



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Executive Council
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, May 16, 2016
7 p.m.

Transcript No. 29-2-7

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The 29th Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W), Deputy Chair

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Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
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Also in Attendance

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Executive Council

Hon. Sarah Hoffman, Deputy Premier

Jennifer Anthony, Director, Issues Management

Marcia Nelson, Deputy Minister

Mark Wells, Managing Director, Public Affairs Bureau

7 p.m.

Monday, May 16, 2016

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

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

The Chair: Welcome, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone to the committee. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Madam Deputy Premier, when we get to you at the end of the table, please introduce your staff that are joining you as well. My name is Graham Sucha. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and chair of this committee. First, I'd like to note for the record that Dr. Starke is an official substitute for Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Schneider: Dave Schneider, MLA for Little-Bow, vice-chair.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Taylor: Wes Taylor, MLA, Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Panda: Prasad Panda, MLA, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Cyr: Scott Cyr, MLA, Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cooper: Nathan Cooper, the MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Dr. Starke: Good evening. Richard Starke, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Ms Hoffman: I'm Sarah Hoffman, honoured to be the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and MLA for Edmonton-Glenora. Here with me at the table tonight is Mr. Mark Wells, managing director for the office of managing director, Public Affairs Bureau. There we go. That's correct. Let's read these ones. We also have with us at the table Andre Tremblay, deputy secretary to cabinet, and Jennifer Hibbert, senior financial officer.

Mr. Carson: Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Piquette: Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung.

Mrs. Schreiner: Good evening. Kim Schreiner, MLA for Red Deer-North.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Good evening. Maria Fitzpatrick from the lovely Lethbridge-East constituency.

Mr. S. Anderson: Shaye Anderson from the doubly outstanding Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Connolly: Michael Connolly from Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Coolahan: Craig Coolahan, MLA, Calgary-Klein.

The Chair: Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we'd ask that BlackBerrys, iPhones, and all smart phones be turned off or set to silent or vibrate and not placed on the table as they may interfere with the audiofeed.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for Executive Council, I would like to briefly review the standing orders governing the speaking rotation and note that the speaking times are different for the two-hour meetings. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(7), the rotation is as follows. The minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the next 50 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the following 20 minutes, private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation just outlined to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation 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. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking times are being combined. 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.

If a member has any questions regarding the speaking times or rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly to either the chair or the committee clerk about the process.

Two hours have been scheduled for consideration of estimates of the Executive Council.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate; however, only committee members or an official substitute for a committee member may introduce an amendment during a committee's review of the estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the Deputy Premier may address the committee. Ministry staff seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Members' staff may be present and, space permitting, may sit at the table or behind the members along the committee room wall. However, members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 9 p.m.

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 by the Premier or the Deputy Premier in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Again I will remind all meeting participants to address their questions and responses through the chair and not directly to each other.

The vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply tomorrow, May 17, 2016.

If there are amendments, an amendment to an estimate cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimate being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate

by its full amount. The vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply convenes tomorrow, May 17, 2016. 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 committee members and staff.

I will now invite the Deputy Premier to begin with her opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am here as the Deputy Premier, representing Executive Council, to present the ministry's estimates and business plan. Regrettably, Premier Notley and the head of the public service, Marcia Nelson, could not be here this evening.

I'd like to begin by introducing the officials who have joined us today. As I mentioned, Andre Tremblay, deputy secretary to cabinet; Jennifer Hibbert, senior financial officer; and Mark Wells, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau, are at the table. Also with us today are John Heaney, deputy minister of policy co-ordination; Don Kwas, executive director, economic and resource policy, intergovernmental relations.

I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere appreciation for the hard work and dedication of Alberta's public service, including those who are working at the Provincial Operations Centre right now. This has never been more apparent than in observing how the public service has responded to Fort McMurray's situation in recent days.

Overall, government's work is aimed at building a diverse, resilient, and inclusive province for every Albertan, and that's what Budget 2016, the Alberta jobs plan, is about.

Mr. Chair, the Alberta jobs plan is built on four pillars. First, the plan supports families and communities by providing the assistance they need to get through a tough economy. For example, the new Alberta child benefit and enhancements to the Alberta family employment tax credit support 380,000 children in Alberta.

The Alberta jobs plan invests in infrastructure, building schools, hospitals, roads, and transit. These investments support our economy today and will leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

The plan also helps to diversify our economy. The climate leadership plan is key in this effort. The climate strategy reduces emissions through a carbon levy, and this levy is rebated to Albertans and invested back into our economy to grow our renewable sector, advancing green technologies and infrastructure and to make the air we breathe cleaner. The Alberta climate leadership plan secures our international reputation and erases any doubt about our environmental record.

Finally, the Alberta jobs plan supports Alberta businesses with new tax credits, expanded access to capital, and by cutting the small-business tax by one-third.

The Executive Council plays a central role in accomplishing these important goals. The Executive Council includes the offices in Edmonton and Calgary. The Premier's office is led by the chief of staff and deputy chief of staff and provides strategic advice, media relations, stakeholder relations, and issues management support to the Premier. Also included is the Deputy Premier's office. The Deputy Minister of Executive Council is the head of Alberta's public service and provides strategic policy advice, operations, and issues management and supports the government decision-making process. These offices are supported by the cabinet co-ordination office and the policy co-ordination office.

The work of these offices includes co-ordinating the overall government response to wildfires through the Wood Buffalo

Ministerial Recovery Task Force and the Deputy Minister Public Safety Committee.

Executive Council includes intergovernmental relations, the protocol office, and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Lastly, the Executive Council also includes administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council.

Mr. Chair, allow me to outline how the Executive Council supports our government's priorities. The Executive Council business plan is centred on three outcomes. The first is to ensure the work of ministries is aligned to support the efficient implementation of government's agenda. Through the work of the policy cabinet co-ordination offices Executive Council takes a leadership role in policy development, aligning policy and legislation across ministries. Executive Council is also a partner with other ministries in implementing policies, programs, and services to achieve government's priorities.

7:10

The second outcome of the Executive Council's business plan is to ensure that Alberta's priorities are advanced across Canada. These priorities include addressing climate change, opening up new markets for our energy industry, partnering with indigenous peoples, and capitalizing on important marketing opportunities for our products, services, and technologies.

The experts in intergovernmental relations help our government build the positive relationships we need to serve Alberta's priorities as a contributor to Confederation.

The Alberta protocol office leads the development of key visits linked to our international priorities, including new markets for traditional and more diverse Alberta products.

The Executive Council's third business plan outcome is effective communications of government priorities both inside and outside of government. Strong relationships rely on open and effective communication, and that includes the relationship between Albertans and their government. Executive communications are even more vital when times are tough, as they are right now. The Public Affairs Bureau co-ordinates and supports communications across government to provide accurate information on policies, programs, and services and to engage with Albertans and stakeholders in moving Alberta forward together.

Mr. Chair, the operating expense for the Executive Council's work is \$26.8 million for the next three years. This budget includes a 2 per cent reduction in budgeted salaries. The budget also includes a 2 per cent reduction this year for supplies and services and an additional 3 per cent reduction for supplies and services in subsequent years. These cost control measures are part of our government's overall commitment to take a careful and stable approach to reducing the cost of government. As reported in Budget 2016, the overall growth in the government's operating budget falls to an average of 2 per cent for the next three years.

Mr. Chair, these are just a few of the highlights of our Executive Council's work to advance the government priorities and to serve all Albertans. In partnership with the ministries across government, we are all working together to support Albertans in a tough economy by creating jobs, diversifying our economy, and controlling costs. I want to thank everyone in Executive Council for being a leader and facilitator and helping to achieve the government's shared goals for a more prosperous and healthy province for all Albertans.

I've just been informed that, concluding the press conference that just happened on the wildfires, Ms Nelson is attempting to join us this evening, hence the empty chair here at the front. Glad that she'll make that effort.

I welcome our discussion on Executive Council's budget as well as the business plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Deputy Premier.

For the 50 minutes that follow, members of the Official Opposition and the Deputy Premier may speak. Would you like the timer to be set at 20-minute intervals?

Mr. Cooper: Please.

The Chair: Okay. Would you prefer to share your time as well with the minister?

Mr. Cooper: If that's good with the Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Happy to do so.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Just for clarification purposes, is it 40 or 50 minutes?

The Chair: Fifty minutes.

Mr. Cooper: Well, there's 10 extra minutes of awesomeness.

Ms Hoffman: I'll be happy to help you fill those.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I'm sure that you will. I have observed these things before, and if there's one thing you're excellent at, it's filling time.

Before we begin on such a pleasant note, I'd just like to say that our thoughts and prayers are with the first responders this evening. I understand there's some additional excitement to the north of us and some additional evacuees. We are thinking of them this evening while we discuss very important things here. It pales in comparison to the important work that they are doing to keep our province and certainly our energy industry safe.

With that, Mr. Chair, let us start at line 1.1 of the budget. As you mentioned in your opening remarks, the budget estimates show about \$12.3 million, and that is a modest decrease. Can you just briefly go over what all is included in the decrease and how you achieved that?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we're working diligently to find ways to streamline our services to Albertans. The \$221,000 decrease from the '15-16 forecast to the '16-17 estimates represents a 2 per cent decrease, as was mentioned. Based on the current fiscal climate, a general decrease of 2 per cent to salaries and benefits was applied across the entire department. The decrease will be achieved through attrition and management of vacant positions.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

In the last estimates part of the challenge for Executive Council in terms of the overall budget was a significant amount of monies that was paid to departing staff. When we take into consideration that significant amount, do you think that there could not have been more done to achieve additional savings given that you don't have to pay out those payouts again?

Ms Hoffman: From the 2015-16 forecast I believe the majority of those transitionals were in the past year's fiscal budget, but certainly we'd be happy to provide feedback on that. I think that in '15-16 we didn't have many transitional allowances that were paid out.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Speaking of providing additional feedback, I just would like to note that I believe that there were 10 separate

items that in the previous estimates had been discussed around – I have a list of those documents. The Premier at that time said that they would be getting back to us on them. Now, to the best of my knowledge, none of those items actually were tabled. It's not like they were a written question and a point of privilege in the House or anything. I know that from time to time the department has a hard time tabling those documents, but I just hope that, as we go, this year we'll be a little bit better off when it comes to getting those documents back to us. Can we receive some assurances?

Ms Hoffman: To our knowledge, they were provided, but if you do give me a list of the documents that were requested, I'd certainly be happy to follow up and ensure that if they weren't in fact tabled, we will provide them as well as address to the best of our abilities questions that might arise tonight. I don't want to make a blanket commitment without knowing what exactly it is that you're asking for. Obviously, we have privacy legislation that governs us as well.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, yeah. You bet. All of the things were items that had been said would be tabled for us. We did double-check with the Clerk, who said that they hadn't been tabled, but there's no sense in arguing whether they have or they haven't been. We can just move forward, hoping that they will be.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chair, if the questions can be provided to us – obviously, I do have the *Hansard*, but if there are specific questions, I'd be happy to receive those this evening and ensure that if for some reason they weren't tabled, for those documents that are congruent, we do follow up on that.

Mr. Cooper: Perfect. Thank you.

Again, when we spoke in November, the Premier said that there were 26 FTEs within the office of the Premier and 59 FTEs within the office of the Premier and Executive Council. She said that there were four funded positions that were vacant. Can you update us on those numbers now?

Ms Hoffman: Sure. Certainly, we're at the point now in the office of the Premier where we have 27 positions there in this current budget.

Mr. Cooper: And when you include Executive Council?

Ms Hoffman: Let me see that line item. The entire Executive Council, including all staff though the different departments, would be I believe it's 178, but the office of the Premier is 27.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

When we asked the same question last time – I just want to make sure that we're clear. We asked the question: how many full-time FTEs are there in the office of the Premier and Executive Council? At that time there were 59 FTEs inside Executive Council, and now you're suggesting there are 178?

Ms Hoffman: There are 178 when you add up all the line items. I think the question is around the definition of Executive Council and what's being referred to in that. The office of the Premier does have 27. Perhaps the Executive Council was referring to the office of the Premier combined with the deputy minister and cabinet co-ordination. If that's the case, cabinet co-ordination has 24 as well. I imagine that with the question that was being asked at that time, maybe the interpretation was that Executive Council is the office of the Premier combined with the deputy minister's office. There are, of course, other offices. We're responsible for the Lieutenant Governor, corporate services, the Public Affairs Bureau – those all

go on – but in terms of the office of the Premier and the Deputy Premier the answer would be 27 plus 24.

7:20

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Would you be willing to table that information, the number that gets you to 178, so I have a sense of . . .

Ms Hoffman: Why don't I answer the question now?

Mr. Cooper: It depends on how long you want to take to do that.

Ms Hoffman: Well, if you want the answer, this is our chance to provide it. The office of the Premier is 27; the Deputy Premier, 24; the policy co-ordination office, 21; protocol, nine; the office of the Lieutenant Governor, five; corporate services, 21; intergovernmental relations, 27; the Public Affairs Bureau, 44.

Mr. Cooper: And do you know the year-over-year increase? Are any of those significantly increased or decreased, given that you are the only one with the number?

Ms Hoffman: The net change is four, and those four are from the Public Affairs Bureau. Those four positions were the transfer of two FTEs from Economic Development and Trade, so the addition of those two doesn't reflect an increase to government. It's moving people from one department into the Public Affairs Bureau. As well, Economic Development and Trade had two vacant positions that weren't filled under Economic Development and Trade that were moved to the Public Affairs Bureau, so the net change year over year is zero if you count in those transitions.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, in several different ministries we've heard about government-wide reductions. Are these reductions purely in terms of staffing, or are there other reductions as well? If so, could you give us a couple of examples of those and how long you anticipate these reductions to be in place for?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. The big area, outside of doing the staffing reductions, is around supplies, equipment, and services, where we've also done a 2 per cent reduction. For Budget '16 there is a reduction of \$436,000 in salaries and benefits as well as a \$60,000 reduction in general operating costs, so that's that supplies and services piece.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. I'm interested in the creation of an issues management department. My understanding is that there haven't been similar such departments, particularly within the context of the Premier's office. There's still an issues management unit showing under the PAB, but I understand it doesn't identify any staff or positions. Can you confirm or provide some context around: has the issues management unit been moved from the PAB into the Premier's office, or are there two different issues management departments within Executive Council?

Ms Hoffman: Actually, the areas that I think you're referring to around the new proportion of issues management is paid for within our different ministries. For example, I'll have an issues manager in Health, and it's somebody to help triage certain specific issues that we're dealing with and co-ordinate between our office as well as the Premier's office.

In terms of the PAB issues manager side, the folks who – when we have constituents call your offices or call our offices, we have people that spend time on the phone trying to remedy certain constituent concerns, so those will be the issues managers through

the other area. Those are still, of course, necessary. We just seem to have two names for two very different functions.

Mr. Cooper: So you've created a new issues management department that didn't exist prior, then?

Ms Hoffman: It's not a department. It's staff that we have in each of our ministries working. They're staff that would have been ministry staff, and instead we've grouped them together so that they can triage crossministerial items. For example, if there's stuff happening around the fire situation, we have an issues manager tied to Agriculture, Environment, Energy, Health, Human Services, and they can co-ordinate in a more effective management. There is no net increase to GOA. It's just a realignment of where some of those resources were through ministry supports.

Mr. Cooper: So you've moved them out of the ministries per se and into the Premier's office budget?

Ms Hoffman: No. They're not in the Premier's office budget. They're in our ministries, and they're co-ordinated in a fashion that helps support the work of the Premier as well in co-ordinating and expediting matters that need to be dealt with urgently.

Mr. Cooper: Can you just let me know what the scope of the responsibility is for the department? What is the scope? How far does it reach?

Ms Hoffman: Would you mind repeating that part of the question, please?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. What's the scope of the responsibilities of the department of issues management? You know, how far do they go or not go in terms of assisting the Premier?

Ms Hoffman: Certainly. I just want to provide a little context. The model that we've established around having some movement and some co-ordination with the Premier's office more mirrors the structure that's in the Prime Minister's office, for example, in Ottawa, around co-ordinating those types of matters in an effective way.

Mr. Cooper: More Ottawa and less Alberta, then: is that what I hear you saying?

Ms Hoffman: I'm saying that we look at all of our neighbours and we look at what might work. The wise thing to do, if there's a structure that is serving other jurisdictions in a way that might be able to provide some efficiencies in ours, is to consider finding ways to use it at the local level. I'd be happy to have Deputy Minister Nelson add some context to that.

Ms Nelson: Sure. The way the issues management function works is that staff are applied to try to identify issues before they occur, so to help prevent, you know, small problems becoming bigger issues. Once issues are identified, they have multiple roles in terms of helping develop management strategies with department staff, helping develop communication strategies, and helping with ongoing stakeholder engagement strategies.

Mr. Cooper: Can you confirm for me the total number of staff that are in the issues management department?

Ms Hoffman: I don't usually call on folks behind me . . .

Mr. Cooper: Glad I could help.

Ms Hoffman: . . . but if Ms Anthony would be willing to respond to that question. Thank you very much. This is Jen Anthony. She heads that area.

Mr. Cooper: There's a microphone there if you want it. Sorry.

Ms Hoffman: No problem. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms Anthony: There is a director, a deputy director, a researcher, six issue managers, and one admin staff.

Mr. Cooper: Would it be safe to say that if the government was doing a better job, there would be fewer issues?

Ms Hoffman: No.

Mr. Cooper: Just checking.

Ms Hoffman: Would it be safe to say that if the Official Opposition – I wouldn't go there.

Mr. Cooper: I just find it unique that you've created a whole department to manage the issues of the Premier's office.

Staying within the Premier's office and inside new hiring, I understand that there's a new hire in stakeholder relations. Is that correct?

Ms Hoffman: Can you tell me – sorry. I'm wondering: are you talking about a specific posting or a specific person that's been added to the website? As this isn't my everyday file, can you give me a little more context for the question?

Mr. Cooper: Fair enough. I think his name is Chris O'Halloran.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, yes. I'm happy to speak to that. Absolutely. Yeah. Chris O'Halloran was hired in the Calgary office, and he's been hired as a stakeholder relations manager for that part of the province and works under the Premier, through McDougall.

Mr. Cooper: Now, the government announced their intent to hire this individual in December. I just have a couple of quick questions. When was Mr. O'Halloran originally offered the post?

Ms Hoffman: I don't have the date on which he was offered it, but I do know that he began work in April, on the 20th, and the position will report to the director of stakeholder relations in the Premier's Edmonton office.

Mr. Cooper: How many people are employed in the stakeholder relations department inside the Premier's office, again?

Ms Hoffman: We'll certainly be happy to gather that number, probably in the next three seconds. Certainly, the manager for that position – it's a critical position, and we wanted to make sure that we had people who had proven skills, who could be an asset to that office in terms of the southern Alberta branch as well. The details of the appointment will be available publicly as all contracts for political appointments are disclosed on the government website. If that contract isn't up there already, certainly it will be in short order.

The numbers for the southern Alberta office: was that specifically your question?

7:30

Mr. Cooper: Yeah; both of them in stakeholder relations.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. There's a director of stakeholder relations; a communications and stakeholder relations manager; and an

executive assistant, an admin position, essentially. That's the southern office, and then we have stakeholder relations in Edmonton as a separate one. That's the southern Alberta piece.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. There were certainly comments in the media in December on the intent to hire, but they didn't begin work for four months. Do you know what the delay was?

Ms Hoffman: I can't speak to what the delay would have been. Obviously, there are a variety of reasons why somebody might begin a contract months after initially anticipated.

Mr. Cooper: During the interim period was the individual creating any documents for his new role or contributing to the government in any way?

Ms Hoffman: Not that I'm aware.

Mr. Cooper: Moving to the business plan on page 58, outcome 1. If you turn to page 58 of the business plan with me, Mr. Chair, outcome 1 of the business plan reads: "work of ministries is aligned to ensure the efficient implementation of government's agenda." Naturally, I understand the importance of wanting to ensure effective implementation. Would I be correct in stating that the policy co-ordination office is integral to ensuring that this outcome is met?

Ms Hoffman: Yes.

Mr. Cooper: I notice that this office has grown substantially since the fall. By my count it's grown by half. Can you explain why tens of thousands of Albertans are losing their jobs yet the size of government is increasing?

Ms Hoffman: I can explain that your assertion is not accurate, that it has not increased, that the numbers in that office are the same as they were before.

Mr. Cooper: I accept that's a possibility.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. If you want to know why it looks like there was an increase, it's because some folks were moved from Treasury Board and Finance, the Regulatory Review Secretariat under Treasury Board and Finance, so the number of people doing the work is still the same. Again, it's just reporting a structure shift.

Mr. Cooper: They've moved from Treasury Board into policy co-ordination?

Ms Hoffman: Treasury Board, under regulatory secretariat, into PCO. Yeah. There's, again, been no increase to the number of FTEs. They're still doing the type of work they would have done before. They're just in a different office, reportingwise.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Continuing with this outcome, I'm also interested to know how the FOIP process . . .

The Chair: That's your first 20 minutes.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms Hoffman: Time flies.

Mr. Cooper: Only when you're having fun.

I'm interested to know how the FOIP process fits into this. We know that there's a weekly report provided which outlines what FOIPs are in the queue. Do you know the number of people who receive that update and which departments they're in?

Ms Hoffman: I am not aware of who receives the update. I don't think we have that information. That can be one of our take-aways that we will reply to you in writing.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Someone circle the calendar; I got one.

Is there a co-ordinated effort from the Premier's office in how FOIP requests are handled, particularly given that you have 10 issue managers, and how information is released? Is the government withholding information from FOIP applicants?

Ms Hoffman: No. Absolutely not. The process is that we respect the legislation and the folks who are interested in executing it.

Mr. Cooper: Is there a co-ordinated effort from the Premier's office in how FOIP requests are handled and how information is released?

Ms Hoffman: No. My understanding is that FOIP is administrated through the public service side, not through the political arm, and the public service does deliver on their responsibilities in accordance with the legislation. I guess the co-ordination would be in co-ordination with and respect of the legislation. If you would like, I would be happy to call on Deputy Minister Nelson to respond.

Ms Nelson: There are, from time to time, FOIP requests that are made across government for the same information to be provided from multiple departments. In those instances sometimes there will be a co-ordinated effort made to make sure we are providing a common approach and a common interpretation so that it isn't inconsistent.

Mr. Cooper: To make sure the wrong information doesn't get out.

Ms Nelson: No, no; to make sure that it's not inconsistent.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, okay. Over the past year we've noticed a shift in how records are released. There appears to be several types of requests that take an inordinate amount of time to be released. I'm wondering if there's a strategic element at work here that links the release of FOIP documents to the effective implementation of the government's agenda. I know that in the past the NDP have been very adamant about the importance of FOIP and the importance of access to information. I'm just trying to understand if there's been a shift in the way that FOIPs are handled given that the delays cannot be blamed on the previous government.

Ms Hoffman: Certainly, when I was on the receiving end of FOIPs, I too shared frustration when the legislated timelines weren't met. I want to acknowledge that in reviewing these estimates, we recognize that there has been a delay in providing responses to a number of FOIP requests. Over the last couple of years the FOIP area has been experiencing increases in the number of requests that it does receive. The increases in requests created a situation where the FOIP office was understaffed given the number of requests. As such, they were not meeting up with the demand. Recent staff changes in the finance and administration area, which includes FOIP, have allowed us to resource the area with new staff, a new structure, including a director position dedicated to FOIP and records management.

Certainly, our intent moving forward is to be more timely with responses, and should extensions be required, to inform the applicants in a timely fashion.

Mr. Cooper: Plus, crossministry co-ordination takes some time.

Ms Hoffman: If there are multiple ministries being FOIPed that need to be co-ordinated, obviously, to specific departments on the applicant's side as well as the respondent's side, it's more efficient.

Mr. Cooper: Moving back to the budget, line item 1.3, corporate services. I see there is a small decrease shown here of about \$38,000, but at a time like this every little bit counts, so I appreciate that. Is this a real decrease or is this just moving money around?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. The \$38,000 decrease from the '15-16 budget to our estimates for this incoming year does represent 1.5 per cent. Based on the current fiscal climate, a general decrease of 2 per cent to salaries and benefits was applied across the department, as mentioned. Because the 2 per cent reduction was applied only to the budget for salaries and benefits and no reduction was taken to supplies and services in this area, the overall reduction appears as 1.5 per cent. The reason why it couldn't be a 2 per cent to supplies and services is because, really, that piece of their budget is so small that you can only buy paper, for example, in packs of 500. Cutting that by 2 per cent would be extremely difficult. The 2 per cent cut to the salaries and benefits portion of this line item is what's enabled that \$38,000 decrease.

Mr. Cooper: In line 2 on page 122, I'm hoping to understand the decrease to intergovernmental relations. Would you agree that intergovernmental relations are critically important to the success of our province? Yet there is a decrease of \$80,000. What is the reason for this?

Ms Hoffman: It sounds to me that the member is calling for an increase to that line item. Any time the Official Opposition ask about an increase, certainly, my ears perk up even more.

Absolutely, intergovernmental relations is an important piece of the work of the office of the Premier and our government as a whole. Salaries and benefits, again, are the area where we're focusing on a reduction. They were reduced by \$60,000, and supplies and services were reduced by \$20,000. Based on the current fiscal climate, a general decrease of 2 per cent to those salaries and benefits, again, was applied across the department. That's hopefully going to be managed through attrition, again. Certainly, as we've been called upon many a time to try to find ways to work more efficiently, we stay committed to that call. The area where we're anticipating the decrease is in admin support only.

7:40

Mr. Cooper: Thank you.

Let's transition back to the business plan, page 59, outcome 2. This outcome talks about co-ordination and advancement of Alberta's priorities and leadership and participation within the Canadian federation to serve the needs of Alberta and Canadians. I'm certain that you would agree that Alberta's energy industry is of vital importance to both Albertans and Canadians. Why is the department not engaged with the Prime Minister's plan for a tanker ban on the northwest coast? You often mention advancing Alberta's interests. Would you agree that a tanker ban, whether speculative because the Prime Minister is speaking about one or one that is actually in place, would negatively affect our interests and, by extension, would negatively impact Alberta and Canada's economy?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question. Certainly, market access is a very high priority for this government and arguably for all Albertans, and also I believe it should be an incredibly high priority for all Canadians given the importance. We can't control, necessarily, the price of oil, which I hear today did

close at over \$47, so that of course is better news. But what we do have some control over as Canadians is trying to get the very best price on the international market. Certainly, the federal-provincial relations have improved with the new federal government.

Mr. Cooper: Would a tanker ban negatively impact our interests?

Ms Hoffman: I hear you regularly speculating that there will be a tanker ban. Again, we have not seen evidence of that through policy, but absolutely we're focused on making sure that we continue to have access to markets, and that means making sure that we have the ability to get a pipeline to tidewater and, of course, are able to transport that product across tidewater.

Mr. Cooper: If there was a tanker ban, would that have a negative impact on our interests?

Ms Hoffman: I love that you like to ask these speculative and theoretical questions.

Certainly, we have communicated to our partners at western premiers and will continue to communicate to the Prime Minister's office around the importance of market access, which includes access to transport via tanker. Certainly, they're aware of our position and all Albertans should be aware as well.

Mr. Cooper: You just supported a motion that says that a tanker ban is bad.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Mr. Cooper: You did say that a tanker ban would be bad?

Ms Hoffman: Through you, Mr. Chair, I responded to the question. I did say that important access to markets, including our ability to transport via tanker . . .

Mr. Cooper: There's been some conversation about . . .

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to conclude my remarks should I still have the floor.

The Chair: Proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Certainly, transporting our product and getting access to those markets is of utmost importance. Both pipelines and access to transport via tanker are important to the people in the government of Alberta.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's been some conversation about a potential agreement with B.C. in relation to electricity and pipelines. Can you update us as to where that conversation is now?

Ms Hoffman: I believe that's a question that would be geared towards Energy estimates. Is there a line item or an item within the business plan that you're referring to so I can comment in the context of the Executive Council and the Premier's office?

Mr. Cooper: Sure. Outcome 2, co-ordination and advancement of Alberta's priorities and leadership and participation within the Canadian federation. I would say that an agreement with B.C. in relation to electricity and pipelines certainly would fall under the leadership and participation within the Canadian federation.

Ms Hoffman: Certainly, discussions around ways that may proceed moving forward are of interest, I know, especially to partners on the distribution side. We're certainly continuing to have

conversations about meeting future demand and open to continuing conversations with partners on the west side of our provincial boundary. Certainly, we have interests in accessing tidewater, and they have interests in being able to sell their power.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, the target for renewal of the agreement on internal trade was expected this past March, so two months ago or last month, whatever it is. An agreement of internal trade was expected this past March. To my understanding, that deadline has come and gone. Can you update us on the progress being made, and are we close to an agreement?

Ms Hoffman: Again, is there a line item that you're referring to? It sounds to me like an outcome related to the Economic Development and Trade ministry. I'm wondering if there's a reason why it's being asked at these estimates as opposed to those.

Mr. Cooper: Sure, mostly because in the business plan it speaks specifically to "the coordination and advancement of Alberta's priorities," and trade amongst our partners is certainly one of those, and to "leadership and participation" – your words, not mine – "within the Canadian federation to serve the needs of Albertans and Canadians." I would suggest that internal trade would certainly fall into one of those priorities. Perhaps it doesn't for Executive Council.

Ms Hoffman: In terms of the agreement on internal trade we expect that the final negotiations will be completed in text by the end of May, and this would allow each government the opportunity to review and approve the new agreement in time for the Premiers' review and approval at their annual meeting in July in Whitehorse. Progress is being made, and the final text is, hopefully, very close to the ink drying.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Chair, I understand that the framework for this agreement is consistent with that of the New West Partnership trade agreement. Can you confirm that these two agreements will complement each other?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. When the western Premiers gathered last week, there was a broader table than just the New West Partnership in that all of the territories were present as well. Certainly, there is a desire for us to continue to work collaboratively and find ways to increase access for each of our jurisdictions in terms of our products that we have to serve each other as well as the world. Collaboration continues to be ongoing around the New West Partnership. Given that it was one of the hundred-day commitments in the Manitoba government platform, certainly we know it's a priority for them, and we're happy to be part of those discussions.

Mr. Cooper: Speaking of the New West Partnership, do you know when the last meeting was held between the Premiers or when the next one is scheduled for? Not the Premiers' meeting or whatever you were just at but specifically to the New West Partnership attendees or signatories.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. The New West Partnership does have the three western provinces. There is a desire by a fourth, Manitoba, to express interest in joining that. The Western Premiers' Conference also had the three territories, and while all of the jurisdictions were in the room at the same time, certainly there were opportunities for us to talk about it but not in a way that would overlap with the New West Partnership. As I understand from those discussions, officials

are in regular contact on behalf of our staff, sharing updates. The work continues whether people are face to face in a room at once or not, and certainly there's ongoing work in that area.

Mr. Cooper: I understand that three of the co-operation agreements expired on April 30. Can you update us on the status of these agreements? Will they be renewed, and does the New West Partnership have the full support of your government?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, we are signatories on the New West Partnership and continue to work with the partners who are currently at the table as well as with the Premier of Manitoba, who has expressed interest in finding ways to collaborate on that. Market access and trade were themes of the entire Western Premiers' Conference and will continue to be. I would expect that there will be additional advancements around the New West Partnership and other opportunities for trade that are both within our control and others, hopefully, that the federal government will be co-supporting moving forward as well.

Mr. Cooper: I'd like to talk with you about your budgets for communication strategies. Of course, in the fall the last budget was accompanied by \$736,000 for an advertisement strategy. At that point the province was moving towards \$47 billion in debt by '19-20. Now, with this new budget the forecast is \$58 billion in debt, and you're spending \$747,000 to advertise. It seems to me that the higher the debt goes, the higher the amount to promote that debt. Can you explain why, when this government is already taking on such high levels of debt, over \$1.5 million is being spent to advertise that fact?

7:50

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chair. Certainly, advertising is an important piece of raising awareness and encouraging conversation about the 2016-17 budget between Albertans and their government, and this happens in other jurisdictions often as well. Albertans want and need to be informed about where their tax dollars are going. Spending on advertising around the budget will be lower than planned spending on the previous budget as we removed the final week of advertising program related to the budget because it was really important for us to do public service announcements related to the Fort McMurray wildfire. Certainly, communicating with the public about what's happening in their province is a priority for us.

Mr. Cooper: This ad, the one to advertise the budget: was it tendered?

Ms Hoffman: I think I'll have to call on my team here. We'll start with Mr. Wells from the Public Affairs Bureau.

Mr. Wells: Sure. Actually, the contract was effected through a company that is an agency of record. That agency of record was awarded through a duly tendered process, and it is a contract that we use for informational advertising on an ongoing basis. The media buy itself is also through an agency of record that was billed through a tender awarded by the previous government, and the contract continues.

Mr. Cooper: Do you know who won that tender, off the top of your head?

Mr. Wells: Sorry. The tender for the agency of record?

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. What is the agency of record you speak of?

Mr. Wells: Sorry. For the creative production or the media buy?

Mr. Cooper: Both, please.

Mr. Wells: Our media-buying company is DDB Canada, and the agency of record for informational advertising is ZGM, Zero Gravity Marketing Inc.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you.

Will there be an advertising campaign once your long-awaited climate leadership plan comes into effect, and how much is budgeted for that?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Certainly, speaking with the public is an important piece of what the government does, and there are a variety of different ways that we do that. One of those could be through traditional media, and we're certainly not ruling out the ability to be able to communicate with the public around such an important piece of public policy that's moving forward.

Mr. Cooper: Surely, there must be an amount budgeted to do that, though.

Ms Hoffman: In this budget there are high-level budget lines, but I don't think that we've determined a budget around that specific initiative at this point. There's a communications budget, though.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Do you find it a bit strange that you're going to spend money advertising on a tax that's going to increase the cost of everything, and have you considered the carbon footprint of that advertising campaign?

The Chair: You have 10 minutes remaining.

Ms Hoffman: Ten minutes remaining?

I think it's absolutely fair to communicate with Albertans around the public policy directions that their government is taking. I think they expect that from us. I think that it's important to have information available. We have seen instances in the past where if the government isn't communicating facts about what the government is doing, that spin happens from other areas in the public sphere, and that certainly leads to misunderstanding and miscommunications. So I won't rule out speaking directly with Albertans either through media or other means.

Mr. Cooper: Does the department reach outside of Executive Council or the PAB for additional advice on strategic communications or advertising?

Ms Hoffman: Is there an example or something that you're – I'm just trying to understand. Outside of the Department of Executive Council or the Public Affairs Bureau?

Mr. Cooper: Sure.

Ms Hoffman: So do we talk to our departments about things that we'll be communicating about the budget?

Mr. Cooper: No. Like, we have seen in many other departments significant use of firms like KPMG to provide additional advice to the department. Is Executive Council or the PAB doing the same?

Ms Hoffman: I'll call on the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, please, and if you choose to add others, feel free.

Ms Nelson: Sure. I understand that virtually every advertising agency that we work with as a matter of course provides us with advice when they're delivering their products.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to move to key strategy 3.4, that reads: "Provide crisis communications coordination and support in times of emergency." I'm sure that none of us expected this strategy to be practised so quickly, and we would have all preferred it not to have had to be practised. I just would like to again commend Alberta's first responders for the quick and selfless actions they took and for their hard work battling fires and in assisting the people of Fort McMurray.

What types of costs are you expecting in regard to your communications budget given the significant need to use it? Do you foresee budget overruns to increased communications costs? Now, let me just for the record say that I am not implying that this line item had anything to do with the need for the crisis but am just seeking clarification around the costs that may be associated with that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. I think it's an important matter. Of course, we have had increased communications just in the last two weeks in substantial ways, including some of the public advertisements that we've done around registering with the Red Cross. That's been very successful. As well, right now I believe there's a telephone town hall with evacuees to continue to provide that ongoing information.

I'd be happy to have Mr. Wells supplement that response.

Mr. Wells: Yeah. The public service advertisements: the total cost of those will be offset in large part by the discontinued budget advertising campaign, that would have overlapped with this message that we needed to get out. In that respect there may be some incremental increase to the spending on advertising.

In large part, though, with specific reference to line 3.4, the Public Affairs Bureau and public service communications staff from across ministries have been working at the Provincial Operations Centre seven days a week and often up to 16 hours a day to co-ordinate the crisis communications that you referenced. I understand some previous administrations may have relied on outside contractors to a greater extent, but I've found that the public service has been very capable and willing. Most of the people in the POC from the various communications departments are at a manager level, so I believe that we shouldn't see increased overtime costs associated with the long hours that they're working.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. If I could add one more thing, Mr. Chair. The disaster recovery program within Municipal Affairs may have some resources that we can transfer, where necessary, to this line item. As well, I know that there is the potential to apply for some federal disaster recovery funds although some of my neighbours have said that it takes many years to receive those funds. But there is the potential there, so we will certainly consider that as well.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, in light of the fact that I am not a substituting member of the committee today, I would like to just allow Mr. Taylor to move an amendment on our behalf if that's possible.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have the amendment here, that has the required 20 copies and has been passed through

Parliamentary Counsel 24 hours prior to this meeting. If I could, I will read this in as we're distributing this. Okay. Notice of amendment, 2016-17 main estimates, Ministry of Executive Council.

Mr. Taylor to move that the 2016-17 main estimates of the Ministry of Executive Council be reduced as follows:

- (a) for office of the Premier/Executive Council under reference 1.1 at page 122 by \$409,000
- (b) for corporate services under reference 1.3 at page 122 by \$97,000
- (c) for public affairs under reference 3 at page 122 by \$461,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 121 for expense is \$25,840,000.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: If I might, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah.

8:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Thank you for the advance notice. I look forward to having an opportunity to debate this down the road. I just have to acknowledge that there's a desire to have more timely FOIP responses, yet there is a proposal to cut corporate services. Certainly, our desire is to meet the outcomes of all members. I look forward to debating this more fully, but certainly part of having open government is having the areas that enable that staffed appropriately, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Chair, how much time remains?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Mr. Cooper: Other than the town halls that have surrounded the Fort McMurray fires – and I'm speaking about outcome 3, "effective communication of government priorities and initiatives within and outside of government" – are there additional telephone town halls planned, and have they been budgeted for?

Ms Hoffman: Is that page 60?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Correct.

Ms Hoffman: Certainly, co-ordinating decision-making, advancing the work that we're doing within government, and engaging with Albertans are sort of the three main pillars of this area within the plan. Engaging with Albertans can take place in a variety of ways. I won't say that we won't have them, but certainly it's on an as-needed basis, I think. We will continue to find ways to best communicate. Sometimes that's through surveys, sometimes it's through face-to-face meetings, and sometimes it's through co-ordinated telephone efforts. Having the flexibility to do that within the appropriate situation I think requires us to be flexible. So the answer is possibly, but we don't have a definitive plan for using that resource at this point.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

In your documents you speak to two-way communication, but there's been a significant amount of nuance in the language around the communication being more directive from the government to Albertans and less receiving. Is that the newest direction from this plan?

The other question that I am curious to know about is: is the government tracking IP addresses when they're doing telephone town halls as well as online surveys? More specific to online surveys, are they tracking IP addresses to ensure that the values and

the opinions of Albertans are being taken into account and not just those who don't have a direct interest in Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Chair. Certainly, the first part of the question . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allotted has expired.

We will now proceed to the third party, the PC caucus. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Dr. Starke: If it's acceptable to the Deputy Premier, yes, please.

Ms Hoffman: I would like that.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Chair, very much. Thank you to the Deputy Premier and to staff from Executive Council.

I'd just like to start by saying that there has been a great deal of tribute paid to all of the first responders and everyone that has contributed to what I think has been a Herculean effort in terms of the response to the Fort McMurray wildfires. But, Deputy Premier and, as well, Mr. Cooper and members of the Wildrose opposition caucus, if you would be so good as to pass on my personal thanks to both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition for their leadership in this crisis. I think that in both cases they've shown exemplary poise and grace under fire, literally. I will tell you, having gone through another crisis, in 2013, with the southern Alberta flooding, it is, to me, something that is good to see, that both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition are co-operating and are both duly playing their roles in terms of encouraging Albertans and providing leadership in their own ways. I want to thank them both for that because I do believe they deserve tremendous credit for that.

Deputy Premier, recognizing that you've been brought in to pinch-hit, if you will – but I think you're very capable of doing that – I want to start by looking at performance measures. Back in November, when we did Executive Council last – and I'm quoting now from page EF-111 of *Hansard* – I asked the Premier some questions about performance measures because the 2015 business plan had no performance measures. The Premier explained exactly why that was, that those performance measures were being redeveloped.

You know, I'm just going to quote here for the record. She said:

I agree with you that performance measures and performance standards are very important tools in terms of holding the government to account.

A little later in the same paragraph she said:

They should be crafted in a way that has some meaning to it. I believe that certainly in the case of my ministry there was probably some value in trying to identify some slightly more measurable outcomes and to injecting those in the process.

I was really looking forward to the performance measures in this year's budget and this year's business plan, and I have to say, Deputy Premier, that I came out completely underwhelmed. The five performance measures that are listed here are, I think, weak. They do nothing to hold the government to account as far as the performance of Executive Council.

Dealing specifically in terms of a question with performance measures 1(a) and 1(b), these two performance measures are largely the same statement except that the first talks about services in general and 1(b) talks about "satisfaction of ministries with communications and support services they receive from Executive Council." For reasons that are unknown to me, that has a 5 per cent higher threshold or target than the regular services. I wonder if you'd care to comment on those.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question and Dr. Starke for asking it. Certainly, I had a chance to review *Hansard* from last time. I can understand where you're coming from and where the Premier was coming from at the time. In doing some follow-up with her department, we talked about these performance measures and how they relate to satisfaction and support from the policy co-ordination office, the cabinet co-ordination office, machinery of government, and government operations.

Although they are similar to measures in the past, there was a thorough review, and it was deemed that the most appropriate manner in which to measure the performance was in these areas of the ministry, having an inward-facing Executive Council, and a big part of its work is working to facilitate across ministries within the government and doing a review with other jurisdictions across Canada. Unfortunately, there didn't seem to be exemplars of measures that could be held to a higher standard. I share your frustration, but a lot of the work is around inward facing.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Then let's turn to perhaps a performance measure that is more outward facing, and that's performance measure 3(a), "public satisfaction with government communications," on page 60 of the business plan. The last actual was 71 per cent. The target is at 75 per cent. I'm going to suggest, Deputy Premier, that based on the performance of government in the communication of specifically Bill 6, especially with rural residents, you'd be really lucky to get 7.5 per cent, never mind 75 per cent satisfaction. I guess my question specifically is: what has the government learned from the experience with Bill 6 and the communications shortcomings, let's just say, that surrounded that bill?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. I think one of the biggest learnings was around being careful about expectations, being careful about co-ordinating when consultation does happen and in what ways, and making sure that all of the consultation documents are reflective of the direction that the government has provided, certainly, taking responsibility for there being a great deal of misinformation. It was a good learning experience about the importance of speaking directly with Albertans as well.

8:10

Again, this was an example, I think, of when there's a gap in providing that clear information, the space gets filled – and unfortunately we didn't fill it with facts early enough – and also of the importance of being very clear about the amendments. While, of course, it wasn't our intention to put regulatory direction in as an amendment, it certainly was necessary. People said, "Put it in writing," and that's certainly what should have been done earlier.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Thank you. Well, lessons that we all learn as we go along, so that's fine.

I want to talk a little bit about a change between the October business plan and the April business plan, specifically on the very first page under Ministry Overview. In October the very first expected outcome talks about "supporting long-term strategic planning and policy coordination for government" and then this part, "and promotion of cross-ministry coordination of strategic priorities." In this business plan that drops to number 2. I understand these things get changed in order, and that's fine. Number 2 talks about "supports long-term strategic planning," so the same start of it, but the whole bit about promotion of cross-ministry co-ordination of strategic priorities is dropped, is completely left off.

I'm concerned about that because one of the things that happens in large governmental organizations is ministries and departments working in silos, and I discussed this with the Premier back in October. We used to have what were called ministerial working groups, and certainly Ms Nelson will be very familiar with those. We found those very useful, and I guess I'm wondering: are crossministerial working groups still happening? Would these be useful to eliminate the formation of silos within departments? What is presently in place to try to encourage the crossministry coordination? I'm assuming – it's been dropped off the outcome – that it's still happening.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to confirm that, absolutely, it needs to happen. I think that perhaps 1.1 could encompass some of those values, but I'll add some of the ways that it actually gets lived in our everyday work. A big one is our work among cabinet committees. For example, we have a social policy committee, that has representation from a variety of ministers who meet regularly, bring items forward, an opportunity to collaborate on the impacts to the various ministries and bring forward proposals to cabinet itself. Certainly, social policy is one, economic development is another, climate change, the Municipal Government Act, and then also we're doing another emergent one around our response to Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. So those are some of the areas where regular collaboration takes place.

Dr. Starke: So perhaps under a different name, but crossministerial work is continuing on.

Ms Hoffman: Yes.

Dr. Starke: Okay. That's great. I want to move sort of in that same light. I want to move to the capital plan within the overall fiscal plan starting on page 45 but sort of going through all of these. I'm asking these questions in terms of the overall capital plan and how it compares, you know, again, trying to break down these silos between departments.

I did a little bit of math, and I noticed that when we're looking at the capital plan, if we were to add up the proposed expenditures for the climate leadership plan, GreenTRIP, the valley line LRT, and municipal transit grants, that totals for the next five years to \$3.49 billion, just under \$3.5 billion. Curiously, Minister, in your role also as Health minister, that's actually more than what's being proposed to be spent on health facilities in the next five years and only very slightly less than what's being proposed to be spent on schools in the next five years. I wonder if you could comment on: is this reflective of your government's priorities, especially considering that some \$2.1 billion of that \$3.5 billion is simply entitled climate leadership plan capital, but there is absolutely no detail as to what that \$2.158 billion is going to be spent on.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. I imagine it may have been an item of discussion at the Infrastructure estimates.

Dr. Starke: Environment, actually.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, Environment. Okay. Interesting. Thank you very much.

Certainly, as we move forward with the climate leadership work, it's been mentioned that a variety of buildings, including government buildings, could be eligible for some of that energy retrofit money, which I believe could also address some of the other areas of deferred maintenance in collaboration. It's been communicated very clearly that cabinet's intent is to not have any money leave the economy, that it be reinvested back into supporting

economic diversification, addressing our desires to green our infrastructure and support communities. Certainly, cabinet is proud of the way that we're moving forward with that in a concrete and meaningful way in the next three years.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Deputy Premier, I guess what I would ask is that as soon as some of the details as to how that \$2.158 billion is going to be spent are available, you would share those details with Albertans because I know, especially in my part of the world, when I tell them that there are five years' worth of spending totalling over \$2 billion for climate leadership yet in that same period of time the construction of roads and bridges outside of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary is less than \$1.7 billion, I have some people who are not very happy about that. I would really suggest that that is something that needs to be clarified as soon as possible, okay?

One of the other areas that I wanted to just ask about – and I'm going to assume, but I don't want to assume incorrectly. In the health facilities and equipment capital budget, in the adult education and skills budget, and in the schools budget, in each of these areas there are fairly large allocations for unallocated priorities: \$125 million per year starting next year in the schools budget; the \$100 million per year that you and I discussed last Thursday in the Health budget; and in the adult education budget, unallocated in the last three years of the capital plan, \$100 million per year. Are these placeholders for projects that have not yet been identified but are anticipated? What is the reason for these rather large sums that are as of yet unallocated?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, when I was preparing for this and said, "So this is about discussing the business plan and estimates for Executive Council and the Premier's office," I was assured that that was the intent of this debate. I respect that there's a desire to speak more broadly to the entire government planning, but certainly my understanding was that we were working through these items in the document. There isn't capital in terms of a business plan for Executive Council and the Premier's office. I respect your desire to have that information, and we'd be happy to find some way that we can continue the conversation although I don't feel best prepared for it in the context of this meeting this evening.

Dr. Starke: You know, Deputy Premier, that's fine, and that's understandable. I absolutely understand that situation.

Let's move completely, then, over to something specifically within Executive Council, and that's sole-sourced contracts. Now, since May 2015 there have been a number of sole-sourced contracts that have been let, and a few of them sort of jump off the paper at me in terms of just wanting to ask about, you know, whether it would be possible to have documentation of the satisfactory completion of these contracts, what deliverables were specified by the contracts, and what value Albertans received.

Specifically, a Ms Judy Samuelson was contracted by Executive Council, once from September to December 2015 for the amount of \$20,000 and again after a three-day hiatus, starting on January 4 until the end of the last fiscal year, March 31, 2016, for an additional \$20,000. The contract services in the first case were to make recommendations on processes and paper flow that must exist in order to ensure the Premier is well informed, briefed, and prepared for meetings. The second contract: to provide advice on machinery of government, establishing office processes and efficient working relationships. Now, Ms Samuelson is from Regina, and she had previous history working with Premier Romanow in Saskatchewan. First of all, what value did Albertans get for the \$40,000 that was

spent? Secondly, was there nobody from Alberta that could provide those services?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question. Ms Samuelson was hired under contract to provide advice on transitioning to a new government, and given that there hadn't been a transition to a new government in Alberta in 44 years, certainly the pool of experienced applicants within Alberta was smaller than it might be in other jurisdictions.

The value of the two collective contracts was \$40,000 plus travel expenses. However, it was \$27,621.88 that was paid out during the fiscal year 2015-16 as the work was able to be done more efficiently. In terms of some of the transitions that took place as a result, I'll tell you that my scheduler moved to the Premier's office, so certainly there was a desire to make sure that some of the people who were working effectively were surrounding her. As well, Ms Samuelson had over 30 years of experience in government and served as cabinet secretary and clerk to Executive Council in Saskatchewan. That was some expertise that we were hoping to harness.

8:20

Dr. Starke: I'm curious, Deputy Premier. Ms Samuelson's first contract with government started on September 28. This was four and a half months after you took office. You said that it was for transition purposes. Isn't that a little late to be advising on transition purposes?

I guess my other question – certainly, Ms Samuelson has an impressive record of service to the government in the neighbouring province with Mr. Romanow, but she did not work during a transition period. Her work in Mr. Romanow's office was when the government had already been well established. So I'm curious to know what made her expertise or her experience with the Saskatchewan government specifically applicable to the situation, especially arriving as she did some four and a half months after the change in government occurred.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question, certainly a fair one. I think we all wish the transition would have been smooth and seamless and that it wouldn't have taken in excess of four months. There was a feeling that there were areas where we could improve and that they hadn't been achieved yet by that point in September, so it was important to bring in somebody who well understood the proper flow of information to enable decision-makers to have the right supports. Her experience in that area was certainly of value. That's why there was the initial contract around paper flow in the fall and later there was an additional contract around the machinery of government. Again, that's around co-ordinating flows of information, trying to make sure things are as expeditious as possible. Again, she didn't bill for the full amount because we did have that per data, per hour piece.

Dr. Starke: Yeah. You did mention that. I appreciate that.

Now I want to move slightly to the area of intergovernmental relations. Since May 2015 there were three grants provided for a total of \$295,000: two to the University of Alberta financial services and one to the Canada-ASEAN Business Council. I'm curious to know what value Albertans received for the \$295,000 that was provided in these grants, these three particular projects. I understand fully if you don't have the information at your fingertips, but I wonder if you could provide that information back to me at some later date.

Ms Hoffman: I'll do my best to get it in the next 35 minutes. If not, we'll provide it at a later point, but if we can get it before the end of the meeting, we'll certainly make efforts to do that.

Dr. Starke: Well, that would great, Deputy Premier. Thank you, and thank you very much for your co-operation in this segment.

Those are all of my questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right. Your time will have elapsed by now.

We'll now proceed to government caucus members. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mrs. Schreiner: Yes.

Ms Hoffman: I'd be happy to do that.

The Chair: Excellent. Please proceed.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Deputy Premier. I'd like to start off by saying that my thoughts and prayers go out to all the first responders who are working hard to deal with the forest fires in Alberta. We owe each of you a debt of gratitude. Again, thank you.

Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Premier. Outcome 2 of the Executive Council's business plan indicates the provincial government's commitment to promote Alberta's interests and priorities with other governments in Canada. How is the government going to work with the federal government to address Alberta's priorities as per key strategy 2.1 on page 59 of the ministry business plan, and what are these priorities?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Certainly, our government is keenly engaging in a new and different approach with our federal counterparts, and we're committed to working with our neighbours right across the country as well as with the federal government. I think some of the early outcomes for the Council of the Federation are evidence of that; for example, around the Canadian energy strategy. We're very proud of the work that was accomplished there by our Premier.

In terms of the priorities, they include market access, which remains crucial; renewed emphasis on intergovernmental relations, and our government will emphasize this as we continue to work moving forward; with the recent devastation of Fort McMurray, ensuring that federal disaster money is put to work quickly, and that certainly is a priority for us.

I'm going to point to the Premier's recent work and success in advocating for enhanced EI coverage for the people living in Edmonton and region. On federal budget day that was certainly a very clear message delivered by her in March. Typically we'd have to wait until the following March to see changes. They're usually only made once a year to EI. I think she made it very clear that that wasn't something that Albertans would be willing to wait for. I think that her respectful determination, focusing on making sure that evidence is presented, has been one of the ways that the citizens have seen that benefit recently announced for the Edmonton region.

Thank you.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Premier: in relation to the business plan, in particular outcome 2 and again key strategy 2.1, what has been done to establish relationships with other governments, both provincial governments as well as American officials?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. It continues to be a priority of the government of Alberta to make sure that time is spent building those relationships. I'd say that part of it is around increasing opportunities for trust and collaboration. Certainly, the work that's happening with other provincial and territorial governments continues to be a focus; with our federal government;

with the Premier recently going to Washington to discuss various items of concern with officials there, including our climate leadership plan; meetings that happen bilaterally with many other provinces.

Specifically with Ontario, there have been, I believe, four meetings already to date in that area. Yes, in July, October, January, and March with Premier Wynne; with Premier Couillard in July and March; with Premier Gallant in October and March; and with Premier McLeod in October. Of course, the COF meetings are going to be taking place in July as well in Yukon. So those are a few of those opportunities.

In terms of relationships with other orders of governments as well I think it's important to acknowledge that we are embarking on a new relationship with our indigenous leaders here in Canada, with the First Nations, honouring the role that we play upholding part of the treaties that we were all signatories to, treaties 6, 7, and 8, and have responsibilities in fulfilling. The example, I think, that we're really proud of around working with other governments, including governments within Alberta, includes the work around the Treaty 8 protocol agreement as well as work that's happening around the big-city charter.

Certainly, there's lots of work that needs to happen on working with government outside of Alberta as well as within.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Premier. The first ministers announced the intention to develop a pan-Canadian framework for clean growth and climate change at the March 3 meeting in Vancouver. Given that this framework serves the needs of both Americans and Canadians alike, which is key to Executive Council's mandate as indicated on page 59 of the ministry's business plan, given that this is a key priority for Alberta that requires significant intergovernmental efforts, what steps has our government taken with other jurisdictions in Canada to ensure that we meet our goals?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mrs. Schreiner, and to you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to respond. The Canadian energy strategy adopted last July certainly provides Canada with the framework to protect the environment and develop our energy industry. Every government in the country understands that these issues must be dealt with and that we need to continue to work on these areas collaboratively.

The Premier and the Minister of Environment and Parks took part as well in COP 21 talks, that happened in Paris, as part of the Canadian delegation, and I have to say that the Prime Minister and all Premiers meeting ahead of time, prior to going to those meetings, I think was a great move. I think it's important that the delegates who were there certainly seemed united on the messages that they wanted to share with the world about our responsibilities, that we take them seriously but that we do continue to be an energy leader and will for decades to come and that everyone should be incredibly proud to buy energy products from Canada.

The Premier and the minister of environment continue to work with their partners on climate change. We know that it's real, and we take our commitment very seriously in addressing it.

Thank you.

8:30

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Premier. The Canadian energy strategy was adopted by all of the Premiers at the Council of the Federation meeting in July 2015, and the federal government has publicly expressed an interest in participating. Deputy Premier, how does our government plan to work with the federal government to ensure

this strategy, which is critical to Alberta's long-term prosperity, is supported by the federal government, and how is this supported in the Executive Council budget?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, we've been very clear that we're working to get to yes on pipelines and that our work will not stop until we do. I think part of how that strategy is supported through Executive Council is through the many opportunities for engagement that the Premier as well as the ministers have through provincial-territorial as well as federal-provincial-territorial meetings, that we are co-ordinated in our efforts, that we are thoughtful and diligent, and that when we see one jurisdiction responding to the efforts we're making, we ask questions about how we can communicate with other partners throughout Canada.

Certainly, when I've had the opportunity to do so with representatives from the federal government, they've said: talk about your climate leadership plan; make sure everyone knows that Alberta is doing its fair share and that Alberta isn't waiting for Ottawa to tell them how to deal with climate change, that you've come up with a made-in-Alberta solution that will help us meet our national and then international collective responsibilities to the people we serve. Certainly, we continue to express that pipelines are the safest mode of transportation, that they provide a venue for provinces to work together on the energy infrastructure. We know that there are steelworkers across this country who would love to be able to contribute to a project with this kind of vision moving east, west, north. They are keen to get to work and help Canada get its product to tidewater.

Not only is a pipeline of benefit in the short term to the people here in Alberta; it's a benefit in the short term and long term to all Canadians. Certainly, that is continuing to be one of the key messages from the Premier and, arguably, from all of her ministers as we continue to build those relationships with our partners across Canada.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you for that.

Through the chair, Deputy Premier, Albertans have shown their fortitude during the current economic climate. As our government works toward an economy that is not intrinsically affected by external factors, the need to build pipelines is clear. Key strategy 2.2 on page 59 of the ministry business plan indicates the need to co-ordinate with other jurisdictions to ensure our government is able to effectively meet Alberta's interests. Given our government's full support to building pipelines, what initiatives has intergovernmental relations taken to support the various significant pipeline projects in order for these projects to move forward?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, we are engaging in what we'd like to refer to as drama-free discussions with governments across Canada and with our indigenous peoples, who certainly do have treaty rights when it comes to these conversations. We think it's important that products do get to tidewater, and we also think it's important that we honour our environmental responsibility as well as have adequate consultation with our indigenous partners.

We are certainly focusing on outcomes and trying to take an approach that focuses on mutual benefit. We are working to build and maintain a really strong relationship with the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments, advocating for Alberta's interests on these issues of importance to Albertans as a key strategy to ensure that Alberta's priorities, including pipelines, are advanced across Canada. And we're happy to make those messages very clear. Energy market access is critical

to the future of our country and to the well-being of every Albertan, every Canadian, and pipelines build a strong Canada and a strong economy.

I can't help but think back on how many Canadians worked together to get rail from coast to coast. It didn't make it to the third coast, but certainly that was a very laudable endeavour that I think people put their collective will towards. This is something that I think is in the interest of all Canadians. We need to collectively help them see the benefits personally and jurisdictionally to getting a yes on pipelines.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to now invite MLA Fitzpatrick to ask a few questions.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, before I start, I too would like to acknowledge the incredible work that's being done by first responders, by our public service people throughout the government in assisting in this devastation in Fort McMurray. I'd like to thank the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition for the work that they've done, and I'd like to say that my thoughts and prayers are with everyone, especially with the situation today, with the fire coming back on itself. I certainly hope that changes quickly.

Now, Mr. Chair, to the Deputy Premier, I've received lots of feedback in my constituency, again, regarding the federal government's original EI decision re Edmontonians. It was pretty loud and clear to me from my constituents that our government needed to pressure the federal government to allow Edmontonians access to the enhanced EI coverage, and we did. As the feds announced on Friday that they'd make the change, we certainly succeeded there. Given Executive Council's commitment to advocate for Alberta's needs and priorities as per outcome 2 on page 59 of the ministry business plan, how do you think this will affect the reality now?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think it's shown that focused yet respectful advocacy, ensuring that we do have the evidence and that we encourage the federal government when the evidence does get presented to act expeditiously, has been of benefit to government relationships but also to the families who are going to benefit by the changes to EI. While we wish that we would have been eligible in March, when the data did show that we did meet the criteria, we were very quick to heed advice from the federal government about whether or not that would result in change, and they committed to reviewing it and then shortly thereafter announced that they would indeed be including Edmonton as one of the regions qualifying for enhanced EI benefits.

I think some of the families, that you've probably heard from, said to me: if you work in oil and gas and your primary residence is in Lethbridge or in Edmonton, it shouldn't matter; you work in the industry, your family has been impacted, and you need to have that cushion to support you as you move forward. Certainly, we were grateful to see that that quiet determination did result in a yes on EI. We're looking forward to getting other yeses in other areas as well.

This extension will mean that those who are eligible for EI can claim an additional five weeks of benefits for regular claimants and an additional 20 weeks of benefits for longer tenured workers. These benefits will be available for one year, beginning July 3, 2016, and will apply retroactively to anyone who started a claim on or after January 4, 2015, and is still unemployed. Certainly, while we work to get these individuals back to work, we also know that they are due a fair return for monies paid into EI, and now that's a possibility.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much.

Again, through you, Mr. Chair, in 2015-16 the budget for the Premier's office expense increased slightly, but this year we see that there is a decrease, which I'm pleased to see. Page 122 in the budget estimates shows this decrease. How was this achieved?

8:40

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. There was a decrease, which was partially offset by the transfer of two full-time equivalents into Executive Council from Economic Development and Trade, and there was a 2 per cent decrease to salaries and benefits and supplies and services. When you break that down, that decrease is \$436,000 to salaries and benefits, a \$60,000 decrease to supplies and services – again, that's approximately a 2 per cent reduction – \$26,000 transferred out of corporate human resources for the leadership and talent development program, and \$303,000 transferred from Economic Development and Trade. Again, those funds were for two full-time equivalents in the Public Affairs Bureau.

The primary way that we're going to achieve that decrease in the salaries and benefits line item, the \$436,000, is through attrition and targeted reductions in admin support. We need to be thoughtful about where we do those. We need to ensure that we're still working effectively, but we also don't want to impact the workflow or workers where we can avoid it.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier.

Mr. Chair, through you to the Deputy Premier, this question is kind of a follow-up to the one that was asked previously. Line item 1.3 on page 122 in the estimates package shows a decrease in the corporate services budget. Why was this done? Actually, that was kind of answered before. How do you think this will support Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you for the question. As was mentioned, I think, in the Official Opposition's questions, it reflects a \$36,000 decrease to the 2015-16 budget, and that's an overall estimate of 1.5 per cent to that line item. Based on the current fiscal climate, again, we tried to focus the reduction on the salaries and benefits area because there was the ability to do that. Really, supplies and equipment was so small that it would have been impossible, almost, to find reductions there, so we had to find other ways to find those efficiencies. The majority of the supplies and services fund are within corporate services support and IT systems, systems maintenance, and licensing, and the decision was made that reductions would be better taken from the larger contracting programs such as intergovernmental relations and the Public Affairs Bureau. Again, the reduction is through attrition and management of vacant positions.

One of the ways I'd say that it serves Albertans is that we are demonstrating that we are looking everywhere to find these efficiencies in the bigger departments as well as the smaller ones. Certainly, if there's room to reduce some of our expenditures without negatively impacting the services that Albertans count on through the Premier and Executive Council, we feel that we owe them a responsibility to do so. That certainly has been communicated through ministries that have larger budgets such as Health as well.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. All right. Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

Deputy Premier, my next question is about intergovernmental relations. Under line item 2, page 122 in the estimates package, again we see a decrease in the budget for intergovernmental relations. Will you please explain to the committee why this budget was decreased and how this will impact Albertans?

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt. We'll now repeat the same rotation for five-minute speaking times, reverting back to the Wildrose Official Opposition caucus.

Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Panda: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Deputy Premier, thank you for being here with your staff to answer our questions. It seems the theme of the budget this time is the jobs plan, and you also said that in your opening comments. Your plan to create 100,000 jobs in the next three years is what you've been talking about, and we're trying to find a little bit more detail. We know that the government doesn't create the jobs; you help to create the jobs. To create 100,000 jobs in the next three years: that means each year it's maybe 33,000 or whatever. I mean, there should be some plan. Can you speak to that?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question and to Mr. Panda. I think this is our first opportunity engaging through *Hansard*. It's always fun to speak to a colleague through an impartial third party such as yourself, Mr. Chair. I imagine, Mr. Panda, as the critic for Economic Development and Trade, that that question was raised at those estimates, which certainly is the minister who would be most capable to respond to that. But let me say that as a partner of his at the cabinet table, if all 100,000 jobs are this year, we will be grateful for that as well. Certainly, the work that he's been doing with Alberta Treasury Branch, with supporting small businesses and accessing additional loans and so forth, are pillars within that.

Unfortunately, I can't speak to every ministry with the same level of expertise as the ministers would.

Mr. Panda: Sure. Mr. Chair, as you know, I sat through all those estimates with the economic development minister, the Labour minister, and the Infrastructure minister. The economic development minister said that it's government-wide. You are the Deputy Premier, so that's why I'm asking you that question. He said that it's government-wide, not just his portfolio. When we talked to the Labour minister, she said to ask the Infrastructure minister. We talked to the Infrastructure minister; he said: about 10,000. That was the understanding we got from the Infrastructure minister. The remaining 90,000: you should have some idea in which department, where it will be created.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you for the question. Certainly, the lead on the economic diversification portfolio is the Economic Development and Trade minister, who's responsible in that area. Certainly, a big area of moving the economy forward is to create the right conditions for partners, who are the employers, to be able to do so.

In terms of government-wide initiatives, certainly, one that we've taken in Health is around making sure that there's stable, predictable planning available for the primary deliverer of health care, being Alberta Health Services, as well as working around predictable forecasts in those ministries moving forward. I understand why he may have said government-wide. I recently toured a seniors' housing project that's in my constituency that had

140 people working at it that day. Certainly, building that seniors' housing is employing skilled tradespeople and providing that service long term to Albertans.

Mr. Panda: Out of that 100,000, how many will be from the Ministry of Health?

Ms Hoffman: Certainly, the lead on the job-creation file is Economic Development and Trade, and we'd be happy to relay your question to him. Certainly, in Health we employ – Alberta Health Services is the fifth-largest employer in Canada. They are individuals who, if the proposed cuts that were being brought forward prior to the election by other parties had gone forward – there would have been many workers who wouldn't be in their jobs today.

Mr. Panda: Then is it fate that the other parties are not in government? You're in government, you're in the driver's seat, and you're not cutting any jobs. That means about 90,000 jobs, substantially. Will you add more jobs in government, or is it going to be in the private sector?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question. Certainly, the desire to move forward on the creation of the jobs as outlined by the Economic Development and Trade minister is through partnerships with employers outside as well. We are finding ways to achieve efficiencies within the public sector but not at the cost of citizens' health and well-being or children's educational opportunities. We need to be thoughtful. One of my doctor colleagues said: while some parties might propose using a machete to find cuts, we prefer to use a scalpel.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Chair, I think I'm asking the question about the 100,000 jobs of the Deputy Premier. I'm not getting that answer, but you said that you'd try and get it through the economic development minister. Is that the commitment?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. The Economic Development and Trade minister is the lead on the piece around economic diversification. I would be very happy to communicate that you raised these questions here as well. Perhaps he might be available to meet with you again. I know that in my Health portfolio I regularly meet with my critic, from both parties as well as the independents, and find those conversations very helpful to the work that we're both doing.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. I tried my best. That's why I'm asking you.

Let me try it differently. On page 57 of the business plan, strategic context, in the last paragraph your first sentence and last sentence speak about the jobs. I mean, you can try and answer, or you can get the economic development minister to answer, but somebody has to answer this.

8:50

Ms Hoffman: Is it a question to economic development or a question to me?

Mr. Panda: It's about the jobs. The budget theme is the jobs plan, so somebody should own it.

Ms Hoffman: I'm on page 57. What is your question?

Mr. Panda: Again, the same question, 100,000 jobs. If your government is serious about creating 100,000 jobs, which is a great idea, the plan should be workable. There has to be some detail somewhere, okay? These 100,000 jobs don't come through thin air.

There have to be certain departments that will create those jobs in certain time frames.

We tried to ask the economic development minister in different ways: which sectors will create those jobs and by when? That means that to achieve the target, you should have some metrics. Each year, say, for example, you choose five or six or seven government departments which will create those jobs in a certain time frame. There should be some workable plan. If somebody can share that with us, that will be great.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. I'm on page 57 of the business plan, as you referred to. Which specific bullet or theme would you like me to elaborate on?

Mr. Panda: The last paragraph under Strategic Context speaks about: "The immediate focus for this government is to help families in need." As you know, 100,000 families are out of jobs, and you're telling them that you'll create 100,000 jobs in three years. I'm tying my question to that. There should be some plan. You're saying all these things, but there are no details. That's why I'm asking.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to expand. Certainly, the point refers to helping families in need, including providing "stability to health care, education and other services Albertans rely on."

In terms of looking at the global budgets, certainly funding growth in education not only was the right thing for those students educationally but also for the educational assistants, custodians at the schools, teachers who have jobs because funding was provided for new enrolment this year.

Mr. Panda: But these 100,000 jobs, Madam Deputy Premier . . .

Ms Hoffman: As well, if I still have the floor, Mr. Chair, certainly, around health care we're investing \$800 million immediately after being elected and continuing to have sustainable, stable growth within the public sector. But rather than increasing at rates of 6 per cent in health, as was the trend for more than a decade, we've worked to develop a strategy to bend that cost curve but still provide that stability to families, both those who receive the health care services as well as the families as recipients as well as the workers who are working in those facilities. Certainly, I'd be happy to comment on that further as it relates to this item, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Chair, how much time is left? One minute? I'll share my time with my colleague here.

Mr. Cyr: I'll try to make it very quick. If you could do a written response, that would be great. On page 57, ministry overview, point 6, "plans and coordinates state, official and working visits to the Alberta government," I have two questions. Are there any notable events or diplomats expected for 2016-17, and if so, would that be on line 2 of page 122 of the estimates? How much would be budgeted for it?

I'm sorry. I had less than a minute here.

Ms Hoffman: No. That's fine. Thank you very much for the question. The government is committed to continuing to work with our international dignitaries. In '15-16 there were 11 official visits and meetings.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt. The final allotted six minutes will be allocated to the PC caucus.

Please proceed.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Chair. If it's all right with the Deputy Premier, we'll continue with the back and forth.

Actually, it's interesting that Mr. Cyr's question sort of dovetails into what I wanted to talk a little bit about. Within the responsibility of Executive Council has also been the portions of the old IIR, international and intergovernmental relations. Deputy Premier, there's been concern expressed by a number of officials, mostly from Asian countries but also from other countries, that have approached us and said that they are having a great deal of difficulty obtaining meetings with senior Alberta government officials, specifically with the Premier. Given the Executive Council and the IIR responsibilities of the Premier and given that from a cultural standpoint in many cases the establishment of strong trade relationships depends on the highest level of a state government meeting with these officials, I'm just wondering: which specific heads of state or consuls general has the Premier met with in the past year, and what further meetings are being planned?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Chair, there were 11 official visits or meetings, international visits, which included ambassadors, High Commissioners as well as national ministers. There were two sister province visits to celebrate milestone anniversaries and reaffirm relationships. Those were from Kangwon, Korea, as well as Hokkaido, Japan. There were two joint heads of mission visits between the Nordic Baltic states. Eight countries were represented. Those were in November. Heads of mission as well as economic missions to 26 countries represented were in March, and we were proud to host them.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Deputy Premier, I guess what I would just say with regard to that – and I know that you'll no doubt have communications with the Premier about this meeting this evening. I would just suggest that you place it firmly on her radar screen that this is the feedback that we've been receiving – again, this is the view of our foreign partners – that the Premier's office has not been sufficiently accessible to meeting requests that they have made through the Premier's office. That's just what we're hearing.

Ms Hoffman: I'll just respond by also adding that protocol has 10 visits and meetings already scheduled for the first quarter of this fiscal year. I appreciate that feedback. I'll pass it on and let them know that this is a priority for us.

Dr. Starke: Okay. Great.

The next topic that I want to go to, Deputy Premier – and forgive me; this is, you know, perhaps a little bit of a stretch for you under the circumstances, but it's very topical. This is a question I wanted to ask the Premier specifically, and it arises out of a conversation I had with the Minister of Culture and Tourism in estimates last Wednesday afternoon in which he suggested that the Premier's council on the economy would take over or would supplant the need for the Strategic Tourism Council by giving a broader perspective for economic development within the province.

Now, I want to say from the outset that I have absolutely no hesitation with regard to any of the 10 members of the Premier's council. These are outstanding individuals, and it's incredible that we can get these folks to work on this effort. But I note in reading through their biographies that not one of them has any specific expertise or experience in the field of tourism, yet the Minister of Culture and Tourism indicated that keeping the Strategic Tourism Council would be counterproductive to tourism development when the Premier's council on economic development would in fact be looking after it in a broader based way. I guess my question to the Premier that I wanted to ask is: who will be providing, either to the Premier's council or to the minister or to anyone else in

government, specific information on the tourism industry, which has always been touted by your government as being one of the bright lights of economic diversification?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question and for the trailer from question period earlier today. It's always nice to have a chance to reflect on some of these items, so I greatly appreciate it. And thank you for your service as a minister in this area in the past.

As you well know, there is a tremendous public service in this area as well, and while there are times when we need to be finding efficiencies – and certainly part of our campaign commitment was around looking at agencies, boards, and commissions and how we can streamline some of those moving forward – there are areas where we feel the public service can step up and continue to provide great support moving forward. I imagine that it'll probably be a collaboration between the committee that was referred to by the Minister of Culture and Tourism and the public service.

I certainly want to thank past members of that committee for their service. Absolutely, we are thrilled. There aren't places better in the world to visit than Alberta, and we have such diversity here that we all should be proud of.

Dr. Starke: Deputy Premier, absolutely nobody argues that fact, and we're certainly proud of it as well. I just have grave concerns that the collective experience of these 17 individuals has in fact been treated with less than respect, and with respect we have to indicate that.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for the item of business has concluded.

Congratulations, everyone. The meetings for consideration of the 2016-17 main estimates have been completed. I thank everyone.

The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9 p.m.]

