



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Executive Council
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 20, 2014
10 a.m.

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The 28th Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Ministry of Executive Council
Hon. Dave Hancock, QC, Deputy Premier
Peter Watson, Deputy Minister

10 a.m.

Thursday, March 20, 2014

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

**Ministry of Executive Council
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Welcome. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome all of you to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. Welcome to the Deputy Premier and his staff. The committee has under consideration the estimates of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

I would like to ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves for the record, and, Deputy Premier, when we get to you, would you please introduce your staff? I'm Moe Amery, MLA for Calgary-East and chair of this committee.

Mr. Fox: I'm Rod Fox, MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka and vice-chair of this committee.

Mr. Rogers: George Rogers, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. McDonald: Everett McDonald, MLA, Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Ms Kubinec: Maureen Kubinec, MLA, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Dorward: My name is David Dorward. Welcome, everybody. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Hancock: Dave Hancock, Deputy Premier, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud. I'm bringing forward the estimates on behalf of the Premier's office this morning with Peter Watson, who's the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, and Andrew Sharman, deputy clerk of Executive Council.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mrs. Sarich: Good morning and welcome. Janice Sarich, MLA, Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Anglin: Joe Anglin, MLA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Stier: Pat Stier, MLA, Livingstone-Macleod.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, MLA, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Quadri: Sohail Quadri, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Barnes: Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Do we have anybody online? Not yet.

Well, thank you very much. Please note, ladies and gentlemen, that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we would ask that BlackBerrys and iPhones be turned off or set to silent or vibrate and not placed on the table as they may interfere with the audiofeed.

Hon. members, as you know, the Assembly approved amendments to the standing orders that impact consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for Executive Council, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation for a two-hour meeting.

As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister may make opening comments not to exceed seven minutes. For the 40 minutes to follow, members of the Official Opposition, the Wildrose, and the minister may speak. For the next 14 minutes the members of the third party, the Alberta Liberals, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 14 minutes the members of the fourth party, the NDs, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 14 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Legislative Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 14 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak, and for the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time.

The chair acknowledges that this is a new procedure, and if members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair or the committee clerk about the process.

Two hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of Executive Council. Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may also participate. Ministry officials may be present, and at the direction of the minister officials from the ministry may address the committee. Members' staff may be present and, space permitting, may sit at the table or behind their members along the committee room wall. Members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, Executive Council estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at noon sharp.

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

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 16, 2014.

With this, ladies and gentlemen, I would like now to invite the hon. Deputy Premier and minister representing Executive Council to begin with his opening remarks.

Minister, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to say how humbled and privileged I am to appear before the committee to discuss the 2014-15 Executive Council estimates and the 2014-17 business plan. As I indicated earlier, I'm joined today by Peter Watson, Deputy Minister of Executive Council, and Andrew Sharman, deputy clerk of Executive Council. I want to say on the record in here what a privilege it is and has been to work with the leaders of our civil service, the people who actually head up the work for government on a day-to-day basis and do such a fine job with their team in doing so.

It was a challenging year in our province as we dealt with the largest natural disaster our province has ever had, the devastating flood that hit our southern Alberta communities last spring, but I

want to reiterate how proud I am of the public service, including Executive Council, of how they came together as part of a large government team to support Albertans affected. It was incredible. I was there on the ground in my role as minister, and we had people, civil servants, who gave up their July long weekend, who gave up their time, who drove from all over the province to be a part of the team on the ground.

As many of you have heard, read, or seen, our Budget 2014 is the next step in the government's building Alberta plan, our long-term commitment to a strong, healthy, and prosperous Alberta today and for the future. Our government is focused on three priorities that Albertans told us were very important. They are investing in families and communities, opening new markets for Alberta's products, and ensuring that government lives within its means.

We've made tremendous progress. Following on our commitments to build and modernize schools, bring health closer to home for Albertans, and invest in vital infrastructure like the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads and the twinning of highway 63, now we take the next step forward, providing the services and infrastructure that Albertans rely on, managing taxpayers' dollars wisely, and finding new customers and fairer prices for our products to support our growing province.

With that in mind, I'd like to begin an overview of Budget 2014's allocation for Executive Council. Overall, the Executive Council allocation is \$48.4 million, an increase of \$2.2 million from the 2013-14 forecast. Over \$1 million of this increase is funding for inflationary pressures like employee contribution rate changes and standard, in-range salary adjustments. This is consistent with the approach for all ministries. There is also an increase of \$300,000 for our correspondence unit and \$420,000 for the protocol office.

Regarding the correspondence unit, I'll say that it's important that we do everything we can to make sure Albertans have accurate information about the work that government is doing. Whether they have questions about the disaster recovery program funding, the budget, or new schools, we want to make sure that Albertans get answers as quickly as possible. This summer it became clear that response times were too long. In one month we received nearly 1,300 – that's 1,300 – individual pieces of correspondence on top of the countless form letters. Simply put, people weren't getting the answers that they needed fast enough, so we had to make changes to respect the concerns of Albertans and improve response times.

I'll point out that some of the questions we receive in the correspondence office are detailed and complex and require a comprehensive response that requires extensive research and co-ordination among multiple departments. When Albertans take the time to share information with us or ask a question, they deserve the courtesy of a timely and accurate response, and we're taking steps to ensure that we can deliver this.

As I mentioned, there's also an increase for the protocol office. This is something we need to do as Albertans to attract key decision-makers and investors to our province and grow our markets. It's very important work for Alberta.

I'd like to take a moment to review Executive Council's priorities as outlined in the business plan. Executive Council includes offices in the Legislature and McDougall Centre in Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, the policy co-ordination office, the Public Affairs Bureau, the Regulatory Review Secretariat, the Agency Governance Secretariat and protocol office, administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, and corporate human resources.

Our 2014-17 business plan lays out several priority initiatives for Executive Council, including working more effectively across departments to provide clear, cohesive, and effective public policy, strengthening the policy capacity of the Alberta public service, working collaboratively with ministries to improve the quality of Alberta's regulatory systems, ensuring co-ordinated and effective two-way communication and engagement with Albertans, and promoting Alberta at home and abroad as a great place to live, learn, do business, and visit.

10:10

One theme I think you will see throughout Executive Council is change in how government operates. No longer are we a collection of ministries acting independently; we are one government in service of one client, the people of Alberta. Executive Council staff facilitate collaboration on crossgovernment work in ensuring that multiple sides of an issue or policy are given due consideration, and they ensure that ministries receive co-ordinated support and analysis on initiatives and regulations to help them stay aligned with Albertans' priorities.

The transformation of the Public Affairs Bureau is part of this evolution. Just as in other government functions, we're building a team focused on Albertans' priorities and facilitating meaningful engagement with primary stakeholders. I would note that we're accomplishing this with the same number of FTEs as before.

These are just a few highlights of the work that's taking place through Executive Council.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chairman, and I can take questions from committee members. I would say at the outset that given that I am only now being familiar with these estimates, I would prefer that we hear the questions first – and I'll respond – rather than going back and forth, to give time for us to consult.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

I would like to ask Mr. Mason and Mr. Luan and Mr. Lemke to introduce themselves for the record.

Mr. Lemke: Ken Lemke, Stony Plain.

Mr. Luan: Jason Luan, MLA, Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, MLA, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Chair: Anybody else? Yes, please.

Mr. Rowe: Bruce Rowe, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all hon. members to make sure that your questions are really focused on the budget estimates of the Executive Council, that we have before us today, for the fiscal year 2014-15. Please also refrain from mentioning the names of any political party.

Now we'll move to the Wildrose opposition, and you have 40 minutes, Mr. Anglin.

Mr. Anglin: Just as a point of clarification, we have 40 minutes, but we're breaking these out into blocks. Am I correct on that?

The Chair: Yes. Out of 20 minutes.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. Twenty minutes. So it's 10 and 10.

The Chair: Yes, 10 and 10. Would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Anglin: No. I like what the minister said. I will take 10 minutes and then give him 10 minutes to respond. These are unique circumstances, so I'm quite comfortable with that.

The Chair: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister, and I do realize the unique circumstances. If you can't provide an answer right at this moment, if you could provide it in writing and submit it to this committee, that would suffice as long as we can get it in, hopefully, before the budget is actually passed. That would be good.

Mr. Hancock: I have an excellent team of people here. I'm sure we'll be able to answer your questions.

Mr. Anglin: I thought you would. On page 94, the operational spending that we're going to be voting on, particularly line 1.1, the office of the Premier and the Executive Council: now, we have a budget there of \$13 million. Can you break that down for us, please? In other words, how much is allocated to which office? For instance, you have the Premier's office, and then, of course, you have the deputy and so on and so forth. If you could provide a breakdown of how much is budgeted per office.

I believe you mentioned it in your opening statement. It was reported in the *Edmonton Journal* that there was a \$300,000 increase in the Premier's office budget, and that was for correspondence. I understand the complexities of what you mentioned, but what I'm more interested in is: how much of that is for staff? How much of that is for, particularly, salaries versus, say, the other incidental expenses? What we're looking for on that question is, again, another breakdown on how this money is budgeted.

Now, in the same report there was a report that there was \$900,000 allocated for hospitality, which would be in that I call it \$13 million, but realistically it's listed in line 1.1 as \$12,838,000. This \$900,000 was reported for hospitality in contractual agreements. That came out of that same *Edmonton Journal* report. What I'd like to get is a breakdown of that budgeted item also. How did that get allocated? That's a sizable sum.

Now, going on to section 2.1 on the same page, there's another \$13 million budgeted for the Public Affairs Bureau for this next year coming. I'm curious on the duties of the Public Affairs Bureau and how that correlates to the various press secretaries that each of the ministries employs. There's a crossover of various responsibilities; it's actually listed in the business plan dealing with the co-ordination. I'm trying to get a handle on how this money is allocated and where the lines are drawn between the co-ordination of the other ministries and their press secretaries. A question we have for this is: some of these duties that we see from the Public Affairs Bureau, are they joint duties? In other words, are the other press secretaries doing the same thing in some situations? Is there a shared responsibility? As we try to track this budget from a budgeted to an actual performance, it's difficult, certainly, for the opposition, without the use of freedom of information requests, to try to figure out where that money got spent and how to evaluate whether it was spent efficiently or not.

On page 43 of the government business plan goal 2.5 has to do with crisis communications in times of emergency. Now, on this Public Affairs Bureau budget of \$13 million what we've noticed is that, as a result of the flood, there's been sole sourcing of communications to Navigator. Interestingly enough, it was a former PC campaign manager. We're interested in how much of that money is allocated for this contract. Or does that get allocated from some other source? Where does that fit into this budget? Clearly, this

would be a responsibility of the Public Affairs Bureau. [interjection] A point of order?

The Chair: No. Go ahead, Joe.

Mr. Anglin: I thought I was being good so far.

What I'm looking at, moving forward on this budget: is the Public Affairs Bureau planning on allocating money to more consultants? Can we expect other sole-source contracts to come out, or can we expect that other contracts will be put out for tender? What should we expect here, dealing with this \$13 million that's being budgeted? Then the real question, and it's a question that even the public is asking: is \$13 million enough for a communications office? It's a valid question. You know, it's one thing to say that this is a large figure, but without the breakdown do we know if we're getting good value? Clearly, I know someone in this room is probably going to say that we're getting good value, but we want to see it in line items or in the books so we can measure that good value.

Let's take a look at some of the value measurements as they exist. That would be on your performance measure 2(a). It talks about public satisfaction with government communications. Under 2(a) basically what we're seeing here is that it shows results for 2012-2013 at 64 per cent. Now, I would view that as a low result. I'd be interested in your opinion on that, whether you consider that low. Is that normal, or would you consider that high? I just want to emphasize that I would consider it low. Can you explain this satisfaction report here? How is this Executive Council going to address that? What is the plan, going forward with this current budget, to improve that number? As you see, going forward the number does rise to 71 per cent, but going out further, it just stays at 71 per cent. Is that a long-term sort of final objective, that 71 per cent or better is sufficient? There's no goal set to go better than that. I'm trying to get a handle on the number, dealing with satisfaction. That goes back, of course, to the \$13 million. Is it enough to do the job, or is it too much?

10:20

The Chair: Mr. Anglin, you have two minutes.

Mr. Anglin: I only need a 30-second notice, and I can wrap up my last question.

The Chair: Okay. Great.

Mr. Anglin: Goal 2.4 is about delivering government information to Albertans. It mentions advertising, and as I understand it, the Public Affairs Bureau is primarily responsible for buying and contracting out that advertising. Can we get a breakdown, and can you tell us how much the government has spent on advertising and what the plan is going forward on this budget for spending on advertising? Is it up? Is it down? One of the things that is missing in your performance measures, depending on how much money is really allocated to advertising out of this budget: is the campaign working? How do we know that you're getting the result that you're intending to get? I would assume that there are various advertising campaigns, not just one. I was wondering if we could get a list of the projected campaigns this budget is going to fund, recognizing the fact that there will be ongoing situations where a new campaign pops up as a direct result of whatever is the political issue of the day. Clearly, we should be able to have something to track this by.

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Mr. Anglin: One of the things that I was hoping to find from your office is: of the campaigns that were undertaken, can you give us an itemized list of what was more expensive, what was less expensive, and what was the performance of each so that we have an understanding of how this is working for the government?

What I'll do is stop here and pick up when I come back.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Mr. Anglin.

Mr. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. The first piece was with respect to the office of the Premier, Executive Council estimates and the breakdown of what offices run. There are 99 staff in the office of the Premier, Executive Council. There are 15 in the Edmonton office, four in the Calgary office, nine in the correspondence unit, eight in communications support, 10 in the deputy minister's and cabinet co-ordination office, 17 in the policy co-ordination office, five providing support to the regulatory reform secretariat, two providing support to the Agency Governance Secretariat, nine in protocol, five in administrative support and communications support for the Lieutenant Governor, and 15 providing corporate services to Executive Council and the bureau, including human resources, finance, administration, business planning and annual reports, records management, FOIP, and IT support and development. There's a wide range of services provided out of that \$13 million budget.

The question about \$300,000 for correspondence and the question about what that does: essentially, that is all encapsulated – and one of my colleagues here will correct me if I'm wrong – in four FTEs to add value to the correspondence unit, really to shorten the time so that people get responses more quickly.

The \$900,000 that you talked about in protocol is not actually all protocol; \$420,000 is protocol. Additional staffing resources support a more proactive and expanded visit process. As I've answered in the House before, we do a lot of work going out to other parts of the world to sell our products, to provide open doors for business in Alberta to connect with the rest of the world. But it's also important to get the rest of the world to come and actually see. There are a lot of images that go out there about what we're doing in this province. What we really find effective is when people actually come and see this province and see the oil sands and see what's actually happening. That makes the biggest impact on their understanding of how well we're actually doing. That budget will help to do that.

The remainder is a \$300,000 reallocation from operating to capital to cover the development of a new electronic document distribution system for cabinet committees. We're going, hopefully, paperless. There's been the development of that process. And \$200,000 covers inflationary pressures like employer contribution rate changes, standard in-range salary adjustments, the rate changes to the pension plans, and those sorts of pieces. That would cover the numbers you're talking about.

With respect to the Public Affairs Bureau how are the dollars allocated, and where is the line drawn? Essentially, press secretaries and communications staff in departments are paid for in the department budgets. The Public Affairs Bureau provides the co-ordination of communication across government, the alignment of communications, the budget for all communications. It also provides, as was noted in your comments, an advertising piece. The breakdown, essentially, is that professional communications staff . . . [interjection] Okay. The 44 professional communications staff seconded to ministries who manage the planning and implementation of communication initiatives are paid for out of this budget.

There are three staff in the PAB's deputy chief's office; 44 staff develop communications for the long-term strategic plan, priority initiatives, co-ordinate government communications during public emergencies, support internal government communications, provide website management, media monitoring, news release distribution, news conferences, all that sort of stuff. There's a breakdown of about 50-50. Fifty per cent are seconded to departments; 50 per cent are within the Public Affairs Bureau itself doing co-ordination work. They provide technical work for communication and manage the government websites as well.

The sole-source contract to Navigator in this year's budget? I don't think so. I think it was in last year's budget, so that's a Public Accounts question, essentially. Sole sourcing is not used that often, but it can be used where you're looking for a particular piece of talent or for a particular job. You'll recall that during the flood, that came up very suddenly. It was all hands on deck, essentially, and I believe that it was in four different circumstances that there were sole-source contracts that went out to supplement the work that was being done by the public service in that area. But those contracts were part of last year's spending.

Is \$13 million enough for communication? Well, that's in the eye of the beholder.

In terms of value measurements, the target of 71 per cent for public satisfaction with government. Last year the overall satisfaction rate, as is noted in there, was 64 per cent. The 71 per cent may seem low in relation to other targets, but if you look across the country, you can see that ratings above 70 per cent for public satisfaction with government communications are actually quite rare. It's a tough job, so 70 per cent is actually a very strong target in that area. However, I would say that satisfaction with the Internet home page was 86 per cent. The target was 90 per cent. The satisfaction level of government clients with communication services provided by the bureau was 92 per cent. Targets for existing performance measures are considered to be very aggressive, and the bureau has come very close to achieving them. We look, of course, for ways to continue to increase those ratings because communication with the public is absolutely a very important part of government, and the \$13 million that's in that budget is probably a small price to pay for ensuring that Albertans and their government have strong communications with each other.

The 2.4 item, advertising. We anticipate that approximately \$9 million will be spent in 2014-15. That's down from the \$11 million that was spent in '13-14. Some of the recent campaigns included relief and recovery information following the unprecedented flooding, the mandatory warranties for new homes, traffic safety such as impaired and distracted driving, informing Albertans about the benefit of the building Alberta plan. So some very important topics were advertised. The money goes for purchasing advertising space, producing and purchasing recruitment ads, producing and purchasing legal and tendering ads, and an agency that provides public information ads. The agencies are selected through an open and fair and transparent competition that complies with the government's established purchasing procedures, and the aim there, of course, is to get the best price for the bulk advertising that government does across the spectrum.

10:30

I think that answers all the questions. We don't have an itemized list for you – and I'm not going to go to the work of putting together an itemized list –with respect to each detailed piece and how it happened. There are a wide variety of campaigns, a wide variety of communications pieces, and obviously the success of those is a question of a broader set of measurements rather than specific measurements. It's a question of how the public perceives

what's happening and how well we're communicating the rules, the regulations, the opportunities for news about safety and those sorts of things.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mr. Anglin, you have the next 20 minutes.

Mr. Anglin: You're going to give me 20 minutes? I'll take 10.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half from this segment if you want to use it.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm just reaching for the ring on this one; that's all.

Before I continue on with my line of questioning, I just want to kind of cover some of the answers you just gave with some additional questions. You mentioned something about going paperless. How will that help us get more information? Would we as the opposition and as the public be able to see more information versus what we're able to get today without the use of FOIP?

Second, you talked a little bit about the crossover between the individual press secretaries and, of course, the Public Affairs Bureau, which was one of my questions. With respect to that, there are some issues here. I was wondering if internally there are some measurements or if there's been an analysis of outsourcing versus in-house, particularly with things like websites and website management.

The Chair: Thirty seconds in this segment.

Mr. Anglin: I thought you said that I was starting my next 10.

The Chair: No, no. I gave you a minute and a half extra.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. All right. That's fine. Good enough.

In my next 10 seconds, even though you don't have something to give us today, is it the view that you don't do any internal measurement to evaluate your ad campaigns? Did I understand you correctly on that? If you do an evaluation, we'd like to see it.

The Chair: Well, you can keep going on your next 10 minutes.

An Hon. Member: He had a hangover from the last series.

Mr. Anglin: Well, I definitely had a hangover, but doesn't he get the answer on my hangover?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Anglin: Then I should have a hangover all the time.

Mr. Quadri: It feels like you always have a hangover.

Mr. Anglin: I know. I know. All right. That's good.

On goal 2.2, which is about promoting Alberta at home and abroad, this is – and I don't think anyone disagrees – a serious issue. We're all, I think, in alignment in the sense that we want to promote Alberta, we want to grow economically, and that is an admirable goal. How we measure it, how we manage it is really the key where we may or may not disagree.

Clearly, with no disrespect under the current circumstances, you know that the public has been quite focused on the travelling and the travelling expenses. Some would say that the travelling has been extravagant; others would say that it was not. We did criticize, as you know, but we also believe that it is important that the Premier go to Washington to lobby for, you know, things like the Keystone pipeline. But there are other trips that Albertans had

a very difficult time understanding. In fact, some would argue that it did damage our reputation. We had a situation where our goal is to go out and promote, and it didn't work out well because of the press we got.

Can you offer some more insight into some of these travelling practices? I mean, you can pick on anyone you'd like. If you want to pick a particular example, certainly the South Africa trip would be a particular example. What we're looking at is: why are the costs high? Is this an expectation going forward? Is this going to be something that's consistent in the travelling?

What we're looking at is the ministry's travel policies, basically. Is first class the first option? I don't know the government's travel policy. I've not seen that. If it's up on a website or if it's publicly available, I would like to see it. Has that changed from last year to this budget year? We don't see that, so I presume it's still the same and that it hasn't changed. Is it normal for staff to fly first class? There were some public comments that were made that our travel is a little bit more extravagant than most G-7 leaders have seen. Is that something that is consistent with our objective going forward in measuring this government's travel policies? How do we measure ourselves?

I'll just give you an example. Coming from the private sector, I don't know a private company that doesn't have a travel policy that is fairly consistent with their competitors' in one form or another. How are we creating our travel policy? Can we expect in this budget a shift from those expenses because there's going to be a policy change? Is that an expectation that we should have? If you could provide some insight on that, that would be tremendously helpful not just to the opposition but to the public at large.

Switching gears a little bit, you talked about these full-time equivalents, and I think you referred to it, if I'm not mistaken – I wrote it down in my notes – in the Public Affairs Bureau when I asked the question. Could we have a breakdown of these FTEs? I'm referring to page 96 of the government estimates. How many are going to be in the Executive Council? Going back, my presumption on this question is that I thought that when it was first brought up in your answers, you referred to it in the Public Affairs Bureau. But it doesn't matter.

How many of these full-time equivalents are expected to be in the Public Affairs Bureau? Then, of course, you have human resources. The other thing: of these full-time equivalents, are some of these consultants or contracted employees? How does that break down? Of course, regardless of the FTEs themselves, are there other dollars allocated to the task at hand that they've been contracted or hired to do? Could we get sort of a breakdown of this budget? I see the quizzical look. I'll give you an example. You hire a contractor, say, for website management, so you're going to allocate maybe some costs to a website. We connect the dots here in the budget.

Then, of course, the real one when we deal with all of this is outcomes. How can you tell us that the outcomes and the savings on this budget, you know, based on this budget, are performing as expected? As an example, the Public Affairs Bureau is a significant bureau, with a \$13 million budget. Has that been examined for savings? Has that been examined to improve its efficiencies? How has it been examined, is that reflected in this budget, or is that something that might be further down the road, that has not yet been undertaken? Clearly, \$13 million is a significant amount of money. The question really is: are we getting the best value for the money spent?

Goal 2.1 is related to the themes of the building Alberta plan. The government, of course, has been quite open about this, the cost of the building Alberta plan, except that we don't really know

what the cost of the building Alberta plan is. I'm not sure that's been communicated very well. I would assume that that comes directly out of this Public Affairs Bureau and out of this ministry. This is, I think, the number one program this government has undertaken. Other than using the FOIP process, we're not getting information, that I can see. Can you tell us how much the building Alberta plan costs per year? I'm sure those costs are directed across a number of ministries, but it all centres in on this ministry.

I will congratulate you. You've just been named interim Premier by the newspapers, too. [some applause] I hate for the opposition to inform you.

10:40

Mr. Hancock: If I can interject, the newspapers didn't do it. It was my caucus, and I appreciate their endorsement.

Mr. Anglin: I suspected you knew because you voted, but that's beside the point.

How much time left? I got interrupted by the applause.

The Chair: Joe, you're done now. You had 10 minutes.

Mr. Anglin: I'm done?

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Anglin: Why did you just tell me two?

The Chair: Because you had two minutes at the end of the Deputy Premier's response. That's what I've been informed by the clerk.

Mr. Dorward: There'll be time later.

Mr. Anglin: Okay.

The Chair: There'll be two minutes at the end.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order. When I asked you the question, you started me on my new 10 minutes. I'm showing I've got two minutes left. I hit my stopwatch at the same time you told me I had 10 minutes.

The Chair: Okay. We continued the clock, and you took two minutes from the Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier only used eight minutes when he responded to your questions.

Mr. Anglin: I think I'm following your logic. It just wasn't clear last time. I thought you started the clock over again when you said: 10 minutes. Okay. I understand.

The Chair: Okay. Good.
Deputy Premier, please.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Your first question was with respect to my comment about going paperless. Essentially, what you're looking for in terms of access to information is Service Alberta doing an open data portal and making sure that all appropriate information in the hands of government is available to the public through that open data portal and data sharing in that area. What we're talking about in terms of the paperless side is cabinet committee and other committee reports, just the functionality of the internal processes of government. That's where that paperless project is working, in the e-committee technology.

With respect to the division of press secretaries and the Public Affairs Bureau, I believe I answered that fully in the first question. The Public Affairs Bureau has done some reorganization. There's

been some restructuring there. That's one of the reasons why there's an increase in the budget. It's relative to how it's organized.

But I would point out for you that in 2012-13 the budget was \$20 million. There were a number of adjustments and changes. The comparable budget estimate in 2013 would have been \$15.35 million, so the \$13.5 million there is really a cut since 2013, not an increase. It's a very small increase over last year but essentially still well down from earlier years. There was a significant restructuring, a significant cutting of that budget, and now a restructuring of some of the organization. Peter Watson can get into that for us in a minute.

With respect to 2.2, promoting Alberta at home and abroad, and travelling and travelling expenses, the Premier has asked for a review of the travel and expense policy. It has served the government well over the years in terms of making sure that we do our job well when we travel, that we handle expenses in an appropriate way, and is, of course, the gold standard in expense policy in terms of publishing expenses. You can of course – and I'm surprised you haven't – find the travel policy on the website, right where the travel expenses are listed.

What I think Albertans want government to do is to be effective and efficient with public resources, and in terms of travel you have to then make sure that the travel is done in a way in which people can arrive and do their job, and that will dictate often in cases what and how the travel is put in place. I mean, I think the policy says that if you're flying for over four hours, you can fly business class.

That's not necessarily the way everybody travels. But if you're travelling to meetings and you're going to arrive and go right to the meetings and are travelling overnight or across the pond, so to speak, you might well find it most effective to go business class, particularly if you're doing briefings on the way, which, I can say from my personal experience, I often have when I've travelled. I haven't travelled that much, but when I have, you want to be able to read the briefing books, be ready for the meetings, and then often you arrive and go to those meetings. You know, we do business travel in the same way business does business travel; that is, making sure that it's the most effective and efficient use of resources but that you're ready, willing, and able to do the task when you get there and get the job done. That's the most important piece of it.

Sometimes mistakes get made when stuff is done at the last minute or last-minute changes have to be made. Sometimes you can't get the best price because you have to be flexible in terms of the process. But staff are equipped and asked to do their best in terms of making sure that we have that ability to be effective and efficient with the travel costs and expenses. It is not extravagant travel. It is not a perk by any stretch of the imagination. If you've been on any of these trips doing 10 stops in 12 days, as I have done formerly as minister of intergovernmental affairs, I can tell you that it is tiring, it is exhausting for everybody involved, but it's very important work, and we do it because it is very important work for Albertans.

The FTEs in the Public Affairs Bureau. Okay. You had a broader question, even, about FTEs. I can tell you that there are 99 FTEs in the office of the Premier and Executive Council, 91 in the Public Affairs Bureau, and 176 in corporate human resources. That's where the FTEs are.

In the Premier's office – I think I gave some of this answer before – there are 15 in the Premier's office in Edmonton; four in the Premier's office in Calgary; nine in the Premier's correspondence unit; eight in the Premier's communications office; 10 in the deputy minister's office and cabinet co-ordination; 17 in the

policy co-ordination office, providing strategic policy and planning co-ordination for government; five in the Regulatory Review Secretariat; two in support of the Agency Governance Secretariat; nine in the protocol office; five in communications and support for the Lieutenant Governor; 15 in corporate services staff, who provide human resources, finance, administrative, business planning, annual reports, records management, IT, et cetera, for Executive Council.

In the Public Affairs Bureau, as I mentioned, there are 44 professional communications staff assigned to ministries, who manage planning and implementation of communications initiatives and the provision of a range of communications services; 44 other communications professionals provide communications support and co-ordination for policy development and communications for major initiatives, including public emergencies; support internal government communications; provide media monitoring, news release distribution, news conference technical support, et cetera. There are three FTEs in the deputy chief's office.

On the corporate human resources side there are 176, as I mentioned. There are four in the Public Service Commissioner's office, eight providing services to recruit candidates to senior positions, et cetera, 24 developing HR policies and policy frameworks, 17 who develop and support training programs for employees and managers, 37 executive mobility and policy interim positions; 47 provide labour and employment services to ministers; 19 provide attraction, development and HR information, et cetera; 20 are corporate human services staff, who provide HR, finance, administrative, and communications support. So a number of people who provide crossgovernment services for departments.

I mentioned the Public Affairs Bureau budget.

The building Alberta plan: you asked how much that cost. I haven't seen the bottom-line number. I don't have it in my head. But it's about \$42 billion. Everything we do in government is about the building Alberta plan, about investing in families and communities, about building the infrastructure that we need to have, about creating new markets, and about living within our means.

If you want to break that down into the capital business plan, that would be something to discuss in each of the department estimates or in Infrastructure and Transportation primarily, but I think the capital building plan is in excess of \$6 billion. So when you talk about the cost of the building Alberta plan, really, that's what government is doing, building Alberta. All of the budgets in all of the departments across government are focused on the building Alberta plan: delivering good services to Albertans on a day-to-day basis, helping families where they need help, making sure we have educational opportunities for every Albertan, whether it's in the K to 12 system, whether it's in postsecondary, ensuring that they have access to the education that they need to take the new jobs. Every single thing we do in government is about building Alberta.

10:50

The Chair: Are you done, Minister? Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: How much time?

The Chair: Mr. Anglin, you have two minutes and 25 seconds. Due to the confusion that occurred in the beginning, we'll give you another minute. How's that?

Mr. Anglin: Good enough. Basically, you just talked about – and I agree with you that the public wants you to be both effective and efficient. We have this building Alberta plan, but the question I

have for you is: what is this building Alberta plan? What we've seen so far is you taking credit for retroactive projects. Is that part of the building Alberta plan? This came forward under this administration, and we hear what is projected in this budget and in these other ministries as you've said. But what we've seen is a taking credit for that going all the way back to Mr. Stelmach's administration. So is this a retroactive building Alberta plan?

The Chair: Let's try to talk about the future, not the past, please. Thank you.

Mr. Anglin: Well, I need to know about the plan. The plan is the future. The plan is the future, Mr. Chairman. What I want to know from this minister is: is that about the future, or are we taking credit for the past? Is that part of the plan retroactively? That's a fair question. I want to emphasize that point.

Another thing is that we've got a lot of signs out there right now that now have to be changed because you've got a name on that sign that has to be changed. How much money going forward are we going to spend additionally on signs, to correct this information? I mean, now we've got to deal with the past, but we've got to correct it for the future. This is why putting names on huge signs can be difficult.

Again dealing with this building Alberta plan, how much was open for bid and how much was sole sourced? We have no idea, and I was wondering if your office has any idea. How are you judging the success for the value of this program, this building Alberta plan? What we're seeing is that we're taking credit for schools that were proposed four or five years ago and are finally getting completed. To me, that's retroactive. Again, when did the planning start for the building Alberta plan so that we can get a measurement of its effectiveness? Is it actually working?

Again, we go into effective and efficient measurements on your performance measure 3(a) on page 44 of the business plan. You have a measurement there, the quality of leadership in the Alberta public service. That measure is 51 per cent. Now, everything is subjective, and I notice you threw out some comments about some measurements that were 90 per cent, but I don't know if that's good or bad either. But 51 per cent: presumably, that's about confidence in senior leadership. If I understand it correctly – and this is why I need your clarification – it's the employees who give that measurement.

The Chair: Mr. Anglin, you have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you very much. Just yell it out, and I've got it.

Basically, the measure is 51 per cent. Is that what's going on here, that only 51 per cent of employees have confidence in the senior leadership? Do you call that success? I want to get an answer to that because that goes to your comment on effective and efficient leadership.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Anglin. Thank you, Minister.

Now we will move to the Liberal opposition's 14 minutes. Would you like to combine your time with the minister, or would you like to go for seven?

Dr. Sherman: I'll go seven and seven.

The Chair: Seven and seven? Minister?
Go ahead.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, I'd like to thank Premier Redford for her service to our great province, and I wish

her and her family the best. And I congratulate you on your new post as interim Premier.

Now, I'm looking at the government estimates, page 93. The government on the one hand said that they want to hold the line on spending; on the other hand, they want to lead the pack on spending, on staff salaries, the Premier's office. Spending is up 5.4 per cent overall for the ministry. Broken down, the office of the Premier's spending is up 10.4 per cent. That's more than double the rate of population growth and inflation. For the Public Affairs Bureau, one of the most well-funded public affairs bureaus in the country, that spending is up 7.4 per cent. How can the government justify that they're actually holding the line when in the Premier's very own office there are amongst the largest expenditures of any ministry? It seems to me that government has its priorities backwards, where the very people that build this province are taking cutbacks, yet those that run the government at the highest levels have gotten the largest increases.

The increase of \$1.2 million in the Premier's office, \$410,000 or \$420,000 for hosting and protocol expenses, on top of what already are very high expenses seems to be extraordinarily inappropriate. You know, what are you buying? That's \$1,500 a day in hosting every business day of the year. How much champagne, foie gras, and caviar are you feeding people? Are you actually having meetings every day?

The \$300,000 for the scribblers, for the letter writers. Every opposition party – we get lots of correspondence as well because people are not happy with government services. We have not requested extravagant increases in our spending. For many of these disaster recovery responses it appears to me that if the government actually ran government business properly, they wouldn't get so much correspondence. The government has the Public Affairs Bureau. I'd like to know why there's an increase of \$300,000 when you have a very well-funded PAB? You've got the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. You've got three associate ministers' offices. You've got LandLink, and you have the sole-source contract to Navigator. Why do you need more resources in the Premier's office for correspondence?

I'd also like to look at the ministry's business plans, page 43, the performance measures. You're measuring public satisfaction with government communications. How about measuring public satisfaction with government services, with government performance? Do people feel served appropriately by their government? Why is that question not asked and not measured and reported?

Goal 3, that the Alberta public service has effective leadership and governance, page 43: I am glad that you actually measure this. Your goal is to improve outcomes for Albertans through a public service that is empowered, responsive, lean, and less hierarchical. In what business is your target actually only to empower 54 per cent of your staff? Why is that goal so low? Why are your results so low? It seems to me that it should be about 90, 95 per cent.

Goal 4 is that Alberta public service employees are skilled, engaged, and able to deliver on business goals. This is on page 44, where 4(a), the percentage of public service employees who are somewhat or highly engaged, is 45 per cent, and your goal is 47 per cent. How is it possible that you have one of the highest spending Public Affairs Bureau and such an extravagant increase in Premier's office spending and your goal is actually to disengage 53 per cent of the civil service for 2014-15? The goal is only to improve to 47 per cent.

I'd like to talk about the Navigator contract because this contract came from Executive Council. The contract . . .

Mr. Dorward: Point of order. I think we already had the answer to Navigator going back in time.

The Chair: Citation?

Mr. Dorward: I don't know. Which one do I want?

The Chair: Continue. Please focus on the estimates at hand.

Dr. Sherman: This is about policy, about how contracts are made moving forward. I reference this: is it standard procedure for Executive Council to sign a contract three days before it's supposed to expire and put the date of July 18? The question is: is it standard procedure to have people working and using confidential information without an operating contract? And if they were operating, where are the reports? We'd like to know of the reports back from July 18 to August. This seems highly inappropriate, a sole-sourced contract for a quarter of a million dollars. I'd like to know if that's happening moving forward.

11:00

The Chair: Dr. Sherman, you have one minute left.

Dr. Sherman: Gee. Seven minutes.

The Chair: You're wasting time.

Dr. Sherman: Well, I'll ask you one more, and we'll have a little bit of fun with this. The Building Alberta signs. You know, Premier Stelmach had – oh, what was the slogan, and how much money did they spend? – Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, and a nice picture from Northumberland. Now you have Building Alberta signs. We actually call them the billing Alberta signs. My question is: how much will you be billing Alberta to change the signs? Might I make a suggestion of using some Liquid Paper instead of taking all those signs down? Will you be having a new slogan when you get a new Premier? What will that budget be for the new slogan that you will have with the new Premier?

Do I have more time?

The Chair: Fifteen seconds.

Dr. Sherman: You know what? I'll actually give you 15 seconds. Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Dr. Sherman, and thank you for your kind remarks at the beginning.

Let me answer the last question first. It was also raised by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I don't think there's going to be any need to change signs across the province. The signs are put up, as every business does, as every organization does, to communicate what's happening. Albertans want to know what's happening. They want to know where their dollars are going. With all due respect to this committee this isn't actually where they go for their information, and Albertans appreciate knowing when and where a school is going to be built. They appreciate knowing what's happening with respect to highway construction. They appreciate knowing the various things that are being advertised by those Building Alberta signs. There's no need to change the name on them at this stage.

As you have noted, I'm only an interim in office until the process of leadership review can happen, and there'll be a new Premier and a new direction at that time. Anything else that one would say on that topic would be entirely speculative at this time. I understand the rules well enough to know that speculation is not something that we ought to be engaging in.

The importance of that building Alberta program has to be, I think, very clearly put on the table. Albertans expect to have the infrastructure that they need to grow forward. That means that

they want the 50 schools that have been promised and have been announced and are being delivered and the 70 renovations that have been promised, announced, and are being delivered. If one wants to get into the details of that, that should be done in the Infrastructure and other line budgets in terms of their estimates.

The fact of the matter and the questions about the overall building Alberta plan: we have \$19 billion in the infrastructure building plan over the next three years to actually create the infrastructure that Albertans need going forward. That's on top of the stuff that's already being built and announced. Yes, a very important piece of this government's building Alberta plan is to make sure we're investing in the infrastructure that Albertans need to get education for their children, to get back and forth to work, to get their products to market, and to have the health system that they need. That's a very important grow-forward piece for us in terms of the commitment we've made.

The building Alberta plan is not just about building buildings and roads. It's also about investing in families and communities, and that's a very important part of the building Alberta plan. We're very proud of that direction. Albertans asked us to do it. Albertans have asked that we not wait to build infrastructure, that we get on with the job and get it done. They're asking for the schools in their communities. They're asking for the roads. They're asking for the other facilities. These are facilities that are not just built for today; they're built for multigenerations of Albertans. So it's a very important piece of the work.

Your initial questions were talking about the increases in the office and the 5.4 per cent increase and the office of the Premier increase and the Public Affairs Bureau increase. On the Public Affairs Bureau side, overall, across government communications are up less than 4 per cent, I believe. But as you pull it into the co-ordination office in government, that increase is a little bit higher. It's a little higher because of a restructuring, and Peter Watson may want to go into more detail on the restructuring, on how that is organized. Essentially, that's the head office, if you will, for the operation across government. The overall communication is up, as I said, only about 4 per cent. The Public Affairs Bureau piece going up is due to reallocation of core positions and those sorts of pieces.

In terms of the protocol we've been into the protocol issue.

Correspondence is adding four members to the correspondence office, and while it's tempting to link that back to the correspondence that we get as MLAs or the correspondence we get as ministers, I don't think you have any apprehension of the amount of correspondence that Albertans direct through their Premier's office and the need for that response. I can tell you that the operation of the correspondence unit has been thoroughly reviewed for efficiencies and effectiveness and that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council has come forward saying that this is what we need in order to provide the standard of service that is wanted in that area.

The question about performance measures in terms of service delivery. Ministries do the service delivery, and the performance measures with respect to their service delivery are in the ministry business plans and budgets. That's the appropriate place to look for how we're hitting the ground relative to the impact of specific programs and delivery for Albertans, so it wouldn't be necessary to do an overall piece in there.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Hancock: The question that you really got into was the public service. I think we have an exceptional public service. We have a plan, the reaching our full potential plan. I can tell you

from my experience in Human Services that when you organize things and you create change, that creates angst among the public service, so some of that would explain the current ratings in the public service at the present time, because when you're making change, that creates issues for people. But I'm very confident that the deputy minister is working through that, and I'd like to give him a few minutes to just respond to the reaching our full potential program.

Mr. Watson: Thank you. The notion of engagement is dependent on a wide range of factors: relationships with supervisors, dynamics on teams, the quality of communication throughout the organization. So there are a number of things that we are working on across all of those areas to improve our practices and ensure that we move our engagement scores up.

We've set our targets so that we can demonstrate continuous improvement on a sustainable basis with engagement across the entire public service of Alberta, which is composed of many, many departments, many, many individual teams. It's a strong cultural change, and it's all about helping and supporting and creating competencies for everybody at every level so that we've got leaders in every chair, and that's the focus that we've been putting on it, and we're actively taking steps to ensure that we are better than we've ever been at growing leadership and talent development throughout the organization. I want to stress that we're not focused on senior leaders in the organization; we're focused on creating leaders in every tier.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Peter. Thank you, Deputy Premier. Thank you, Dr. Sherman.

Now we will move to the Alberta NDPs. Mr. Mason, you have 14 minutes.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Would you like to combine your time?

Mr. Mason: I'd like to take five minutes to ask questions, give the minister – sorry; the acting Premier in a few days – his seven minutes, and then I have an amendment, so I'd like to come back for my last two minutes. Can we arrange it that way?

The Chair: I guess we can.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much.

The first question, Mr. – what should I call you right now?

The Chair: Deputy Premier.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. You're the Deputy Premier until Sunday, right? Congratulations, by the way.

I went to school with him, you know.

Mr. Hancock: Quite a handsome young lad you were.

Mr. Mason: Thanks. I know. That's how I got elected the first time.

Anyway, I want to ask you if it's not possible to take a look at the compensation costs in the Premier's office. They seem to be out of line. For example, one senior person in bargaining received a termination severance – I'm not going to use names here – of \$478,776 in 2002 despite having an annual salary of only \$253,668 and only being due 12 months' notice in his contract and a \$77,000 bonus. The Public Service Commissioner received a salary of more than \$274,000 with benefits over a hundred thousand dollars, and it's 8 per cent over what the previous one got. In

the Premier's office a former chief of staff, of course, received a \$130,000 severance, and the current chief of staff has an annual salary in excess of \$300,000. The point has been made repeatedly that the Premier's chief of staff gets considerably more money than the chief of staff of the President of the United States.

11:10

So it really seems to me that the compensation and severances are too high, and they're out of line. I'd like to know what can be done to bring those more into line. I think that's something that our front-line workers would really like to see considering that the government's message to them is that they should take, you know, pretty much zero for a couple of years. That's certainly one thing that I'd really like to address.

The overall budget has been growing in Executive Council very quickly. In 2011-12 the budget for the Premier's office had gone up more than 30 per cent. In '11-12 the budget was \$8.7 million. This year we're looking at a budget of \$12.9 million, which is an increase of \$4.2 million, and this year it's another \$1.2 million, which is almost a 10 per cent increase. I think the message that's been coming from the government is that everyone else is expected to live within their means, but it doesn't seem to me that this is being reflected in the Premier's office and in Executive Council. So that's something that I think really needs to be given some attention, Mr. Deputy Premier.

I'd like to ask, if you can tell us, a little bit about the Executive Council privacy computer for \$300,000 and whether or not that will have any impact on the cost or results of freedom of information requests that might be made.

Travel is another one. Others have dealt with this. But I think that those are areas of concern as well.

I'd like to know how you're going to handle transition costs in the office of the Premier. Obviously, there will be two such transitions within probably, well, considerably less than a year. I don't know what the time frame is going to be.

I think, actually, Mr. Chairman, that's really all I want to say right now.

The Chair: Thanks.

Minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the leader of the ND. The question of compensation costs is always a difficult one, and severance costs is always a difficult one. Obviously, when you're hiring people for specific positions, you have to look at both what an appropriate pay scale for the position is, but you also have to look for what it takes to get the type of person you want to have. So there are not direct comparisons to other chiefs of staff because it depends on where they come from, what they were doing, and what it takes to get them, but I take your point, that one needs to look at them in a context of value and the overall cost.

Severance in political offices is another issue that's always a difficult one because when people come to serve in a Premier's office, as is only too apparent today, it's not a long-term contract. It can be a very volatile contract. So when you're asking people to put whatever else they have on hold and move in there, you're not guaranteeing that they're going to have any particular length of time in doing the job. So that accounts to some extent for the issues around severance.

That being said, most of the stuff that you've been talking about is historical and probably better dealt with in terms of Public Accounts. But you were talking about policies going forward relative to compensation and severance, and those are really

negotiated contracts. They're negotiated. They're not a question of – well, they're really depending on the person that you're getting, where they're coming from, what they're giving up to come and do the job, what the value of that is, and then how much you need to give them in terms of some assurances that they're not just taking way too high a risk. Otherwise, you'd never get anybody with the competence you want to do those jobs, because everybody has families and everybody has a position.

You did mention the public service and that we're asking them to take pretty much zero. That's actually not the case. The offer that's on the table with the public service is a good offer. If I recall it correctly off the top of my head, it's \$1,550 in the first year, \$1,550 in the second year. That's the equivalent of a 2 per cent increase in each of those two years, and in the third year 1 per cent on the grid and \$875, which is the equivalent of 1 per cent on the grid plus another 1 per cent in a cash increase, and then 2 per cent in the third year. So, really, the offer is an equivalent of 2 per cent in each of the four years, and the reason why that's above the 0, 0, 0, and 2, which was the fiscal baseline, if you will, is because every group starts from a different place. But it's very inaccurate to suggest that the public service is being asked to take zero. There's a very generous offer on the table, including Christmas closure, which for families is a very important time. So that's a very important offer.

We've heard from people as well, if we're trying to deal with the fiscal agenda, which we are, to make sure that, as we say in the building Alberta plan, one of the things is to live within our means. More than 50 per cent of the provincial budget goes to compensation of people who are paid out of the public purse, so in order to ensure that we have, yes, well-paid public servants, being paid very competitively with other jurisdictions and with the local market, being paid appropriately for what they're doing, being paid fairly, but also that the increases in costs are commensurate with what we're trying to accomplish.

The offer that's on the table is not asking them to take zero for a couple of years. It's in fact giving 2 per cent each year over the next four years plus a very, very important family time benefit of time off at the Christmas holidays, which, if people wanted to, they could trade for other holidays and monetize that. So it's a very generous piece on the table, and I'm hoping that people will consider that very closely.

I can't speculate on transition costs. That would be totally inappropriate for me at this time. I have no idea what that would encompass or how that would be encompassed, but I can tell you that we have a very good Deputy Minister of Executive Council, and he will do his very level best to make sure that any transition happens in a most effective way on behalf of Albertans. That seamless transition is extremely important. It's important that we maintain good governance. Leadership changed, but we've been elected to provide good governance. We will do that, and we will do that effectively, efficiently, and within our building Alberta plan, which speaks to living within our means.

The e-cabinet question that you raised: I think it's important for us to become as effective as we can and use the technology that's available. It should have no impact on FOIP, freedom of information, or those pieces. There are backup documents for everything that we do, and where appropriate they can be accessed. Of course, there's a major process being undertaken by Service Alberta to make information publicly available through open data, so hopefully over time as data subsets and those things can be identified and put on availability for the open data portal, even more information will be available to the public much more easily than having to make specific FOIP requests. But with respect to the e-cabinet project, that will have no effect on the ability to

access appropriate information or FOIP requests or any of those sorts of things.

Again, I guess, if we go back to the transition costs, there may be contractual obligations that need to be met in terms of transition, but senior officials are governed by contract, and that'll be taken care of relative to the contracts that are in place. But, again, I would go back to say that in circumstances where you have senior executives whose roles may change with little or no notice, that does impact the way contracts are written, and it does impact the amount of severance that people would look to have in their contract. It's not an unnatural circumstance even though it seems excessive sometimes with respect to certain individuals. The nature of governance is that you don't get a lifetime. We know when we get elected that we get four years. We can plan ourselves accordingly, but the staff don't have that luxury.

11:20

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mr. Mason, we're going to give you that two minutes to do your amendments.

However, before you do that, at the beginning of the meeting I was not informed that an amendment was going to be presented, so I did not read into the record the rules pertaining to amendments. I will do that right now. 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 total estimate to be voted on by its full amount. Vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply on April 16, 2014. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. Twenty copies of amendments must be provided at the meeting for the committee members and staff.

So now you can proceed with presenting the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you.

Did I use my full five?

The Chair: You did. You only have a minute and 30 seconds left.

Mr. Mason: I will go ahead. I'll provide that for you. I do want to respond to the minister, but I'll make the motion first. I move that the estimates for the office of the Premier/Executive Council under reference 1.1 at page 94 of the 2014-15 main estimates of the Executive Council be reduced by \$911,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 93 for operational is \$47,486,000.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: This amendment, members of the committee, eliminates the increase to the Executive Council budget. It leaves it where it was in last year's budget, so it totals out at a zero per cent increase. I think, as I've pointed out, the Premier's office budget has grown more rapidly than other departments and is not consistent with the direction that the government is trying to impose in other areas.

I want to deal with what the minister said. He focused very much on the current offer to AUPE as evidence that the government is not pursuing the zero, but the fact of the matter is that that was the government's objective. That's what the government did impose through legislation on teachers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Your time is up. We will now move to the Progressive Conservative caucus, starting with Mr. Quadri.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Mason: Just on a point of order.

The Chair: Citation?

Mr. Mason: Standing Order 13(2). Well, I just want to ask you because you read out the rules, but you didn't explain the process for dealing with amendments. Could you do that, please?

The Chair: It will be voted on on April 16.

Mr. Mason: So not today.

The Chair: Not today. No.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you. Sorry.

The Chair: Mr. Quadri, you have 14 minutes. Would you like to combine your time with the minister or ask your question and get an answer?

Mr. Quadri: Ask my question and get the answer. That will be good. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Deputy Premier. Thank you very much for your time and accommodation again.

Mr. Hancock: I heard, "to ask the question and get an answer," but I'd prefer that we get all the questions on the table first so that we can get appropriate answers, if you don't mind.

The Chair: My understanding is that Mr. Quadri has one question.

Mr. Hancock: Excellent. No, I understand. For each individual I understand that.

Mr. Quadri: Sure. I have a few questions about promoting the building Alberta plan. Why does the government of Alberta continue to promote the building Alberta plan?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think some of the things that I talked about earlier about the building Alberta plan are really critical. That is, first of all, to understand that it's not just about building buildings. It's about people. The building Alberta plan is about creating the kind of environment where we have the best place to live, work, and raise our families. It's more than just promoting a plan; it's about living it. It's about ensuring that we have the support for families when they need it. It's about ensuring that we have the educational opportunities for Albertans when they need them so that they can develop to their full potential, take the jobs and opportunities that are available for Albertans.

It's a blueprint, actually, for what matters most to Albertans: actively building by investing in families and communities; living within our means, which is important; opening new markets for Alberta's resources. So the balance of how we raise the money, how we create an active economy, and how we support Albertans who need our help with respect to quality of life: that's the building Alberta plan. We listened to Albertans. We heard from them loud and clear. They've told us that planning for our future success is important to Albertans, that the building Alberta plan focuses on what really matters to Albertans.

When the questions come up about how much we're spending on the building Alberta plan, it's clear that that whole budget is about building for that future potential. As I often say, today was

actually planned yesterday. Our job as government now is about what the future of the province looks like and how every Albertan has an opportunity to participate in that future. That's what the building Alberta plan is about.

Mr. Quadri: That's wonderful, but how does putting up the signs and sending out the brochures really advance our quality of life?

Mr. Hancock: Well, it's really not about signs and brochures. It's about Albertans knowing and understanding what is happening and why it's happening and what we're doing. It's about letting Albertans know that they were heard and letting them know where their investment is going. We're investing \$19 billion in capital over the next three years. Albertans actually want to know where that's going.

It wouldn't be good government just to quietly go out and distribute \$42 billion worth of their tax dollars and their resource revenues without actually telling them what we're doing. So communicating with Albertans is very important. It provides the opportunity for additional feedback.

You know, I liken it to my own constituency, where you go in and there are school sites set aside. Realtors typically sell houses and point to that vacant space and say: that's where your school is going to go. Now, I'm not down on realtors. Don't get me wrong. They sell their houses. But I've experienced that. They say, "That's where your school's going to go," and I know that there's no school going to go there.

But I can go into my constituency right now, to the school sites, and I can say: "There's the sign. That's where the school is going to go." You still have to do your due diligence because you don't know where the school board is going to draw the lines about where the kids will go to that school. But when that Building Alberta sign goes up, you know that that's the site and that that has been designated and it's been announced and we're going to be building that school. That's important to Albertans. It is the practice of the province and most other provinces, the federal government, to post signs so that citizens know where their tax dollars are going.

The other piece that was really important in the signage piece and in the communications piece was that we did go through that flood last year. At some point in time we will get through that process, but as a part of that process the assurance role of government kicks in. How do we assure Albertans that it's going to be all right? Well, one of the ways you assure them is, again, by putting up a sign saying, "Yes, this road is going to be fixed," by putting up a sign saying, "Yes, this public building is going to be replaced," by putting up the sign to say, "Yes, this bridge is going to be replaced."

That assurance, when you go through the trauma – and I was down there as Minister of Human Services with so many of our public servants who were there, who were doing the work on a day-to-day basis to help Albertans get through the grieving for their loss. I don't mean loss of life. I think there were four people who lost their lives, but it could have been so much worse. But, still, people are grieving because it's a very traumatic experience in their life. Part of the assurance role of government is to have the boots on the ground, to have people there doing the things necessary to help them recover, and part of it is signage to say: yes, your school is going to be fixed; yes, your road is going to be rebuilt; yes, your bridge is going to be replaced.

Mr. Quadri: That's good. I get that, but what is the fiscal impact of the signage and brochures and all of that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, in a \$19 billion, three-year building plan the cost of putting up the signs is really one of the investment pieces. Some would say that it's not important, but there are a number of things that that signage does, and I mentioned some of them already in terms of both the assurance role and the communication to say: your tax dollar is at work. But there's also some pride in our communities in knowing and understanding that we're moving forward.

So I think that investment is a strong investment. Communicating infrastructure investments in the community via outdoor signage or delivering brochures is an effective communication means to let Albertans know that we're moving forward, that we're building that future, that we're putting up the infrastructure that they need, that they have a comfort level that when that sign goes up, they know something is actually happening in that space and place and that something is building the future for them. That's a very important message to Albertans in terms, again, of the role of assurance that we have but also understanding the investment, understanding the significant investment that's being made in the future potential of the province.

11:30

Mr. Quadri: My next question is, you know, a different question, regarding correspondence's increased budget. Why does the correspondence office require a budget increase?

Mr. Hancock: I've tried to respond to that one already in a significant way. The correspondence office is an essential part of the Premier's office. Whether we like it or not as individual MLAs, Albertans actually write to the Premier. They don't necessarily just contact their MLA. Sometimes they copy us with the correspondence. Sometimes they get to us directly, but the Premier's office deals with a massive amount of direct communication.

They not only have to respond to the communications from individual Albertans, but in many cases there is a wide range of things that come in. Sometimes it'll just be opinion. Sometimes it'll be advice to government couched in many different ways. Many times it's very personal about something that's happening to them in their lives. The Premier's office has a duty to understand those needs of Albertans, to respond to those needs of Albertans. In some cases it's a fairly complex process of bringing together and understanding who needs to be involved in that response. I've seen in my office many situations where there's correspondence that we need to respond to the Premier's office on – and it's one piece of correspondence from an Albertan – and three other ministers and ministries might be involved in doing the research that's necessary to get the response back to the Premier's office so that they can respond on a timely basis.

We have a number of ways of communicating. Part of it is that if we put the signs up and if we send the brochures out, that can have an effect of communicating, so we don't need to have as many direct personal communications. It's all part of the same package. The \$300,000 essentially is four FTEs in the correspondence unit. The deputy minister has done a review of the correspondence unit, and we believe that it's being run very effectively, but they need four more people to handle the correspondence so that it can be dealt with on a timely basis.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you. Just regarding the same thing, how will this additional funding for the correspondence office be used?

Mr. Hancock: Extra dollars will go to increasing the staff complement, as I mentioned. We've delivered upwards of a

thousand pieces of correspondence each month. In fact, I think it was closer to 1,300. You know, it has to be done in a timely way. Each of us as MLAs knows how difficult it is sometimes to return the phone call on a timely basis, to answer the correspondence on a timely basis. If you add that up and multiply it by, you know, a quantum leap of correspondence that goes the Premier's office, that's an essential piece that we have to deal with. It's multiple questions. It's not simply a matter of getting a letter and answering it. It needs to be well documented to make sure that the answer is consistent with government policy or, if it's a personal matter, that it's the appropriate answer in terms of where a person can get the help that they need or how government is responding to it. It's not simply just a matter of a few people in there writing letters; it's a very complex organization.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Quadri. Thank you, Deputy Premier. Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The questions that I have relate to page 44 of the business plan. You make note of the Alberta public service leadership index, and there are 10 questions. I was wondering if you could provide the rate of participation and also if it would be permissible to receive what those 10 questions would be. To the committee it might be helpful. I notice that the target has not gained a lot of increments over the last number of years, and I'm wondering if there's an explanation for that. When I look at the percentage of Alberta public service employees who are somewhat or highly engaged, the target for where you are now – and you're setting some targets – is actually quite low. I was also wondering: is there any direct tie of this level of engagement to the cost of absenteeism, the health of the employees, a level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the public service as working, you know, for government? I'll stop there.

Mr. Hancock: With the permission of the chair I'll ask the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, Peter Watson, to respond. They have a reaching our full potential program. It's really quite a dynamic program, and perhaps Peter could give us some detail.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are both new measures in the Executive Council business plan from previous years. Partly because we felt so strongly that we needed to be reporting and measuring our progress on leadership at all levels of the public service, this is an index that doesn't just measure senior leadership in the public service. When you see the questions, you'll see that it's intended to help us identify how we're doing in developing leaders throughout the Alberta public service and the notion of leaders in every chair.

The same thing with engagement. There are multiple measures that go into our employee surveys that help us assess and understand: what are the factors that are driving employee engagement? I mentioned that we're a large organization, more than 28,000 people distributed around the province in a variety of teams working on a variety of things. Satisfaction and engagement can be driven by something as simple as the relationship with your supervisor or something that's more complex like: are you receiving good communication about the direction of government and where the province is going and how your work contributes to that? So there are a number of factors, and we're trying to be as good as we can be at identifying where the issues are at various

places in our organization so that we can work to improve it and ensure that we have leadership being exhibited by all employees and not just the supervisors that may be on a particular team there.

A number of months ago we launched an initiative that we called reaching our full potential. The intent of that was to ensure that we were instilling best practices and doing things to ensure that every individual was able to grow their capability to be able to improve the service to Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson. Thank you, Mrs. Sarich.

Now, for the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Mr. Anglin.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As you understand, there's been an amendment brought forward, but I'm curious. This budget is the Premier's second budget coming forward. These are the programs that this government has run on. This is the agenda of the Premier's leadership. Can we expect any amendments, any significant changes to this budget as a direct result of the resignation? Is that something that is legitimate in the sense of changes that we can expect?

Now, if we can't expect any changes and there will be no amendments brought forward by this budget, I'm not sure how we connect the dots to what's going to change. Clearly, what we're looking at here, right now, is consistency. This budget coming from the hon. Premier is all about the programs that have been bought into. It's all about the building Alberta plan. It is fundamental to the execution of everything that is relevant to her leadership, and now she's not there. You're interim – I understand that – but if there's not going to be any significant change to this budget, what is the change?

That's the only question I have for now.

11:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, the hon. member falls into this trap that we've got into, I guess, over the last number of years in public life, that it's all about one person. It's not. A government was elected, and the budget was brought down by the Provincial Treasurer on behalf of government. It's the government's budget. In the parliamentary system if a government's budget is changed or defeated, the government is defeated, and that's not the plan of this government.

This government plans to fulfill its commitment to Albertans. This government plans to continue to do the work that we promised to do for Albertans – to plan for the future, to invest in our families and communities, to open markets, and to ensure that we live within our means – to create that vision and opportunity for the future of the province so that people have the hope and the opportunity that really is a part of living and working and raising our families in the best place in North America, if not the world, to do it. That doesn't change.

The leader has decided that she wants to step down. That's a personal decision, and that's an understandable decision. This is a difficult business to be in these days. Your life is not your own, the challenges you get, you know, as we go along – nothing is perfect. No one is perfect. Leaders make choices. Their offices do things. There's accountability, and the Premier stepped up. She stepped up and said that the expenses for that South Africa trip were difficult for the public to understand and accept, and she took full responsibility for that. Those are the things that happen in this life.

I have to say that she provided, I thought, inspirational leadership not only for our party but for our province. As the

Premier she stepped into it. She set the standard, but it wasn't just the Premier. It's a team of people, who've offered themselves to provide good governance to Albertans. Albertans have accepted us as doing that, and we will continue to do that.

The process of selecting a new leader: we'll go through that process. There will be discussions within the party, and those that want to will participate relative to how we go forward and what the future might look like and whether there should be a change in direction or not, and that will be in the fullness of time.

Right now there's a government in place. The government brought forward a budget. We will ask the Legislature to approve that budget so we can continue to provide the good governance that Albertans want and deserve, so that they can develop to their full potential, so that they can participate in the opportunities that are in Alberta, so that they can have the opportunities for their children and grandchildren to live and work in Alberta and work and trade out into the world, so that we develop the markets, open those markets. That's a very important part of what the Premier has done, travelling to other parts of the world which buy our products to make sure that we get a fair price for our products, to work across the country to make sure that we have access to markets by getting our products across the country, developing a Canadian energy strategy, all of that good foundational work. This government will continue to build on that good foundational work to deliver the promises we made to Albertans about the hopes and the dreams and the aspirations that they have for their children and grandchildren.

The Chair: Mr. Anglin, do you have another question based on the estimates of Executive Council, please?

Mr. Anglin: You'd better believe it. Right on the estimates. It's on the whole estimate.

The Chair: I'll allow the questions, but I'm not sure whether I'll allow the answers.

Mr. Anglin: You've got it. It's actually on the program, so let's get right down to the question.

There will be no change to this budget, as I understand from what was just given for an answer, so the public can expect no change. That's what I wanted. I have my answer. Thank you very much.

Going down to these confidence targets on your business plan – and this is dealing with the target on page 44, 3(a) – you have a confidence target for next year of 52 per cent. It's interesting. The target was actually 61 per cent in last year's budget, but now it's 52 per cent. I'm curious, as this has dropped, that the expectation has changed. If you look at 3(a) on page 44, you have the actual of 51 per cent and a target going forward of 52 per cent, and if you look at last year, 61 per cent was the target. So we've dropped by basically 9 per cent. For '15-16 last year's budget had a 66 per cent target, and that's dropped to 53 per cent. So our expectations have been reduced.

What I'm hearing from this government is that there will be no change to this budget. Our expectations now have been lowered, and I don't understand why the expectations are going lower and not higher in dealing with these questions. I wonder if you could respond to that, please.

Mr. Hancock: Well, I'll start by indicating again that you as a member of the Legislature would understand, hopefully, the parliamentary protocol with respect to budgets. Governments present budgets. If budgets are changed or defeated, governments are defeated. Albertans don't want that right now. What they want

is for the government to continue to do what it promised to do. The leadership change is a party process, and we'll go through that process, but government will continue to govern under its promises. The government will continue to govern as promised, and the budget that's presented to the Legislature is the budget that we're going to ask the Legislature to vote on.

With respect to the targets with respect to the public service I'd like to ask Peter Watson again as the Deputy Minister of Executive Council to go through that because there's a great deal of complexity in government and the reaching our full potential program that he's instituted for the public service. Again, a dedicated public service doing good work for Albertans is extremely important.

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really do want to stress that our expectation is that those numbers will improve and we'll begin to see improvement at all levels in our organization. That index is comprised of a number of questions because, as I said, in an organization as large and a culture that has as much diversity and different things going on as ours, an organization the size of a small city, it's hard to succinctly identify specific issues. We've been working more broadly to engage staff and engage their passion for public service and engage their ideas on how we make improvements and how we support them in growing their skills so that they can make a difference for Albertans and on what we can be doing as senior leaders in the public service to do our jobs better to support them.

As part of our effort we've been just going out and talking to people and reaching out and inviting people that want to be part of this to engage with us. We started a number of months ago when we asked for a group of volunteers to help us develop strategies because we were concerned. We sent an e-mail out and asked our employees if they had a passion for public service and wanted to be part of building a better organization. More than 500 people immediately put their hands up in response to that e-mail, and we engaged all of them in the development of our strategies for reaching our full potential.

We've now connected with more than 6,000 of our employees directly, face to face, and have had sessions with them and sat down across the table to talk about what their issues are. What do they need to be able to do their jobs better? What are some of the tools and the supports? What is bothering them in some cases with their . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Mrs. Sarich.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to pick up my line of questioning on the workforce and also to provide you an opportunity to say anything further. Before you say any further comments, I wanted to focus on workforce absenteeism because it has a tremendous cost to any organization. I was wondering when I look at the financial statements – and there's been a bit of an increase in corporate human resources programs – if there's a direct tie to that to respond to the issue of the cost of absenteeism. I was wondering if you could provide to the committee what the cost is and the dollars that you're using in the budget to combat that so that people can have an appreciation of how hard you're working to care for a healthy workforce.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chair, I'd ask the Deputy Minister of Executive Council to continue and respond to that.

Mr. Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have the specific numbers on workplace absenteeism, but we can track that data down and provide that in writing to the committee.

I do want to say, though, that I think one of the issues that impacts absenteeism is the relationship and the dynamics on the local team. That's one of the reasons that we're doing an awful lot of work not just with individual staff but front-line supervisors around: how do we improve engagement and communication practices right at the rock face for these teams of people that sometimes have very difficult jobs providing front-line services to Albertans? How do we ensure that that team dynamic is healthy and supportive and is working to ensure that we're providing the most effective service to Albertans?

We've developed over the course of the last year new programs and approaches specifically for front-line supervisors because they are some of the people we're trying to support. In a lot of respects they're the most important people for the individuals on their team. The dynamics and the healthy culture on that team are some of the most important things that we can have across all the variety of teams in the public service.

11:50

We're spending an awful lot of effort to get at those kinds of issues and to ensure that people are living the values of the public service as they interact with each other on their teams day in and day out and that we've got good, healthy, respectful practices occurring on our work sites that support individuals to do their very best, sometimes in very difficult situations as they're providing very difficult services to Albertans. A good example that's been referenced already is the support we provided to flood victims with significant empathy for people whose lives have been, you know, significantly impacted. Our folks did step up and did some amazing and tremendous work.

We're concerned about that and concerned about absenteeism. We track that data, and we can provide that data. That's at the foundation of having a respectful workplace where people are being provided the opportunities to do their very best, where they're given opportunities to grow their skills so they can provide better services to Albertans, and where there's strong leadership in the organization and strong leadership behaviours being exhibited by everyone in the organization.

We talk about leaders in every chair now, not hierarchal leaders. We need people exhibiting strong leadership behaviours wherever they are, whatever they do. We have very good people. We're very proud of our people. But we can be better, and we're going to work to be better. That's part of the reason the targets are going up incrementally. We're a large organization, the size of a small city. This type of cultural change does take time, and we want to ensure that we're tracking sustainable improvements as we go so that we know that our efforts are working.

The Chair: You have a question? Go ahead.

Mrs. Sarich: Yes, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much. Based on your response, Mr. Watson, is that tied directly to line 3.2, corporate human resources programs? On your estimates the

figure is \$19,134. I'm looking at page 94. I hope that I am quoting the correct page for this linkage to the programs and efforts that you're talking about because we do see that there's a little bit of an increase there.

Mr. Watson: Yes. The vast majority of our programming for employee training and development, for strategies around workforce engagement and strategic workforce planning – a lot of the frameworks and the policies and the practices that provide that come out of corporate human resources.

As part of this change and as part of this notion of reaching our full potential, we fully realize that we're taking our organization and improving our practices from – in some cases they are outdated, and they need some improvements. We recognize that, and we're taking steps within our corporate human resources program but also in every department. I would say that this is something where the senior leadership of the public service is fully committed and engaged. It's a range of things that's required. Some of it is programming and training and development opportunities for staff. Some of it is just continuing a conversation around the values of the public service. When we get into difficult situations and are having difficult conversations, are we doing that in a respectful way and creating the conditions where people feel safe to try some new things and to be innovative and to ensure that our supervisors are fully facilitating and supporting that? It's a combination of programming and supports for people, but it's also a reinforcement of the culture and our expectations around values and behaviours inside our system. We're working on both of those.

Mrs. Sarich: I also had a question about: do you do a calculation on the costs of turnover, you know, overall throughout the public service? That's another cost, another level of cost. Then your mitigation on that for the retention side.

Mr. Watson: Yes. We do track our turnover, and I can provide that information to the committee.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to close by saying that I truly appreciate all the hard work that the public service employees do on behalf of Albertans. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Sarich.

We have about four and a half minutes left. Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Well, seeing none, then pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(8) the estimates of Executive Council are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule.

I'd like to thank each and every one of you, and I would also like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Tuesday, April 8, 2014, to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned. Thank you, all.

[The committee adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

