about saying that. It doesn't matter what political stripe you're from; we should all be loudly talking about equality and not just doing it one day of the year or a couple of days a year when a particular occasion arises. That's a commitment I'll try to do in the next year.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Absolutely, Minister. Thank you for your personal reflection there.

Being a very visible individual growing up in Calgary in the 1980s, somebody not so long ago asked me about my experience. My response was always that it was fine. Then one day I actually thought of my experience going through elementary and junior high school, and for some reason I woke up and realized it was not fine. It was not normal to go to school and to have somebody insult you because of the way you looked. It was not normal and it should never be normal to go to school and know that these four or five people are going to continuously try to physically rip something off your head. That's not normal. That's not acceptable. It took some time for me to actually admit that that happened, and, you know, that was quite interesting.

Regardless, we live in a profound province. I've visited many aspects of this province throughout the past nearly two years, and I've been greeted with smiles on more occasions than not. We have had some strange occurrences. I have met some very interesting characters, to say the least.

I will also take this opportunity to talk very briefly, and then get back to the budget, about an idea and a principle that I've talked about at great length over the last 10 or so years of my life, and that's integration, saying that without integration we are no stronger in our diversity. We're no stronger in our diversity as a province and as a nation unless we integrate, unless we really beyond a surface level get to know one another, get to see one another for our true human form and are willing to put these polarizing differences and these external differences aside.

Maybe, sir, I will ask this: what policies in your department do you feel support integrating folks into our Canadian mosaic? Now, I use the word "integrating" and not "assimilating." I mean, I don't speak of assimilation; I speak of integration where I myself am a proud Canadian nationalist. Canada is my only nationalistic identity, yet my religious identity is clearly Sikh. How do you think your department works in this area at present, and how can we perhaps build on this in the future?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, one of the things we've worked on in the last year is that we've talked about collaboration and especially the not-for-profit sector and the arts communities, too. How do you share resources, and how do you work together? It doesn't always have to be physically moving into the same building. Is there a way to get one accountant to work for five different organizations and pool your money? How do we work with other departments? For instance, every not-for-profit has to spend between \$10,000 and \$25,000, some of them more, every year to have their books audited. How do we as government work to help make that something that can be reduced? What we're doing is giving out funding in our grants, but a chunk of that is eaten up by the necessity that we create of red tape that is just operating costs for those organizations.

We talked about, especially in Edmonton and Calgary, when we sat down with the not-for-profit sector: why are we setting up a parallel structure to deal with aboriginal groups or various ethnic groups? If Big Brothers and Big Sisters in Calgary, for instance, who I've worked with for a lot of years, are great at mentoring, why



don't we just help encourage more outreach into those different communities than going and creating another not-for-profit who doesn't have the experience or the capability to go and reach that group? So it's that, and it's policy. In our discussions we know we have to do that.

Now, the next step is: how do we actually do that? We have to look at creating incentives for people to collaborate without punishing people, those that don't need to or that for whatever reason it doesn't work for them. When you have 140 organizations in Calgary that are focused on housing for not-for-profits, you've got a problem. We've got 5,600 that we fund out of government out of 19,000. Every time that we change the school playground legislation or the rules from the municipality, we've got to create new playgrounds and we've got to create a new not-for-profit. Every time we do a technology upgrade in school, we create a new not-for-profit. Once you fund them, you can't kill them.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Well, collaboration is most definitely the theme that I've heard you talk about before, so I support you in your pursuits to further increase collaboration.

I'm going to take this opportunity to advance an idea that I guess is related to a thought process that has kind of been in my head for the last 24 or 48 hours; namely, just because of the company I've been blessed to have had over the last couple of days. I think that in our society, Minister, we place great emphasis on medals, on cups: the Stanley Cup and the Grey Cup and gold, silver, and bronze medals. We place great emphasis on this stuff. We place great emphasis on the movie stars on TV, on the performers on the stage. There are so many beautiful unsung heroes that truly are advocates for the true values of our nation and our province. I speak of somebody like Amanda Lindhout, who was held hostage in Somalia for 15 months, who went to Somalia because she saw an injustice and said: I want to in my own humble way bring some light to the injustices that are taking place there.

When we look at fostering a Spirit of Alberta, Minister, how can we encompass those sorts of people and those sorts of ideals and those sorts of pursuits in the Alberta spirit? How can we see to it that our young people don't just want to be on stage and be on TV and be famous, but they want to act on their convictions to really make the world a more profound place? You know, I see this feeling, because you're the minister responsible for community spirit and the Spirit of Alberta, and I think this is such an important aspect of the spirit of our province and our nation that really doesn't receive the sort of attention that we need it to.

I'm completely deviating from all the fiscal-related questions I had, but you know, I think this is a conversation that doesn't happen often enough, so I'll take this opportunity to have it with you.

**Mr. Blakett:** Yeah. It's an area that needs to be addressed amongst a multitude of things that our department encompasses. I mean, we touch 3 and a half million people. Almost every single Albertan somehow, one way or another, touches our department and we touch them. How do we foster that? How do we encourage them to volunteer? I said to the sector that I think one of the things that we miss is that we're working on a paradigm from 15, 20 years ago. You know, in Edmonton I think the average age is around 40. In Calgary it's under 40. In my constituency it's under 35. Lots of people with young kids. They can't volunteer at that rate when they run their kids to ballet class and hockey and all that other stuff, but they want to participate. Right now when we ask for volunteers, it's the traditional. There's no room for the family to come and volunteer or very little. I think that's the part that we have to touch on.

Arts Days helped do some of that. Not only did it give a stage for all our artists, whether professional or amateur – by the way, we're the only province that funds amateur artists – but we incorporated the schools, so we had 88 schools, and we had 140 libraries that participated. It reached out to different people in the community. The libraries help the people with lower income levels. They also help new immigrants because that's where they go to get a lot of their information. That's where they tend to congregate. Schools educating kids to help educate their parents.

We've got to do more of that. We've got to work with the Minister of Education and come up with these programs and realize it's 2010, not 1990, and do that. So let's have a bigger discussion because it's an important one.

9:20

**Mr. Bhullar:** Absolutely. I'm looking at the human rights education and multiculturalism fund, and I see that as being a very, I guess, adequate place to have this discussion of how we want to advance human rights.

**Mr. Blakett:** I think that's a starting point, but like I said before, I think we need more of a cultural department that has that as a part of it, has the festivals associated with it, not to segregate anything but to actually recognize that we've got diversity. We talk about it, but there's no one place that you can go except that education fund, and that's not necessarily what it was meant for. So we're stretching it in so many different ways.

Really, I think, as I said before, we've got to be able to identify what we need, and then we've got to go and ask for the money. Because, you know, we could take another \$2 million, just throwing a number out there, and we could do powerful things, but it is not all about human rights. There are a whole lot of other positive things that we can do for people in those communities. We should have the northeast and the northwest have an exchange through schools so that we get to learn more about one another. There are a lot of things that don't cost money. They just cost time and inclination and showing that you give a darn.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Absolutely, and perhaps just thinking outside the box. I know that you're more than prepared to do that. Now, on the point of thinking outside the box, in my short time here so far as a government MLA I've seen how stakeholders are so very important in any given area. I've seen how everybody comes together and says: "Yes, I want that. I want that hope. I want that vision. That's where we want to go." But they also say: "Don't touch my part of the pie. Don't make me change any part of my actions."

Minister, you've talked a few times about unions. Can you just clarify for me what role they've been playing in the film industry?

**Mr. Blakett:** The unions and guilds represent the people that are the lifeline of making a film. It's all the production crew. It's your grips. It's your cameramen. It's your set people, your set design people, the sound technicians. All of those people are valuable. It's nothing against the union because that would be against the people, and that's not what we're trying to do. All we're trying to do is to be more competitive, and if we get an agreement like B.C. has or Ontario has, then we check that one off. We're trying to knock off things so that we can give them a reason to come to us, not a reason not to come to us. That one is just a problem right now, but I think we can deal with it.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Okay. Then very quickly, because I think I'm probably running out of time, you talked about streamlining the

grant processes for nonprofits, and that's something I think is absolutely wonderful because nonprofits should be out there serving the people and not having to hire staff and allocate so many resources just to do fund development or government relations and the like. So I want to applaud you for your efforts in that respect. Anything we can do to support nonprofits in being able to devote more and more of their time, effort, and energy to serving the people I think is absolutely wonderful.

Now, there is a certain part of the world . . . [Mr. Bhullar's speaking time expired]

**The Acting Chair:** I'm sorry, Calgary-Montrose, but I have to interrupt you.

The last six minutes are for Ms Blakeman from Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I'm actually just going to read a bunch of questions into the record because I don't think we'll have time for exchange. That might give somebody else a chance to get in if I can do this fast enough. A couple of things, though. There is a great deal of concern from the NGO sector and the arts community around the casino review and how that could affect groups that are primarily found in urban centres. What input has the minister had on this review, and what contingency plans are in place if this does affect them? For a certain number of people this could be significant funding.

Next question. The minister had indicated that he had talked to his colleague the Minister of Education about an increased arts curriculum. I'm wondering if there's been any actual measurable progress on that and whether there had been any support. Was Education willing to actually fund that change or facilitate it in some way? Just saying it will happen without accounting for in-service and additional time in the classroom and resources: it's not going to happen.

Next question. What are the plans for the Legislature Grounds renewal projects, and what involvement does the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit have working with the Department of Infrastructure on these various changes, including the Centennial Plaza project?

Next question. Alberta magazines are bringing up the point that less than 6 per cent of them qualify for funding because there is a requirement for a cultural aspect. That does not occur in most other jurisdictions. Specifically, I looked at Ontario and Manitoba. Is the minister considering changes to this criteria so that we could have more support for Alberta magazines, or is that not being considered given that we're in a cutback mode? Could it be considered in the future?

Finally, the minister has repeatedly referred to unions, particularly IATSE, in conjunction with the funding and the situation and the competitiveness of film in Alberta versus other places. What I think I hear the minister saying is that he believes that there should be an agreement from the craftspeople and the artists and the technicians to take less money and that somehow this would solve the problem.

The minister has some time to respond to me, so I would look for some clarifications about that because I'm getting a little concerned. I've heard him go at it a couple of times.

The last thing is that there was film development and script development money. There was an entire organization called the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, which was funded by the same government he belongs to and was shut down in 1994. There was also, during the '80s, a federal film tax credit which was enhanced. I think people got almost double credit. If you put money in, you were getting a higher percentage than what you put in as a way of trying to get individuals to invest in the film industry in Canada. So there are a couple of examples out there that he could go to as he looks to improve our film competitiveness here in Alberta.

Thank you.

**Mr. Blackett:** I can run them off real quick. Casino. I've had input. I'm not sure that the new minister is going to go forward with those. My biggest concern is that 980,000 man-hours are used by organizations to staff those casinos, 980,000 hours that could be utilized in their community or in their own not-for-profit.

In terms of Education nothing has been committed with the budget the way it is, but we'll pursue that.

Magazines. Yeah, that's definitely something on the horizon along with songwriting and book publishing that we need to address in a better fashion.

Unions and guilds. I'm not for a second saying that they should be taking any less. They're going to have an increase. They're asking for an increase now. I don't think that's a problem because I think they're a little cheaper than in other jurisdictions, and everybody should get a fair dollar. All I'm saying is: let's just come to an agreement with the producers, whatever that is, so you can live with it, they can live with it, and it's not an impediment for us.

The CFTPA came forward, IATSE came forward, and now I'm hearing that they're reluctant to do it. I'm not saying what it should be. I don't tend to tell them how to run their business. I'm just saying: you guys need to get together at the table and work something out if you want to help yourselves.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

We are so awfully close that I know the buzzer is going to ring if I ask. I'm sorry, Edmonton-Decore, but you won't even get a question out and we're going to be out of time.

Again, I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise that the committee has run out of time allotted. The business is concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that you're scheduled to meet next on Tuesday, February 23, to consider the estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:30 p.m.]



