



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, April 15, 2014
3:30 p.m.

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The 28th Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC), Chair
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W), Deputy Chair
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)*
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Hughes, Ken, Calgary-West (PC)**
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)

* substitution for Genia Leskiw

** substitution for George VanderBurg

Also in Attendance

Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Support Staff

W.J. David McNeil	Clerk
Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services
Philip Massolin	Manager of Research Services
Stephanie LeBlanc	Legal Research Officer
Sarah Leonard	Legal Research Officer
Nancy Zhang	Legislative Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Christopher Tyrell	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications and Broadcast Services
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General

Hon. Jonathan Denis, QC, Minister

Kimberly Armstrong, Deputy Attorney General and Associate Deputy Minister

Tim Grant, Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.**Tuesday, April 15, 2014**

[Ms Olesen in the chair]

**Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015.

I'd ask that we go around the table and introduce ourselves for the record. Mr. Minister, when we get to you, if you would introduce your staff, please.

My name is Cathy Olesen. I'm the MLA for Sherwood Park and chair of this committee.

Mr. Young: Steve Young, MLA for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, and I'm sitting in this evening for Genia Leskiw, the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Jeneroux: Hi, everyone. Thanks for being here. I'm Matt Jeneroux, MLA, Edmonton-South West.

Ms Cusanelli: Good afternoon. Christine Cusanelli, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

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

Ms Blakeman: Laurie Blakeman. I'd like to welcome each and every one of you to my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Denis: I'm Jonathan Denis from the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Acadia and Minister of Justice. Beside me to my left is Kim Armstrong. To my right is Major General (Retired) Tim Grant, who's our deputy minister. Gerald Lamoureux is also further to the right, and behind me – if you could just do a quick wave when I mention your name, please – are Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, Lynn Varty, Greg Lepp, Frank Bosscha, Bill Sweeney, Curtis Clarke, Jim Bauer, Dana Thompson, and Dan Laville.

Before I pass it over to Blake here, just so everyone knows, I am feeling incredibly sick today, and I actually took the morning off. So if you see me going out to the washroom, please do not take offence. It's nothing any one of you said.

Mr. Pedersen: Blake Pedersen, MLA for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Saskiw: Shayne Saskiw, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hughes: Ken Hughes, MLA, Calgary-West, on behalf of George VanderBurg.

Ms Fenske: Good afternoon. Jacquie Fenske, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Sandhu: Good afternoon. Peter Sandhu, Edmonton-Manning.

Mrs. Jablonski: Hello, everyone. Mary Anne Jablonski, Red Deer-North. Minister, I hope you get well soon.

Mrs. Fritz: Good afternoon. Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross. Welcome.

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point I'd like to confirm for the record that pursuant to Standing Order 56(2.1) to (2.3) the following substitutions have

been filed: Mr. Eggen for Ms Notley, Dr. Brown for Mrs. Leskiw, and Mr. Hughes for Mr. VanderBurg.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and we'd ask that BlackBerrys and iPhones be turned off or set to silent. Please try and keep them away from the microphones on the table.

Please introduce yourself.

Mr. McAllister: Bruce McAllister, Chestermere-Rocky View.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Notley: I'm not quite sure why Mr. Eggen was replacing me today. I know he's in Culture estimates right now, and I am here.

The Chair: I'm happy to see you here.

Ms Notley: Just to make sure that it's clear that he's not actually replacing me.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. members, as you know, the Assembly approved amendments to the standing orders that impact consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation.

As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition, the Wildrose, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes members of the third party, the Alberta Liberals, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the fourth party, the New Democrats, 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 next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes.

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

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. With the concurrence of the committee, I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting.

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

If debate is exhausted prior to three 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 6:30.

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

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

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

Deputy Chair, if you would please read your name into the record.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to invite the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to begin his opening remarks. Welcome.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate everybody coming here today, and I think we're happy that it's not snowing. It's just raining today.

My department's mission is to achieve a fair and safe Alberta within the context of the common-sense, conservative approach to justice that we have taken. As all hon. members know, our government is committed to ensuring that Alberta's communities and neighbourhoods are safe and secure for all.

Our business plan supports the ministry's vision "to work together so that Albertans have safe communities and an accessible, effective and innovative justice system" and reflects the range of elements that make up the continuum of the justice system. My ministry's business plan goals focus on outcomes for the Albertans we serve. Specifically, they include ensuring that Alberta's communities are safe and secure; providing Albertans with a fair, accessible, and innovative justice system; and ensuring the security of our province through effective custody and community supervision of offenders.

Our core businesses are to support law enforcement and crime prevention; provide prosecution services; deliver programs and services to victims of crime; promote safe and secure communities; provide court administration services; provide legal and strategic services to government; provide secure custody, supervision, and facilitation of rehabilitative opportunities for individuals under correctional authority; and, last but not least, provide accessible front-line justice services.

Performance measures related directly to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General help us see how we are doing with our core businesses and help us understand how Albertans perceive the work that we do. These performance measures include, without limitation, public perception of safety in the neighbourhood; public satisfaction with policing; victim satisfaction with services provided by employees and volunteers in the criminal justice system; compliance rate on maintenance enforcement program cases; public perception of the prosecution service; median elapsed time from first to last court appearance; successful completion of conditional release; number of escapes; and offender involvement in work, education, treatment, or other life management programs.

This year Justice and Solicitor General will continue to help make communities and neighbourhoods in Alberta safe places to live, work, and raise families. As you can tell from our list of core businesses, the work done by the ministry touches the lives of so many Albertans in so many ways. This year our ministry's program budget is nearly \$1.333 billion. It is, for the most part, a hold-the-line budget while allowing the ministry to address rising

costs associated with increased population, inflation, and service volumes.

That being said, I'd like to speak of some of the great work being done by Justice and Solicitor General and what we're working with this year. In this budget we have increased funding for the provincial police services agreement, otherwise known as the PPSA, allowing for 40 new RCMP positions to be added across Alberta. I'm pleased to report that one of the new officers will be placed with the Zebra Child Protection Centre, very close to us here in Edmonton, and another will be placed with the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in Calgary. These officers will provide important support to those organizations that help children, our most vulnerable citizens.

The remaining new officers will boost RCMP positions to more than 1,500 officers paid for by the province serving Alberta communities under the PPSA. We support our provincial police service and will continue to work with them through the annual budgeting process over the coming years, and we will continue to look to our provincial police service to use their considerable expertise to uphold the law.

Government has an obligation to ensure that tax dollars are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. It seems that there is an infinite demand on finite resources, not only in this department but in others as well. My ministry has fully committed to the results-based budgeting process, and I want to assure all Albertans that we're safeguarding tax dollars. This year several areas will go through the process, including our enforcement branches of fish and wildlife and conservation. Through their efforts we will help ensure that our resources are well used to protect the public lands and fish and wildlife resources so Albertans today and tomorrow can continue to enjoy them responsibly.

3:40

Our province is growing, demographics are changing, and we must be fiscally responsible. Change is not always easy, but at the end of the day we all want a system that provides just outcomes and meets the needs of Albertans. One of the changes that we are currently exploring is to traffic court. Almost 2 million tickets were issued in Alberta in the 2012-2013 year alone, and of these, approximately 60,000 tickets were disputed, which is the right of the individual who was charged, requiring court time, space, and staffing resources. Traffic courts use the same infrastructure, security, court clerks, computer systems, and general court staff as in criminal and civil matters. In areas outside of Calgary and Edmonton traffic court is not a separate entity. Courtrooms in these locations must split time between civil, criminal, and traffic matters. Because of this, Provincial Court judges and Crown prosecutors are frequently involved in traffic ticket matters.

We know that there is a better way that can facilitate traffic court that is more efficient but also preserves the rights of the offender. However, regardless of the changes under consideration, Albertans will always have the right to challenge a traffic ticket. This will not change. Full stop. For non Criminal Code charges and nonserious Traffic Safety Act charges we are pursuing a number of different possibilities, but again nothing has been decided as we just completed a complete consultation process on March 31 of this particular year.

Another change we are exploring is the way civil claims are handled in court. The civil claims review project is working to make better use of our existing resources. The changes being considered include increasing the monetary limit on matters that can be heard in Provincial Court from \$25,000 to \$50,000. The last change was from \$7,500 to \$25,000 in 2004.

Another item that we are considering is implementing a judicial triage system to help allocate court resources more efficiently. These changes will help ensure efficient use of court resources, helping Albertans get the most of our justice system and recognizing that not all Albertans want or need to hire a lawyer for a small debt claim.

Through finding more efficient and effective processes for traffic court and civil claims court, we hope to reduce pressure on the courts for more serious matters. We've already seen some success in this area. On average, lead times for adult criminal trials in Provincial Court across the province decreased by more than 7 per cent from 2012 to 2013. Initiatives such as the court case management program and the Alberta Crown prosecutor services' increase of direct indictments are helping to make gains at the Provincial Court level. Case management offices have been set up in 10 courthouses across the province. These offices make it possible for 6,500 to 7,000 criminal matters per month to be handled by a justice of the peace rather than a judge.

All of these initiatives help ensure that our justice system resources are available for serious and violent crime prosecutions. We will continue to hold offenders accountable for their actions, and we will continue to ensure that victims of crime are heard and put first.

I'm particularly proud of the support provided to victims of crime by my ministry. Last year alone more than 67,800 Albertans were assisted through various victims' services programs supported by our department. Of those individuals helped, more than 56,900 were adults, and more than 10,900 were under the age of 18. These programs supported by our ministry help Albertans overcome physical and emotional hardship caused by crime and to begin to rebuild their lives.

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General's victims' services works with community groups, law enforcement, other criminal justice stakeholders, and all levels of government to develop, deliver, and improve programs to support victims of crime in our province. Last year approximately 3,539 volunteer advocates, board members, and special purpose volunteers contributed a total of 214,092 volunteer hours. I'm pleased to continue collaborating with the providers of victims' programs and services to help ensure victims continue to get the support they need. Indeed, there's always room to improve no matter how good you get.

I'd also like to update you on the Alberta first responder radio communications system, otherwise known as AFRRCS.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, two minutes left.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

AFRRCS is a province-wide, two-way radio network that will allow first responder agencies such as firefighters, police, and ambulances in the province to use the same radio communications technology. It will ensure that first responders can more easily communicate with one another and improve co-ordination among agencies across this province. I'm pleased to report that we anticipate that the system will begin initial operations later this year.

Madam Chair, in summary, Budget 2014-2015 shows our government's continued support for safe communities, with roughly a 4 per cent budgetary increase. It allows us to continue providing safe and secure communities where Albertans can live, work, and raise a family. We are building an Alberta that we can all be proud of.

I'm happy to take any questions over the next two and a half hours. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move on to the Wildrose rotation. MLA Saskiw, how would you like to proceed?

Mr. Saskiw: Combined time.

The Chair: Combined time. That's okay? Great. Thank you.

Mr. Saskiw: First off, I'd like to thank all of the staff within the ministry for all the hard work you guys do on a day-to-day basis. My first line of questioning will reference line 7.11 on page 159 of the Justice and Solicitor General estimates, marked sheriffs protection services. My first question is: does this line item include all costs associated with protecting the Premier?

Mr. Grant: This line item includes a number of things. It includes Legislature Grounds and Government Centre security, technical services, the Alberta Security and Strategic Intelligence Support Team, and the energy security unit.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Are there other costs associated with protecting the Premier that do not fall under this line item?

Mr. Grant: All the costs involved in the executive protection unit are in this line item.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you.

In last year's estimates the minister had stated that when the Premier was in Calgary, she was protected by the Calgary Police Service. I'm assuming that when this budget was crafted, there was no plan that the Premier would resign. The practice of using the Calgary Police Service as security while the Premier was in Calgary I'm assuming, obviously, will not continue. With the contract being cancelled and Premier Hancock residing in Edmonton, what exactly are the cost savings that we are going to see this year?

Mr. Denis: First, I just wanted to confirm that the contract dealing with the CPS that you referenced has concluded effective March 31 of this particular year. Premier Hancock has indicated that he does not wish to be directing security. It's up to security to direct itself. He will be protected by sheriffs exclusively.

I believe Tim would have some further comments.

Mr. Grant: To your specific question, this budget actually was produced with the aim that there would be no Calgary Police Service involvement in the protection of the Premier. This line item does not include any costs for Calgary Police Service.

Mr. Saskiw: You guys predicted something that a lot of people couldn't predict. Or some of us could have, I guess.

What was the billing process for the Calgary Police Service to provide protection? Was a bill submitted to the province every time the Premier was in Calgary, or was there a previously agreed-upon contract between the Calgary police and the province?

Mr. Denis: Just a point of clarification if I may. I believe that we are talking about the budget moving forward on a pro forma basis and not into past years here. That would be the process for Public Accounts. Does the chair want to comment on that?

The Chair: Thank you. Yeah. The 2015 budget is what we're looking for questions on.

Mr. Saskiw: Exactly. I guess my question is in relation to 7.11, the sheriffs protection services. If you look at the comparables between 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, in the original one, in 2012,

there would have been these charges incurred. I'd like to know how the billing practice actually had occurred.

Mr. Grant: We did receive invoices from the Calgary Police Service – I believe they were on a quarterly basis – that were covered off as they were received.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Do you know the full value of those services? What I'm trying to get at here is that now that we don't have the Calgary Police Service, how is that going to impact us going further, and what cost savings are there as a result of us not having to have the Calgary Police Service provide protection?

Mr. Grant: As I mentioned, those costs are not in this budget. There are no CPS costs in this budget. Those costs were absorbed out of the overall sheriff budget, not specifically this line item last year. I don't have those figures with me, but they were in the range of about \$400,000, I believe.

Mr. Saskiw: So \$400,000 to provide protection to the Premier while she was in Calgary under the Calgary Police Service's protection?

Mr. Grant: I can confirm those numbers.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I guess my question is: given those increased costs what was so different about Calgary for this Premier than for any other Premier in history that required this special arrangement, and why was such an arrangement needed in Calgary and not in Edmonton?

3:50

The Chair: If I could get us to focus. The rear-view mirror is for Public Accounts. We're looking forward to 2015. If we could just focus on the budget at hand.

Thank you.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, of course, going forward, there's every potentiality that this special arrangement could occur again, so I'm asking why this special arrangement occurred and if this will occur in the future and what's the rationale when you consider these types of special arrangements.

Mr. Denis: As indicated by the pro forma statements, there are no plans to have security in place for the Premier from anything other than the sheriffs. That's what's in the budget.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Would you agree with me that the sheriffs do a tremendous job in this province and have protected our Premiers very well and that they do a good job and that perhaps, going forward, it may not be a good use of tax dollars to set up a separate contract with a separate police agency?

Mr. Denis: I think that all law enforcement in Alberta does a good job.

Mr. Saskiw: Hmm. I guess they weren't good enough for that Premier, though.

I'll go into another line item here. On page 41 of the fiscal plan, under the heading Policing, it reads: "Funding for the provincial policing contract increases by \$15 million to \$240 million in 2014-15. This will provide for 40 new frontline RCMP officers." I'm sure this fits nicely with goal 1, that Alberta's communities are safe and secure, on page 80 of the ministry business plan. My question is: will the addition of the new RCMP officers be governed by the terms in the provincial police service agreement, otherwise known as the PPSA?

Mr. Denis: Yes, and we can refer to that as the PPSA for the future here.

I've often indicated that it is not up to politicians to be directing police, and this is no exception. It will be up to the RCMP to decide where these 40 officers are most needed. They will make that decision throughout the province.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Can you explain the chain of command in governance, if any, established under the agreement, and how does the office of the Solicitor General fit into that chain of command?

Mr. Grant: The agreement is between the province and Canada to provide the RCMP under a contracting arrangement with the province. The Solicitor General provides civilian oversight into the RCMP on certain matters that fall within provincial standards. In other cases they are governed clearly by the RCMP, and their internal discipline is an RCMP matter. For instance, the commission for public complaints is the instrument run out of Ottawa by the RCMP for complaints against the force.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you.

Does the governance model in the PPSA allow the Solicitor General to dictate RCMP operations, especially in a crisis situation?

Mr. Grant: No, it does not.

Mr. Saskiw: Under priority initiative 1.1 on page 80 of the business plan it reads, "Set strategic policy direction for law enforcement consistent with the Law Enforcement Framework." Priority initiative 1.2 reads, "Continue to identify and implement efficiencies . . ."

Mr. Denis: Could you let us get to the page, please? Thank you. We've got it. Please go ahead.

Mr. Saskiw: In various components of it it says that the minister would set the strategic provincial policy direction, continue to identify and implement efficiencies. It also states that it would provide oversight governance of Alberta's law enforcement organizations. Under your governance model of the PPSA does your department have the ability to introduce these priority initiatives within the RCMP?

Mr. Grant: We work with the RCMP, and we develop a business plan with them that is presented to the minister. From that standpoint we have a collaborative undertaking to produce their business plan as it applies to policing in the province.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. In an emergency situation does the minister have the authority to direct the actions taken by the RCMP under the PPSA?

Mr. Grant: The minister does not give operational direction to the RCMP.

Mr. Saskiw: But does the minister dictate the priorities to the RCMP under the PPSA? I'm not talking about day-to-day activities. We're talking about what their priorities are.

Mr. Grant: Their priorities are laid out in the business plan, which is agreed to by both the province and the RCMP in K Division.

Mr. Saskiw: So if something changed, for example, an emergency, and there were certain priorities within an emergency,

would the minister have the ability to set the priorities in that emergency situation?

Mr. Denis: From a global standpoint, absolutely, but not from a day-to-day operations standpoint. I'll give you an example. In two occasions since I've been Solicitor General, since 2011, there have been situations where we have had to bring in additional RCMP resources from outside of the province. One was when we were looking for an escaped fugitive and then the other one last year when we were dealing with the illegal strike at the new Edmonton Remand Centre. Under our PPSA we can fund additional RCMP officers coming in here, but the day-to-day operations of those RCMP officers are handled, again, independently of political authority. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah.

Does the PPSA give Alberta Justice and Solicitor General the authority to launch provincial-led investigations into the actions of the RCMP? If so, does your ministry plan on taking any disciplinary action or review of the gun seizure that took place in place in High River following the devastating 2013 flood?

Mr. Denis: The first thing I'll indicate is that on June 27 of last year I visited the RCMP detachment at High River when I was out there, and I saw many firearms coming in. It seemed to me as odd, but I recognized that it's not my job to direct the police, nor is it any other civilian's. What I did was that I sent a letter that same day to Dale McGowan, who was the deputy commissioner at that time, confirming that individuals could get their guns back, and I wanted to confirm that they were stored and not seized. I did receive a response. I do not have a copy of the letter here, but I'd be more than happy to provide you with a copy of that.

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks.

Considering the statement after the seizure by the Prime Minister's office – it was stated that they believe the RCMP should focus on more important tasks such as protecting lives and private property – what measures has your department taken, other than sending that letter, with the federal government to make sure that such a gun seizure doesn't happen again in a disaster situation?

Mr. Denis: This government has a 20-plus-year history of supporting the rights of law-abiding firearms owners, and that will not change. What happened is that subsequent to that correspondence, given the public concerns expressed and as a matter of national public interest, the RCMP's Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP initiated a public interest investigation into the conduct of the RCMP members in High River. The CPC is an agency created by Parliament to be responsible for ensuring that public complaints about the conduct of RCMP members are examined fairly and impartially and also not by other police officers, so it's not police investigating police.

The letter that I had sent did spark a lot of interesting comments. At the same time, I know that it did play a big role in having the RCMP move towards this particular process. I've also since spoken in person to Bob Paulson, who is the commissioner of the RCMP in Canada, about this particular report. He's indicated to me that it will be out sometime in June, and I'm looking forward to that because I share your concern about the rights of law-abiding firearms owners.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess my question is, of course: there is this complaint process that you've outlined, but if there's another disaster, and it happens again, what's the recourse for citizens?

They just have to go and complain again? Is there not something that could be done within your ministry to make sure that it is very clear that in an emergency situation the rights of gun owners aren't trampled upon?

Mr. Denis: First of all, it's actually in the Criminal Code that the RCMP were acting in that particular area. That matter is a federal matter, and I would suggest that you may want to talk to your federal counterpart there as well. I intend to take whatever steps necessary that the complaint process identifies that we can do at a provincial level to ensure that the rights of law-abiding firearms owners are protected, full stop.

Mr. Saskiw: What can you do at a provincial level to protect the rights of firearm owners in a situation like this?

4:00

Mr. Denis: First of all, as I mentioned, the RCMP were acting under the Criminal Code, and it seems to me that the Criminal Code is federal, under section 91 of our Constitution.

Mr. Saskiw: So they weren't acting under any emergency provincial legislation?

Mr. Denis: I believe that they were acting as part of the Criminal Code. I don't know the particular section. I'm sorry; unlike you, I wasn't a criminal lawyer.

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks for that comment.

I guess my question is: with the situation there, was it not the case that they were under an emergency piece of legislation within the province? Was there not any provincial legislation that applied to RCMP officers? Are you trying to say that?

Mr. Denis: My understanding is that it was the Criminal Code.

Kim, do you have any comments here with respect to this section?

Mrs. Armstrong: There was a short period of time – I don't have the dates – where there was a declaration in the area of High River. I believe it was called a local emergency. I believe that existed for 13 or 14 days. Just to be clear, I am not aware of that having an impact on the Criminal Code of Canada and its enforcement. Rather, I believe it was provincial, and it dealt more with what I could call provincial powers and provincial authorities.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Under the PPSA I guess my question is: if a minister or anybody within government knew about a gun seizure in advance of it occurring, what would be the process for that minister to follow?

Mr. Denis: First off, as I've indicated before in the Legislature, I found out about this when I was in High River and went directly into the RCMP's detachment and then started making inquiries. I'm not aware of any minister that had any advance knowledge. I will indicate that no minister, no MLA has the right to direct the police in this particular area. Period.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess my question is: have you inquired with the other ministers whether or not they had knowledge? There has been documentation that has come forward that has indicated that a minister did know that the gun seizure was happening two days after the fact.

Mr. Denis: I have not heard from any minister that they knew or had any advance knowledge to me, but you would have to ask

them directly. What I can tell you, just under this particular committee, as I've said before, is that I found out that particular day when I went into the RCMP detachment and then sent the letter. To indicate that any directive came from my department would be incorrect.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you. I think you've made it very clear that your ministry or your direction, I guess – there's apparently nothing that you can do to prevent this from happening again other than . . .

Mr. Denis: That's not what I said.

Mr. Saskiw: You haven't given any evidence or any type of policy change that you would suggest to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

I guess I'll just go on.

Mr. Denis: That's not what I said.

Mr. Saskiw: Clearly, in securing the homes and seizing weapons, approximately 1,900 homes were damaged. Have negotiations been settled with all those affected by the seizures as to compensation for damages?

Mr. Denis: I don't believe that that would be under this department. I believe that would be dealing directly with the RCMP because it was their direction. That has nothing to do with Justice and Solicitor General of Alberta.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess you've kind of somewhat answered this. Has it been determined which agency, organization, or level of government is ultimately responsible for reimbursement for the damages?

Mr. Denis: It would be the RCMP.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess the RCMP is paid for by your ministry, so who's going to eventually incur that cost?

Mr. Grant: I can take that. The RCMP is working with the town of High River. The RCMP are processing all of the claims. My understanding is that the vast majority of them, 75 or 80 per cent, have been processed at this point. There are some questions on the others that are missing information. Those are then being forwarded to the town of High River for payment.

Mr. Saskiw: So the town of High River is paying for the RCMP, which is contracted by the province, seizing weapons in High River?

Mr. Grant: As I understand it, as Mrs. Armstrong mentioned, this was, if I remember correctly, undertaken during a state of local emergency which had been declared by the town of High River, and in that case the RCMP were supporting their actions.

Mr. Saskiw: Oh. So during that time of the seizure it was under the local emergency order, which is allowed for under provincial legislation?

Mr. Denis: Is your specific question having to do with the budget here moving forward, or not?

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. It's regarding the priority initiatives within your government, and we're asking quite a serious question for people who have had their homes broken into. To relate it to the

budget: is there anything in the budget that allocates any funds or earmarks any compensation for damage done during the gun grab?

Mr. Denis: That is something to deal with the RCMP directly.

Mr. Saskiw: Or the town of High River, I guess.

Mr. Denis: Or also the department of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Saskiw: So your department doesn't have anything budgeted for it? Okay.

Mr. Denis: No.

Mr. Saskiw: Just moving along to page 159 of government estimates, line item 9.1, is the budget for the Alberta Human Rights Commission. It's receiving \$6.47 million this year. That would be a \$202,000 increase in the amount of funding for the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Why does the commission need the increased funds?

Mr. Denis: That percentage doesn't even keep up with population growth plus inflation.

Mr. Saskiw: So is there any type of rationale for the increase, or is it just due to increased costs? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Denis: It's due to increased costs as a result of population growth plus inflation.

Mr. Saskiw: Over the last fiscal year how many cases involved section 3(1)(b) of the Human Rights Act? How many of those cases were brought before the commission, and does the funding in this budget estimate an increase or a decrease of section 3(1)(b) cases over the coming year?

Mrs. Armstrong: We are advised that there were no cases or complaints made pursuant to the noted section in the last fiscal year. We're advised that there were two complaints in the previous fiscal year, both of which have reached resolution. There is no particular pocket of funding allocated to deal with those complaints distinct from any other types of complaints that are made pursuant to the act.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you.

In relation, there was a motion, of course, put forward to repeal section 3(1)(b). Does your ministry have any plans – I don't see it in this document – to introduce legislation to repeal that section over the next fiscal year?

Mr. Denis: You're talking directly about your Motion 502, which I supported on the record and will continue to support. That being said, it was defeated quite resoundingly. I think that indicates that, unfortunately, you and I are in the minority opinion here. I would say that there are no plans in that particular area. However, it is an issue where, frankly, I believe that you are correct, and it's one that I will continue to support reforming.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you.

In relation to line item 3.2, that's . . .

Mr. Denis: Which page are you on, please?

Mr. Saskiw: Page 158, the same page or the page before it. That's the cost for Legislative Counsel. We know that over the last year or so there has been a lot of big legislation, including new elections financing legislation that allows massive corporate

donations to go to one party exclusively, that there are massive donor limits for leadership campaigns and apparently loopholes for secret trust accounts. We know that there was a lot of money being spent on that last year. Why is there an increase for that service this year?

Mrs. Armstrong: This increase is population plus inflation. There are no additional dollars being allocated to this area aside from the regular population plus inflation increase.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. I guess my question is that last year there was a significant amount of government legislation coming forward.

Actually, I'll just go on. Are there any resources dedicated to new legislation when it comes to donation limits for leadership campaigns or anything like that?

Mrs. Armstrong: I'm not aware of anything like that, sir.

Mr. Denis: No. At the end of the day, I just want to note, as I'm sure most people here are aware, the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer independent of this government, doesn't report to anybody else. In particular, in his sole and unfettered discretion he would be able to direct where his budget goes in his department, and that is not supervised by anybody.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. I guess I agree that we as legislators are the ones that would have to set the parameters on donation limits to campaigns, particularly leadership campaigns.

I'll just go to line 7, on public security.

Mr. Denis: Sorry; which page are you on?

Mr. Saskiw: The next page.

Mr. Denis: Page 159?

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Yes.

Mr. Saskiw: You recently had a decision, what I would call a flip-flop, on a program that protects women who are victims of domestic abuse. I'm sure that you know that Albertans want a Premier or a minister that can make the right decision the first time around and not have to be called to account nearly every week to change what I would say are ill-informed decisions. What reassurances can you offer to victims of crime that they are going to be safe in their communities and that you won't arbitrarily cut effective programs like the electronic monitoring bracelets that protect Albertans?

4:10

Mr. Denis: Well, first off, there were no cuts in that particular program. That program was a three-year program which concluded. We've fulfilled our full terms and obligations under that program. It was a pilot project that ended March 31. I personally made the decision to continue this program for at least six months. We do expect in June the outcome of the independent report from the University of Calgary. I must thank the members for Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South for bringing this to my attention prior to your question in question period.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, thanks. I guess my question is: what is the process if a program ended March 31 and victims who've suffered atrocious domestic abuses are informed that the program no longer has the funding in place? Would it not be perhaps a better approach prior to the conclusion of a pilot project to examine the

results and make sure that there's no interruption in the provision of the services and that there's no undue, unnecessary hardship placed on those victims of crime like there was in this case?

Mr. Denis: I would disagree with your statement again. I will tell you that in this particular case we did fulfill our entire mandate. There were no cuts. We decided to extend it. At the same time we also have to look from an independent third party's perspective, and that's the University of Calgary in this case. The U of C is going to be advising us whether or not this program is useful on a permanent basis, if we need to improve it, or if it was not useful. We want to go ahead and look at what the third party actually has to say.

I believe Kim has something to say as well.

Mrs. Armstrong: The only point I would make is about the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter, which provides the high-risk domestic violence victims with services. The actual GPS device is one part of a fairly significant package of a comprehensive safety plan. As we're all aware, a device like that isn't going to stop someone from coming after a victim. It's actually a comprehensive package of services that's provided.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. Although, clearly, with GPS if the offender is getting close to the victim, there's going to be an alert system in place, so it can prevent . . .

Mr. Denis: The other thing I'll mention is that . . .

Mr. Saskiw: Just let me finish on just this one thing.

Going back to your comment that there was no delay or whatever, the decision apparently to renew the program – and this was in your own press release – was made on a weekend, yet the funding ended on a Wednesday. So you had victims of crime coming out to the media saying that they are scared and terrified that the program would not be funded. I guess my question is: why would you even have that four-day delay so that those victims didn't know if their abusers were going to come and attack them? There would be no warning system.

Mr. Denis: Well, first off, there was a warning system, if you would have read the press release. These victims in this particular case were provided with a GPS locating beeper in the event that they were actually in distress, so what would happen in that particular case is that they would press the beeper, and the police could be dispatched to exactly where they were. There was no delay in that whatsoever from the March 31 deadline going on.

Mr. Saskiw: But there was no GPS tracking for a four-day period. Or what happened there?

Mr. Denis: There were the beepers. I've answered your question.

Mr. Saskiw: But on the criminals were the ankle bracelets secured during that four-day period?

Mr. Denis: We acted in the best interests of victims and made the right decision.

Mr. Saskiw: Were the bracelets secured on the convicted criminals during the four-day period? Yes or no?

Mr. Denis: I've answered your question. So you can continue this, or we can just move on.

Mr. Saskiw: I'll continue this.

Mr. Denis: Okay.

The Chair: I think we're getting a little sidetracked here. The question was answered, that there were beepers in place.

If we could focus on the 2014-15 budget, it would be appreciated. We've got some very limited time.

Mr. Saskiw: Actually, the question wasn't answered. The question was regarding electronic monitoring bracelets that are placed on criminals in relation to public security, line 7 of the budget. The question was: during that four-day period were those electronic monitoring bracelets secured on those criminals?

Mr. Denis: During that four-day period all the victims had GPS locating beepers designed to protect them and act in their best interests.

Mr. Saskiw: So the victims had the beepers, but the criminals did not have the bracelets on them. Is that correct?

Mr. Denis: The victims had the beepers on them. I've said this about five times. Which word didn't you understand?

Mr. Saskiw: And what about the criminals? Did the criminals have ankle bracelets placed on them? Yes or no? Are you going to answer this?

Mr. Denis: I've already answered this question, and I fail to see what this has to do with the budget moving forward.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, the budget has a line item here that's called public security, and part of those costs within that budget line item would include the cost to put GPS electronic monitoring bracelets on convicted criminals who've committed serious atrocities against domestic abuse victims. I think every Albertan has a right to know whether or not over that period of time these bracelets were actually on the criminals.

Mr. Denis: I've already answered your question.

Mr. Saskiw: So I guess the answer is no, then.

Mr. Denis: That's not what I said. I answered your question.

Mr. Saskiw: Is the answer yes, then?

Mr. Denis: I've answered your question already.

Mr. Saskiw: Wow. I feel for those victims. I hope you do as well.

Mr. Denis: I absolutely do.

Mr. Saskiw: I have that they don't know whether or not during that four-day period these criminals, who were convicted of serious and heinous crimes, had an electronic monitoring bracelet placed on them. I really feel . . .

Mr. Denis: As was already indicated, this was a three-year pilot program. We're looking forward to what the U of C has to say about it. If the U of C says that this is a very positive program, we will look at implementing it province-wide on a permanent basis. We have to act in the best interests of victims but also of taxpayers.

Mr. Saskiw: Well, I guess I'll just put it on the record that the question in regard to whether or not convicted criminals had electronic monitoring bracelets placed on their ankles during a four-day period was not answered by the minister.

Mr. Denis: Yes, it was answered.

Mr. Saskiw: And what was the answer?

Mr. Denis: I've already answered it.

Mr. Saskiw: Can you answer it again? Sorry.

Mr. Denis: What does this have to do with the budget here?

Mr. Saskiw: Line item 7.

Mr. Denis: I'd like to raise a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) that this member is continually imputing matters involving . . .

Mr. Saskiw: Just answer it. Yes or no?

Mr. Denis: If I could finish.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Denis: Okay. I've already answered this question. He continues to impute false and unavowed motives. I would look for your ruling on that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

And to respond?

Mr. Saskiw: I would pre-emptively apologize to the minister if his feelings were hurt on this, but I think he should apologize to the victims of crime, who didn't know that those electronic bracelet monitors . . .

Mr. Denis: Alberta Justice supports the victims of crime first every day. I think you should apologize for trying to take credit for something you had nothing to do with.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

If we could move on, please. Thank you.

Mr. Saskiw: You betcha. I guess at this point on that same line, the victims of crime fund. Page 169 presents the operational statement for the victims of crime fund, and there is a \$269,000 operational surplus. According to the Justice and Solicitor General annual report 2012-2013 the net assets of the fund are \$63,213,000 as of March 31, 2013. As of today what are the assets of the victims of crime fund?

Mr. Grant: Sorry; could you restate the question now that we have the page?

Mr. Saskiw: What are the assets as of today in the victims of crime fund?

Mr. Grant: The victims of crime fund has accumulated a net surplus of nearly \$51 million since being established in 1997. However, the fund has over \$37 million in future contractual obligations to be paid out of the fund. Accordingly, the fund retains an accumulated surplus to ensure it can meet all of those future obligations.

Mr. Saskiw: It's interesting that you mentioned the \$37 million figure because last year in estimates you specifically mentioned that of the assets in the victims of crime fund, approximately \$37 million is already appropriated. Has that amount of appropriated funds increased or decreased over the past year?

Mr. Grant: Based on the start point for this year it has remained the same.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay.

Mr. Grant: That number has not been audited by the Auditor General since last year.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Why does the victims of crime fund need to operate with such a large cushion? If we assume that the fund is approximately \$60 million and the amount already appropriated has not changed, why does the victims of crime fund need to operate with nearly a 40 per cent cushion?

Mr. Grant: To be clear, sir, you're asking about the \$14 million between the contractual obligations and the reserve that's there?

Mr. Saskiw: Well, right now the fund is at approximately \$60 million, and the amount already appropriated has not changed. That's \$37 million. Why does the victims of crime fund need to operate with a nearly 40 per cent cushion?

Mr. Grant: The victims of crime fund doesn't need to operate with a cushion, but we can only give out money to people who apply for it. As victims' services and financial benefits are paid out, that's the amount of money that is provided.

Mr. Saskiw: I'm surprised that there are not more applicants trying to seek those funds.

4:20

Mr. Denis: I just wanted to note that about two weeks ago we made an announcement of an about \$9 million payout, and we can get you a copy of that release if you like as well.

Mr. Saskiw: What is the time frame for the payout of appropriated funds? Will the fund be relieved of these liabilities? What is the time period? Last year you said that it was \$37 million. This year it's \$37 million again. Is there a natural turnover there? What's the time frame for it to be paid out?

Mr. Grant: I'd have to go back and get those details for you, but it is over multiple years, more than five years. Some of those contractual obligations are dependent on court cases, so it will be well beyond five years for some of those contractual obligations to be undertaken.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. In 2013-14 the fund was budgeted to have a \$403,000 surplus, and according to forecasts the actual surplus will be in excess of \$2.5 million. This year the fund is budgeted to have a net operating surplus of \$269,000. Why are we essentially hoarding the money? Why is not going to help victims of serious crime such as to programs like the Be Brave Ranch?

Mr. Denis: I don't believe the Be Brave Ranch has ever applied under our victims of crime funding.

Tim?

Mr. Grant: No. In that particular case the Be Brave Ranch is looking for capital funding. They haven't applied to the fund, but as I understand it from the media, they're looking for capital funding to help build the ranch. This particular fund legislatively is not allowed to give out capital dollars.

Mr. Denis: Did they apply or not?

Mr. Grant: No, they did not apply. But there is a potential that if they did apply to the civil forfeiture fund, that fund would be able to provide them funding.

Mr. Denis: Are you familiar with how the civil forfeiture fund operates?

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah.

Mr. Denis: Okay.

Mr. Saskiw: On page 80 of the department business plan, priority initiative 1.2 states: "Continue to identify and implement efficiencies and standardization of ministry enforcement services to ensure effective specialized enforcement is provided throughout the province." Does the use of aerial traffic enforcement fall under this line item? Will its use be expanded to other parts of the province?

Mr. Grant: At the current time the RCMP and their integrated traffic unit are using aerial enforcement specifically on highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary, and from time to time they'll use it on highway 63, but there are no plans that I'm aware of right now that it would expand beyond that to the other highways in the province.

Mr. Saskiw: Does the ministry have statistics to qualify the success or failure of aerial enforcement?

Mr. Grant: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess the question is to the minister. Do you not think that, you know, when you implement a program like aerial enforcement, you should have empirical evidence and statistics to determine the effectiveness of the program?

Mr. Denis: We're experimenting with it right now, and we will develop the statistics on that basis. As the deputy minister has indicated, the aerial traffic enforcement is only being used on a limited basis, and that's where, I think, our statistics will come from.

Mr. Saskiw: How long has the program been in effect?

Mr. Denis: Not even a year. I don't remember the exact date. It's not even a year.

Mr. Saskiw: What are the extra costs of using aerial enforcement, and which line item is associated with this cost?

Mr. Grant: That cost would be part of the PPSA, so it would be part of the RCMP K Division business plan. We could find out what the costs are, but they're not incorporated other than in the one line item that talks about the PPSA. It would be included in that 240-odd million dollars.

Mr. Saskiw: Do you have a ballpark of what the cost would be for aerial enforcement?

Mr. Denis: One thing I wanted to note about aerial enforcement is that it is done on an intermittent basis. You don't have an aircraft up there 24/7.

Mr. Saskiw: Do you have a rough estimate?

Mr. Grant: No, I don't.

Mr. Saskiw: Will you undertake to provide the cost of that?

Mr. Grant: Yes. For sure.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. The other question is regarding the use of advanced technology, where planes use sophisticated cameras in order to issue photoradar tickets from the sky. Is there any money allocated in this budget to either introduce or to conduct research on this type of aerial photoradar? If not, why did you say that there was?

Mr. Denis: No, there's not. I was mistaken as to the particular item, particularly as to how that worked. I've indicated that publicly, which I'm sure you're well aware of.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. So that was a complete mistake on your part?

Mr. Denis: I was mistaken.

Mr. Saskiw: So that *Star Trek* type of technology will not be used here?

Mr. Denis: No. One of your members was suggesting that I said something about photoradar from space. I've never said anything like that.

Mr. Saskiw: We won't get into *Star Trek* here.

How much time do I have remaining?

The Chair: Twenty minutes.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I'd like to go to page 159 of the budget estimates, line item 7.13, traffic sheriffs. Their budget is increasing by 13 per cent, so that's \$1,843,000 over last year's budget. The forecast for last year under that same item is 11 per cent over budget. How much of the cost overrun between Budget 2013 and forecast and the 13 per cent funding increase is associated with the cost of enforcing Alberta's .05 legislation?

Mr. Denis: First off, actually, I can say zero because traffic sheriffs at the present time do not have the legal authority to enforce drunk-driving legislation.

Mr. Saskiw: What would encompass the cost overrun? What were some of the details?

Mr. Denis: Well, first off, I don't think that there is a cost overrun. There is an increase in cost, but there's not a cost overrun per se.

Mr. Grant: So that increase of about \$6.1 million is comprised of \$4 million in 2013-14 to replace the 30 per cent portion of the federal funding for the traffic sheriffs, that expired in 2013. There had been a three-year MOU that expired at that time. It also includes \$1.8 million for an in-year increase for the transfer from contract policing and sheriff oversight as well as minor adjustments for a sheriffs protection services transfer to address increased population, inflation, and services volume. The vast majority of that was related to the MOU, which expired, with the RCMP.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Since the introduction of the .05 laws on September 1, 2012, how many individuals have been charged and/or convicted under the terms of the Traffic Safety Act, section 88, of a blood-alcohol level of .05 and .08? Was this budget created with the assumption that this number would be increasing, decreasing, or staying the same?

Mr. Denis: First off, as I'm sure you're well aware, people who are found to have a blood-alcohol content of over .05 milligram per cent do not incur a criminal charge. So there would be no criminal charges in that particular area because they are handled on a civil and administrative basis as the Supreme Court has allowed us to do.

Do you have some specific comments here?

Mr. Saskiw: Just who's been charged? I'm not saying criminal.

Mr. Denis: There have not really been any charges per se. It's like a traffic ticket. You're not charged with a traffic ticket. A charge deals with a criminal offence.

Mr. Saskiw: Is that your position as well?

Mrs. Armstrong: I don't have an answer to the question that you've asked.

Mr. Denis: We can get that to you. I don't think we have that here.

Mr. Grant: I would say, based on a previous job I held, that those statistics are the purview of the Department of Transportation as with the registrar of vehicles and licences.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay.

Mr. Denis: We can ask Transportation for that for you.

Mr. Saskiw: I'll just switch it up here. In relation to line item 5 on page 158, that is with respect to support for legal aid. In the Legislature you've repeatedly blamed our federal government for a decision to reduce funding for legal aid, yet these cuts came long before the federal government reduced transfer payments, as shown on page 165 of the estimates. Why are you blaming the federal Conservative government for your actions in reducing the amount of funding that goes towards legal aid?

Mr. Denis: With respect, everything stated there is completely incorrect. We have not stated that the federal government has cut any money. In fact, they haven't cut any money. Their funding has remained static over the last nine years. During that particular time we haven't made any cuts. In fact, we continue to invest more in legal aid. Nine years ago \$20.2 million was our level of funding, and last year it was \$55 million, more than a two-and-a-half-fold increase. So, like you, while I do support the federal government, they need to treat Alberta fairly.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess if you look at page 158, in 2012 the actual amount spent was \$65,810,000. In 2013 the amount is \$58,810,000. Is that not a decrease?

Mr. Denis: It is not a cut, no. If you look back to the end of 2012, we gave a one-time investment to legal aid in the amount of \$7 million. It was always intended to be a one-time increase to that particular item, and that was from the surplus in the management of our department.

Mr. Saskiw: So where is the \$7 million? Say that again. When did that influx of cash come, and where does it show up in this budget?

Mr. Denis: That was in last year's budget.

Mr. Saskiw: So in 2012?

Mr. Denis: In 2012. I don't know the exact date.

4:30

Mr. Grant: It was transferred on the 31st of March, at the end of the year.

Mr. Denis: Of last year.

Mr. Saskiw: But you'd agree with me that from 2012 to 2013 there would be a \$7 million differential in the amount of money that went towards that.

Mr. Denis: I would agree with you that we've been consistent in the fact that we gave \$7 million and it was intended to be a one-time injection.

Mr. Saskiw: Given the crisis that has occurred, you've probably seen the proposals to the Law Society of Alberta to withdraw from the agreement from the Legal Aid Society.

Mr. Denis: Actually, that proposal failed.

Mr. Saskiw: Yes, but there are a large number of people who were very concerned about access to justice. Given the funding model – and I think you would agree that it's an ongoing issue – are you at all contemplating another injection of funding to ensure that those who are most vulnerable in our society have access to justice?

Mr. Denis: Yes, absolutely. Next year we do plan to increase the budget by about 4 per cent, but we will not stop in asking the federal government to look forward and actually fulfill their obligations as well. In fact, I was at the federal-provincial-territorial Justice ministers' meeting in Whitehorse in November. Don't worry; it wasn't a hot vacation on the government dime. Every province is experiencing the same issue.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. If there's a 4 per cent planned increase to legal aid in the following year, why is it not in our budgets this year?

Mr. Denis: That's for next year.

Mr. Saskiw: So we have the 2013 to 2014 numbers. We have the 2014 to 2015. You're saying that in 2015 to 2016 there's a 4 per cent planned increase?

Mr. Denis: It was just announced the other day.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. So that's not in the existing documents that we have.

Mr. Denis: No. It was just announced the other day.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess, you know, what we're hearing on the ground is that there are a lot of recipients of AISH that aren't able to qualify for legal aid any more. We're talking about the most vulnerable people in our province, and I don't know what we're doing to help them. How can you justify denying access to justice for these types of people?

Mr. Denis: Actually, we're not denying access to justice for anybody. One of the things that I think is very important and that I had frustration with some of the criminal defence lawyers last week at the Law Society's meeting is that we do not directly get involved in legal aid. We fund the prosecutors. We fund the police. At the same point in time if we fund legal aid directly, I think that does create a bit of a perception of a conflict of interest.

That's why the Legal Aid Society of Alberta manages solely their own operations but also their own qualification criteria.

Mr. Saskiw: I think there'll be probably more questions on that later, so I'll head onto something else.

Page 160 of the budget estimates document. In line 7.17 there was nearly \$132 million being allocated for the Alberta first responders radio communications system, yet last year only \$83 million was budgeted for the project, and only 61 per cent of that allocated money was spent. This year there's a dramatic increase of 58 per cent in capital funding for this project over last year's budget. Why does this budget need a 58 per cent increase in funding when it only spent about half of its allocated budget last year? Why do you need the increase?

Mr. Grant: AFRRCS is a long-term project worth over \$400 million. We did suffer some delays last year in the delivery of this particular project. We have changed the governance structure and some of the project management folks inside the department. We are back on track now, so we're making up for time we lost last year. Treasury Board did move some of that capital money into this year's budget. Because we're going to be operating it later this year, we did need additional operating funds, at \$5.2 million, to start the operation of the system.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess during the time of this Justice minister there were two very expensive projects that were cancelled, the police and peace officer training centre in Fort Macleod and the Alberta police integrated information initiative, API3. Last year you had mentioned that the cost of the API3 program was \$69 million and that the majority of the products, including computer coding and servers, those funds, could be reused. I think it was Mr. Grant that actually had stated this. What is the exact market value of the API3 product that was reused? Can the minister please point out to me where in the budget the recycling of those products led to budgetary savings this year? Or was that a mistake?

Mr. Grant: The project was cancelled last year completely. There were some hard and soft assets that were available. About \$20 million of that went into our own use inside government, both for sheriffs and for IT activities in the department. There were a number of pieces of equipment and software that were provided to police services. We're still finalizing the details with Calgary Police Service, but at the end of the day it'll probably be about \$20 million of goods, services, and hardware that will be made available to the police services in the provinces outside of government.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. But you're not telling us that of the \$69 million cost only \$20 million has been recovered? You're not saying that, are you?

Mr. Grant: Forty million dollars. As of this time there's about \$40 million, \$20 million that we're using internally in government for sheriffs and for departmental IT activities and about \$20 million for police services in the province.

Mr. Saskiw: So we're still not adding up to the figure of \$69 million.

Mr. Grant: Not yet at this time, but our intention is to continue to move forward and make sure that all of that complete \$60 million has been put to useful purposes. We're just not there completely yet.

Mr. Saskiw: What is the remaining \$19 million that hasn't been utilized, and why is it taking so long, I guess? What does it consist of? Or is it not going to be a sunk cost? I mean, there are generally some sunk costs.

Mr. Grant: Some of it will be sunk costs, and I don't have that figure at hand. But without question there are challenges with giving things to people, and I would use Calgary as an example. In order to donate this to Calgary, we're actually having to go through the Calgary city procurement process, which has slowed things down much more than we thought it would.

Mr. Saskiw: What is the rough estimate of the sunk costs?

Mr. Grant: I don't have that, but I can provide that to you.

Mr. Saskiw: I think I asked this question last year, and that same answer was stated, that it would be provided, and I still haven't received the answer.

Mr. Denis: Actually, we did respond.

Mr. Saskiw: I think if there are millions of dollars in sunk costs, we should know that figure. Do you have any idea of it?

Mr. Denis: I just wanted to confirm that we responded to all inquiries from last year's questions.

Mr. Saskiw: If you responded to the inquiry from last year's questions, clearly you know the answer to this question.

Mr. Denis: I don't know the answer off the top of my head. I said that we'd get it for you.

Mr. Saskiw: We're talking about a situation of a \$69 million project. We've had some indication that \$20 million was recovered. We have another example of \$20 million, apparently, being recovered some time this year. And there's a \$19 million amount that is unaccounted for. Are you telling me today that you don't have any idea of, roughly, the \$19 million and how much will be recovered? What kind of boondoggle is this?

Mr. Denis: Again, I don't think anybody has said any of the things that you've asserted here.

I'll hand that over to Mr. Grant.

Mr. Grant: We don't have the figures, but we will provide them to you. We do have those figures available, what the sunk costs are. We will provide those to you.

The Chair: You've got six minutes left.

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks.

I guess it's actually \$29 million, then – right? – that we're looking at in terms of what still needs to be utilized. You said that there's \$20 million plus \$20 million that is being reused, so there would be a \$29 million amount that remains outstanding. Is that correct?

Mr. Grant: Well, our figures would be \$65 million, so it'd be \$25 million that remains outstanding, yes.

Mr. Saskiw: That's a little different number. It's a \$69 million project. Is that right?

Mr. Grant: We will give you all of the figures as soon as we can get them and put them together and send them off to you.

Mr. Saskiw: I guess that's the purpose of estimates, that, you know, with big line items like \$69 million in a department there should be a breakdown of those numbers. I'm going to just ask again. To the best of your knowledge currently can you provide a breakdown of those dollars? How much has been reused? How much is going to be reused within this fiscal period? How much is remaining?

Mr. Denis: As indicated previously, we will get the information for you because we don't have it available in front of us today.

Mr. Saskiw: Just to confirm: there's no ballpark figure on the amount of sunk costs?

Mr. Denis: You know, with respect, if I were to throw a number out and just make a guess, you'd criticize me for it later. You'd have every right to do that. I've indicated before that we don't have the number for you today, but we'll be happy to get it for you.

The Chair: If we could move on. I think you've got a commitment to get the numbers to you. Thank you.

4:40

Mr. Saskiw: I guess, you know, you can forgive us, Minister. Your track record on large capital projects that commenced before your tenure as Justice minister have not been fantastic. We've looked at both the Fort Macleod police college as well as the API3 program, and of course that was before you were Justice minister that those projects were initiated. Both the Fort Macleod police college and the API3 have the same narrative. Both projects were deemed to be demanded by police forces around the province, but both were later cancelled because of a lack of police support around the province.

Even in your own caucus there has been concern shown around the viability of the program, with Mr. Young showing concern over the project, asking about if there are "police services in Alberta or municipalities that are asking for this system today." Which police forces have specifically given you assurance that they would join the Alberta first responder radio communications system?

Mr. Grant: The two big police forces, Edmonton and Calgary, absolutely are onside. I can't go through the list of the other 45 and tell you which ones are on and which ones are off, but certainly the feedback we're getting from municipalities across the province, including High River, who wants to move forward on this very quickly, is very supportive. Edmonton and Calgary, both of those police services, have said that they are very much supportive of this particular program.

Mr. Saskiw: Some smaller police forces in the province have expressed concern over the cost of receiving equipment for the Alberta first responder radio communications system. The provincial project only covers tours whereas purchasing and receiving equipment is the responsibility of the police force or the municipality. What is your ministry's plan to enable smaller police forces to take advantage of this new system?

Mr. Grant: The purchase of radios themselves has always been a municipal responsibility. What we're providing is the backbone system across the province that will allow those radios to operate. We've set the standard, and we set the conditions for the right radios to operate on those systems and to allow them to operate in multiple networks so that all first responders can be on the same

system. The purchase of the physical radios themselves has always been a municipal responsibility.

Mr. Saskiw: Given the history of cancelling large capital projects like API3 and the Fort Macleod police college and that all police forces have not bought into this project as of yet and smaller municipalities and forces are worried about the cost, has your ministry prepared plans to mitigate the financial loss if this project must be cancelled because of lack of support?

Mr. Grant: Absolutely we have not. We're absolutely convinced, as I've said, that the big players are onboard. The governance committee has reached out to municipalities across the province, and the support is very strong for this particular activity. The other piece is that the RCMP will be a big user of this, so it is absolutely essential for law enforcement across the province that this project continue to go ahead.

Mr. Denis: The one thing that I just wanted to add briefly is that some people have called for a full broadband service to be added. We don't think that's in the taxpayers' interest. It would cost about \$250 million, and the current system does allow for small packets of data to be transferred over it.

Mr. Saskiw: Continuing along the narrative for cancelling large projects, your answers, or lack thereof, on the API3 are percolating some other questions. What were the costs associated with the Fort Macleod police college that were sunk costs in that situation?

Mr. Denis: That was a couple years ago. I don't know what that has to do with a pro forma budget, but we can get that to you. It's already been made public.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Do you have a cost estimate? Are you saying that that was in 2012?

Mr. Denis: That was a couple of years ago. It doesn't have anything to do with a pro forma budget. It was a one-time cost, and that was paid to the town. It was actually from Infrastructure, not from Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Is there any outstanding litigation with Alberta Justice with regard to the cancellation of the police college?

Mr. Denis: Honestly, we are the department that receives all the lawsuits. I don't believe we've received anything on that. I can say emphatically no.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay.

Mr. Denis: Unless you're commencing a lawsuit.

Mr. Saskiw: No. I can't afford that.

I just want to go back to API3 for a moment. Can you just give us some example of what that \$69 million cost includes?

The Chair: Thank you very much for the questions and answers.

We will now move on to the Alberta Liberals. How did you want to proceed?

Ms Blakeman: I, unfortunately, will just have to do a straight 10 minutes. When we only have that amount of time, it's hard to go back and forth equally. My apologies for that, but that's the choice I have.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: I'm going to start with vote 7.17, the emergency response radio . . .

Mr. Denis: What page are you on, please?

Ms Blakeman: Well, capital is on page 160, and operating is on page 159 of estimates.

I got a little lost in the questions that were going on before us. I understood that the total capital allocation for this system that you've put in place was \$198 million, but we have heard estimates from other places that the total would be \$435 million. I'm wondering if the minister is able to confirm the \$198 million. I also was led to believe that there was no data transfer capability; the minister has said small packets. Could you please give an exact definition of what small packets of data information is? Thank you for that.

I'm going to move on to the business plan, page 80, goal 1, safe and secure communities. There's \$20 million allocated for the family and community safety program. It's supposed to be addressing a number of root problems. I'm wondering if that is including poverty.

Mr. Grant: I believe that's Human Services.

Ms Blakeman: This is not in your department at all? Okay.

You do have a section in here where you're talking about mental health. Crime prevention, crime reduction, page 80 of the business plan, goal 1, priority initiative 1.5. You're talking about mental health, I think. Now, this department was partly funding safe communities. It did include funding for mental health and additional support to inmates. What is happening to any offender that has mental health issues now? Is there any programming available for them? That's another question.

Page 81 of the business plan, goal 3, priority initiative 3.3: collaborate with justice system partners to expand services to individuals in the justice system with addiction and mental health issues. Can the minister tell me exactly what that is and what programs are being offered under that priority initiative?

Let me jump to vote 9.1, Alberta Human Rights Commission, on page 159. I don't expect you to know this off the top of your head, but I would like to know how many files were opened, how many were closed, and how many were carried over the year.

Mr. Denis: You're right. I don't know the answer.

Ms Blakeman: That's fine. You can table it in the House, and all of us will have the advantage of that. Thank you very much.

I'm going to move on to page 81 of the business plan, goal 2: Alberta has a fair, accessible, and innovative justice system. Priority initiative 2.1 is about the sustainability of the legal aid plan by implementing new funding strategies to allow low-income Albertans access to legal services. Could the minister describe exactly what that is? So far it looks like they've just been told that they don't get legal aid. If he can tell me what the new funding strategies are, that would be terrific.

4:50

Priority initiatives 2.2 and 2.3: accessing resources to use in the civil and family justice system and implementing simplified processes for resolving uncomplicated, low monetary value civil claims, which he mentioned in his opening remarks. What does this mean? Exactly what is being anticipated under these two initiatives?

Priority 2.5, sense of urgency report. There's a long list of recommendations about what the sense of urgency report would like to implement. I won't use your time by going over them because I'm sure you know them well. I'm wondering which exactly the department is planning on moving forward with? At a quick glance there looks to be about 20 of them. Which ones are included in the budget for moving forward this year, please? Thank you.

Legal aid. I think my colleague from the Wildrose has already asked what people on AISH are supposed to do. I know that the minister believes that it is not his problem because he doesn't make these decisions; Legal Aid does. But I think the rest of the world does believe that there's a direct connection. What is the department going to do to make it possible for people that are having to self-represent to be able to access legal aid? I'm interested in what the minister is planning on doing there.

Access to justice, page 158 of the estimates, operational vote 2.2. Is the quality and quantity of service the same as it was at this time last year?

Am I boring you, that you have to check your BlackBerry?

Mr. Denis: No. I'm checking for an actual stat to try to answer one of your questions. I'm sorry if that offends you.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Is the quality the same? Secondly, since this year's budget actually cut that same line, 2.2, by almost 20 per cent, how do you reduce a budget by almost 20 per cent and not decrease the quality of service and the quantity of service? I'm looking forward to that.

The Chair: You have about two and a half minutes left.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

Traffic court. I would like to know – again, you won't have this off the top of your head, but you can supply it – how many traffic ticket challenges were done in courts outside of Edmonton and Calgary. The minister provided two numbers for us at the beginning, which I didn't get. The total number of tickets and the total number of challenges: I would like to know how many of those happened outside of Edmonton and Calgary, which would give us the number that seemed to be happening in the courts where there's only one court. I'm wondering how big an issue it is.

The minister has also mused, as part of the consultation plan, about putting traffic court out in the suburbs. Since I come from a largely walkable and public transit community, I'm wondering how far out in the suburbs he's planning on going with this. First of all, I wish he wouldn't do that. Secondly, if he is going to do it, what kind of access to bus and LRT is going to happen?

The performance measurement 2(c), page 81, has the median elapsed time from first to last appearances on criminal cases going down by one day. That's kind of unimpressive. Why is it only one day? I look forward to your response on that.

I'm also very interested, under sexual assault survivors, why the third option for sexual assault kits has not been moved forward? It was trialed in 2011. This is where sexual assault survivors could defer the decision to contact police until a later date because the kit is kept somewhere secure. That is part of best practices. What is the current status of the initiative? How many other locations have implemented the program, if they did, and in what cities?

Is the best practices guide that currently exists required reading for Crown prosecutors and police officers? How many individuals have been trained with the guide, and is it all staff that are required to review this or just new people coming on?

I'm almost out of time here. There it is.

The Chair: Thank you for your questions.

Mr. Minister.

Mr. Denis: Okay. With respect, we will take most of these by way of undertaking and get back to you.

Do you have any other comments here?

Mr. Grant: I can address the first one on AFRRCS. The dollar figure is \$435 million. Essentially, the system is capable of delivering text messages as you would on your phone. We'll see if we can figure out the actual number of characters and get back to you.

Mr. Denis: The items you'd asked for: the numbers about traffic court, 2 million is roughly the amount of tickets every year; 60,000 is roughly the amount challenged every year. We'll get you the amount outside of Calgary and Edmonton. That being said, there are some cases that do spill over into the courts in Calgary and Edmonton.

I wanted to indicate that there have been no decisions made as to how we're going to approach traffic court reform. We are working with B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to look at their best practices as well.

I'll get you the information on the sexual assault kits.

Do you have anything else you can offer?

Mrs. Armstrong: We can certainly obtain the information in relation to the questions asked about the Alberta Human Rights Commission statistics. I don't have them here. I understood you wanted opened, closed, and carried over.

Mr. Denis: I can tell you that there were just under 700 complaints that were made over the last year. That has been a small decline from last year, which, again, was a small decline from the year before. I think it's just under 700.

You had mentioned civil claims as well. We do anticipate making an announcement later this summer. We do anticipate an increase in access to justice, particularly on civil claims, because these individuals won't have to go to the higher level of Court of Queen's Bench, which typically requires a lawyer to figure this out. We do anticipate fewer self-represented litigants as well from the higher court. We do have an announcement planned sometime this summer, and we'll send you details on that as well.

Mrs. Armstrong: Forgive me if I've misunderstood the question, but in relation to legal aid and the provision of legal services for vulnerable Albertans, I believe the question was around what types of programming are available in this regard. Did I state that correctly?

At one time legal aid was provided exclusively through a certificate method of delivery. You would come in, and if you qualified, you would receive a legal aid certificate, and that certificate would entitle you to counsel. A program review was done by Legal Aid a number of years ago, and following that program review, they developed a new process for serving Albertans. Essentially, they now have a whole variety of different services offered to Albertans who may not qualify financially for what I'm going to call a full certificate. For example, they offer what's called brief advice and duty counsel services to individuals who are appearing both in court but also in and around the Legal Aid offices themselves.

In addition to that, with respect to the business plan priority that you referenced, we offer programs and services to Albertans with legal needs such as the Family Law Information Centre and the aboriginal court-worker program and mediation services. So it's

not just the certificates. There's actually a panoply of services offered to folks who have legal needs.

Mr. Grant: I'm not sure if I fully understood your question on mental health. Approximately 20 per cent of the correctional services division budget is focused on programming and rehabilitative support and services. Much of the mental health support is actually contracted through AHS. They provide it on a contract basis in the institutions and follow up, then, with the community corrections when they go into the probation system.

5:00

So we moved to that system in about 2010, I believe, and what it's done is actually put inmates and remanded individuals into the Alberta health system so that they can be tracked and have continuity in their service both while they're in this institution and when they go into community corrections under probation.

I don't know if that answers your question or not.

Mr. Denis: The rest we can get back to you on. Do you have any further inquiries?

The Chair: Yeah. You can continue with questioning. There are still four minutes left on the rotation.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'm wondering if the minister is aware that it was a government-wide decision a couple of months ago to stop sending press releases to members of the opposition, I think, and the media. I appreciate him referencing that we should know this, but actually we don't because they don't come to us anymore. So that's one question for him.

The Chair: And that would be related to the budget how?

Ms Blakeman: Because the minister mentioned it several times, that we should be able to know this if we'd read the press release, but the press releases, in fact, are no longer circulated to members of the opposition and members of the media.

Mr. Denis: That's actually not my understanding. I actually get press releases just by signing up on the news release website, just as any other citizen can. That's how I get them.

Ms Blakeman: Well, congratulations. But we don't.

Mr. Denis: Anybody can sign up on that.

Ms Blakeman: No, sir, they can't. It was done that way.

Mr. Denis: Again, that is not my understanding, but I'm really at a loss as to what this has to do with the budget.

Ms Blakeman: You referenced it, sir, so ask the question to yourself, I guess.

Mr. Denis: Yes, and I stand by my comments.

Ms Blakeman: The last couple of questions I have are under page 81, performance measure 3(b) around corrections and the remand centre. Now, there were three escapes from secure custody last year, and I'm wondering what has changed to ensure that this doesn't happen again. I'm also wondering why there is no performance measure for injuries amongst corrections officers in the line of duty in provincial correction and remand centres. Perhaps you have an internal one, and you just don't publish it. In which case, great, please share that, and if you don't, I'd like to

know why you don't share it because I think that's an important part of what's happening there.

The maintenance enforcement program compliance rate, page 81 of the business plan, performance measurement 2(a), the compliance rate on cases enrolled by regular monthly payments: why is the target percentage only 73 per cent? Why is it not higher? We're still at a place where 28 per cent noncompliance is happening? This program has been in place a long, long time. I'm wondering why there isn't a better compliance rate.

The victims of crime fund on page 169. The minister very briefly mentioned this. Victims who are needing capital cannot get it from the victims of crime fund. They have to go to civil forfeiture. I'm wondering where that money appears in this budget. Secondly, I'm wondering if the budget contains any consultation amount for actuarial numbers. I would think they would be able to provide to the department the number of people expected to be in need of the victims of crime fund, X number of people per year given the number of motor vehicle crashes and other things like that in a given year, which would alleviate some of the need to keep that rather large amount sitting there doing nothing, as a cushion. So maybe he could supply me with that information as well.

Got a couple of seconds left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, wonderful. Thank you very much.

Under the communications budget, page 158, vote 1.3 under the minister's department: a couple of times I have tried to get some factual information either from the communications staff or from one of the other sections in the department and was told that I had to submit something in writing to the minister, when I was looking for some pretty quick information that was factual. I'm wondering if that is a standard practice in the ministry or why that's being done. I mean, I asked the question on a Friday, and sure enough on Monday afternoon I get a call back with information that's, of course, no longer useful to me because it's all gone by then.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Well, thank you.

Now would be a good time for a five-minute break. So if we could take a quick break and be back and ready to go. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 5:06 p.m. to 5:12 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. I'd like to call this meeting back to order.

Now it is time for the New Democrats. How would you like to proceed with your questions?

Ms Notley: Going back and forth is how I'll try to do that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Notley: As I say at the beginning of every time I do estimates, because I have a short period of time I may hasten you through your answer. I want to just apologize in advance and assure you that it is not a sign of my typical level of disrespect anyway. It's no greater than usual, shall we say. Not for you, just generally the way I sometimes conduct myself. My point being is that I'm just trying to move quickly. So I apologize in advance.

Mr. Denis: We get it.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to go to legal aid as quickly as I can. I can't remember if we've ever shared stories about our law school careers. But in the

slight possibility that we haven't, you know, I went to law school out east in particular pursuit of a program at Osgoode around access to justice and poverty law. I spent three years really deciphering and going through from a philosophical and every other perspective the idea of access to justice and what real justice looks like and what it looks like when it's broken. I can say, quite definitively, that I almost didn't move back to Alberta because at the time Alberta was a disaster, and our legal aid system in the province compared to almost any other provincial jurisdiction was almost nonexistent.

Nonetheless, I did come back. We had a brief bump of funding, I think, in the mid-2000s or so. But, generally speaking, we continue to, I would suggest, let Albertans down in terms of our legal aid system and access to justice not only relative to other provinces but also relative to the system as a whole. As you know, observations have been made across the country about the problem with access to justice not just in Alberta but across the country. Quite frankly, as a lawyer who wants to believe that people have respect for the justice system and who wants people to continue to respect the notion of the independence of our justice system and its existence as a separate state in our society, as it were, I'm very worried that we're on the verge of having the system collapse on itself because it is becoming increasingly a forum within which only a very elite group of Albertans can participate.

That being said, you've talked of course about the role of the federal government. But just speaking about provincial funding, we know that on a per capita basis Alberta is the third lowest funded province in the country and that we fund – this is based on '11-12 numbers – about \$4.50 per person below the national average and that we also contribute the least of any province in terms of the total share of legal aid revenues. Now, that may in part be due to money that comes from the trust fund. I don't know. In any event, the fact of the matter is that we are not winning any awards on a national level for the level of funding that we provide, so I would suggest that it's not just an issue of the federal government.

Now, I could probably spend three hours having a fascinating conversation with you about access to justice and what it looks like when we genuinely have a fair system, but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to go on the issue of simply a good, wise, conservative use of taxpayers' dollars, to use the minister's phrasing.

In Public Accounts about a year ago I asked you guys if you were tracking unrepresented litigants and if you were coming up with estimates on the cost of those unrepresented litigants and whether there was information about the number of unrepresented litigants as they go through the system, if it's going up year by year. The reason I ask about that now going forward, of course, is because I think that has profound implications on the adequacy of our current line item 5. I'm wondering if you could begin by telling me: have you gotten any progress in terms of coming up with that matrix that we talked about in the past?

Mr. Denis: First off, tracking unrepresented litigants is really difficult because some of them will start off with a lawyer, some of them will start off on their own and then get a lawyer later, so that's very difficult, but we are working on a performance metric there.

Did you want to comment on that?

Mr. Grant: Yeah. We are, but at this time we do not track that specific number. I remember the discussion you had with the other deputy last year, absolutely, but we are not tracking that specific number right now.

Ms Notley: Would you not be concerned in terms of understanding the implications to the cost of our justice system of having unrepresented litigants and asking us to support, let's say, anything in line item 2 of your budget, that without understanding the cost per unrepresented litigant to the system, we really can't look at whether, in fact, it might not be cost-effective to, say – oh, I don't know – triple legal aid funding and ultimately see an associated reduction in costs in the court system? I mean, I'm throwing that out. Maybe it's not tripling; maybe it's increasing it by 10 per cent. Who knows? At a certain point we all know that unrepresented litigants are putting a profound stress onto our court system.

Mr. Denis: That, actually, is the big impetus behind our civil claims reform. That's exactly what it is.

Ms Notley: Indeed, but your civil claims reforms are drops in the bucket, and I think you know that in terms of the problems that exist in our courts and in the QB system.

Mr. Denis: I would disagree, but that's fine.

Ms Notley: Well, all right. Anyway, once again I simply ask that you consider bringing this forward because this is a clear cost containment issue and a cost management issue, and it continues to surprise me how irresponsible it seems to be to not be tracking the cost of this.

In terms of legal aid it looks to me like the nature of the services between '11-12 versus '12-13 – and I realize that's going backward – went down that particular year. So even though the total number of services increased from 220,200 to 227,600, more than twice that difference was actually accounted for by, you know, phone help or something, which is ridiculous to really characterize as legal support. At the same time, certificates went down and criminal resolution unit stuff went down and duty counsel went down. Do you anticipate those numbers of actual representation work decreasing in the upcoming year?

Mr. Grant: We don't have that information available today, but we are working with Legal Aid to confirm right now exactly how they're going to move ahead with the range of activities they provide, whether it's certificates or duty counsel or the like. Those numbers we don't have specifically with us right here.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, I'm just looking at the Legal Aid annual report, and I'm telling you that what's happening is that the actual representative services work, as opposed to somebody picking up the phone and going, "Oh, yeah, let me mail you a pamphlet," is decreasing. My question is whether you anticipate that work to continue to decrease. I'm surprised that you wouldn't have turned your mind to it in the course of coming up with a frozen legal aid budget, but I would be interested in hearing what you have to say about what estimates formed the basis of your projected funding requirements for the year going forward in terms of services. Certainly, we're seeing that that representative service is decreasing with legal aid. Maybe I can just ask that if you can come up with something, you send that to me.

5:20

Mr. Denis: Yeah. We can do that for you.

Ms Notley: Okay. I'd like to move really quickly. In terms of the ankle monitoring program for people that were in the program in Red Deer, my understanding is that that same program was also in place in Edmonton, and there was a great deal of concern about a

shelter in Edmonton. Can I assume that the program was extended in Edmonton, or was theirs terminated?

Mr. Denis: I'm not aware of such a program in Edmonton. It is our intention that once the U of C's report comes out in June, if it comes out very positively, it would be our intention to roll it out across the entire province.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, I was advised that there was actually a similar program in Edmonton.

Mr. Denis: Between the three of us, we don't have any knowledge of that, no.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, I will check my source as well, then.

Going from that, then, to the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, a quick question there. I am hearing that there is talk of the office of the Chief Medical Examiner discontinuing examinations with respect to workplace fatalities associated with occupational disease. At the same time we see an increase in her budget. Is that just a rumour, or will she continue to be compelled to do that work? If not, who will do it, and if not, why is she getting a budget increase when the actual work she's doing is decreasing?

Mr. Grant: Deaths as a result of occupational disease – particularly lung disease is what I think you were focused on – are considered natural deaths, so they're not considered under the legislation that governs the office of the medical examiner. In fact, the Workers' Compensation Board contracts lung pathologists through the University of Alberta who actually focus on that organ in the human body postmortem.

While the medical examiner assists right now in providing the organs to the University of Alberta, that is a workmen's compensation job and a contract with the U of A.

Ms Notley: My understanding is that the Chief Medical Examiner actually did more than just assist, that they played a role in it, that often with these occupational disease examinations you need to look at more than just the lungs, and that what we're actually seeing is a reduction in what the office of the Chief Medical Examiner wants to do with respect to the adjudication and deliberation of these files.

Mr. Grant: As I understand it, the issue is really a legal one of: what is the Chief Medical Examiner legally allowed to do with human remains, and what can be provided to a third party? That's the issue that's being addressed right now as opposed to saying that she is not going to assist the U of A pathologists. They're just trying to rationalize where the legal line is for how much she can actually do with the remains that are in her custody.

Ms Notley: If she doesn't do it, who will, then? We don't have forensic pathologists running around the province. Who would do it? I mean, I realize that the lungs have a place, but that's not all there is to occupational disease investigations. Where would the rest go?

Mr. Grant: If there is a fatality that falls under her legal framework, she will do the autopsy. If it's determined natural causes, she will not do an autopsy.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, I think we'll have to follow up on that.

I'd like to quickly follow up on a question that was asked by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. You talked about contracting work being done under line item 8 through AHS with respect to mental

health services. I'm wondering if you could advise us: what was the cost of those contracts under line 8 through AHS vis-à-vis mental health services both last year as well as what's being forecast to go forward?

Mr. Denis: We can advise you. I don't believe we have that information in front of us here.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, that's really kind of a big component of a \$175 million line item.

Mr. Grant: That funding comes from Alberta Health. That's a program run by Alberta Health in our institutions. It's an Alberta Health program.

Ms Notley: And when we talk to Alberta Health, they tell us to talk to you. What we want to know is: how much money is being spent within our institutions to deal with mental health? I want to know how much it was last year and how much we're projecting this year going forward.

Mr. Denis: I'd like to talk to you about results as well rather than just the money.

Ms Notley: But this is budget estimate discussion.

Mr. Denis: I know, but you can ask what the results are, too.

Ms Notley: We'd love to know that, but what I'd first like to know is how much money we're spending on it because that's what we're here to discuss. This is a critical component of corrections, which is a critical component of your ministry. We've had lots of discussions around the problems with mental health services in corrections, so I'm just wondering if we can get an actual breakdown of what will be dedicated to that this year and how that compares to last year . . .

Mr. Denis: Yes.

Ms Notley: . . . before we vote on the budget, which begins tomorrow. So someone is going to have to scramble back to the office and put that together. I'm sure it's available to you. It's surprising it's not here, but I'm sure someone back at your office can put that together for us.

Mr. Grant: I will undertake with my colleague the Deputy Minister of Health to get that information for you.

Ms Notley: Thank you.

Speaking of mental health, I'm wondering if you can tell us how many suicides have occurred in the remand centre since it opened, the new one . . .

Mr. Denis: In Edmonton, you're talking about?

Ms Notley: Yes, the Edmonton one.

. . . as opposed to the number of suicides that occurred in the previous remand centre on an annual basis, maybe going back a couple of years.

Mr. Denis: I'm advised that it's two, but I'll have to confirm that.

Ms Notley: Okay. Had there been suicides the previous year in the other remand?

Mr. Grant: In the old remand centre? I don't believe there were, but we'll confirm that.

Ms Notley: Right. Okay. Thank you for that.
How am I doing here for time?

The Chair: Five minutes.

Ms Notley: Five minutes. Thanks.
Okay. Prosecutors. I'm wondering if you can tell us how many prosecutors you currently have, how many FTEs.

Mr. Denis: I believe it's just over 300. It's 305, I'm advised.

Ms Notley: How does that compare to last year?

Mr. Denis: Flat. The same.

Ms Notley: The same. How many unfilled vacancies do you have?

Mrs. Armstrong: Virtually zero.

Ms Notley: I'm hearing from a number of places that it appears as though their workload is increasing quite a bit. Do you have caseload numbers? Do you track their caseload?

Mr. Denis: I'm advised by Greg Lepp, our chief Crown prosecutor for the province, that the increase in complexity does result sometimes in an increase in workload, but he does monitor that throughout the entire province.

Ms Notley: Do we have some measurable standards that we can talk about in terms of caseload and in terms of whether that's going up or down or the amount of time that's required on average to spend on a file? I mean, we're looking for measurables here, performance measures, to see whether we need to be increasing funds in this area.

Mr. Denis: We can get you some further information there as well.

Ms Notley: All right. Okay. I hope that next year we can have more of this stuff here for these discussions.

Occupational health and safety prosecutions. I learned yesterday in the Labour estimates that whereas a couple of years ago the number of prosecutions per number of files referred to the Crown was running – I mean, I'm ballpicking right now, but it was roughly that about 90 per cent of what was referred would end up in some kind of investigation or prosecution. Instead, what happened is that we saw that the number of prosecutions dropped dramatically under OH and S, and meanwhile the number of files being referred has increased dramatically. For instance, three years ago there were maybe 24 files referred and 20 prosecutions. Last year we had 60 files referred and five prosecutions. That indicates to me that in your special prosecutions unit, when it comes to prosecuting employers who allow dangerous situations to exist that result in people dying on the job, there seems to be a problem there, and I'm wondering if you can tell us about that.

5:30

Mr. Denis: One thing I will tell you is that this is something that is monitored on a regular basis. I found out about some of the issues that you referenced a couple of weeks ago, and under my direction and Mrs. Armstrong's direction we saw fit to make some staffing changes in this particular area.

I believe Mrs. Armstrong would like to just chat about some of the other specifics that you asked about.

Mrs. Armstrong: As the minister referenced, we actually today made some staffing changes in our OH and S prosecutorial unit,

and we will be moving to increase the oversight and accountability of the folks in this unit in the coming months. We're also committed to jointly examining the prosecutorial guidelines that impact on OH and S prosecutions with the department officials from JSTL, Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, to ensure that we're on the right path overall while maintaining individual prosecutorial discretion.

We've also identified that strong investigations are the key to successful prosecutions, and over the next six months, again, myself and my staff and JSTL staff will be working together to ensure that investigators have the knowledge they require to provide the evidence that the prosecutors require to successfully prosecute.

The numbers you gave were a little off but not much. I can give you the correct numbers. I've verified them. Of 51 files sent to Crown for review in 2012, 12 were prosecuted, 39 were not, and of the 62 files sent to Crown for review in 2013, 12 were prosecuted, and 50 were not.

Ms Notley: Our numbers showed five.

Mrs. Armstrong: I understand that those were your numbers. I've gotten the correct numbers from the Crown, and we have verified them with JSTL.

Ms Notley: JSTL must have given us the wrong numbers, because that's where we got them.

Mrs. Armstrong: Okay.

Ms Notley: Fair enough. But we're still seeing a problem.

Mrs. Armstrong: Absolutely, and I have committed to the minister that I will . . .

Ms Notley: So is it that you've changed the staff? Have you increased the staff, fired staff? What's happening here?

Mr. Denis: There have been no firings made per se. The two staff that were handling it earlier have been moved into another area, and we've reassigned two people who we feel are the most qualified to handle these OH and S prosecutions.

Ms Notley: I see.

The Chair: We will now move on to the PC caucus. They have agreed to split up their time. We will start with MLA Sandhu.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister. I have a very serious concern about mental health, and other colleagues have already asked the question. You look at the 2014 business plan, page 81, goal 3, initiative 3.3: "Collaborate with justice system partners to expand services to individuals in the justice system with addiction and mental health issues."

Mr. Denis: I'm sorry, Peter. Did you want to go back and forth?

Mr. Sandhu: Yeah.

Mr. Denis: Okay. Well, first off, I have to say that I agree with you that mental health is a major driver in how people end up in our criminal justice system and often reoffend. Addictions is one of those issues as well. It's complex, it's very interconnected, but I think you're quite correct that you need the social support systems to address these issues.

One of the things that we're doing is collaborating and working with our partners and stakeholders so that Albertans, especially

individuals with mental health problems, will have safe communities, effective and innovative justice. That's what we're all about. It's also important that we treat people on an individual, case-by-case basis. We have to move away from the stigmatization that people have about mental health. People will talk about almost any other illness, but even to this day there's a stigma attached to mental health issues, and we've got to move away from that.

Over the past 10 years a number of initiatives have been implemented, including the integrated justice services project, police and crisis teams, provincial diversion programs – drug treatment court has been quite a successful one – a provincial family violence treatment program, and we're also enhancing addiction and mental health services in our corrections facilities, including the new Edmonton Remand Centre.

Kim, did you have some further comments here as well just on mental health?

Mrs. Armstrong: No.

Mr. Denis: No? Okay.

Tim.

Mr. Grant: This issue has come up again, and it is clearly an important issue for us, particularly as it relates to remanded individuals in our institutions. But we are working closely with AHS. AHS are the technical experts in this area. They're working on a number of initiatives to increase the delivery of mental health services in the institutions.

Just a couple of examples would be the development of advanced screening assessment predictions in mental health to ensure that both the staff and the remanded individuals get the most out of that. A new tool has been recommended and was piloted in the Calgary Remand Centre, so we're going to look to roll that out throughout the province.

There has been and continues to be enhanced mental health training for all of the staff.

An example of a specific program would be the woman's path, which is a gender-specific, trauma-informed program at Fort Saskatchewan, and 110 women completed that program in 2012, and 79 completed it last year in 2013. Another example would be Footsteps, which is the name for a sex-offender group at the Edmonton Young Offender Centre. It consists of four group modules: self-esteem/coping, mood management, enhancing empathy, and anger management.

We are working closely with Alberta Health Services to make sure that we can deliver the right product, the right resource to individuals regardless of whether they're remanded or sentenced individuals.

Mr. Sandhu: From my own personal experience with the community I can speak about the death of six adults in the last three or four years. In our current system adults over 18 need to come forward themselves and ask for help. Most of the young people who have mental problems/issues feel like they're fine. They're still living with their guardians, parents, or sometimes with a spouse. The guardians see the need for treatment but are unable to get assistance because the person with the health issue must do it themselves if they are over 18. The people who have issues, you know, and are over 18 are considered to be adults. If the guardian goes for help, they say: "No. You can't do it. They themselves need to ask." It is mostly anger problems, and they commit suicide, or they kill innocent people. It happens a lot in this society.

Mr. Grant: Sir, could I just get clarification? You talked about guardians.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm saying that if they're 18 years old and still living with the parents, once you're 18, they say: "You're an adult. You've got to come forward if you need help." The guardians say that their son needs help or that their daughter needs help. In the system we've got, they can't get help because they need to come forward themselves.

Mr. Denis: The one thing that I'd add to that – you're quite correct – is that once someone reaches the age of 18, unless there is an adult guardianship order, they're basically on their own. That's, obviously, the age that has been set throughout Canada as the age of majority. That being said, we do have an adult guardianship and trusteeship policy in the event that someone is seriously mentally ill and is unable to take care of themselves. This is in Human Services, though, too.

Mr. Sandhu: Well, Minister, this file needs work, you know. You need to work on this. This is a very, very serious issue. I know a person – he was an engineer who worked with an Alberta ministry, Infrastructure – who last Friday hung himself. Twenty-eight years old and a good man, everybody said. Outside in society he was okay, but inside of the home he was angry. He committed suicide last Friday. About a thousand people attended the funeral. The issue is all over. We need to deal with mental health or anger. I don't know if you work with Alberta Health Services or how your crossministry works, but we do need to look into that file very seriously.

The Chair: Thank you. Are you finished?

Mr. Sandhu: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you so much.
We'll now move on to MLA Hughes.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Obviously, Minister, you and your department deal with a lot of very difficult issues, and we're grateful for that. I would like to ask today about what your department is doing over the next year and what you're doing to strengthen the work you're doing on domestic violence experienced here in Alberta. We all know the challenge, the impact of domestic violence. The Canadian Women's Foundation reported that three quarters of Albertans know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse. We all know that the consequences for that woman are devastating and in many cases life changing. It goes well beyond that, to children and to families and the whole community of people that that person knows. Can you share with us what you're doing in this next year?

5:40

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much for your comments. You know, this past week we had a radio station here in Edmonton that was asking the question: do you think victims are to blame for domestic violence? The fact that anyone would even ask that, to me, is disgusting. But if there's one good thing from all of that, the public outcry shows me that attitudes about domestic violence have changed significantly for the better in the last few years.

One of the biggest things that we do to counter domestic violence is the I-TRAC program, which is an acronym for Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre. That is part of ALERT, Alberta law enforcement response teams, our integrated policing unit. We are continuing to fund that this year. I believe that this is a good investment, and I also believe that it's important to always view this through the eyes of the victim, to put victims first.

I wanted to mention that we also have the Family Law Information Centre, which provides referrals for self-represented litigants to get emergency protection order programs. We recognize that a lot of the emergency protection orders may happen at a very difficult time of day, so what we have is a process whereby an individual who applies for an EPO can go to a justice of the peace who's sitting there. Then it has to be confirmed by a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench on the next business day. In that way, we ensure that women who need these emergency protection orders are protected and are not simply caught up in the whole system.

The Family Law Information Centre also provides protection order and restraining order information and forms packages for individuals who want to apply for such orders. Now, this type of information is provided in plain language because we recognize that the legal system can be very complex, but we have to serve absolutely everyone, particularly victims first.

Within corrections facilities there are also programs related to domestic violence awareness, mostly on an educational basis. Some of the programs focus on the broader topic of healthy relationships as opposed to targeting solely the issue of domestic violence.

The ministry was involved in a partnership to develop the Strategies for Safety guide, launched in 2013, for police and partners to develop a safety plan for victims of domestic violence. One thing I've often said is that we can have the programs in Alberta Justice as much as we want, but each one of us is responsible to report things that we see that are questionable. Quite often these instances don't get reported to the police. It's the responsibility of all of us to make a change for domestic violence.

I believe Mrs. Armstrong has a couple of comments as well.

Mrs. Armstrong: Just to amplify what the minister has said, the court services programs and services branch is currently implementing safety screening for individuals who meet with mediators, family court counsellors, and intake workers. The purpose of the screening is to identify risks for future violence for clients and ensure that our family and justice services are not increasing risks to families through their use of our services. Last week, for National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, JSG sent out a family violence toolkit to over 100 agencies in the province. Finally, we've provided funding to address domestic violence in our province through the previous SCIF funding, the victims of crime fund, and the civil forfeiture fund, for a total of 21 projects: \$16.3 million through SCIF since 2008; five projects totalling just under a million dollars through the civil forfeiture fund; and the funding of 16 specialized programs for families of domestic violence through the victims of crime fund.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you.

Can you perhaps share with us a bit of perspective about how the Crown prosecutors as well play a role in protecting people from domestic violence?

Mrs. Armstrong: Certainly. I recently had the good fortune to meet with Alison Downey-Damato, who is the head of our Edmonton Crown prosecution unit, which actually focuses not just on domestic violence but what's called family protection services. Whether it's elder abuse, whether it's partner abuse, child abuse, they have a group of dedicated Crowns who work closely with the Zebra protection society here in Edmonton to ensure that the right skill sets are brought to these prosecutions, that the right services are provided for victims involved in these prosecutions, that there's a similar wraparound service provided to these individuals. There is a similar

unit in the Calgary Crown prosecutors office which works with an organization called HomeFront in Calgary to provide similar wraparound services to victims of domestic violence.

The Chair: Thank you.
MLA Fenske.

Ms Fenske: Thank you very much. A couple of questions. The first one is on 7.14, fish and wildlife enforcement, on page 159. In my travels about I have heard from people that they're burned out because sometimes they are covering for someone; someone from Cold Lake will be covering for someone in Red Deer. It's my understanding that there probably are vacancies. I'm wondering if the dollar amount is going to be enough, one, to fill those vacancies and address that need, and, secondly, some of the I guess it's the salaries: will they be able to meet the needs in actually attracting people to that particular area?

Mr. Grant: Right now we have 143 enforcement officers in the fish and wildlife branch, and we would certainly like to have more. One of the challenges we have is that the training course that we run is actually run with the four provinces in western Canada, and it runs only in the fall. We top up and try to get above our manning level at that course by Christmastime because we will suffer attrition over the course of the next year. On average we have zero vacancies, but it does fluctuate depending on the time of the year.

One of the things that we're looking at doing during the results-based budgeting program is to look at how we actually manage public lands and how we enforce laws and regulations on public lands. We do have two groups of officers, fish and wildlife and conservation officers, who work inside the park boundaries. We are looking at determining if there is a better way to leverage all of those officers to make sure that we're providing a better service or the best possible service we can to Albertans.

We absolutely do have a couple of challenges. It has been raised that because of the cost of living in some parts of the province it makes it more difficult for public servants to live there. Bonnyville-Cold Lake is one of them. We are looking at what we can do to assist our members who are working in those areas.

Ms Fenske: Thank you.

I have one more question. It's rather selfish, I guess, but in your additional allocation of RCMP officers I'm just wondering if there's anything further happening for the wonderful little town of Tofield.

Mr. Denis: Well, it may not be beautiful Calgary-Acadia, but it's wonderful, the town of Tofield. As I indicated, only two of those officers had been assigned, one to the Zebra centre and one to the Sheldon Kennedy centre in Calgary. The other 38 are assigned based on the areas that have most need by the RCMP independent of political authority. However, I'd be happy to ask them for you.

Ms Fenske: Great. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Hopefully, we'll know from the other departments whether or not that can happen.

You mentioned in your opening remarks something about the small claims court reform. Having dealt with a small business, sometimes that is the best and most efficient way to get some kind of resolution. You went through it very quickly. Could you just kind of slow down and go over it just a little bit?

Mr. Denis: Yes. In 2004 Alberta was a leader. We were the first province to bring the small claims court limit above \$10,000. It

went to \$25,000. What we found through that was that you were seeing fewer small debts claims go to the complex Court of Queen's Bench. People had better access to justice. I think it's time to improve that again, and I'd like to see it go to at least \$50,000. There are too many self-represented litigants in our legal system, and many people from many different parties have mentioned that here. That's one way to go and deal with this.

We also want to have a judge that handles a triage. For example, someone comes in with a residential tenancies issue: we push them over to the residential tenancies dispute resolution service. Someone has a builder's lien: well, they can't go there. They're going to have to go to the Court of Queen's Bench. I'm very confident this is a positive way to be going. We've had a lot of positive responses from our stakeholders, particularly from judges as well. The judges believe that with some of the systems that we want to put in place here, they can handle the increased workload with the existing amount of man- or womanpower on the bench.

Do you have any further comments as well?

5:50

Mrs. Armstrong: No. You covered it.

Ms Fenske: Okay. Well, thank you.

I guess that if there's time, I can throw in one more.

The Chair: Unless there's anybody else, Jacquie, you can ask another one. Absolutely.

Ms Fenske: Okay. Let's move to 7.15, on page 159, which is commercial vehicle enforcement. I see that there are some additional dollars. Are you looking at exploring alternative ways of doing that kind of enforcement? Why I ask this question: when we were doing the functional study for highway 16 through part of my constituency – there is a building that houses some of the commercial vehicle department. When the conversation started about moving that, there were comments made that maybe that's not the way we'll be looking at commercial vehicle enforcement in the future. I don't know where that actually came from. It could have come from the general public who were at the open house. I don't know if there are different ways. I mean, I know you already have the little arm that stretches across the highway and that vehicles can go through there, and you have the PIC program. That's probably through Transportation, but certainly I'm sure that there must be some interdepartmental conversation going on.

Mr. Grant: Absolutely. We're in a unique position because the enforcement arm is in this department, but the policy arm is in Transportation, and the infrastructure, the people who own the weigh scales and the like, are in Infrastructure. So it does cause us to work together closely to deliver this particular service. Essentially, we will continue with commercial vehicle enforcement very much as it is today. Having said that, we are looking again to results-based budgeting as to how we can make sure that these individuals who are out on the highways can continue to contribute to the safety of all Albertans and not be generally stovepiped into just commercial vehicles. So we are looking at how we can leverage the ability of both commercial vehicle enforcement and traffic sheriffs with the RCMP to make sure that we're making roads safer for everybody.

The challenge that we do have right now, though, is that we have a large and increasing number of commercial vehicles on the road. The numbers go up dramatically every year, so how we adjust our routines . . .

The Chair: Okay. Well, that ends that segment. Thank you very much.

We are now onto the 10-minute time slot for Wildrose. You'll be taking that?

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks. I'd just like to refer you to page 159, section 7.13. Essentially, a few questions are going to relate to traffic court. Of course, there have been comments about, you know, taking away the rights of an accused to cross-examine their accuser. I guess my question is: what is the timeline for implementing the reforms that you have suggested? When will it start? When will these rights be taken away?

Mr. Denis: First of all, I've never said anything about rights being taken away. I've never said anything about taking away the rights to cross-examine anybody. In fact, I've said repeatedly that there have been no decisions made. The consultation concluded on March 31. The one thing that we will continue with is that anyone who wants to fight a traffic ticket will have the right to fight it, period.

Do you have any timelines here? Do you want to address that?

Mrs. Armstrong: Sorry. Just on a point of clarity, you referenced 7.13, traffic sheriffs. I was just trying to understand what you're saying. So you're not talking about traffic sheriffs; you're talking about traffic court reform?

Mr. Saskiw: That's correct.

Mrs. Armstrong: In terms of the timelines the consultation period closed on March 31 of this year. As you can imagine, there's a fair amount of feedback that's been obtained, so our department officials are currently in the process of examining a multitude of perspectives that have been submitted for consideration and identifying some of the threads and commonalities in the perspectives that have been given. We're in that process right now of data mining through what we've learned and coming up with some recommendations.

Mr. Denis: One of the strongest threads that we have heard is that individuals can be frustrated, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, by the fact that often they'll have to take a half-day off work, stand in long lineups, often go through airport-style security. I think we can improve access to justice in that area.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Just in terms of timeline when would you expect the recommendations to be made? Would they be made to the minister, and if so, would they be made public?

Mrs. Armstrong: They'll definitely be made to the minister, and we would expect to have recommendations flowing to him within the next few months.

Mr. Saskiw: Would those recommendations be made to the public?

Mr. Denis: Once we've made a decision, yes.

Mr. Saskiw: So the recommendations to the minister, to yourself, would not be made public. Like, I know your decision . . .

Mr. Denis: I said just the opposite just now.

Mr. Saskiw: Your decision on the recommendations. But I'm actually just questioning the recommendations themselves.

Mr. Denis: We'll make the recommendations public once our decision is made.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I just wanted to go back to some of the comments you made in July 2013 in response to a reporter's questions raised in regard to aerial photoradar. You were quoted as saying that it's not in the immediate plans but that at the same time you're looking at it. This leads to two questions. The first is regarding the legality of photoradar on provincial roads. According to some other remarks you indicated, I believe you said – and correct me if I'm wrong – that allowing photoradar on provincial roads would require a policy change. In the next fiscal year do you or your government plan on changing the photoradar policy for Alberta's provincial highways?

Mr. Denis: I've already answered the first part of your question. I said that I was mistaken on a couple of those comments, which I'm sure you're well aware of. Dealing with the provincial roads, we have no plans this year to make any changes to the photoradar policy. That being said, photoradar is decided on a municipality-by-municipality basis. Just yesterday Morinville had a referendum on photoradar. We respect a municipality's autonomy if that municipality wants photoradar, but we have no plans to put in photoradar on provincial roads this year or in the foreseeable future, frankly.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. So nothing on highway 63?

Mr. Denis: No. We did put additional sheriffs, RCMP on highways 63 and 16 last year. You know, sometime in the future you may even see more of those. I'm not going to commit to that, but I wouldn't rule that out. What I would rule out is photoradar on highway 63.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I'd like to refer you to line item 7.11, on page 160, and that's in regard to capital expenditures for sheriffs protection services. It's my understanding that in the new MLA office building, the federal building, there were plans to have a security operation centre for the Premier's security on the 10th floor, and what's often referred to as the Premier's sky palace would be on the 11th floor. My question is: where on page 160 is there the cost for the security centre for the former Premier's sky palace? If it's not there, where would those funds come from? Would it come from Infrastructure? Or if they are there, why is it no longer an expense?

Mr. Grant: The provision of infrastructure – and I'm not aware that there was any operation centre that was planned for the federal centre. The operation centre for sheriffs currently is in a different building in this location, in this vicinity, and it will move out of the downtown core in the near future to a different provincial building. So there's absolutely no intention, nor was I ever aware that there was an intention, to put the sheriffs operation centre into the federal building. But all the costs for the federal building, as I understand it, are through Alberta Infrastructure.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. You speak on behalf of the minister. So at no point were there any plans or costs incurred to set up a security operation centre, a room, particularly on the 10th floor of the federal building? Yes or no?

Mr. Grant: The words "operation centre": the sheriffs operation centre is not planned for the federal building. As in the current Legislature there is an office for the sheriffs to work out of. There

may be an office on the 10th floor. I'm not aware of that, but it is certainly not an operation centre.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I guess that given that the whole sky palace plan apparently has been nixed, are there still any plans to your knowledge of whether there would be space – I won't call it an operation centre – for a security detail for the Premier?

Mr. Grant: Not that I'm aware of, but it wouldn't surprise me if there was an office for them to work out of.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. That would not come from the Justice and Solicitor General budget?

Mr. Grant: Correct. That would come from the Infrastructure budget.

Mr. Denis: To be fully clear, anything to do with sheriffs or security does come out of our budget, but when we deal with the actual building itself, that would come solely out of Infrastructure.

6:00

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. I'm just looking at page 160, line 7.11, sheriffs protection services. Maybe that cost is for something else. What would that small amount . . .

Mr. Grant: That cost is for the sheriffs operation centre, which will move to a building outside of the downtown core.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay.

The Chair: You've got two minutes and 30 seconds left.

Mr. Saskiw: I'll just pass it on to my colleague.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Minister. I just have a constituent question, and it's concerning the civil forfeiture fund. Is there a way to see if any organization from Medicine Hat was approved for any of the granting or the funding under that fund? What we're hearing is that the ones that did apply were denied and that it was groups that actually had applied before and had been approved.

Mr. Denis: One thing I'll just mention to you – and thank you for your comments – is that the civil forfeiture fund is incredibly oversubscribed. We turn away many more organizations that ask for money than we can actually provide to. It's also impossible for us to go and plan in the coming year, for example, how much in criminal assets we're going to be able to seize. That fund does operate independently. If you have the specific program, I'd be happy to look into that for you. Again, it's very oversubscribed.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. And the recommendation would be for them to just keep applying?

Mr. Denis: Well, the other thing, too, is that if your constituent wants, I can have somebody talk to him and see what may have been deficient in the application form.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
One minute left.

Mr. Saskiw: I just want to touch back on API3. In terms of the \$69 million incurred, can you just do a breakdown of what those costs were?

Mr. Grant: A rough order of magnitude is that we absorb \$20 million for use in the department.

Mr. Saskiw: What is the \$20 million? What does it consist of?

Mr. Grant: A combination of hardware, software, and licences. About \$20 million was made available outside of government to police services, and we advised that we would get back to you on the breakdown of the remaining \$29 million.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

So we can move on to our next presenter, then? The Wildrose is good? There's half a minute left. You're good?

Mr. Saskiw: No. He doesn't know the answer, so I'll just wait.

Mr. Denis: We said that we'd get back to you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move on to the Alberta Liberals and their 10-minute segment.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are you going back and forth, or are you doing your five?

Ms Blakeman: No. Unfortunately, I'm doing my five.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Blakeman: Just a couple of things to follow up on if you can just straighten them out for me at some point. When we asked about victims of crime, I believe I heard that that was for sort of operating money only, not for capital money. And when I asked where a victim of crime gets capital money from, I was told from civil forfeiture, which is the money from selling drug dealers' cars, right?

Mr. Denis: Including that.

Ms Blakeman: So that's kind of an unstable fund if I might note that. What's a victim of crime who needs capital funding supposed to do? Pray for drug dealers to get arrested? I don't get this. I'll just let you answer that.

When Mrs. Armstrong was answering my question about what people on AISH, for example, that are making too much money to be able to get a certificate for legal aid are supposed to do, she mentioned the law library. Now, we know that that's being cut. By how much? How much of that service will be left? I thought I heard the minister reference that it would be privatized. Whether it's cut or privatized, how is that affecting a poor person or someone who's on AISH or Alberta Works being able to find other resources if one of the things she recommended actually has been cut or privatized or is less available to them?

I understand that the aboriginal jail in Stand Off was closed – funding for aborigines is under vote 8, I believe – because it only had seven people in it. I'm a bit confused about why that would happen when 37 per cent of the incarcerated population in Alberta is aboriginal. How did you end up with an aboriginal corrections facility that only had seven people in it, so you closed it? This might be simple. You might be not willing to transfer people from other places – I don't know – but it just struck me as a bit odd.

Somewhere I read – and I cannot find it now – that there were going to be new courthouses built, and I'm sure one of them was

in Red Deer. I note that the courthouse in Sherwood Park, I believe, is in a strip mall. Is that one also on the list? Edmonton's is leaking like a sieve. I'm sure they're not very happy in there today as a matter of fact as I look outside. So exactly what is the list of courthouses that are on the hit parade for replacement or significant upgrade in the fiscal year here?

I have a question about what the capital is for the maintenance enforcement program, which is vote 6.2 under the capital budget, which is coming out at half a million dollars. I'd still like to know what it was.

The Property Rights Advocate is – oh, jump into my hands, please – vote 6.4. How many staff are in that department, and exactly what are they doing? I'm just interested. You're funding it. What's happening there? Did they produce an annual report? Do they have programs? Do they sit there and wait until people walk in the door? What's the deal?

I also have a question about youth detentions. Some time ago there was . . .

The Chair: One minute left.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

. . . some to-do about a youth detention centre being closed in Peace River or Grande Prairie. It was in northern Alberta, I think, so any of the youth that would usually be incarcerated there were now being moved to Edmonton. I'm wondering: what was the outcome of that? Was there any follow-up? I'm getting a lot of eyebrow answers there, so I'm sure you'll figure it out. I'm just following up on that. What was the result of closing that and moving the youth into Edmonton, I think it was?

I also have a question about the sort of progressive militarization of the Legislature Grounds, which, of course, are in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We've had increased surveillance, permanent guardhouses, a visible sheriffs' presence on the grounds. We now have the back door to the Annex, which is the one all the MLAs use, being locked because a person in the southern U.S. shot up his school. So we've got locked doors to our Annex. Are there additional plans for increased security on the Leg. Grounds in this budget?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I'm going to answer the items that I know off the top of my head and then pass this over to my officials here. First off, victims of crime – you're quite correct – is just program funding there, not capital funding. The civil forfeiture last year was about 3 and a half million dollars. It does seize assets – vehicles, houses, even cash – involved in organized crime.

You asked also about the Kainai facility at the Stand Off reserve. The cost of that facility was \$1.1 million annually, and when it was shut down, at the end of March of this year, there were only two people that were actually there. That particular facility only offered corrections facilities for individuals who were of that particular reserve. We have met with the band. We've given them some transition funding, \$200,000, but I didn't feel that \$1.1 million was a proper expense for the two people that were there.

You mentioned courthouses. I've sometimes been accused of not knowing where the courthouse is. At the same time I will tell you that the Edmonton courthouse is not on our list for constructing new ones. However, this budget does include \$1 million for courthouse planning, and part of that, we suspect, will involve actually fixing up that particular courthouse. We do have \$30 million of capital funding in this budget for courthouse

construction. The areas that we've identified on a preliminary basis to be in most need are Airdrie, Sherwood Park, as you mentioned, but also Red Deer. So we're moving ahead with this. Thirty million dollars, unfortunately, will not even construct one particular courthouse, but it is a start, to get the ball rolling. I do agree with you that Sherwood Park is one of the areas where we need to have that particular priority.

The Property Rights Advocate employees are the advocate himself, in Lethbridge, and there are a total of three individuals up in Edmonton. The issue on property rights is to provide information. There's a lot of misinformation that goes around about property rights, and the goal of the Property Rights Advocate office is to provide information but also to be a mediator sometimes if an individual feels that his or her property rights have been infringed. The Property Rights Advocate does provide an annual report to the Ministry of Justice as well, and I'm not aware if we have that yet.

Mr. Grant: No.

Mr. Denis: We don't have that yet, but they do provide an annual report. The budget is about . . .

6:10

Ms Blakeman: It's \$505,000.

Mr. Denis: Yeah. So you know that already. I'm wondering if I could pass this off and if you could comment on the sheriffs' presence here as well as the AISH issue and on legal aid.

Mr. Grant: Thanks, Minister. The issue of security on Government Centre, the capital grounds here, is not a direct responsibility of this ministry. The person who's ultimately responsible for security is the Sergeant-at-Arms. We do meet with the Sergeant-at-Arms on a regular basis and provide him the support that he needs, but there are different forces, I'll call them, at play here, both the legislative security staff and our department's sheriffs, who are here as well. The person who is ultimately responsible for these buildings and, in fact, for the security of the constituency offices is the Sergeant-at-Arms. That question about the militarization of the government grounds would probably be better directed to him.

Mr. Denis: Just one thing that I would add to that is that the only person elected in Alberta that has security is the Premier. If an individual has security concerns, they can report them to us, and we do a threat-risk assessment on an individual basis. You know, I've been sued, I've been threatened, I've had liens on my houses even, you know, but none of us get security except the Premier.

Ms Blakeman: I didn't actually ask that, but I'm not surprised.

Mr. Denis: Were you behind any of that?

Mr. Grant: You had asked about the puzzled look on our faces when you asked about youth detention centres being closed. There are only two youth custody centres in the province, one in Edmonton, one in Calgary. There was some discussion last year around budget time on whether either one of those would be closed or drawn down considerably. None of that happened, so those two, the Calgary Young Offender Centre and the Edmonton Young Offender Centre, continue to function. There are no other youth detention centres that I'm aware of in the province. There is a correctional facility that houses both sentenced and remanded offenders in Peace River, but it continues to operate. It has not been shut down.

Mr. Denis: The other thing I just wanted to mention is that if anyone is ever threatened, of course, never to blame the victim.

Mr. Grant: You'd also asked about capital for MEP. It's an IT system.

The Chair: Just in the nick of time. Thank you very much.

We will now move on to the New Democrats. Did you want to go back and forth?

Ms Notley: Yes, I'll go back and forth. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Notley: I would like to start by asking you a couple of questions about item 3.1, civil law. I assume that that consists of the lawyers who represent the government of Alberta in various and sundry capacities as well as those that you hire to represent the government of Alberta in various and sundry capacities. My first question is: can you give me a sense, just sort of a ballpark, of how many matters, how many cases the government of Alberta currently has before the Supreme Court of Canada?

Mrs. Armstrong: Oh, I see the list regularly. I'm going to guess 30, and that would include criminal and civil. I would need to get you the exact number.

Mr. Denis: Would that include intervenors as well?

Mrs. Armstrong: Yeah. We have a running list of all of them, but I don't know the exact number, so I'll have to get that for you.

Ms Notley: Could you provide that to me and break it down between criminal and civil and intervenor versus, you know, the main applicant or party? Party is the right word.

Mrs. Armstrong: Certainly. Yes.

Ms Notley: Thank you. That is good.

Under this line item I see we've got an increase there from \$50.996 million to \$53.115 million. Can you tell me how much of that increase is attributed to your estimated costs of defending bills 45 and 46 or pursuing those to the Supreme Court of Canada? I know you've just started the process.

Mrs. Armstrong: None of that increase is earmarked for that particular purpose. The increase of \$2.2 million is primarily to address costs associated with increased population, inflation, and service volumes as well as a minor increase for delivery of legal services to other ministries.

Ms Notley: Okay. So in terms of the file on bills 45 and 46 is that being handled in-house, or has it been contracted out?

Mrs. Armstrong: We have in-house legal staff that are assisting on that file, and we also have external counsel that are retained on that file.

Ms Notley: We've tried to FOIP what the cost of that is, and we've thus far been incapable of getting that information, strangely. I don't know why. So I'm wondering if the minister might be prepared to disclose to us at this point how much money has been set aside for that.

Mr. Denis: I don't know the answer to that question. I'll have to take that under advisement as there is a solicitor-client issue there.

I'm not sure where that would end up, but I can get some advice and then get back to you one way or the other.

Ms Notley: All right. Thank you.

Moving on, let's talk about the safe communities innovation fund. We've obviously talked a little bit about it in relation to the program that was extended for six months, but that's a program that initially started out with about \$68 million if I recall correctly. Almost all of those programs have now expired. About \$20 million has resurfaced or been transferred to Human Services, roughly, as far as I understand. Of course, if any of those understandings are incorrect, by all means feel free to correct me. My question is in terms of the SCIF programs that were administered and run through your ministry. Because they were all pilot projects, do we have reports on them? Is there a summary of reports? Do we have a summary of success, a summary of continued need, an estimation about what we're going to move forward on, what the outcomes were, all that kind of stuff?

Mr. Grant: The short answer is yes. But let me go back to the issue of the \$20 million.

Ms Notley: Sorry. Are those available publicly?

Mr. Grant: I'll explain that, if I could. The \$20 million, that's mentioned a couple of times, is money that has been allocated this fiscal year to Human Services. There had been discussion about it coming to our department, but it is in Human Services for them to use.

Ms Notley: Yeah. I know.

Mr. Grant: As far as the SCIF grants go, a number of them were extended to make sure that all of the money that was allocated to them could in fact be spent, so some of them will actually not wrap up until this year. What we have done is that we have moved the management, the control, and the oversight of those projects into public security, who is used to working with grants. So they are in the process now of going and looking at all of those and, as you say, looking at: what was the intent, what were the outcomes, and what was the social return on investment for those projects? We are in the process of putting all of those reports together.

Ms Notley: Do we have an ETA on when those will be complete? Again I ask: will they be publicly released since they are sort of, you know, \$68 million worth of pilot projects that the taxpayer funded? Will they be publicly released?

Mr. Denis: Yeah. I have no objection to that.

Ms Notley: Do we have an ETA on when? I know there's the one that you're hoping to have some kind of report on in June, the one that's received some attention. But I'm assuming there must be at least 30 others out there, right?

Mr. Denis: Yeah. Mrs. Armstrong has advised me that there are agreements with each of the fundees, if that's a word. I would actually just have to go and look at the specific agreement to ensure that it does not prohibit any type of disclosure on what they were up to.

Ms Notley: Well, I would say that, yes, I'd look forward to hearing back from you because I would be very, very disappointed to hear that the government would have kicked \$68 million a year out the door and, in so doing, signed a contract that prohibited the

outcomes of said pilot projects from being published. Bear in mind . . .

Mr. Denis: I'm just saying that I haven't seen the contract in and of itself, so I would just take that under advisement until I review the contract. Okay?

Ms Notley: Okay. So we can expect to hear something back from you in the next week or so about whether that will be something that would be publicly released?

Mr. Grant: Sure. I think the minister has said that it would be the intent. We will certainly look at all of the projects and advise on when we will expect the reports to be completed.

Ms Notley: Right.

Mr. Denis: I know at this juncture that we would not have every one of the reports, though.

Ms Notley: Sure. I understand that some of them might not be complete yet, as with the example we discussed, that will not be finished until June. What I'm looking for is just ensuring that that information is publicly released. Taxpayers have invested a lot of money into these very innovative and, in some cases, worthwhile programs. Obviously, we would expect to have the reports that were produced by them shared. So if they're not going to be – what I'm looking for is just the answer to that question or if it varies by contract and if we can be advised soonish.

6:20

Mr. Denis: We'll have to review the contracts. I haven't seen them myself.

The Chair: There are three minutes left. Okay?

Ms Notley: All righty, then. Aboriginal justice. Now, again, we had 49 projects for indigenous justice that were funded under safe communities. I'm wondering if you can tell me how many, what the combined number was for those, so that we have an understanding of what is about to end in terms of indigenous justice initiatives.

Mr. Grant: We'll have to go back and calculate those numbers for you.

Ms Notley: Okay. Yes. I'm looking forward to it because – who knows? – it could be \$60 million.

Mr. Denis: I believe this deals with last year's items, too.

Ms Notley: Well, not really because we're looking at what it needs to be going forward.

Mr. Denis: Okay.

Ms Notley: They're pilot projects, so implicit in the name is this notion of testing future needs.

The other question I have, then, is about the aboriginal corrections strategy, something that was discussed in Public Accounts. I'm just wondering what line item it exists in now. In March of 2013 we were told that there were no benchmarking or performance measures indicated yet and that they were sort of in the governance stage of development. So I'm just wondering: what is the status of the aboriginal corrections strategy, where is it funded, in what line item, and how much is it funded?

Mrs. Armstrong: The correctional services division has full-time staff, aboriginal program co-ordinators, who provide services at most correctional and young offenders centres, and an additional full-time, centre-based aboriginal program co-ordinator has been hired at the ERC, or NERC. The division is hiring a full-time elder for youth at the Edmonton Young Offender Centre. The division facilitates cultural and spiritual ceremonies such as sweetgrass ceremonies and sweat lodges to foster cultural identity and support for aboriginal individuals in custody. There are also several youth-specific programs provided. One example is the warrior program, which focuses on aboriginal youth caught in the cycle of violence. The division also has specialized aboriginal youth justice committees located . . .

Ms Notley: Sorry. Excuse me, Mrs. Armstrong. Thank you. But I just have about 30 seconds left. Can you tell me what the combined budget allocation is? Is this part of the aboriginal corrections strategy, and is it written anywhere? Because we didn't have a completed one last time we asked, in March 2013.

Mr. Grant: I don't think it's finished yet.

Ms Notley: It's not finished yet. Okay. Do we have an ETA on when it might be finished? It was not finished in March of 2013. Is there a plan to finish it, or have we just sort of walked away from it?

Mr. Grant: No. There is a plan to finish it for sure. We have had some significant changes in the leadership of the corrections division over the course of the last year. It absolutely is our intention to finish it.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thanks. I guess I'm out of time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have six and a half minutes left for the PC caucus, and we will turn to MLA Hughes.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Obviously, I just want to follow up on some of the comments from my colleague opposite there. I think we'd all be very keenly interested in seeing things move forward on the aboriginal policing front in order to support that important community.

My question, Madam Chair, through you to the minister, relates to the Property Rights Advocate office. I see that the actuals from 2012-13 were \$113,000, and the budget for last year and the estimate for this upcoming year is about half a million. Can you tell me whether that office is now up and running? Is it functioning? Does it have adequate support for the work that the Property Rights Advocate is doing? Then I'll have a supplementary.

Mr. Denis: Thank you for your question on the Property Rights Advocate. The head office for the Property Rights Advocate is in Lethbridge. There is a satellite office here in Edmonton. The reason we decided to locate the Property Rights Advocate office in Lethbridge is because that's where a lot of the main concerns were, in southern Alberta. It is fully operational. The Property Rights Advocate is Lee Cutforth. He's a Queen's Counsel lawyer, and he has dealt with a lot of these particular areas. Of course, I'm quite happy that he did go to the University of Saskatchewan's law school.

Moving forward on the Property Rights Advocate, we recognize that it can be very complex when people have questions dealing with property rights. That's why we hired someone like Mr. Cutforth to actually be able to answer their questions and put them

in the right direction. I don't believe someone should have to hire a lawyer to go and deal with property rights on their land, in other areas as well, and that's why we are providing this particular service.

I look forward to your second question.

Mr. Hughes: A couple of supplementaries, perhaps. The first one is: can you tell us what the metrics are that demonstrate success or demonstrate activity as a result of this office performing its duties?

Mr. Grant: Given that the office was established late in the fiscal year '12-13, as I understand it through discussions with the Property Rights Advocate, they're working on establishing those metrics at this time.

Mr. Hughes: Okay. Can you tell me whether they have discovered at any point anywhere in southern Alberta, or perhaps anywhere in Alberta, that anybody has had their property rights imposed upon by the government of Alberta or by any of the initiatives undertaken by the government of Alberta, as may have been alleged, oh, a couple of years ago?

Mr. Denis: The answer is no.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The PC caucus still has three and a half minutes. Is there anyone else who would like to ask a question at this time? Dr. Brown.

Dr. Brown: Yeah. I'd just like to ask a question regarding overcrowding in the Calgary Remand Centre and what the status of that is. What are you planning on doing in the coming year to alleviate the situation there?

Mr. Grant: Thanks very much for that question. In last year's budget we were forced to make some difficult decisions. We decided that we would not open the last two pods in the new Edmonton Remand Centre. There is money allocated this year in the budget to do just that, so we will be balancing off the distribution of remanded individuals so that we get a proper distribution through not only ERC and the Calgary Remand Centre but all of the centres across the province. We need to rebalance and make sure that all of them are operating at the proper capacity. We'll start to see those results almost immediately as the pods come online at the new Edmonton Remand Centre as required.

Dr. Brown: Well, as I understand it, it's way over the designed capacity there, and there are lots of issues with respect to the violence in the Calgary Remand Centre. Can you comment on that, the statistics in there?

Mr. Grant: Yeah. In the past there was overcrowding. We expect that within months if not weeks we'll be able to rebalance the populations between the various locations. One of the things that we've been dealing with Alberta Infrastructure on is to make some modifications to the building so that it will be easier to segregate administratively categorized offenders and to make sure that we can use technology like closed-circuit television to limit the movement of prisoners both in and out of the institution, which will improve safety for everyone.

Dr. Brown: Are you suggesting that some of the remand people from Calgary would be moved to Edmonton?

Mr. Grant: No. There are actually some people from Edmonton who are in Calgary. Depending on where families are, where their courts are, where their homes are, there are inmates, prisoners, that get moved around to various institutions for various reasons. We are trying to make sure that we get the right balance and that we get folks into the right institutions.

Dr. Brown: Presumably that's related to where they're going to make their court appearances.

Mr. Grant: Well, it doesn't always have to be that way, and if we use more and more closed-circuit television, which is good for the courts and good for the offenders, then we won't have to necessarily move them.

Dr. Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

At this time we have 39 seconds left. With your permission, could we call it a night?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. At this time I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this business has concluded.

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister and all of your staff.

If I could remind committee members, we're scheduled to be back here in half an hour, ready to go for the Ministry of Culture.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:29 p.m.]

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